

CHAPTER FOUR

GOOD NEWS! CAPITALIZING ON POSITIVE EVENTS IN AN INTERPERSONAL CONTEXT

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Contents

1. Introduction	198
1.1. Sharing positive events	198
1.2. Positive and negative processes	200
1.3. The capitalization process as a novel research area	204
2. A Theoretical Model of Capitalization Processes	205
2.1. Positive events influence individual well-being	206
2.2. Positive events and positive affect	206
2.3. Positive events and the self-concept	207
2.4. Partner responses to capitalization attempts and the self	208
2.5. Partner responses to capitalization attempts and close relationships	210
2.6. A model of the capitalization process	212
3. Sharing Positive Events	214
3.1. What types of event are shared and with whom?	214
3.2. Sharing events with close others	216
3.3. Perceptions of reactions: Does reality matter?	216
3.4. Reactions to capitalization attempts	217
4. Capitalization Processes and Intrapersonal Outcomes	222
4.1. Mechanisms	225
4.2. Coping with good news	229
5. Capitalization Processes and Interpersonal Outcomes	230
5.1. Actual behavior	233
5.2. Experimental studies	234
5.3. Mechanisms	236
6. The Nature of Beneficial Responses to Capitalization Attempts	239
6.1. The heart of perceived responsiveness	239
6.2. Ambivalence	240

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1	6.3. Other factors influencing responses to capitalization attempts	242	1
2	6.4. Bidirectionality: Iterative capitalization processes in		2
3	close relationships	244	3
4	7. Summary and Conclusions	245	4
5	7.1. Directions for future research	245	5
6	7.2. Conclusion	247	6
7	References	247	7

Abstract

Good things happen. In fact, positive events occur more often than negative events. In this chapter, we review research showing that people often turn to others to share their good news, a process called *capitalization*. These studies show that both the act of telling others about good events and the response of the person with whom the event was shared have personal and interpersonal consequences. We outline a theoretical foundation and propose a model of capitalization processes that includes mechanisms linking the act of telling others and their response to personal and interpersonal outcomes. This research has shown that when the close other responds in an active and constructive manner (and not in a passive or destructive manner), both the discloser and the relationship between the discloser and the responder profit. Personal benefits linked to capitalization processes include increased positive emotions, subjective well-being, and self-esteem, and decreased loneliness. Relationship benefits associated with capitalization processes include satisfaction, intimacy, commitment, trust, liking, closeness, and stability. We also review evidence for mechanisms involved in capitalization processes. Throughout this chapter, we discuss capitalization processes in the larger context of how people “cope” during good times and the value of having supportive partners in this process. Although research has consistently emphasized coping with negative events, our work suggests that positive events similarly provide both opportunities and challenges.

Wendy let me in I wanna be your friend
I want to guard your dreams and visions

(Bruce Springsteen, Born to Run)

Will had not been looking forward to his high school chemistry class. He usually did not like doing the experiments the teacher assigned for their lab. Much to his surprise, he enjoyed the lab assignment more than any of the others the class had previously done and it turned out perfectly. That night at dinner, he excitedly told his parents about the reactions he and his lab partner created. His parents tell him that they are so proud of him. They ask several questions about the lab, what he enjoyed about it, and discuss his burgeoning interest in science.

Gregg finally works up the courage to ask Delinah to go out with him. She agrees and they arrange to meet for dinner that weekend. Gregg is

1 disappointed that his friend Rusty doesn't answer his phone, he wanted to
2 tell him about his upcoming date.

3 Suzanne, a hard-working advertising executive, is called in for a meeting
4 with the company's vice president. She is told that because of her excellent
5 track record she will be handling the firm's biggest and most important
6 account. Along with this assignment comes a big promotion. As soon as she
7 gets back to her own office, Suzanne closes the door and calls her husband
8 to tell him her exciting news. She is very disappointed when her husband
9 responds with a warm but quick, "That's nice, Dear," and asks if he should
10 pick up the dry cleaning on his way home.

11 Every day, good things happen to people. Some positive events are
12 major, such as landing your first job, acing the bar exam, or seeing two
13 pink lines on a pregnancy test. Other positive events are rather routine, such
14 as finishing a project at work, passing a pop quiz, or getting your toddler to
15 bed on time. Until recently, psychologists had largely ignored questions
16 about how people react to the positive events in their lives. Instead,
17 researchers had focused on what people do in the face of negative events.
18 Although this work has yielded much valuable evidence showing that
19 coping with stressors has important implications for health and well-being
20 (Bower et al., 2008; Taylor & Stanton, 2007), we suggest that reactions to
21 positive events are also influential (Gable & Reis, 2001).

22 The coping literature has described several psychological processes
23 linked to negative events and stressors. For example, the way in which
24 people cognitively frame a negative event when it occurs has been strongly
25 linked to its immediate and prolonged effects (e.g., Folkman et al., 1986).
26 The manner and amount of rumination on a negative event after it has
27 occurred also has implications for health and well-being (e.g., Nolen-
28 Hoeksema, 1996, 1998; Segerstrom et al., 2003). These coping processes
29 are not only intrapersonal, taking place solely within the mind of the
30 individual experiencing the stressor. Coping processes are also interper-
31 sonal, as the individual involves his or her social network in responding to
32 stressors.

33 A great deal of research has examined how people use their social
34 networks for support when bad things happen. This process is termed *social*
35 *support*. The availability of supportive others during times of stress is strongly
36 linked to health and well-being (e.g., Uchino et al., 1996). Social support
37 plays a role in coping with both major life events and smaller, everyday
38 hassles (e.g., Bolger & Eckenrode, 1991; Harlow & Cantor, 1995). In short,
39 this research shows that seeking out others, the others' response to
40 the support-seeker's needs, the perceived availability of supportive others, and
41 simply the size of one's social network all influence coping with negative
42 events and, by implication, overall health and well-being (e.g., Cohen et al.,
43 1997; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000; Lakey & Cassady, 1990).
44

1 Research on coping and social support has provided important insights 1
2 into psychological and physical processes involved in responses to negative 2
3 events, but there are many reasons to believe that investigating how people 3
4 respond to positive events holds equal promise (Reis & Gable, 2003). First, 4
5 the frequency of positive events outweighs the frequency of negative 5
6 events. For instance, estimates from daily experience studies conservatively 6
7 place the ratio at about three positive to every one negative event (Gable & 7
8 Haidt, 2005). Interestingly, though, the number of published articles focus- 8
9 ing on negative life events outnumbers those focusing on positive life events 9
10 at more than seven to one.¹ 10

11 A second reason to expect that positive events are important is that they 11
12 are strongly linked to well-being and mental health. For example, everyday 12
13 positive events are negatively associated with depressive symptoms (e.g., 13
14 Zautra et al., 2000) and positively associated with daily self-esteem and 14
15 perceived control (e.g., Nezlek & Gable, 2001). Links among positive 15
16 events, positive emotions, the self-concept, and well-being are discussed 16
17 in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter; we note here that the 17
18 associations between positive events and these outcomes are not accounted 18
19 for by the occurrence (or absence) of daily negative events. 19

20 Finally, research has shown that even though positive events may be more 20
21 frequent than negative events, people are better off when they do not treat 21
22 them as routine. For example, when people systematically note the positive 22
23 aspects of their lives (i.e., count their blessings), their well-being is enhanced 23
24 on several dimensions (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Similarly, work on 24
25 savoring positive experiences indicates that when people reminisce about 25
26 positive events, they also experience greater well-being. People who do 26
27 so regularly show increased well-being (Bryant, 1989; Bryant et al., 2005). 27
28 To be sure, as discussed later, we do not dispute research showing that “bad 28
29 may be stronger than good” (Baumeister et al., 2001). Nonetheless, there is 29
30 ample reason to believe that attention to the impact of positive events will 30
31 provide important new insights into human behavior. 31
32
33

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Sharing positive events

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38 In this chapter, we discuss theory and research about the social sharing of 38
39 positive events, a process we call *capitalization*. One of the most important 39
40 ways that people react to positive events is to tell others about them. In an 40
41

42
43
44 ¹ This estimate was derived from a search of the electronic database *PsycInfo* using the key phrases “positive life 43
44 events” and “negative life events” completed in May 2009 with no restrictions on publication type or year. 44
The former produced 186 hits and the latter 1364 hits.

1 extensive cross-cultural study based on multiple methods and samples, 1
2 Argyle and Henderson (1984) concluded that sharing good news with a 2
3 close friend is one of the six most important rules of friendship. An early 3
4 study by Langston (1994) supported their finding—when people shared or 4
5 celebrated the news of a positive event with others, they experienced more 5
6 positive affect than could be attributed to the event itself. Langston called 6
7 this social sharing of good news capitalization. Capitalization appears to be 7
8 quite common. In studies that we subsequently describe in greater detail, 8
9 people tell at least one other person about the best thing that happened to 9
10 them over the course of the day between 60% and 80% of the time (e.g., 10
11 Gable & Maisel, 2008; Gable et al., 2004). 11

12 Findings from daily experience studies dovetail with studies using differ- 12
13 ent methods. For example, Algoe and Haidt (2009) asked participants to 13
14 recall a time when they got something they had really wanted and describe 14
15 what, if anything, they did as a result. Participants spontaneously mentioned 15
16 telling or wanting to tell other people about their good feelings more than 16
17 80% of the time. Of course, people are more likely to share important than 17
18 to share trivial events. However, capitalizing on seemingly small events is 18
19 also common (Gable et al., 2004; Reis et al., 2009, Study 5); for example, 19
20 in our college-student studies, “sleeping in” is a commonly relayed positive 20
21 event. More importantly, as we later elaborate, Langston labeled of 21
22 “capitalization” was apt because the act of disclosing a positive event may 22
23 expand its benefits beyond the event itself. 23

24 Similar to findings showing that the act of seeking out others in 24
25 stressful circumstances does not by itself account for all social support effects, 25
26 capitalization effects are not merely a function of relating the positive event 26
27 to others. The response of the person with whom the positive event is 27
28 shared is also important. That is, the nature of the target’s response to the 28
29 capitalization attempt is systematically associated with the discloser’s out- 29
30 comes. And because the responder is likely to be a close other (e.g., friend, 30
31 romantic partner, family member, roommate), the response to capitalization 31
32 attempts has implications for the ongoing relationship between the 32
33 responder and the discloser. 33

34 In this chapter, we first provide the theoretical rationale and empirical 34
35 background supporting our research on capitalization attempts, responses to 35
36 capitalization attempts, and perceptions of the availability of effective 36
37 capitalization support. We present a model for understanding the role 37
38 of capitalization in both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes, and 38
39 review the empirical evidence supporting this model. Finally, we discuss 39
40 research on capitalization in the broader context of relevant literatures, 40
41 address its theoretical implications, and note unanswered questions for 41
42 future research. 42

43
44

1.2. Positive and negative processes

Arguably, it is possible that the processes that regulate reactions to negative events are the same as those that regulate reactions to positive events. That is, the sharing of positive events could be linked to the same outcomes as the sharing of negative events, so that responding effectively to positive event disclosures could be comparable to responding effectively to negative event disclosures. Nevertheless, decades of research in several areas of psychology—such as motivation, attitudes, personality, and emotions—suggest that this is not the case. Much research converges on the idea that two independent systems regulate behavior: one involved with rewards or positive situations and the other involved with threats or negative situations. These regulatory systems are often called *appetition* and *aversion*, respectively (e.g., Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Carver, 1996; Higgins, 1998; Lang, 1990; Miller, 1959; Watson et al., 1988).

For example, after reviewing evidence from several literatures, Carver et al. (2000) concluded that approach behaviors and positive affect are managed by one regulatory system, whereas avoidance behaviors and negative affect are managed by a separate regulatory system. Empirically, Gable et al. (2003) found support for a two-factor structure—one appetitive and one aversive—across a wide array of personality and individual difference measures (see Fig. 4.1). Others have pointed out that the appetitive and aversive distinction exists across diverse species (e.g., Schneirla, 1959), may be fundamental and innate (e.g., Elliot & Covington, 2001), and is rooted in separate neurophysiological systems (e.g., Harmon-Jones & Allen, 1997; Sutton & Davidson, 1997).

1.2.1. Positive and negative affect

It has been well established that positive affect is separate and distinct from negative affect (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1997; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). That is, positive emotions are not merely the absence of negative emotions, and

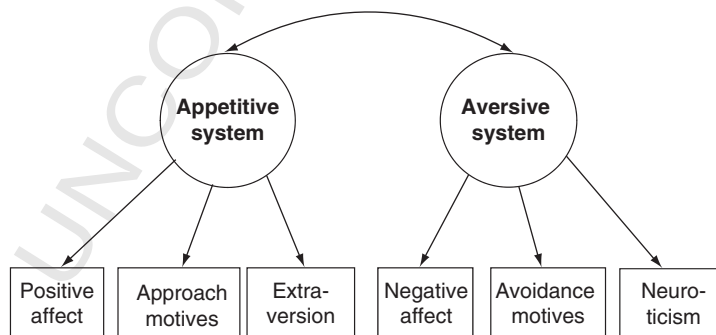


Figure 4.1 Conceptual model of two-factor structure for personality and individual difference measures from Gable et al. (2003).

1 *vice versa*. Conceptually, positive emotions are thought to serve a different 1
2 function than negative emotions. Many theoretical models propose that a 2
3 major function of negative emotions is to orient people toward threats, 3
4 dangers, and other environmental problems (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 4
5 1991). These negative emotions narrow attention and cognition in order 5
6 to prepare the person to act in a particular, potentially adaptive way. 6
7 In contrast, Fredrickson (1998) proposes that positive emotions function 7
8 to broaden the scope of cognition, attention, and action in order to build 8
9 resources. 9

10 Thus, the very function of positive emotions differs from the function of 10
11 negative emotions. Naturally occurring positive and negative affect in daily 11
12 life tend to be only moderately (negatively) correlated (e.g., Diener et al., 12
13 1995). Along the same lines, research has also shown that different types of 13
14 events elicit different sets of emotions (e.g., Gable et al., 2000; Larsen & 14
15 Ketelaar, 1991; Nezlek & Gable, 2001; Watson et al., 1999). Specifically, 15
16 the occurrence of positive events is strongly associated with increased 16
17 positive emotions, such as joy, but not decreased negative emotions, such 17
18 as anxiety. Moreover, the occurrence of negative events is predominately 18
19 associated with increases in negative emotions but not necessarily decreases 19
20 in positive emotions (Gable et al., 2000). 20

21 Substantial evidence indicates that positive emotions are linked to health 21
22 and well-being (for a review, see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). This link is not 22
23 explained by the simple absence of or decreases in negative emotion (e.g., 23
24 Salovey et al., 2000). For example, Pettit et al. (2001) have shown that 24
25 positive affectivity but not negative affectivity predicts self-reported health. 25
26 And, in terms of long-term outcomes, Danner et al. (2001) found that 26
27 expressing positive emotions in written form was inversely predictive of 27
28 mortality six decades later. These findings echo Harker and Keltner's (2001) 28
29 finding that facial expressions of positive emotion captured in yearbook 29
30 photos predicted well-being 30 years later. 30

31 Based on this and other evidence, researchers have suggested that for 31
32 optimal well-being, positive emotions must outnumber negative emotions. 32
33 For example, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) demonstrated that flourishing 33
34 individuals experience more positive emotions than negative emotions, with 34
35 the most advantageous ratio being three positive emotions for every one 35
36 negative emotion.² Regardless of the optimal proportion of positive to 36
37 negative emotions, it is clear that positive emotions are distinct from negative 37
38 emotions, have specific functions, and are independently linked to health and 38
39 well-being. Thus, understanding responses to the events closely associated 39
40 with positive emotions (i.e., positive events) presents a research imperative. 40

41
42
43 ² This ratio of positive to negative emotions is quite similar to the ratio of positive to negative events found in 43
44 daily experience studies in nonclinical populations, discussed earlier (Gable & Haidt, 2005). 44

1.2.2. Approach and avoidance motivation

Further evidence that processes related to positive events are distinct from those related to negative events comes from research on motivation and goal-directed behavior. Of these two distinct systems, one is involved in approaching rewards and the other is involved in avoiding threats (for a review, see Elliot, 2008). Prominent examples of this work include Carver and Scheier's (1990) and Higgins' (1998) models of self-regulation. Carver and Scheier (1990) describe one goal system in which progress is compared to an internal reference in an attempt to reduce the discrepancy (approach) and other goal system in which progress is compared to an internal reference in an attempt to enlarge the discrepancy (avoidance; Carver, 1996). Higgins' (1998) regulatory focus model is similar in distinguishing a promotion focus, which is directed at the attainment of positive or desired end states, from a prevention focus, which is directed at the evasion of negative or undesired end states.

As in the case of emotion, motivation researchers also postulate that the approach and avoidance motivational systems have roots in different behavioral functions and physiological systems (e.g., Carver, 1996). Indeed, both human and animal studies support the existence of separate neurobiological systems underlying approach and avoidance motivation (e.g., Cain & LeDoux, 2008; Lang & Bradley, 2008). Thus, the physiological circuitry involved in obtaining and responding to rewards differs from that involved in avoiding and responding to threats. We view these findings as further indication that responses to positive rewarding events are not simply the mirror image of responses to negative punishing events.

1.2.3. Appetitive and aversive relationship processes

In no other domain of life is there better evidence of the potential for both benefit and harm than in the domain of close relationships. On the potential benefit side of the equation, comprehensive reviews have consistently found that having positive, supportive social interpersonal ties is associated with better functioning of the cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems (e.g., Uchino et al., 1996). Similarly, many studies have shown that having positive close relationships is strongly associated with self-reported happiness and life satisfaction (e.g., Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Diener & Seligman, 2002).

On the potential harm side of the equation, it has long been recognized that relationships can be a major source of distress and misery (e.g., Rook, 1984). For example, relationships characterized by conflict and negativity are associated with deterioration in immune (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001) and cardiovascular function (e.g., Ewart et al., 1991). Berscheid and Reis (1998) concluded that toxic relationships were the greatest cause of life unhappiness. And, relationship difficulty is the most

1 common presenting problem in psychotherapy (e.g., Pinsker et al., 1985). 1
2 In short, close relationships can involve both appetitive and aversive pro- 2
3 cesses (Gable & Reis, 2001). Accordingly, research on close relationships 3
4 reflects both types of processes (although existing research emphasizes 4
5 aversive processes, as we subsequently address). 5

6 Examples of aversive processes studied in close relationships include 6
7 studies of conflict and the management of negative affect during interactions 7
8 (e.g., Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). This work demonstrates that toxic 8
9 patterns of interactions, such as negative affect reciprocity, predict dissatis- 9
10 faction with and dissolution of relationships (Gottman et al., 1998). 10
11 An example of research on an appetitive process in close relationships is 11
12 Aron and colleagues' work, showing that when couples participate in 12
13 novel-arousing activities together they report increased relationship quality 13
14 (Aron et al., 2000). 14

15 Examining both appetitive and aversive relationship processes is impor- 15
16 tant to understanding close relationships, as suggested in Gable and Reis's 16
17 (2001) review of the literature. Paralleling research in other areas, appetitive 17
18 processes characterize behavior, motivation, and affect associated with 18
19 rewarding aspects of relationships, whereas aversive processes characterize 19
20 behavior, motivation, and affect associated with threatening or punishing 20
21 aspects of relationships. Of note here, their model suggests that because 21
22 appetitive processes are functionally independent of aversive processes, they 22
23 should predict different intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes. Thus, the 23
24 social sharing of positive events is important to investigate and these rela- 24
25 tionships processes are likely not to be mirror images of the social sharing of 25
26 negative events (traditional social support). In particular, capitalization 26
27 serves different functions, is linked more strongly to different outcomes, 27
28 and unfolds in a manner distinct from social support. 28
29
30

31 1.2.4. Differentiating capitalization from related constructs 31

32 Systematic examination of capitalization processes is relatively recent, but 32
33 there are several well-established social-psychological phenomena related to 33
34 capitalization. It is useful to differentiate capitalization from these other 34
35 processes, the most obvious of which is social support. Like social support, 35
36 capitalization can occur when one member of a relationship dyad experi- 36
37 ences a personal event that *primarily* affects himself or herself. These personal 37
38 events differ from events or interactions that take place in the context of a 38
39 relationship and that involve both members of the dyad (e.g., conflict, 39
40 transgressions, benefit provision, shared activity). In addition, in both social 40
41 support and capitalization, the person who experienced the event relates it 41
42 (directly or indirectly) to the other person; in turn, the other person's 42
43 response influences the discloser's coping and for the relationship between 43
44 disclosure and responder. 44

1 Nevertheless, social support and capitalization differ in at least one 1
2 fundamental way. Successful social support transactions lead to alleviation 2
3 of negative outcomes, whereas successful capitalization transactions lead to 3
4 growth of positive outcomes. The literature on the functional distinction 4
5 between positive and negative emotions reviewed above suggests that this 5
6 structural difference has several important implications for the individual 6
7 and the relationship. We discuss these implications in more detail in 7
8 subsequent sections. 8

9 Capitalization processes also overlap with self-evaluation maintenance 9
10 (SEM) processes (Beach et al., 1998; Tesser, 1988). SEM processes pertain 10 Au4
11 to situations in which one person outperforms another person on self- 11
12 relevant tasks. People who have been outperformed can experience positive 12
13 feelings, such as basking in the reflected glow of the successful other. They 13
14 may also experience negative feelings such as resentment and envy (e.g., 14
15 Tesser, 1988). According to the SEM model, reactions are determined by a 15
16 variety of factors including how self-relevant the domain is and the closeness 16
17 of the two individuals (Tesser & Campbell, 1982). Depending on these 17
18 factors, people experience either reflection—self-evaluation gains through 18
19 association with a superior performer—or comparison—self-evaluation 19
20 losses through perceived poorer performance (Tesser, 1988). 20

21 When one person shares news of a positive event, SEM processes may 21
22 come into play. This would be the case when the positive event involves 22
23 performance, especially in an area of self-relevance to the responder. How- 23
24 ever, this situation represents only a small portion of positive events shared. 24
25 Many shared events have little or no performance–outcome implications, 25
26 and so reflection is more likely, which facilitates capitalization interactions. 26
27 When the shared event has implications for the responder’s sense of self- 27
28 worth, findings from SEM research are incorporated into our model of 28
29 capitalization. 29

30 Finally, capitalization processes intersect with research on positive affect 30
31 and positive emotions. In fact, we hypothesize that positive emotions are a 31
32 key outcome affected by capitalization. However, as we discuss, capitaliza- 32
33 tion processes involve mechanisms other than emotions, and have implica- 33
34 tions for the self and relationships beyond emotions. For example, 34
35 capitalization attempts and responses influence event perception and evalu- 35
36 ation by the discloser, and may alter closeness and propartner behavior. 36
37 Although positive emotions play a key role in capitalization, other processes 37
38 are also operative. 38
39 39

40 1.3. The capitalization process as a novel research area 40 41 41

42 In the research to be described in this chapter, our goal was to establish a 42
43 foundation for focused examination of positive event sharing. Why have 43
44 capitalization processes not been studied earlier? In their comprehensive 44

1 review, Baumeister et al. (2001) concluded that bad events have more 1
2 power than good events across a wide variety of outcomes. However, 2
3 most of the studies they reviewed did not systematically compare positive 3
4 and negative events (see Footnote 1). Moreover, recent studies have shown 4
5 that positive processes, such as emotion expression, may have substantial 5
6 impact over long periods of time (e.g., Danner et al., 2001). These types of 6
7 long-term longitudinal studies are rare. 7

8 Additionally, as is predicted by an independent appetitive and aversive 8
9 model, positive events tend to be correlated with different outcomes than 9
10 negative events. Because these outcomes were not included in past studies, 10
11 their impact may have been overlooked. Furthermore, even if “bad is 11
12 stronger than good” on an event-by-event basis, positive events occur 12
13 more often. Whereas any single negative event may have greater impact 13
14 than any single positive event, positive events may have greater impact 14
15 *en masse*. Several other methodological factors may also favor aversive 15
16 processes over appetitive processes in comparative studies (see Gable & 16
17 Reis, 2001; Rook, 1998 for reviews). 17

18 Another reason that positive events may not have been the focus of 18
19 research until recently was the lack of a theoretical framework for positive 19
20 emotions. Work spurred by Fredrickson’s (1998) model has, however, 20
21 advanced understanding of positive emotions and has provided a spring- 21
22 board for several areas of research on positive processes, including capitali- 22
23 zation. Indeed, research on positive emotions is not the only area that has 23
24 seen a surge of interest. Research on positive processes has increased rapidly 24
25 in the past decade, and although the balance of attention still overwhelm- 25
26 ingly favors negative processes, important new areas have been opened to 26
27 empirical scrutiny (e.g., human strengths, happiness, hope; see Gable & 27
28 Haidt, 2005). Studies of capitalization are consistent with this general trend. 28

2. A THEORETICAL MODEL OF CAPITALIZATION PROCESSES

34
35 Our description of capitalization focuses on three main elements: 35
36 capitalization attempts, responses to capitalization attempts, and perceptions 36
37 of the availability of capitalization support. Capitalization attempts are 37
38 important because they provide an opportunity for partners to provide 38
39 (or not provide) a positive, engaged response. When the process unfolds 39
40 successfully, both personal and interpersonal benefits accrue. Unsuccessful 40
41 attempts, on the other hand, are likely to have detrimental consequences 41
42 for the capitalizer and the relationship between the capitalizer and the 42
43 responder. In this section, we describe the theoretical rationale for this 43
44 model. 44

2.1. Positive events influence individual well-being

An extensive literature indicates that life events cause changes in affect and well-being. For example, major life events such as the death of a spouse or unemployment (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Lucas et al., 2003; Stroebe et al., 1996) have significant, occasionally long-lasting, effects on well-being. However, it is not just major events that have an impact; everyday events also influence affect and well-being. For example, in one study (Bolger et al., 1989), daily hassles and stressors accounted for up to 20% of the variance in daily mood changes. Although most of the available literature has emphasized the impact of negative events, for many of the reasons outlined in the previous section, some researchers have considered the effects of positive events on well-being. In a review of this evidence, Diener et al. (1999) concluded that pleasurable events are associated with increased subjective well-being. For example, achieving an A on an important test has positive ramifications (Seidlitz & Diener, 1993), as do most positive daily events (e.g., David et al., 1997; Gable et al., 2000).

It bears mention that several moderators of these effects have been documented. For example, responses to both major and minor events vary as a function of dispositional variables. Traits such as neuroticism (David et al., 1997) and behavioral inhibition (Gable et al., 2000) may moderate reactions to negative events, whereas extraversion (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991), agreeableness (Moskowitz & Côté, 1995), and self-esteem (Wood et al., 2003) may moderate responses to positive events. Similarly, Oishi et al. (2007) have documented cross-cultural differences in affective responses to daily events. Nevertheless, over and above these and other moderators, events do influence individual well-being, and more specifically, positive events influence individual well-being.

2.2. Positive events and positive affect

Positive events have clear links to positive affect. Positive affect in turn is associated with success across diverse domains. In a recent review, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) reviewed evidence about the role of positive affect in successful outcomes for marriage, friendship, income, work performance, and health. They concluded that “happy people are successful and flourishing people” (p. 845), citing substantial evidence supporting a causal interpretation (“happiness causes many of the successful outcomes with which it is correlates”) and that these effects “may be mediated. . . by positive affect and the characteristics that it promotes” (both quotes, p. 846).

Because positive events tend to generate positive emotions, they may also have a broadening effect on the self. Fredrickson’s (2001) “broaden-and-build” model proposed that positive emotions broaden people’s momentary thought–action repertoires, facilitating the building of personal

1 resources and social bonds. For example, positive emotions augment 1
2 “broad-minded coping” (i.e., taking a broad perspective on problems and 2
3 generating multiple solutions for them), which over time enhances the 3
4 ability to cope with distress and fosters “upward spirals” in well-being 4
5 (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Most relevant 5
6 to our model, because successful capitalization increases positive affect 6
7 surrounding positive events, it may contribute to this upward spiral. 7

8 Goal striving and attainment represent one class of everyday events in 8
9 which capitalization interactions commonly occur. Generally, people expe- 9
10 rience positive emotions when progressing toward valued goals and nega- 10
11 tive emotions when their progress is thwarted (Carver, 2005; Diener et al., 11 Au5
12 1999). There is good reason to believe that goal-relevant events are partic- 12
13 ularly likely to be shared socially. One reason is that people often converse 13
14 about movement toward their goals, and in such conversations, the partner’s 14
15 response (interest, disinterest, etc.) has affect-eliciting properties and may 15
16 influence subsequent goal-directed behavior (Rusbult et al., 2009). Another 16
17 reason is that relationship partners often play significant roles in goal pursuit 17
18 (Rusbult et al., 2005). Partners (e.g., friends, family, romantic partners) can 18
19 support or encourage, or alternatively hinder or discourage, goal-directed 19
20 activities, especially when the nature of interdependence in a close relation- 20
21 ship necessarily involve each partner in the other’s plans, actions, and 21
22 outcomes (Kelley, 1983). 22
23

24 2.3. Positive events and the self-concept 24 25

26 Personal success and other positive events may also contribute to well-being 26
27 by fulfilling self-enhancement motives (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). In other 27
28 words, if people are motivated to enhance the positivity of their self- 28
29 perceptions, any achievements or events that can be attributed to personal 29
30 attributes are likely to fulfill that function. In our interpersonal model, the 30
31 benefits of capitalization go beyond personally reflecting on one’s accom- 31
32 plishments, focusing instead on the value added by telling others and seeing 32
33 their response. In this, our model of the capitalization process draws directly 33
34 on theories of the self that emphasize its interpersonal roots. 34

35 Early theorists such as Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) argued that self- 35
36 evaluation is based on how we imagine that others, especially significant 36
37 others, evaluate us. More recent theorizing similarly suggests that feedback 37
38 from others helps shape children’s emerging self-concept, and contributes to 38
39 adults’ self-concept maintenance and revision (Chen et al., 2006; Markus & 39
40 Cross, 1990). *Reflected appraisals* are part of this process. Although reflected 40
41 appraisals become stably internalized as central components of self-esteem 41
42 over the course of development, they remain at least somewhat open to 42
43 feedback throughout life (an idea elaborated, albeit in a narrower domain, in 43
44 Bowlby’s, 1969 notion of working models of attachment). Although much 44

1 has been written about the effects of social feedback on self-evaluation, 1
2 *sociometer theory* (Leary, 2005; Leary & Baumeister, 2000) is particularly 2
3 relevant to the present model. 3

4 Sociometer theory proposes that self-esteem is part of an evolutionarily 4
5 adaptive system designed to monitor the social environment for cues of 5
6 acceptance and to respond to changes in perceived relational value. It is 6
7 widely believed that social acceptance had significant implications for sur- 7
8 vival and reproduction over evolutionary time (Buss & Kenrick, 1998). 8
9 According to Leary's model, which has been supported by numerous studies 9
10 (reviewed by Leary, 2005), self-esteem operates as a gauge of one's current 10
11 acceptance or exclusion by others and one's perceived value as a relationship 11
12 partner. Anything that increases one's value as a relational partner will tend 12
13 to boost self-esteem. 13

14 More importantly, the ability of positive events to create such boosts 14
15 depends on relaying news about the event or attribute in question to those 15
16 partners and also on the positivity of their response. This is because the 16
17 perception of an increase in relational value depends directly on feedback 17
18 from relational partners. In this respect, pride becomes a particularly rele- 18
19 vant emotion. Pride has been conceptualized as a marker of social value 19
20 (Shariff & Tracy, 2009). As such, one reason people express pride is to alert 20
21 social partners that they have accomplished something that merits increased 21
22 standing (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Responses to prideful expressions may be 22
23 one reason why pride over time promotes positives thoughts about the self 23
24 (Tracy & Robins, 2007). 24

25 One seeming exception to this principle occurs in the case of low self- 25
26 esteem individuals. Several studies indicate that rather than basking in 26
27 success, persons with low self-esteem are more likely to worry about its 27
28 potential pitfalls. For example, in three studies, Wood et al. (2005) demon- 28
29 strated that compared to high self-esteem persons, low self-esteem persons 29
30 showed no increase in positive self-relevant thoughts following success, but 30
31 instead were more anxious about the downsides of success (e.g., raised 31
32 expectations). Likewise, in a more interpersonal domain, low self-esteem 32
33 persons have more difficulty than high self-esteem persons perceiving and 33
34 accepting their partners' actual positive regard for them (Murray et al., 34
35 2006). Thus, it would be consistent with the literature that people with 35
36 low self-esteem have more difficulty garnering the positive effects of capi- 36
37 talization than people with high self-esteem. Later in this chapter, we 37
38 describe studies that address this idea (Smith & Reis, 2009). 38
39 39

40 2.4. Partner responses to capitalization attempts and the self 40

41 41
42 For a capitalization attempt to be successful, as mentioned above, the 42
43 partner's reaction should be perceived as responsive. Perceived partner 43
44 responsiveness, defined by Reis et al. (2004) as "a process by which 44

1 individuals come to believe that relationship partners both attend to and 1
2 react supportively to central, core defining features of the self” (p. 203), is 2
3 usually studied in the context of negative events and aversive processes, such 3
4 as those that operate in the face of stress, unresolved problems, conflicts of 4
5 interest, disagreeable behavior, threats to the person’s safety or security, or 5
6 when unsatisfied needs are salient. 6

7 Positive situations, although less often studied in this context, also create 7
8 possibilities for perceived partner responsiveness. This is because conversa- 8
9 tions about positive events create a situation in which interaction partners 9
10 may or may not verbally and behaviorally display awareness of, and a 10
11 willingness to support, the other’s aspirations, goals, values, and accomplish- 11
12 ments (Gable & Reis, 2006; Reis, 2007; Rusbult et al., 2005). In social 12
13 interaction, one person’s positive events have the potential for the other’s 13
14 ambivalence. For example, a conversation about an important accomplish- 14
15 ment may foster envy (Scinta & Gable, 2005; Tesser et al., 1988); it may 15
16 highlight or amplify conflicts of interest between the self and the partner 16
17 (Carmichael, 2005); it may threaten stable patterns of interaction (e.g., 17
18 partners’ relative status or their availability to each other); or it may allow 18
19 partners to display indifference or distance. Thus, responsiveness in positive 19
20 situations may be diagnostic of a partner’s regard for the self, just as in 20
21 negative (conflictual) situations. 21

22 Perceived partner responsiveness applies to capitalization attempts in 22
23 two general ways. The first describes reactions to one partner’s personal 23
24 accomplishment or stroke of good fortune—winning a prize, achieving a 24
25 goal, or succeeding at a challenging task. An enthusiastic response is likely to 25
26 foster interaction sequences in which further positive emotions are shared 26
27 and experienced (Hatfield et al., 1994; Reis & Gable, 2003; Rimé, 2007), 27
28 thereby helping to satisfy relatedness needs. Moreover, enthusiastic 28
29 responses signal that partners understand and appreciate the personal signif- 29
30 icance of the good news for the teller, and are willing to acknowledge it. 30
31 A listener’s response also conveys information about his or her feelings for 31
32 the aspiring capitalizer. Enthusiastic responses suggest that the recipient feels 32
33 some pride, perhaps even wishing to “bask in reflected glory” by including 33
34 the other’s good news in the self, both signs of interdependence in close 34
35 relationships (Aron & Aron, 1997). (In Tesser et al.’s, 1988 SEM model, 35
36 closeness and the tendency to share in another person’s success are positively 36
37 correlated, as long as the success does not occur in a highly self-relevant 37
38 domain.) Dispassionate responses, even if nominally positive, signify a lack 38
39 of personal engagement in the other’s outcome. 39

40 Second, partners are often active participants in each other’s personal 40
41 development and goal pursuit. The *Michelangelo phenomenon* (Rusbult et al., 41
42 2009) describes how close partners may promote or inhibit each other’s 42
43 goal-related behavior through perceptual affirmation and behavioral affir- 43
44 mation, which refer, respectively, to viewing and treating partners in a 44

1 manner consistent with their ideal self (Drigotas et al., 1999). Because 1
2 partners in interdependent relationships must coordinate many basic life 2
3 activities, and because interdependence usually connotes at least some 3
4 receptivity to influence by the other, a partner's recognition and encour- 4
5 agement of goal-related activities affects how well a person can pursue 5
6 personal goals (and thereby individual and relational well-being; Rusbult 6
7 et al., 2009). Supportive backing generally makes it easier to pursue goals 7
8 whereas ambivalence, disapproval, or obstruction can interfere with prog- 8
9 ress. Deci and Ryan (2000) discuss a related process, called *autonomy support*, 9
10 which they define as the provision of support for self-ascribed needs, values, 10
11 and goals. 11

12 The role of relationship partners in promoting the self's aspirations is a 12
13 prominent theme in many theories and research areas. For example, Kohut 13
14 (1971) proposed that beginning in infancy (but continuing throughout 14
15 adulthood) humans have a need for significant others to affirm the self; in 15
16 particular to validate intrapsychic attributes that provide meaning and 16
17 stability to a person's sense of self (Steele, 1988). Kohut used the term 17
18 *mirroring* to describe the process by which empathic partners express adm- 18
19 iration for and engagement with the self. Mirroring, he theorized, facilitates 19
20 identification with others and a healthy sense of personal worth. More 20
21 empirically oriented self-psychologists have suggested that mirroring 21
22 responses, when experienced as such, trigger mental representations of the 22
23 self as positively valued by the other (e.g., Fonagy et al., 2002). Thus, by 23
24 monitoring partners' responses to one's own needs, desires, and accom- 24
25 plishments, people develop positive metaperceptions (i.e., perceptions of 25
26 what others think of the self; Kenny, 1994). Positive achievements 26
27 and attributes provide compelling opportunities for the provision of 27
28 mirroring responses, and, when successful, for the perception of partner 28
29 responsiveness. 29
30

31 2.5. Partner responses to capitalization attempts and 31 32 close relationships 32 33

34 We theorize that although responsiveness applies in varying degrees across 34
35 all relationships, it is more likely to be evident and influential in close 35
36 relationships. First, people expect higher levels of responsiveness from 36
37 close than distant others (Reis et al., 2004), and thus the presence or absence 37
38 of appropriate responses to capitalization attempts from them tends to be 38
39 particularly important. Consistent with this idea, according to friendship 39
40 norms, friends should share in each other's joys and sorrows (Argyle & 40
41 Henderson, 1984; Reis, 1990; Rimé, 2009). In addition, closeness, which 41
42 interdependence theorists define in terms of mutual influence (Kelley, 42
43 1983), increases partners' emotional as well as behavioral effects on each 43
44 other (Berscheid & Ammazalorso, 2001). Finally, if closeness is 44

1 characterized as “including the other in oneself” (Aron & Aron, 1997), then 1
2 close-other feedback might be expected to have an impact on the self 2
3 commensurate with the degree of closeness. 3

4 Many theories and studies document the importance of responsiveness 4
5 for relationship development and maintenance. For example, communica- 5
6 tion studies indicate that understanding, acceptance, and support are central 6
7 to effective communication in ongoing relationships (e.g., Burleson & 7
8 MacGeorge, 2002; Davis, 1982; Noller & Ruzzene, 1991). Similarly, 8
9 responsiveness, which goes beyond simple warmth to entail thoughtful 9
10 appraisal and support of the child’s needs and goals, is considered a central 10
11 component of good parenting from infancy onward (Dix, 1992). One 11
12 particular kind of responsiveness, responsiveness to needs, defines the dis- 12
13 tinction between communal and exchange relationships (Clark & Mills, 13
14 1979; Mills & Clark, 1982). In communal relationships, partners feel 14
15 responsible for each other’s welfare, whereas in exchange relationships, 15
16 benefits are provided proportionally. Many important relationship phe- 16
17 nomena reflect the deepening of communal bonds, including the perceived 17
18 availability of emotional support, empathic helping, and emotional 18
19 openness (Clark et al., 2001). 19

20 Validation is one component of responsiveness, and its role in relation- 20
21 ship development is well documented: All other things being equal, people 21
22 prefer to affiliate with others who approve of (or who seem likely to 22
23 approve of) their world view (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Goethals & Darley, 23
24 1977; Wheeler, 1974). Moreover, as first proposed by Sullivan (1953) 24
25 more than half a century ago, validation contributes to the development 25
26 of intimacy. For example, several studies of Reis and Shaver’s (1988) 26
27 intimacy model indicate that perceived understanding and validation fol- 27
28 lowing self-disclosure signal a listener’s awareness, recognition, and appre- 28
29 ciation of the self, which in turn fosters intimacy (e.g., Laurenceau et al., 29
30 1998, 2005; Lin, 1992; Reis, 2006). Similarly, one mechanism by which 30
31 *positive illusions* (perceptions of a partner’s attributes that are more positive 31
32 than the partner’s self-views) contribute to relationship well-being involves 32
33 the positive feedback received by the target (Murray et al., 1996; see also 33
34 Bosson & Swann, 2001). This idea is consistent with the reinforcement 34
35 tradition in social psychology, which shows that positive feedback may 35
36 strengthen attraction to the source of that feedback (Berscheid & 36
37 Walster, 1974). 37

38 A final reason to consider the close relationship consequences of per- 38
39 ceived partner responsiveness in the context of positive events is found in 39
40 attachment theory. Although attachment theory is mainly concerned with 40
41 partner responses in the face of threat, a central tenet of Bowlby’s 41
42 (1969/1982) original theory is that confident exploration of the environ- 42
43 ment occurs only when attachment needs have been satisfied. Consistent 43
44 with this principle, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) review evidence showing 44

1 that secure representations of attachment figures, both as traits or as experi- 1
2 mentally induced (e.g., by priming), serve as inner resources supporting 2
3 diverse exploratory or prosocial behaviors. Similarly, more confident, mas- 3
4 tery-oriented approaches to achievement situations (an adult version of 4
5 exploration) are associated with attachment security (Elliot & Reis, 2003). 5
6 Feeney (2004) provides more direct evidence for this assertion. Using two 6
7 laboratory tasks (discussion of one partner's future goals, a novel computer 7
8 puzzle game) and both spontaneous and experimentally manipulated sup- 8
9 port (responsive or intrusively interfering), she found that responsive sup- 9
10 port predicted increases in the recipient's personal well-being and self- 10
11 reported likelihood of goal attainment. 11

12 13 **2.5.1. Responsiveness versus control** 13

14 Enthusiasm for positive accomplishments should be distinguished from 14
15 more controlling types of feedback. Praise can be construed as informational 15
16 (providing feedback about competence) or controlling (intended to evoke 16
17 desired outcomes), and several studies have shown that controlling praise 17
18 can produce negative emotions and lead to diminished interest in an activity 18
19 (Deci & Ryan, 1980). Also, self-esteem that is contingent on attaining 19
20 approval from others tends to be associated with a variety of costs in the 20
21 domains of learning, motivation, self-regulation, and relationships (Crocker 21
22 & Knight, 2005; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Elliot & Thrash, 2004). 22

23 Responsive support in our model is neither controlling nor contingent. 23
24 Rather, responsiveness, because it is based on understanding and apprecia- 24
25 tion of the recipient's personally important goals, values, and needs, tends 25
26 to be experienced as authentic and supportive of the self. It does not evoke 26
27 external standards or goals so much as it expresses encouragement and 27
28 appreciation for what already exists in the person's mind. Responsiveness 28
29 also fosters engagement and involvement, an important component of felt 29
30 relatedness, whereas controlling feedback typically engenders psychological 30
31 distance. In short, from the perspective of the recipient whose experiences, 31
32 goals, needs, and attributes are at issue, responsive feedback tends to be 32
33 experienced as consistent with autonomous self-regulation. 33

34 35 **2.6. A model of the capitalization process** 35

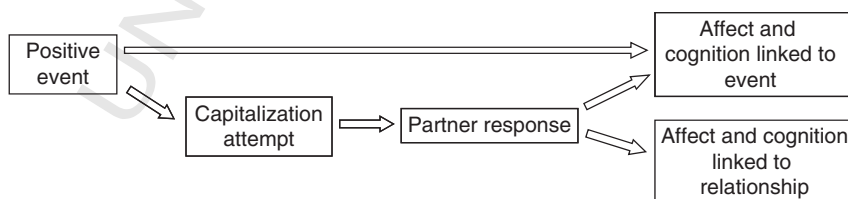
36
37 Langston (1994) originally defined capitalization as the process of reflecting 37
38 on personal good fortune and other positive events, with the aim of deriving 38
39 enhanced, additional, or more enduring benefits from them. In this original 39
40 definition capitalization could be an intrapsychic strategy, such as when a 40
41 person conjures up fond memories of the good news. For simplicity, 41
42 we have come to use the term capitalization to refer to an *interpersonal* 42
43 *strategy*. Moreover, when capitalization strategies are successful, they 43
44 contribute to a cycle of "broadening and building" (Fredrickson, 2001), 44

1 whereby reflection on positive events fosters additional positive affects and 1
2 the development of personal (and in the interpersonal case, relational) 2
3 resources. Thus, capitalization experiences should be considered as part of 3
4 the growing suite of appetitive processes that contribute to human growth 4
5 and well-being (Gable & Haidt, 2005). We focus on the interpersonal 5
6 strategy; it is more complex and variable because it takes place in the context 6
7 of a dyad. 7

8 Conveying news about personal good fortune to an interaction partner 8
9 initiates a process that has both personal and relational implications. 9
10 Although on the surface capitalization attempts are about the transmission 10
11 of information about personal events to social partners, the action in these 11
12 interactions lies in the emotions and interdependence experienced as a result 12
13 of the exchange. Capitalization interactions possess several important fea- 13
14 tures: What emotions are generated? How does each partner's behavior 14
15 influence the other's response? What implications are there for the indivi- 15
16 duals and the dyad? Our model therefore examines this interchange from the 16
17 perspective of an interpersonal process: How the nature of the interaction 17
18 influences the prospective capitalizer, the listener, and their relationship. 18

19 As shown in Fig. 4.2, capitalization attempts create an opportunity for 19
20 partners to demonstrate responsiveness to the self in an aspirational context. 20
21 The end product of this interaction has both personal and relational impli- 21
22 cations. On the personal side, an effective response is expected to enhance 22
23 event-related affects and evaluations, whereas an ineffective or destructive 23
24 response may impair them. Langston (1994) proposed three mechanisms 24
25 (or, as he referred to them, *marking functions*) underlying the personal 25
26 benefits of capitalization: to enhance memorability, to maximize the event's 26
27 personal significance, and to gain value (status) in the eyes of others. Later in 27
28 this chapter, we review evidence relevant to these mechanisms. In each 28
29 case, the act of relating one's news to another person, and the resulting 29
30 feedback provided by a responsive listener, is proposed to generate the 30
31 "value added" during the capitalization process. 31

32 Relational benefits derive primarily from the perception of partner 32
33 responsiveness, shown in Fig. 4.3. Capitalization attempts are, in a real 33
34 sense, requests for partners to demonstrate understanding, appreciation, 34
35



44 **Figure 4.2** Model of positive events and capitalization attempts. 44

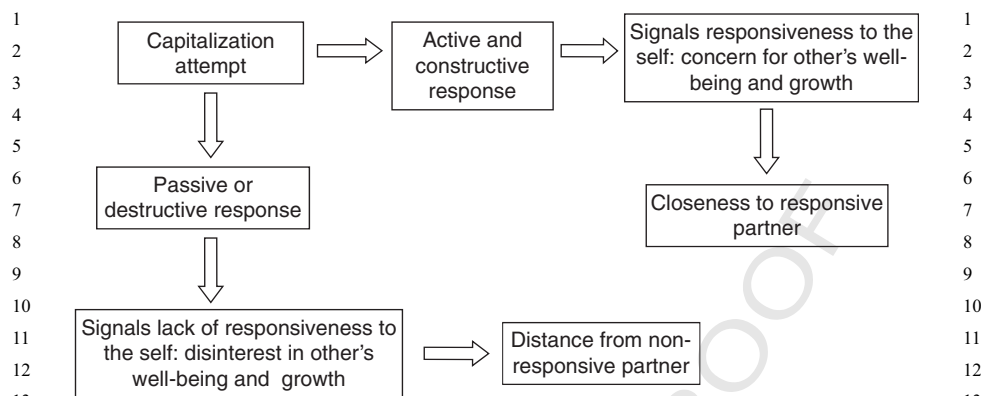


Figure 4.3 Model of responses to capitalization attempts.

and engagement with oneself; enthusiastic or otherwise supportive responses do so, signaling listeners' interest in the capitalizer's growth and well-being. This expression of interest underlies the social resources in capitalization: Responsiveness begets appreciation and caring, and thereby increases the likelihood of reciprocated responsiveness (Reis et al., 2004) as well as other forms of propartner behavior (a process that Rusbult et al., 2006 labeled *mutual cyclical growth*). Propartner behaviors are associated with affective outcomes, such as satisfaction and commitment, and behavioral outcomes, such as trust, accommodation, and the willingness to sacrifice. On the other hand, emotionally disengaged or nonsupportive responses reveal disinterest in the capitalizer's growth and well-being and are expected to create distance and *mutual cyclical deterioration*: a mutually self-perpetuating reluctance to enact prorelational behaviors with the partner. Relevant evidence for these propositions is presented later in this chapter.

3. SHARING POSITIVE EVENTS

3.1. What types of event are shared and with whom?

To determine when and with whom people share positive events, we have conducted several daily experience studies. In our first study (Gable et al., 2004, Study 1), we asked people to briefly describe their best event of the day for 7 days. Events ranged from the mundane (such as receiving a note from a friend or being complimented by a boss) to the seemingly weighty (such as being accepted into graduate school or meeting one's "future spouse"). Over half of the events (57%) concerned social relationships

1 with family, friends, and romantic partners, about 36% were about jobs or 1
2 schoolwork, and about 7% fell into the category of health and body (e.g., 2
3 exercise, sleep, weight). 3

4 Participants were also asked how important each event was to them 4
5 using a continuous Likert-type scale. Finally, participants were asked the 5
6 extent that they let other people know about this event using a continuous 6
7 measure in which 1 indicated “not at all” and 5 indicated “very much.” 7
8 Therefore in this study, we were able to compare no-sharing days to days in 8
9 which they shared their most positive event by coding a response of 1 as 9
10 “did not share” and all other responses (2–5 on the scale) as “did share.” 10
11 We found that participants in this study shared (to some extent) their most 11
12 positive event of the day slightly more than 70% of the time. Interestingly, 12
13 social and nonsocial events were equally likely to be shared with others. 13
14 More important events were shared to a greater extent. However, the 14
15 average correlation across days between event importance and the contin- 15
16 uous measure of extent of sharing was low to moderate (0.26), which 16
17 indicates that even events of low relative importance were shared at times, 17
18 and events of high importance were occasionally not shared. 18

19 Similar frequencies of telling positive events were found in a study of 19
20 214 undergraduates (Reis et al., 2009, Study 5). These participants provided 20
21 daily reports online for 2 weeks. Participants told someone about their event 21
22 about 60% of the time. In this study, they also reported on how “positive” 22
23 the event was on a scale of 1 (good) to 7 (outstanding) and how “important” 23
24 the event was on a scale of 1 (not important) to 7 (very important). 24
25 Consistent with the earlier findings, more positive and more important 25
26 events were more likely to be related to others. 26

27 The frequency of positive event sharing in daily experience studies may 27
28 seem high, given that prior to these studies the process was rarely investi- 28
29 gated. However, related research using different methods has found similar 29
30 estimates. For example, Algoe and Haidt (2009) asked participants to 30
31 remember and then describe a time when they got something they had 31
32 really wanted. They were asked, what, if anything they did as a result of the 32
33 positive event. Over 80% of participants spontaneously mentioned having 33
34 told someone else or wanting to tell other people about their event. 34

35 These studies do not indicate with whom people are sharing their 35
36 positive events. Thus, in a subsequent study we focused on this question 36
37 (Gable et al., 2004, Study 4). For 10 days, we asked people to report on their 37
38 most positive event of the day and who, if anyone, they told about this 38
39 event. Specifically, they used a checklist to indicate if they shared the event 39
40 with a friend, roommate, sibling, parent, romantic partner, or other person. 40
41 Participants were asked to check all that were applicable. They also indi- 41
42 cated whether the extent the event itself was due to luck or their own effort. 42

43 Again, we found that people shared their most positive event on the 43
44 majority of days, 80% of the time. Events capitalized on did not differ from 44

1 those that were not capitalized on in terms of the extent to which they were 1
2 perceived to be due to luck or effort. Nearly all (97%) of the people with 2
3 whom the event was shared were close relationship partners, friends, siblings, 3
4 parents, roommates, or romantic partners. Only 3% of events were shared 4
5 with others such as coworkers and acquaintances. This study also replicated 5
6 our earlier finding that both major and minor events were shared in that there 6
7 was only a small to moderate (albeit significant) correlation between event 7
8 importance ratings and the number of people told ($r = 0.17$). 8
9

10 3.2. Sharing events with close others 10

11 The finding that positive events were shared almost exclusively with rela- 11
12 tively close others confirms our contention that capitalization plays a role 12
13 not only in intrapersonal processes, such as memory and savoring, but also in 13
14 interpersonal processes. Moreover, as outlined above, the other person's 14
15 response is key to understanding outcomes for both the discloser and the 15
16 relationship between the responder and the discloser (e.g., Collins & 16
17 Feeney, 2000; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Thus, just as the response of others 17
18 during stressful times molds outcomes, the response of others in good times 18
19 molds outcomes. 19
20

21 Is the reliance on close others in good times incongruous with recent 21
22 work on the role of attachment processes in social support (Bowlby, 1973; 22
23 Hazan & Shaver, 1988)? Attachment researchers have typically focused on 23
24 the tendency for individuals to turn to others to relieve anxiety and other 24
25 negative emotions, often described as the safe haven function of attachment 25
26 (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2004). These studies have examined normative 26
27 processes and individual differences in social support seeking and provision 27
28 in times of stress (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2000). Bowlby (1988) also stressed 28
29 the secure base function of attachment, which describes how attachment 29
30 figures provide a base from which individuals can explore their environ- 30
31 ment. Although little work has examined exploration in adults (in contrast 31
32 to many studies of childhood exploration), based on the distinction between 32
33 appetitive and aversive process outlined above, it is likely an area ripe for 33
34 inquiry. Indeed the few studies that have examined attachment-related 34
35 processes in nonstressful times have found that attachment figures also play 35
36 an important role in exploration (e.g., Elliot & Reis, 2003; Feeney, 2004; 36
37 Green & Campbell, 2000). Sharing positive events is likely one way in 37
38 which these relationships are maintained. 38
39

40 3.3. Perceptions of reactions: Does reality matter? 40

41 A perennial question in research of this sort is whether actual, objective 41
42 responses matter, or instead, whether it is only perceptions of the partner's 42
43 behavior that are critical. Of course, perceptions of a partner's 43
44 44

1 responsiveness are proximal to relationship outcomes, in the sense that 1
2 actual responsiveness is unlikely to be effective if misperceived by recipients. 2
3 However, given substantial debate in the literature about the extent to 3
4 which perceptions of a partner's behavior represent motivated construals 4
5 (e.g., Murray, 1999), and further, given accumulated evidence that gener- 5
6 ally finds only modest correlations between provider and recipient reports 6
7 of social support (e.g., Coriell & Cohen, 1995; see Dunkel-Schetter & 7
8 Bennett, 1990 for a related review), we briefly address this distinction. 8

9 Reis et al. (2004) provide a detailed review of studies providing evi- 9
10 dence, on the one hand, for the role of motivated construal and, on the 10
11 other hand, for the impact of actual support. At least two types of studies 11
12 support the former position. In the first, personality variables influence 12
13 perceptions of a partner's responsiveness during social interaction. For 13
14 example, numerous studies have shown that a quartet of closely related 14
15 traits predisposing individuals to worry about rejection and a partner's love 15
16 and regard—*anxious attachment, low self-esteem, rejection sensitivity, and* 16
17 *reassurance seeking*—predict more negative ratings of a partner's availability 17
18 and support, controlling for ratings of the partner provided by the partner or 18
19 independent coders (e.g., Downey et al., 1998; Murray et al., 2000, 2003; 19
20 Simpson et al., 1992). A second line of evidence comes from research 20
21 showing that people may project the level of responsive feelings they have 21
22 for their relationship partners onto their perceptions of how responsive 22
23 those partners are to them (Lemay & Clark, 2008). 23

24 On the other side of this distinction are laboratory-based observational 24
25 studies showing that support perceptions can be traced back to observer- 25
26 verified behavioral exchanges (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2000), as well as daily 26
27 diary studies showing that partners agree to a significant extent about 27
28 many of their constructive and destructive interchanges (e.g., Gable et al., 28
29 2003a,b). Furthermore, studies that experimentally manipulate responsive 29
30 support show appropriately corresponding changes in how that support is 30
31 experienced (e.g., Feeney, 2004). After reviewing this evidence, Reis et al. 31
32 (2004) concluded that “both reality and social construction matter—that is, 32
33 that reports of social support are likely to possess both a kernel of truth and a 33
34 shell of motivated elaboration” (p. 214). Of note, that review was based 34
35 largely on studies of conflict-related and social supportive behavior, which, 35
36 as discussed earlier, may differ meaningfully from responses to positive 36
37 events. Further research is needed. 37

38 39 3.4. Reactions to capitalization attempts 39 40

41 In our initial pass at investigating reactions to capitalization attempts, we 41
42 focused on the perceptions the discloser (capitalizer). Of course, as discussed 42
43 in the preceding section, the actual response and the interpretation of that 43
44 response are important; however, we viewed the perception of a partner's 44

1 reaction as proximal, compared to the partner's actual response, which is 1
2 more distal. For example, even if an actual response is objectively support- 2
3 ive, it is unlikely to have a concordant impact unless it is also viewed as 3
4 supportive by the discloser. 4

5 The first studies of reactions to capitalization attempts focused on per- 5
6 ceptions of how a relationship partner *typically* responds when a positive 6
7 event has been shared. We began by adapting Rusbult and colleagues' 7
8 typology of responses to a partner's negative behavior, such as criticisms, 8
9 snapping, and other relationship transgressions (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1982), 9
10 known as *accommodation responses*. Their model, which has received exten- 10
11 sive empirical support, differentiated responses to a partner's potentially 11
12 destructive behavior along two independent dimensions: constructive- 12
13 destructive and active-passive. Constructive reactions to problematic 13
14 behavior can be either active (e.g., "he/she talks about what is going on") 14
15 or passive (e.g., "he/she gives me the benefit of the doubt and forgets about 15
16 it"), and destructive responses can be either active (termed *exit*; e.g., 16
17 "he/she considers breaking up") or passive (termed *neglect*; e.g., "he/she 17
18 avoids me for awhile"). Rusbult and colleagues have found that active- 18
19 constructive responses are positively associated with relationship well- 19
20 being, whereas both active and passive types of destructive responses 20
21 are negatively associated with relationship well-being. Evidence for 21
22 passive-constructive responses is more mixed; in certain circumstances, 22
23 they are beneficial (although less so than active-constructive responses) 23
24 but in other circumstances they are unrelated to relationship well-being 24
25 (Rusbult et al., 1991). 25

26 Adopting this framework, we differentiated possible reactions to positive 26
27 event disclosures. Specifically we conceptualized active-constructive 27
28 responses as enthusiastic and involved support, passive-constructive 28
29 responses as quiet or silent support, active-destructive responses as reactions 29
30 that undercut the event, and passive-destructive responses as reactions that 30
31 ignore the event. Thus, our conceptualization of possible reactions to 31
32 capitalization attempts was as follows: 32

33 *Active-constructive.* An active-constructive response is one in which 33
34 the responder expresses involvement, excitement, or enthusiasm about the 34
35 positive event. This is often accomplished by asking questions about the 35
36 event, seeking additional details about the event, elaborating on the possi- 36
37 ble implications and benefits of the event for the discloser, and commenting 37
38 on why the event is meaningful to the discloser in particular. The responder 38
39 often displays or conveys emotions such as interest, happiness, or pride. 39

40 *Passive-constructive.* A passive-constructive response is one in which the 40
41 discloser perceives a positive attitude toward the event, but the responder 41
42 says very little or is silent about the event. This may be accomplished 42
43 through a pleasant but short or quiet exchange. This response differs from 43
44 the active-constructive response primarily in the responder's level of 44

1 involvement. A passive–constructive response does not ask questions about 1
2 the event, elaborate on its implications for the capitalizer, or comment on 2
3 the personal meaningfulness of the event to the discloser. 3

4 *Active–destructive.* An active–destructive response is one in which the 4
5 responder is attentive and involved, but the feedback is negative in valence. 5
6 This is often done by pointing out negative implications of the event, 6
7 reframing the event less favorably than the discloser did, and minimizing 7
8 the event’s significance. 8

9 *Passive–destructive.* A passive–destructive response is one in which the 9
10 disclosure of the event is minimally acknowledged, if at all. This can be 10
11 accomplished in one of two ways, both of which convey little or no interest 11
12 in the event or the implications of the event for the discloser. The responder 12
13 can either immediately change the subject to discuss something completely 13
14 different or instead direct the conversation to something that happened to 14
15 him or her. 15

16 Consider the following example. Jay calls his fiancé Cynthia from his 16
17 software engineering job to tell her that he was promoted to the senior 17
18 engineer position. If Cynthia provides an active–constructive response it 18
19 would sound something like this: “That is wonderful news! You have great 19
20 leadership skills and you will make a wonderful team leader. This means that 20
21 management recognizes your talent. This is a big step in your career. I am so 21
22 proud of you. What is your first assignment? Will you be changing offices?” 22
23 A passive–constructive response would sound something like this: “That’s 23
24 nice, dear.” If Cynthia provides an active–destructive response it would 24
25 sound something like this: “Are you ready for that kind of responsibility? 25
26 You will probably have to work even longer hours. I thought Joe was being 26
27 considered for that position; he is really talented. I bet there is a lot more 27
28 paperwork with that position.” Finally, a passive–destructive response 28
29 would sound something like “Should I pick something up for dinner 29
30 tonight or do you want to do take out?” or “Wait until I tell you what 30
31 happened to *me* today?” 31
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34 3.4.1. Measuring responses to capitalization attempts 34

35 To assess responses to capitalization attempts, we created a measure of 35
36 perceptions of the typical response of another person when a positive 36
37 event is shared. This measure, called the perceived responses to capitaliza- 37
38 tion attempts (PRCAs), consists of 12 items which were chosen from a 38
39 larger set based on pilot testing. There are three items assessing each of the 39
40 four types of responses described above. See Fig. 4.4 for sample items and 40
41 subscale structure. Participants are asked to consider how “X” responds 41
42 when “you tell him or her about something good that has happened to 42
43 you.” Participants then rate the extent to which each of the items describes 43
44 the typical response of “X.” 44

	Constructive	Destructive	
Active	... my partner usually reacts to my good fortune enthusiastically”	... he/she points out the potential problems or down sides of the good event”	
Passive	... my partner says little but I know he/she is happy for me”	... sometimes I get the impression that he/she doesn't care much”	

Figure 4.4 Sample items from the PRCA (Gable et al., 2004), depicted in terms of the conceptual model of the two dimensions that underlie responses to capitalization attempts. *Note:* Model adapted from Rusbult et al.’s (1991) model of accommodation. PRCA items begin with the stem, “When I tell my partner about something good that happened to me.”

The PRCA was first examined in a study of 59 dating couples (Gable et al., 2004, Study 2). Both members of the couple completed the PRCA along with several measures of relationship well-being (e.g., commitment, intimacy). The four subscales of the PRCA showed good reliability with alphas ranging from 0.66 to 0.87. In addition, we found that the active–constructive subscale was negatively correlated with the other three subscales, whereas the passive–constructive, active–destructive, and passive–destructive subscales were positively correlated with one another.

To provide evidence for validity, we examined how the four subscales predicted relationship well-being. The active–constructive subscale was positively correlated with relationship well-being whereas the passive–constructive, active–destructive, and passive–destructive subscales were each negatively correlated with relationship health. (This pattern of correlations is discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.)

Based on these results, we created a composite PRCA scale by subtracting the passive–constructive, active–destructive, and passive–destructive scores from the active–constructive score. The composite score was positively related to relationship well-being. Participants in this study also completed a parallel measure of accommodation (Rusbult et al., 1991). The correlation between the composite accommodation measure and the composite PRCA measure was 0.41 for women and 0.43 for men, indicating that the PRCA partly taps “good relationship behavior” but has considerable unique variance as well.

1 Typical responses to capitalization attempts were next examined with 1
2 the PRCA in a study of 89 married couples (Gable et al., 2004, Study 3). 2
3 Both spouses completed the PRCA in addition to several daily and general 3
4 measures of relationship well-being. The pattern of correlations in this study 4
5 was similar to that observed in the previous study, and similar as well for 5
6 men and women. In addition, we included a standard measure of marital 6
7 satisfaction and found that the PRCA predicted the daily indicators of 7
8 relationship health, over and above general satisfaction with a relationship 8
9 partner. 9

10 Perceived typical responses to capitalization attempts have also been 10
11 examined in parents and children using the PRCA (Cohen et al., 2009). 11
12 Children reported on their parents' typical reaction to their capitalization 12
13 attempts and parents reported on their how they typically respond to their 13
14 child's capitalization attempts. Providing reasonable evidence of convergent 14
15 validity, parent and child reports on the PRCA were correlated ($r = 0.56$). 15
16 Not surprisingly, parents' reports of their own behavior were slightly more 16
17 positive than their child's reports of their behavior. 17

18 Finally in another study, we compared PRCA scores to actual behavior 18
19 (Gable et al., 2006). Couples who had been dating for a minimum of 6 months 19
20 (average more than 2 years) first completed the PRCA and then participated in 20
21 positive event disclosure discussions and negative event disclosure discussions 21
22 (more details on the sample and methods of this study are described in a 22
23 subsequent section). Each partner took turns disclosing a personal positive or 23
24 negative event. Following each discussion the disclosing partner completed a 24
25 measure assessing how understood, validated, and cared for (responsiveness) 25
26 they felt. These discussions were also videotaped and the partners' responses in 26
27 the positive event discussions were later coded for how active versus passive 27
28 and constructive versus destructive they were. 28

29 If the PRCA has discriminant validity, it should relate to postinteraction 29
30 ratings of responsiveness following discussions of positive but not negative 30
31 events. As predicted, when both responsiveness measures were included in 31
32 regression equation, only the positive event responsiveness ratings were 32
33 associated with the PRCA. This study also examined convergent validity 33
34 by comparing participants' ratings of their partners' typical behavior on the 34
35 PRCA to the partners' observed and coded behavior during the positive 35
36 event discussion. Controlling for the importance of the event chosen for 36
37 discussion, the PRCA predicted actual behavior in the laboratory for both 37
38 men and women. Specifically Gable et al. found that participants who 38
39 reported their partners were typically more active and constructive and 39
40 less passive or destructive had partners who behaved in a more active and 40
41 constructive and less passive or destructive way when participants shared 41
42 their positive event in the lab. 42

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1 In summary, the PRCA was designed to measure perceptions of how a
2 relationship partner typically reacts to capitalization attempts. Active and
3 constructive responding are negatively correlated with the three other types
4 of responses, which are positively correlated with one another. In addition,
5 the measure shows good internal reliability and discriminant validity from
6 other measures, and correlates well with behaviors enacted in the laboratory.

4. CAPITALIZATION PROCESSES AND INTRAPERSONAL OUTCOMES

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13 The research in this section describes the association between capitali-
14 zation processes and outcomes that are primarily intrapersonal. The term
15 “capitalization processes” encompasses both capitalization attempts—the
16 act of relating positive events to another person—and perceived responses
17 to capitalization attempts—the perceived response of the individual being
18 told about the events. Neither predictor includes information about the
19 event itself. Accordingly, when examining capitalization attempts and per-
20 ceived responses to capitalization attempts, our analyses in most instances
21 control for the importance of the event being capitalized upon. This helps
22 rule out differences in event impact as an alternative explanation for our
23 findings. In some of the studies we describe, perceived responses to capitali-
24 zation are assessed globally, as a partner’s general tendency to respond in one
25 or another way; in other studies, the perceived capitalization pertains to a
26 particular interaction.

27 In our first study (Gable et al., 2004, Study 1), 154 undergraduates
28 provided daily reports for 1 week about “the most important positive
29 event or issue of the day” and “the most important problem or stressful
30 event of the day.” Participants were also asked the extent to which they had
31 related each of these events to another person. For control purposes,
32 participants also rated the events on importance and stressfulness. Multilevel
33 modeling, controlling for rated importance of the positive event and stress-
34 fulness of the negative event, revealed that capitalization attempts were
35 significantly associated with increases in daily positive affect ($b = 0.20$)
36 and subjective well-being ($b = 0.23^3$). Because these were group-mean
37 centered multilevel equations, individual differences in the predictor vari-
38 ables are controlled and any individual differences in the outcome variable
39 are also controlled. These numbers represent daily increases over one’s level
40 of the dependent variable when the day’s best event is related to another

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43 ³ Throughout this chapter, we report the unstandardized coefficients from multilevel modeling procedures
44 as b . They are akin to unstandardized regression coefficients. They represent changes from the intercept on
the dependent measure.

1 person compared to days when it is not. In subsequent analyses, we also 1
2 controlled for trait levels of neuroticism and extraversion, and the results 2
3 remained essentially the same. 3

4 In a second and similar diary study, this one conducted over 10 days, 94 4
5 undergraduates provided daily reports of the most important positive event 5
6 and most stressful negative event of the day (Gable et al., 2004, Study 4). 6
7 This study differed from the former one in that participants also reported if 7
8 they had told at least one person from each of the following categories: 8
9 friend, roommate, sibling, parent, romantic partner, and other. This was 9
10 intended as a measure of the diversity of their capitalization relationships. 10
11 Participants also described the response of the first person they had told, 11
12 using a 4-item scale that had one item from each of the four PRCA 12
13 subscales (described earlier). Consistent with the earlier results, telling 13
14 someone else about the best positive event of the day was associated with 14
15 higher positive affect and life satisfaction, controlling for positive event 15
16 importance and negative event stressfulness. Similar results were obtained 16
17 for the number of people told. Perceived responsiveness also predicted 17
18 increases in positive affect and subjective well-being, over and above the 18
19 importance of the positive event, and whether or not the event had been 19
20 related to at least one other person. Capitalizers experienced significantly 20
21 better outcomes when the response was perceived to be more active– 21
22 constructive and less passive or destructive. 22

23 We replicated these results in another study of 214 undergraduates (Reis 23
24 et al., 2009), who for 2 weeks reported on the best event of the day and 24
25 provided daily reports on a variety of outcomes using a secure website that 25
26 verified the time of report. Analyses controlled for the positivity/negativity 26
27 of the best and worst events of the day, the importance of each, and 27
28 yesterday's report on the outcome variable (so that the dependent variable 28
29 in each analysis became change from the prior day; Reis & Gosling, 2009). 29
30 Once again, telling others about the most positive event of the day was 30
31 associated with higher positive affect. Other similar and significant benefits 31
32 were found for daily self-esteem and loneliness (i.e., predicting daily fluctu- 32
33 tations around the individual's mean over the 14 days), as well as on a new 33
34 5-item measure of broadening that encompassed a more open-minded, 34
35 creative mental focus, consistent with Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build" 35
36 model of positive emotion. (Sample items were "Today, to what extent did 36
37 your activities feel creative and 'fresh?'," "Today, to what extent were your 37
38 energies and attention focused on a narrow set of activities?" [reverse- 38
39 coded], and "Today, to what extent did you explore new ideas, new 39
40 activities, or new friendships?") 40

41 Two other daily diary studies compared the relative contribution to daily 41
42 well-being of perceived responses to the retelling of positive and negative 42
43 events. In one, Gable et al. (2008) had 76 participants keep track of their 43 Au6
44 most important positive and negative events of the day for 2 weeks. 44

1 Every day they reported whom they told first (if anyone) and how that 1
2 person responded. Responses to positive events were described on a 4-item 2
3 version of the PRCA scale, with one item for each of the four styles. 3
4 Responses to negative events were assessed with items from Barbee and 4
5 Cunningham's (1995) measure of responses to social support attempts, with 5
6 one item for each of four responses—solve, solace, dismiss, and escape. 6
7 Multilevel analyses simultaneously entering responses to both positive and 7
8 negative events (and again controlling for the importance of the events in 8
9 question) demonstrated that the capitalization composite significantly pre- 9
10 dicted improvements in daily positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, 10
11 and feelings of acceptance, whereas the social support composite did not. 11
12 A second study by Maisel and Gable (2009; see also Gable & Maisel, 2009) 12 Au7
13 was a daily diary study with 67 cohabiting couples (ranging in age from 19 13
14 to 56), examining personal well-being on days in which partners were 14
15 perceived to be responsive (or unresponsive) to days in which events were 15
16 not discussed with partners (which we refer to as *baseline*). This study thus 16
17 examined these processes not only within-person but also within-partner, 17
18 because it was based on differences in the same partner's responsiveness. 18
19 As shown in Fig. 4.5A and B, participants fared better than baseline when 19
20 partners were perceived to be responsive to positive event disclosures 20
21 (represented in Fig. 4.5A as less sadness) and lower than baseline when 21
22 partner responses to negative event disclosures were felt to be unresponsive 22
23 (represented in Fig. 4.5B as more sadness). 23

24 Daily diary studies have the substantial advantage of minimizing certain 24
25 biases that are common in global retrospective measures, such as recall (Reis 25
26 & Gable, 2000). Nevertheless, global measures can be useful in describing 26
27 broad trends. Several such studies have provided results consistent with the 27
28 daily experience findings. For example, in a study of 89 married couples 28
29 (described earlier; Gable et al., 2004, Study 3), scores on the PRCA were 29
30 significantly positively correlated with overall positive affectivity and sub- 30
31 jective well-being for both husbands and wives (0.26, 0.45, 0.36, and 0.31, 31
32 respectively). Similarly, in two samples of 84 and 89 college undergraduates, 32
33 the total PRCA capitalization score correlated significantly with the Satis- 33
34 faction with Life Scale ($r_s = 0.24$ and 0.35 , both $p < 0.05$). 34

35 The benefits of perceived positive responses in capitalization situations 35
36 have also been found with regard to parents. Cohen et al. (2009) adminis- 36
37 tered the PRCA scale to a sample of 94 undergraduates, asking them to 37
38 describe a parent's typical response to good news. As in the prior studies, 38
39 students' PRCA scores were associated with significantly higher positive 39
40 affect and life satisfaction, and significantly lower negative affect. 40

41 In sum, these studies indicate that both the act of telling others about 41
42 personal good fortune or the best thing that happened during the day and 42
43 perceiving their responses to be enthusiastic are associated with personal 43
44 well-being. 44

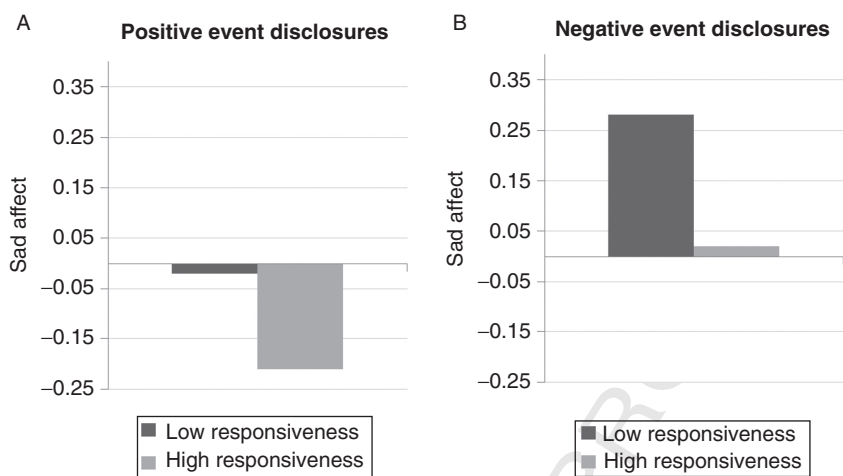


Figure 4.5 (A) Daily sadness depicted as a function of whether partner's reaction to disclosure of a positive event was more or less responsive than their average reaction to positive event disclosures. Baseline is days in which no positive events were experienced and discussed. Low responsiveness days significantly differed from baseline and high responsiveness days, $p < 0.05$ (from Gable & Maisel, 2009). (B) Daily sadness depicted as a function of whether partner's reaction to disclosure of a negative event was more or less responsive than their average reaction to negative event disclosures. Baseline is days in which no negative events were experienced and discussed. Low responsiveness days significantly differed from baseline and high responsiveness days, $p < 0.05$ (from Maisel & Gable, 2009).

4.1. Mechanisms

4.1.1. Maximizing

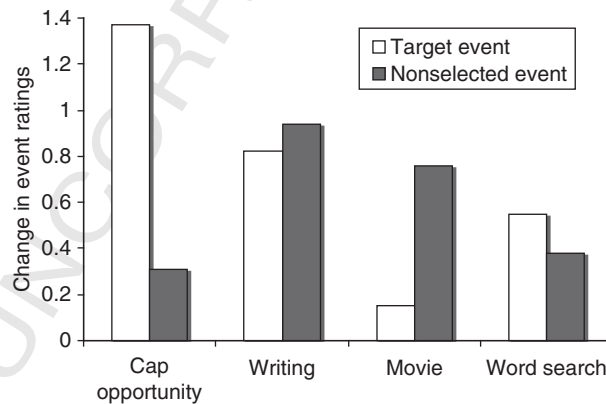
Earlier, we mentioned two intrapersonal mechanisms proposed by Langston (1994) to contribute to the benefits of capitalization: maximizing the event's value and memorability. We have examined the first of these in two laboratory experiments and one daily diary study. Capitalization interactions help increase the event's value by providing feedback from valued others about the event's significance. As described in the theory section of this chapter, this feedback provides validation about the event itself, as well as signifying the recipient's valuing of the person. These should boost the perceived value of the event in question.

Reis et al. (2009, Study 1) used an experimental paradigm with previously unacquainted persons to examine this hypothesis for two reasons. First, experimentation allowed manipulation of responses to create conditions that facilitated comparison of our interpersonal process model with alternative explanations. One of these alternative models suggests that capitalization experiences elevate positive affect in a very general way,

1 rather than specific to the focal events. Second, we employed unacquainted 1
2 persons because responses are substantially more difficult to manipulate 2
3 within existing relationships, given that partners have relatively stable 3
4 expectations of each other based on history. 4

5 In these experiments, participants were first asked to describe and rate 5
6 the three best things “that have happened to you in the past two years.” 6
7 Participants did so by placing an “X” along a horizontal line with anchors at 7
8 the beginning (“pretty good”), middle (“great”), and end (“the best thing 8
9 that ever happened to me”). We randomly selected either the second- or 9
10 third-most positive event and then asked participants to spend about 8 min 10
11 describing it to an interviewer who had been trained to respond enthusias- 11
12 tically and supportively. (For example, the interviewer smiled, made eye 12
13 contact, used a lively tone of voice, and said things like “Your friends must 13
14 be really proud of you.”) After these conversations, participants again rated 14
15 all three of their best-in-two-years events. (This rating scale prevented 15
16 participants from recalling their initial responses when completing the 16
17 second rating.) 17

18 As shown in Fig. 4.6, Reis et al. (2009, Study 1) found that ratings of 18
19 the event discussed increased significantly more than ratings of the event 19
20 not discussed. This supports the idea that capitalization interactions increase 20
21 the perceived value of events; if the outcome of capitalization interactions 21
22 was generalized mood effects, then ratings of both events should have 22
23 increased comparably. Moreover, the effect in this condition differed sig- 23
24 nificantly from three control conditions in which participants also rated 24
25 and then rerated their best-in-two-years events. In one condition, partici- 25
26 pants spent about 8 min writing an essay, describing their thoughts and 26
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42 **Figure 4.6** Change in ratings of events before and after randomly assigned activity 42
43 (from Reis et al., 2009, Study 1). 43
44 44

1 feelings about the target event. This kind of expressive writing can help 1
2 people cope with traumatic events (Frattaroli, 2006; Pennebaker, 2003) 2
3 and requires a similar amount of attention focused on the target event as in 3
4 the capitalization interactions. In a second control condition, participants 4
5 watched a humorous clip from the film, *Austin Powers—International Man* 5
6 *of Mystery*, to see if similar results might be obtained from generally 6
7 being in a good mood (Fredrickson, 1998). The final control condition 7
8 involved doing word-search puzzles. As Fig. 4.6 shows, none of these 8
9 conditions yielded differential increases favoring the event discussed over 9
10 the event not discussed, indicating that the act of recounting positive 10
11 events with an enthusiastic listener is responsible for the benefits of 11
12 capitalization. 12

13 In a second experiment, we asked whether capitalization depends on an 13
14 active–constructive response from the listener. Reis et al. (2009, Study 2) 14
15 compared the capitalization condition from the prior experiment (in which 15
16 the listener was enthusiastically engaged with the participant, as described 16
17 earlier) with another condition in which the listener adopted a more passive, 17
18 disengaged (but not hostile) orientation. For example, throughout the 18
19 participant’s recounting, the listener slouched and fidgeted, mostly avoided 19
20 eye contact, maintained a steady and fairly dry tone of voice, and said things 20
21 like, “Oh yeah, that’s nice.” Enthusiastic listening again led to a larger 21
22 differential gain for ratings of the chosen event over ratings of the non- 22
23 chosen event. In the passive confederate condition, the reverse occurred: 23
24 Ratings of the nonchosen event increased more than ratings of the chosen 24
25 (and discussed) event. This result dovetails with research showing that 25
26 inattentive, distracted listening but not attentive, responsive listening may 26
27 undermine the likelihood of finding personal meaning in oral narratives 27
28 (e.g., Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). 28

Au8

29 We also tested this hypothesis in a daily diary study involving 214 29
30 undergraduate students (Reis et al., 2009, Study 5). For 14 consecutive 30
31 evenings, participants were asked to log on to the study website before 31
32 going to bed and to answer questions about the events of the day. Included 32
33 in this survey were questions asking them to describe, in a single phrase 33
34 or sentence, “the best thing that happened to you today” and the day’s 34
35 “worst problem or concern.” Immediately afterward, participants rated 35
36 those events for positivity or negativity and for importance. They also 36
37 reported if they had told anyone about each of these events, and if they 37
38 had, how the other had responded. Later, between 1 and 3 days after the 38
39 final diary, participants returned for a laboratory session in which they were 39
40 given a list of the 14 positive and negative events they had reported during 40
41 the diary portion of the study. (Participants had not been forewarned about 41
42 this.) They were asked to rate each event according to how positively 42
43 (or negatively) they felt about the event “now.” 43
44 44

1 Consistent with the above experimental evidence, we expected higher 1
2 “postcasting” ratings for positive events that had been discussed, relative to 2
3 positive events that had not been discussed. We also expected that enthusi- 3
4 astic responses would be associated with increased postcasting. Hierarchical 4
5 linear modeling (Raudenbush et al., 2007) was used to test these hypotheses, 5 Au9
6 controlling for positivity and importance ratings of the events provided on 6
7 the days in which they occurred. As predicted, postcasted ratings of positive 7
8 events were significantly more positive if those events had been related to 8
9 another person, $b = 0.15$, $p < 0.02$. Also as predicted, on days an event was 9
10 shared, postcast ratings of positive events increased if partners’ responses had 10
11 been perceived as enthusiastic, $b = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$. Relating negative 11
12 events to others did not significantly affect later ratings, $b = 0.09$, ns. 12
13 However, the listener’s perceived supportiveness was significantly asso- 13
14 ciated with more negative ratings, $b = 0.11$, $p < 0.005$, suggesting that 14
15 supportive responses may have validated and magnified participants’ views 15
16 of how bad those events had been. 16

17 In sum, these three studies provide evidence for one of the mechanisms 17
18 believed to underlie the positive outcomes associated with capitalization, 18
19 namely that relating good news to others, and perceiving an enthusiastic 19
20 response, increases the perceived value of those events. 20
21

22 **4.1.2. Memorability**

23 Enhanced memorability provides a second mechanism for the long-term 23
24 benefits of capitalization. According to this explanation, because the act of 24
25 conversing about a personal positive event is likely to entail rehearsal, 25
26 reliving, and elaboration, it may increase the event’s salience and accessibil- 26
27 ity in memory, and hence its impact on personal well-being. On the other 27
28 hand, when people relate their negative events to others, the goal is more 28
29 likely to be “getting it off their chests,” purging the event or at least 29
30 minimizing its impact. Thus, capitalization on positive events can be 30
31 expected to enhance memorability in a way that seeking support for 31
32 negative events may not. 32

33 Gable et al. (2004, Study 4) evaluated this hypothesis in a 10-day 33
34 daily diary. Ninety-four undergraduates completed daily reports that 34
35 included questions about the most positive and most stressful events of 35
36 the day. As in prior studies, the booklets also included questions about 36
37 whom they had told about those events and ratings of event importance. 37
38 The day after the last diary report, participants came to a laboratory session 38
39 in which they received a “pop quiz,” asking them to list from memory as 39
40 many as possible of the positive and negative events from their diaries. 40
41 Two independent coders then compared these lists to the actual reports, 41
42 with 89% agreement. (Discrepancies were resolved by a third coder.) 42
43

1 On average, participants recalled 58.9% of their positive events and 1
2 51.9% of their negative events. Hierarchical linear modeling was used in 2
3 these analyses with the Bernoulli model for dichotomous outcomes 3
4 (that day's event recalled or not recalled), again controlling for the impor- 4
5 tance (or stressfulness) of the event. For positive events, participants were 5
6 more likely to recall events when they told more people about that event, 6
7 $b = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$. For negative events, the extent others were told about 7
8 the event did not relate significantly to memory, $b = 0.08$, ns. Thus, 8
9 capitalization attempts increase the memorability of events, whereas support 9
10 attempts for negative events do not. 10
11

13 4.2. Coping with good news 13

14
15 These findings suggest that it may be appropriate to view positive events as a 15
16 "coping" opportunity. Coping, usually defined in terms of managing the 16
17 demands of a stressful event, may be conceptualized as part of a larger 17
18 process of self-regulation (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Recent research 18
19 suggests that coping processes go beyond the description of strategies for 19
20 alleviating distress; positive outcomes—such as finding meaning, perceiving 20
21 benefits, and experiencing positive emotions—are also commonplace (see 21
22 Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004 for a review). If so, coping might be consid- 22
23 ered as an umbrella term for the diverse self-regulatory processes that are 23
24 involved in responding to significant events. Like stressful events, positive 24
25 events have the potential to affect individual well-being (positively, as 25
26 opposed to negatively in the case of stressful events), but their eventual 26
27 impact depends to a meaningful extent on what the individual does with the 27
28 event, given that it has occurred. This might be considered part of a pallet of 28
29 coping strategies. 29

30 Capitalization attempts represent one of these coping strategies: The 30
31 individual pursues a response from others that will enhance or prolong the 31
32 benefits of the positive event. Thus, capitalization attempts are similar in 32
33 focus to the better-known and more extensively studied process of social 33
34 support seeking (pursuing help or comfort from others to assuage distress), 34
35 in that both involve recounting one's circumstances to another (anticipated 35
36 to be) responsive, person. In both instances, when these attempts are 36
37 successful, they have personal and intrapersonal benefits; when unsuccessful, 37
38 they have corresponding costs. But capitalization and social support seeking 38
39 differ in at least one key respect: Whereas social support is hoped to resolve 39
40 or otherwise minimize the impact of events, capitalization attempts are 40
41 intended to maximize their impact. It may be fruitful, then, to consider 41
42 both capitalization attempts and support seeking as coping strategies aimed 42
43 at moderating the impact of events through social feedback. 43
44

5. CAPITALIZATION PROCESSES AND INTERPERSONAL OUTCOMES

Our model proposes that capitalization processes are linked not only to the intrapersonal outcomes described in the previous section but also to interpersonal outcomes. The research described in this section focuses on the association between capitalization processes and outcomes that are primarily social or interpersonal. Again, we will examine both capitalization attempts and responses to capitalization attempts (both typically and in response to specific exchanges) as predictors.

Paralleling findings from our studies of personal outcomes, on days people tell another person about a positive event they also experience increases in the quality of their close relationships. In one study, 76 participants reported on their most positive and negative event of the day (Gable et al., 2008). Participants indicated whether they had related those events to anyone and also completed a measure of acceptance. The measure of acceptance was straightforward: Participants simply indicated whether they felt more, less, or the same level of acceptance by members of their social networks. Multilevel modeling showed that on days people told at least one other person about their positive event, they felt significantly more accepted by others than they did on days they did not ($b = 0.10, p < 0.05$). Interestingly, telling at least one other person about the most negative event of the day was not significantly related to feelings of acceptance.⁴

In another daily diary study of 67 cohabiting couples (average length of cohabitation was 1.8 years, 24% were married), Gable (2009) examined whether outcomes specific to a particular (romantic) relationship were associated with telling that partner about a positive event. On days participants reported telling their partner about a positive event, they also reported feeling significantly greater connection to their partner and security in their relationships ($bs = 0.19/0.28$ and $0.19/0.21$,⁵ respectively, $ps < 0.01$).

Our model proposes that capitalization attempts alone do not account for interpersonal benefits. The response of the person with whom the event is disclosed should also account for significant variability in close relationship outcomes. Our first study in this regard focused on typical responses as assessed by the PRCA (Gable et al., 2004, Study 2). In this study, both members of 59 dating couples completed the PRCA and several measures of relationship health, including satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, and trust.

⁴ Note that although not significant, the coefficient was negative ($b = -0.05, p = 0.21$), indicating that if anything people felt *less* accepted on days they shared a negative event with at least one other person. This is further evidence for the difficult to resolve paradox that actual social support is sometimes not beneficial or even detrimental.

⁵ Unstandardized bs reported separately for days in which only the participant reported telling a positive event and days in which the participant and the partner reported that the participant talked about a positive event.

1 Results showed that the active–constructive subscale was positively corre- 1
2 lated with relationship outcomes, whereas the other three subscales 2
3 (passive–constructive, active–destructive, and passive–destructive) were 3
4 negatively correlated with relationship outcomes. In particular, the PRCA 4
5 composite score (active–constructive minus the other three subscales) was 5
6 significantly correlated with satisfaction, intimacy, and trust for both men 6
7 and women (r s ranged from 0.40 to 0.70), and marginally correlated with 7
8 commitment for men and women (r s = 0.28 and 0.23). To assess whether 8
9 these correlations reflected something unique about responses to positive 9
10 events (and not global patterns of responding to all situations), we recom- 10
11 puted these correlations controlling for perceptions of how a partner 11
12 responds to negative behaviors, known as *accommodation* (Rusbult et al., 12
13 1991). The pattern of correlations between relationship quality and the 13
14 PRCA composite score remained essentially the same. 14

15 Associations between perceived typical responses to capitalization 15
16 attempts and relationship well-being were also examined in a married 16
17 sample (Gable et al., 2004, Study 3). Eighty-nine married couples recruited 17
18 from the community (as described earlier) completed the PRCA, and 18
19 measures of intimacy (the PAIR; Shaefer & Olson, 1981) and global marital 19
20 satisfaction (Quality Marriage Index; Norton, 1983). Both spouses then 20
21 participated in a 2-week daily diary study in which they independently 21
22 reported their daily satisfaction, experiences of daily conflicts (major and/or 22
23 minor), and daily positive activities (doing something fun and/or doing 23
24 something relaxing).⁶ 24

25 Results showed that the higher participants rated their spouses' on 25
26 typical responses to capitalization attempts (the PRCA composite score), 26
27 the more intimacy they reported overall and the more satisfied they felt in 27
28 their relationships on a daily basis (r s ranged from 0.39 to 0.50, p s < 0.05). 28
29 In addition, PRCA composite scores were also significantly negatively 29
30 correlated with reports of daily conflict (–0.23 and –0.34, p s < 0.05, 30
31 men and women, respectively) and positively correlated with reports of 31
32 engaging in positive activities (0.26, p < 0.05 and 0.20, p < 0.10, men and 32
33 women, respectively). In addition, we computed partial correlations 33
34 controlling for global marital satisfaction to rule out the possibility that the 34
35 observed correlations were due to general positivity about the relationship. 35
36 When global marital satisfaction was controlled, the results remained essen- 36
37 tially the same. An important advantage of this study is that PRCA and 37
38 outcome scores were collected at different times, with different methods, 38
39 minimizing artifacts due to method commonality. In sum, results from this 39
40

41
42 ⁶ Couples engaged in some category of conflict (major or minor) on 21.3% of the days and some form of 42
43 positive activity (fun or relaxing) activity on 40.1% of the days. Moreover, agreement between husbands and 43
44 wives on whether these events occurred was quite high, ranging from 75% to 97% of the time across different 44
categories of events.

1 sample of spouses showed that people who perceive their partners to 1
2 typically be active–constructive and not passive or destructive when they 2
3 make capitalization attempts have higher relationship quality overall and on 3
4 a daily basis than people who perceive their partners to be less active– 4
5 constructive and more passive or destructive. 5

6 Bermis (2008) reported similar results in a study of 101 dating or 6
7 cohabiting couples. In her study, couples completed the PRCA along 7
8 with a battery of relationship measures. The PRCA composite score was 8
9 significantly correlated with measures of relationship quality, intimacy, 9
10 trust, commitment, and responsiveness, for both men and women (*r*s ranged 10
11 from 0.32 to 0.55, *p*s < 0.05). Moreover, active–constructive responding 11
12 was consistently and positively correlated with relationship outcomes 12
13 whereas the other three forms were again negatively correlated with rela- 13
14 tionship outcomes, for both men and women. The PRCA also predicted 14
15 breakups at a 3-month follow-up: Intact couples had significantly higher 15
16 PRCA scores in either partner’s report than broken couples. 16

17 To get a better understanding of perceived responses to capitalization 17
18 attempts, Gable et al. (2006) conducted an observational study of 79 18
19 heterosexual couples, all of whom had been dating for a minimum of 19
20 6 months (average dating time was 25.1 months; 43% cohabiting). Both 20
21 partners independently completed the PRCA and several measures of 21
22 relationship quality—satisfaction, commitment, and passionate love. All 22
23 three measures were highly correlated and loaded on one factor; therefore, 23
24 they were summed into a composite measure of relationship quality. Cou- 24
25 ples then participated in a series of videotaped interactions. Each member of 25
26 the couple discussed a personal positive event (capitalization condition) and 26
27 a negative event (social support condition), counterbalanced by condition 27
28 and gender. Following each interaction, the disclosing participant com- 28
29 pleted measures of how understood, validated, and cared for they felt 29
30 (perceived responsiveness; Reis et al., 2004). Finally, participants were 30
31 contacted 2 months later to determine their relationship status (together 31
32 or broken-up) and to complete the same relationship quality measures. 32

33 Results of this study replicated prior studies. The composite PRCA 33
34 measure was significantly correlated with relationship outcomes at 34
35 Time 1, *r*s = 0.41 for both men and women. In addition, PRCA scores 35
36 at Time 1 were significantly correlated with Time 2 relationship quality 36
37 scores for both men and women. PRCA scores also differed in couples 37
38 who dissolved their relationships before the 2-month follow-up. As shown 38
39 in Fig. 4.7, participants’ ratings of their partners’ typical capitalization 39
40 responses at Time 1 were lower in the dissolved couples than in the intact 40
41 couples. In sum, perceptions of how a partner typically responds to capitali- 41
42 zation attempts were associated with concurrent and future relationship 42
43 quality and relationship stability. 43
44 44

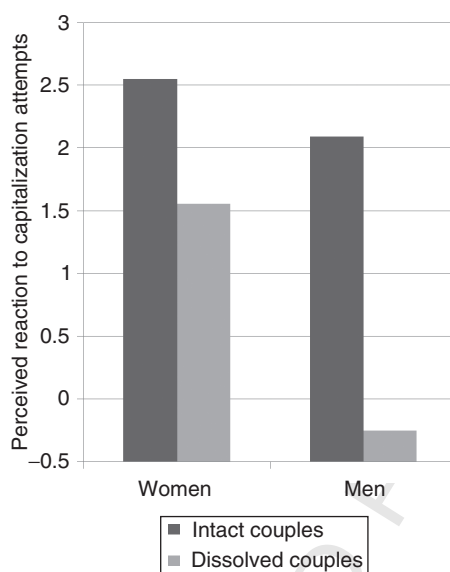


Figure 4.7 PRCA composite scores (range -3.22 to 6.00) of participants describing their partners' typical reactions to their capitalization attempts as a function of whether the couples were intact or broken up 6 months later. The two groups differed, $p < 0.07$ for women, $p < 0.05$ for men (Gable et al., 2006).

5.1. Actual behavior

Trained coders rated the behavior of responders during their partner's positive event disclosure on two dimensions: passive to active and constructive to destructive.⁷ Specifically, for the passive to active rating, coders rated the responding partner's behavior using a scale of from 1 (extremely passive) to 7 (extremely active). For the constructive to destructive rating, coders rated the responder's behavior on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely destructive) to 7 (extremely constructive). Prior to completing the ratings, coders were provided examples of behavior at each level on the scale and completed training ratings of behavior. A composite behavioral rating was made by summing these two scores such that higher numbers indicated more active and constructive scores and lower numbers indicated more passive or destructive scores. Higher ratings of the responder's behavior (i.e., more active and constructive responses) were associated with significantly higher postinteraction ratings of perceived responsiveness by disclosers. These results dovetail nicely with previously described results. That is, just as

⁷ Scores on the two dimensions were uncorrelated for ratings of both males' and females' behavior ($r_s = 0.06$ and 0.02 , $p > 0.60$).

1 typical response patterns are associated with global and daily relationship
2 outcomes, responses to particular capitalization attempts predicted postin-
3 teraction relationship quality.

4 In addition, observed behavior during the videotaped interaction pre-
5 dicted future relationship quality and relationship stability. When respon-
6 ders reacted in a more active–constructive way in the laboratory session,
7 their partners reported higher relationship quality on the follow-up mea-
8 sures 8 weeks later.⁸ Moreover, couples in which the women were rated
9 as less active and constructive during the interaction were significantly
10 more likely to be broken up 8 weeks later (ratings of men’s responses did
11 not predict breakup).

14 5.2. Experimental studies

15 Thus far the studies of interpersonal outcomes described have been correla-
16 tional. Although these studies have included longitudinal analyses, observa-
17 tions of behavior in the laboratory, and partialling of potential confounds,
18 the power of experimental manipulation and random assignment to condi-
19 tions would further support the model. We have conducted several experi-
20 ments focused on relationship outcomes. One experiment (Strachman &
21 Gable, 2007) involved 84 participants who arrived at the laboratory with
22 their romantic partners from whom they were immediately separated so that
23 participants completed the study independently.⁹ All participants were led to
24 believe that they performed extremely well on a difficult task and that their
25 partner knew of this extraordinary performance. Participants then received
26 an email ostensibly from their partner. In fact, the email was randomly
27 chosen from one of four messages created by the experimenters. Participants
28 either received an active–constructive email (which expressed pride and
29 enthusiasm for the performance), a passive–constructive response (which
30 conveyed knowledge of the performance and a smiley face emoticon), an
31 active–destructive response (which undermined the performance), or a
32 passive–destructive response (which did not comment on the performance).
33 Participants were then permitted to respond to their partner with their own
34 email. These return emails were coded for positive feelings of love, appreci-
35 ation, and happiness. As predicted, participants in the active–constructive
36 condition expressed significantly more positive sentiments (means = 1.75
37 for women and 1.25 for men) than participants in the other three conditions
38 combined (means = 0.60 for women and 0.55 for men).

40 ⁸ For women, there was an interaction such that when they discussed an important event and their partner did
41 not respond in an active constructive way, they reported lower relationship quality. If they discussed less
42 important events this pattern did not emerge.

43 ⁹ The cover story for this study was that the experimenters were interested in multitasking, specifically
44 completing difficult tasks while interacting with relationship partners. All participants were told they were
assigned to email-contact condition.

1 In another experiment, 48 dating couples participated in a week-long 1
2 daily experience study (Gonzaga et al., 2009). All couples were instructed to 2
3 take turns discussing their most important personal positive event of the day 3
4 and then independently and privately record their positive and negative 4
5 feelings. Prior to the week-long study however, couples had been randomly 5
6 assigned to an experimental or control condition. Couples in the exp- 6
7 erimental condition received verbal and written instructions from the 7
8 experimenter regarding active–constructive responses. They also watched 8
9 a video of actors engaging in different types of responses. These couples 9
10 were instructed to try to respond to their partners in an active–constructive 10
11 manner. Couples in the control condition received no information and no 11
12 instructions. Results indicated that couples in the experimental condition 12
13 reported significantly more positive feelings (e.g., love) and significantly less 13
14 negative feelings (e.g., contempt) toward their partner following nightly 14
15 interactions than those in the control condition. 15

16 Another experiment was designed to examine closeness and liking in 16
17 previously unacquainted dyads (Reis et al., 2009, Study 3). In this study, 17
18 confederates interviewed participants about an important positive event 18
19 (similar to Reis et al., 2009, Study 2, described earlier). Confederate inter- 19
20 viewers responded in either an active–constructive manner (asked ques- 20
21 tions, expressed interest and enthusiasm) or a passive–constructive manner 21
22 (i.e., took notes but said little). A third condition created a fun interaction 22
23 that obviated potential responsiveness—participants described Dr. Seuss 23
24 pictures while the confederate, who could not see the pictures, attempted 24
25 to draw them (based on Fraley & Aron’s, 2004, task). At the end of the study 25 Au10
26 and again 1 week later, participants indicated their enjoyment of the 26
27 experience and their feelings toward the interviewer. Results are shown 27
28 in Fig. 4.8. As expected, at both time points both the active–constructive 28
29 capitalization and fun interaction control condition led to more liking for 29
30 the interviewer than the passive–constructive condition. But the active– 30
31 constructive capitalization condition led to significantly greater felt close- 31
32 ness, perceived responsiveness, trust, and willingness to self-disclose than the 32
33 two other conditions (which did not differ significantly from each other). 33

34 A final experiment (Reis et al., 2009, Study 4) was designed to examine 34
35 prosocial behavior toward responsive listeners in an anonymous field 35
36 setting. In this experiment, participants were approached on a campus street 36
37 by an interviewer who asked them to describe the best thing that had 37
38 happened to them in the past few years. The experimenter responded 38
39 with one of four scripted responses: *enthusiasm* (e.g., “that’s really great!”), 39
40 *disparagement* (e.g., “what’s so positive about that?”), *neutrality* (e.g., “thank 40
41 you, now let’s move on”), and a *positive mood condition* (offering a piece of 41
42 candy) to compare the effects of capitalization with positive moods. Parti- 42
43 cipants were then surreptitiously given an opportunity to do something nice 43
44 for the experimenter by returning an accidental overpayment for 44

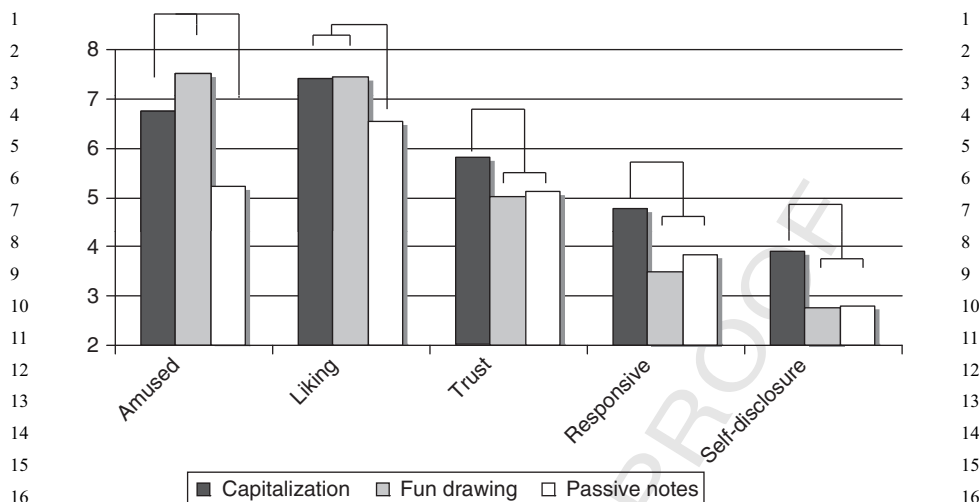


Figure 4.8 Results of ANOVA comparing three experimental groups. Bracketed means do not differ significantly at $p < 0.05$ (Reis et al., 2009, Study 3).

participation. As predicted, participants were significantly more likely to return the accidental overpayment in the capitalization condition (68%) than in the disparagement (36%), neutral (48%), or candy (51%) conditions.

5.3. Mechanisms

5.3.1. Perceived responsiveness

As shown in Fig. 4.3, a key mechanism mediating between responses to capitalization attempts and interpersonal outcomes is perceived responsiveness. Our model postulates that reactions to capitalization attempts will be positively associated with relationship health to the extent the discloser perceives that the partner understands, validates, and cares for “core ... features of the self.” (Reis et al., 2004, p. 203). As described earlier, when responders provide an active–constructive response they display interest in or recognition of why *that particular event* is important to *that particular discloser*. This in turn demonstrates intimate knowledge of the discloser or alternatively a desire to better understand the discloser. Second, showing interest in the event, such as by asking questions and expressing joy over it, conveys that the responder sees the event itself as significant, either presently or in its future value. This validates the perspective of the discloser who chose to share it. Finally, the responder’s positive regard conveys engagement and emotional investment in the relationship, both signs of caring and concern for the discloser’s welfare. Thus, the three critical elements—understanding, validation, and caring—that constitute perceived responsiveness

1 (Reis & Shaver, 1988) are conveyed with active–constructive responses to 1
2 positive event disclosures. 2

3 We speculate that capitalization may provide a context that more easily 3
4 allows the responder to effectively convey responsiveness than traditional 4
5 social support interactions. This is because the act of seeking social support 5
6 may increase the distress of the support seeker beyond the negative event 6
7 itself. Existing evidence suggests that the receipt of support for negative 7
8 events may lower self-esteem (because the self appears inadequate) or draw 8
9 more attention to the problem (e.g., Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Bolger et al., 9
10 2000). Increased attention to the needs of the self may impede personal 10
11 well-being, as well as leading to feelings of resentment and indebtedness 11
12 (Shrout et al., 2006). Ironically, receiving support may also validate negative 12
13 feelings about negative events, also diminishing personal well-being 13
14 (Reis et al., 2009). These experiences may negate, diminish, or mask the 14
15 interpersonal benefits of perceived responsiveness. The capitalization con- 15
16 text, in contrast, is uniformly positive and therefore does not involve these 16
17 added risks. 17

18 We have already reviewed evidence from several studies supporting the 18
19 proposition that perceived responsiveness is associated with active– 19
20 constructive responses to capitalization attempts. Additionally, Gable et al. 20
21 (2006) found that responders’ active–constructive behavior (as coded by 21
22 trained observers) during laboratory interactions was positively correlated 22
23 with disclosers’ postinteraction ratings of perceived responsiveness. Further- 23
24 more, perceived responsiveness during the positive interaction was signifi- 24
25 cantly and positively associated with concurrent relationship quality for men 25
26 and women and future relationship quality for women. Perceived respon- 26
27 siveness during the negative event discussion was not related to current or 27
28 future relationship quality for either men or women and was only related to 28
29 concurrent relationship quality for women. Thus, consistent with the idea 29
30 that the capitalization context may more easily allow intimacy processes to 30
31 unfold than the traditional social support context, we found that perceived 31
32 responsiveness was more consistently and robustly associated with relation- 32
33 ship quality in the former. 33

34 Gable (2009) directly tested the hypothesis that perceived responsiveness 34
35 predicts the interpersonal benefits of capitalization responses. In the daily 35
36 diary study with 67 cohabiting couples, described previously, she compared 36
37 days in which partners were perceived to be more and less responsive to 37
38 their capitalization attempts to days in which positive events were not 38
39 discussed with partners. As shown in Fig. 4.9, feelings of connection to 39
40 the partner were significantly lower on days in which the partner was 40
41 perceived to be lower than average in responsiveness than on the baseline 41
42 days (days with no positive events disclosed to the partner). Also, connec- 42
43 tion to the partner and security in the relationship were higher than baseline 43
44 when partners were perceived to be higher than their average in 44

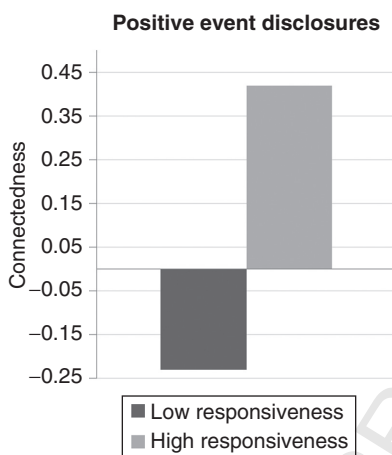


Figure 4.9 Daily feelings of connection to partner depicted as a function of whether partner's reaction to disclosure of a positive event was more or less responsive than their average reaction to positive event disclosures. Baseline is days in which no positive events were experienced and discussed. Low responsiveness days significantly differed from baseline and high responsiveness days, $p < 0.05$ (from Gable & Maisel, 2009).

responsiveness. Reis et al. (2009, Study 5) reported a similar finding. In this study, described earlier, 214 college students completed daily diaries for 2 weeks. Included in their measures were questions about how a target person (someone with whom they had a meaningful relationship and interacted regularly) had responded on that day to their capitalization attempts. On days in which the target was perceived to be more responsiveness, participants reported a stronger prosocial orientation to the target (defined as a willingness to sacrifice, to be nice, and to accommodate to the partner's bad behavior).

5.3.2. Positive emotions

As reviewed in the prior section on intrapersonal outcomes, capitalization attempts and enthusiastic responses to them are strongly associated with positive affect. Positive emotions in turn play a role in the receipt of interpersonal benefits. This prediction is based on the *broaden-and-build* model, in which Fredrickson (1998, 2001) proposes that the experience of positive emotion alters cognition and behavior by broadening the individual's thought-action repertoire. This broadening increases the available number of ways a person can respond to the environment, which is reflected by outcomes such as increased creativity and broad-minded coping (e.g., Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), and which are thought to increase both personal and social resources over time. We believe that the positive

1 emotions experienced in capitalization processes particularly contribute to 1
2 the building of social resources such as closeness and intimacy. 2

3 Emotions displayed by the discloser likely contribute to increased likeli- 3
4 hood of that emotion in the responder, and in parallel, emotions displayed 4
5 by the responder increase the likelihood of that emotion in the discloser. 5
6 This idea is consistent with previous work showing that interactions part- 6
7 ners often mirror each other's emotions (e.g., Hatfield et al., 1994; Lakin 7
8 et al., 2003), such that increases in positive emotion by one may increase 8
9 the likelihood of positive emotion in the other. Fredrickson and Joiner 9
10 (2002) describe a similar interpersonal process, which they called an 10
11 "upward spiral" whereby positive emotion increases resources which in 11
12 turn increase positive emotions. Such mirroring of positive affect provides 12
13 an ironic twist on the well-known phenomenon of negative affect reciproc- 13
14 ity (e.g., Gottman, 1994). If so, both the discloser and recipient should 14
15 benefit from responsive interactions following capitalization attempts, 15
16 which should be reinforcing for relationships and build intimacy. This 16
17 reasoning has not yet been formally tested, but is consistent with available 17
18 research. 18

▶ 6. THE NATURE OF BENEFICIAL RESPONSES TO CAPITALIZATION ATTEMPTS

6.1. The heart of perceived responsiveness

27 Our model proposes that perceived partner responsiveness is at the core of 27
28 the interpersonal benefits and most of the intrapersonal benefits of capitali- 28
29 zation. In the capitalization context, active–constructive responses lead to 29
30 perceptions of responsiveness; passive or destructive responses do not. 30
31 Above, we have reviewed how active–constructive responses may convey 31
32 that the relationship partner understands, supports, and cares for the self. 32
33 More generally, in other disclosure contexts, what leads to perceived 33
34 responsiveness? Are there core behavioral elements that foster perceptions 34
35 of responsiveness across different scenarios? These questions guided research 35
36 by Maisel et al. (2008). 36

37 In their first study, participants read a series of vignettes in which 37
38 relationship partners disclosed positive or negative events with each other. 38
39 They then described behaviors that the characters in each vignette could 39
40 enact to be supportive. From this list of supportive behaviors, two systems 40
41 were created for coding responsive behavior across different types of inter- 41
42 actions (e.g., discussing positive and negative events). One coding guide was 42
43 specific to rating specific behaviors (a microanalytic manual) and the other 43
44 coding guide was specific to ratings on a global level (a macroanalytic 44

1 manual). Both guides included three categories to be rated: understanding, 1
2 validation, and caring. 2

3 Understanding refers the ability to gather information and “get the facts 3
4 right” about partner. Example behaviors from the microanalytic guide were 4
5 asking questions, summarizing the disclosure. Validation is reinforcement of 5
6 the discloser’s views of the self. Example behaviors from the microanalytic 6
7 guide were expressing a knowledge of how the event is important to the 7
8 discloser and expressing agreement with the discloser’s perspective. Finally, 8
9 caring involves communicating affection for the discloser. Examples were 9
10 expressing love and emphasizing joint outcomes. 10

11 Both the microanalytic and macroanalytic scales were used to examine the 11
12 behavior of responders in both a positive event discussion and a negative event 12
13 discussion. The two guides were useful across both types of disclosure inter- 13
14 actions. That is, responders whose behavior was coded as more responsive 14
15 were rated as being significantly more responsive by the discloser. This work 15
16 provides evidence that although perceived responsiveness is much in the eye of 16
17 the beholder, there is also an objective behavioral component to it as well. 17
18 Moreover, these core elements of responsiveness are the same across situations. 18

19 Tanner et al. (2009) used the macroanalytic coding guide to examine 19
20 responsive behavior in parents, children, and children’s best friends. Each 20
21 child (age 7–11) attended a laboratory session with their parents. In addi- 21
22 tion, the child nominated a best friend who also accompanied them to the 22
23 lab session. The children then did three different and independent capitali- 23
24 zation interactions: They shared a recent positive event with mom, they 24
25 shared a recent positive event with dad, and then their best friend shared a 25
26 recent positive event with them. The behavior of the listener (mom and dad 26
27 in the first two interactions, the child in the last interaction) was then coded 27
28 for responsiveness. Among many interesting results were the findings that 28
29 both mother’s and father’s responsive behavior predicted the child’s respon- 29
30 siveness to his or her best friend. In turn, the child’s responsiveness toward 30
31 the best friend was positively related to friendship quality (as assessed by a 31
32 standard self-report measure of friendship quality). Finally, there were also 32
33 direct effects from parents’ responsive behavior in the interactions to their 33
34 children’s friendship quality. In short, the child’s responsive behavior during 34
35 the best friend’s capitalization attempt was predicted by his or her parents’ 35
36 responsive behavior to their own capitalization attempts. Moreover, 36
37 responsive behavior during these parental interactions predicted the quality 37
38 of the child’s friendship. 38
39 39

40 6.2. Ambivalence 40

41 41
42 Although in principle positive events present an opportunity for partners to 42
43 share in one’s good fortune, in practice their impact may be more ambiva- 43
44 lent. Consider, for example, the major job promotion that would require a 44

1 partner to be away from home often, or a close friend's admission to a 1
2 prestigious medical school that denied admission to oneself. Situations of 2
3 this sort are mixed motive, possessing simultaneous potential to evoke 3
4 vicarious joy over a relationship partner's achievement and distress over its 4
5 personal implications. 5

6 At least three such relationship threats are relatively common. First, a 6
7 partner's accomplishments may engender envy, particularly in self-relevant 7
8 domains. As Tesser and colleagues have shown (see Tesser, 1988 for a 8
9 review), a close other's success in a self-relevant domain creates a SEM 9
10 dilemma, requiring behavioral or psychological adjustment. Second, a part- 10
11 ner's good fortune may require geographical relocation or substantial time 11
12 commitment, or may be emotionally or cognitively demanding, all of 12
13 which are likely to detract from a partner's physical or psychological 13
14 availability. Third, a partner's success may threaten stable patterns of inter- 14
15 action, such as when relative status or patterns of dominance are changed. 15
16 Of course, all of these possibilities are contingent on the existence of an 16
17 interdependent relationship—perhaps ironically, the same success by a 17
18 nonpartner would create little such ambivalence. 18

19 Carmichael (2005) investigated the effects of ambivalence in capitaliza- 19
20 tion situations by asking participants to respond to one of three conditions: 20
21 proximity threat (in which the other was admitted to a graduate school 21
22 more than 1000 miles away), availability threat (in which the other received 22
23 a prestigious position with a charitable organization that would require 23
24 substantial increases in time and responsibility), and nonthreatening good 24
25 news (in which the other received a new car because her parents won the 25
26 lottery). Each example was attributed to three different partners: a romantic 26
27 partner, a close friend, or an acquaintance.¹⁰ Participants then described 27
28 how they would feel and respond in that situation, for each type of partner, 28
29 using both a list of mood adjectives and a detailed written essay. The mood 29
30 adjectives were scored for ambivalence using Priester and Petty's (1996) 30
31 gradual threshold model (GTM), which contrasts dominant and conflicting 31
32 reactions. Independent coders also rated the written essays for ambivalence, 32
33 and on the four PRCA response styles. 33

34 Both the GTM calculation of ambivalence and the coders more holistic 34
35 judgments revealed relationship type \times threat condition interactions. As 35
36 shown in Fig. 4.10, participants displayed a pronounced tendency toward 36
37 ambivalence with romantic partners in the two threat conditions compared 37
38 to the no-threat conditions, a somewhat reduced (but still significant) 38
39 similar tendency with close friends, and no significant tendency with 39
40 acquaintances. Moreover, independent coding indicated that threat 40

41
42
43 ¹⁰ Acquaintances were not paired with the availability threat, inasmuch as there is no reason to expect an 43
44 acquaintance to be available to the self. 44

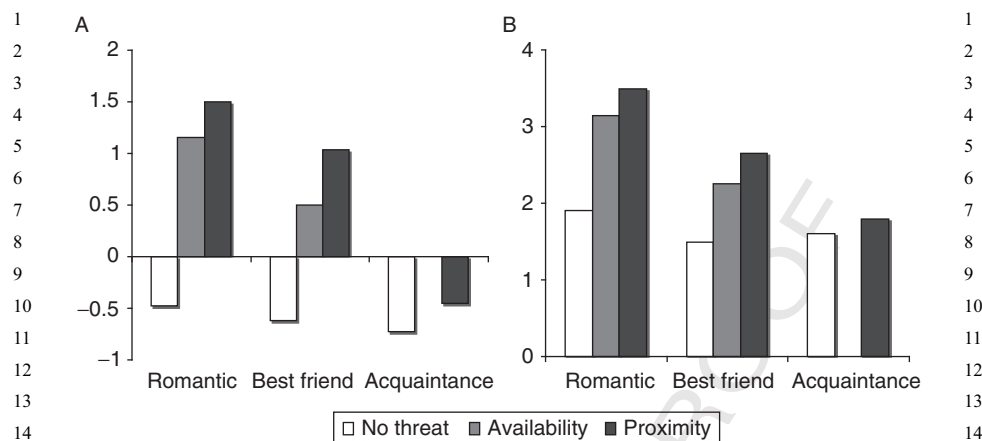


Figure 4.10 Ambivalence as expressed in self-descriptive adjectives (A) and as coded by independent raters from narrative accounts (B; from Carmichael, 2005).

diminished the tendency toward active–constructive responding and increased passive–destructive responding.

In a second study, Carmichael (2005) created videotapes of experienced actors displaying relatively brief (10–15 s) examples of four responses: enthusiastic, ambivalent, disparaging, and ignoring. Each tape included content-free verbalizations (e.g., for enthusiastic, “Wow, that’s sounds like a truly wonderful experience,” and for ambivalent, “Oh, that’s nice, I guess I’m happy for you”) and corresponding nonverbal expressions. Participants first spent a few minutes writing in detail about a personal positive event. They were then shown one of the four tapes and asked to imagine it as the response of a very close friend to whom they had just related the event. As expected, the enthusiastic response produced significant increases in event ratings and positive feelings about the relationship. Ambivalent responses (as well as disparaging and ignoring responses) led to lower ratings of the event and of the relationship.

These findings highlight the recipient’s dilemma in capitalization interactions: Although for the recipient, conversations about a partner’s good news may foster a mixture of positive and negative feelings, displaying that ambivalence can be detrimental.

6.3. Other factors influencing responses to capitalization attempts

Sharing news about personal good fortune is one way that partners may build strength in a relationship. Enthusiastic conversations about good news provide a resource that can help repair damage done by conflict and other

1 threats to relationship security. Our theoretical model, described earlier, 1
2 suggests that this occurs because the discloser perceives in the listener's 2
3 response an appreciation for the event and, when construed more broadly, 3
4 for the self (Marigold et al., 2007). This logic suggests that any factor 4
5 impeding the ability to recognize and accept a partner's responsiveness 5
6 would interfere with this repair-and-rebuild process. Low self-esteem is 6
7 one such factor. In various studies, Murray, Holmes, and their colleagues 7
8 have shown that when their feelings of relationship security are threatened, 8
9 low self-esteem persons tend to deny, dismiss, or fail to recognize their 9
10 partners' regard for them (see Murray, 2006, 2008 for reviews). Although 10
11 presumably this tendency serves a self-protective function, it may never- 11
12 theless simultaneously contribute to a downward spiral in relationship 12
13 well-being. High self-esteem persons, in contrast, are more likely to 13
14 acknowledge their partners' regard, and may even inflate their perceptions 14
15 of such regard, thereby bolstering feelings of relationship security. 15

16 In two studies, Smith and Reis (2009) examined this process directly, 16
17 asking whether low self-esteem persons tend to overlook or underestimate 17
18 their partners' responses in capitalization situations. Their first study was run 18
19 online through the Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences 19
20 (TESS), an NSF-funded project that conducts online experimental studies 20
21 with relatively diverse samples. One-hundred seventy two adults ranging 21
22 from 18 to 88 years of age, all of whom were in committed romantic 22
23 relationships, were randomly assigned to imagine and then write about 23
24 one of three priming conditions: a betrayal (their partner running into an 24
25 ex-romantic partner and neglecting prearranged plans with the participant), 25
26 a disagreement (vividly arguing about a topic on which they and their 26
27 partner disagreed), and a neutral event (a mundane, neither positive nor 27
28 negative, activity in which they were likely to engage during the next few 28
29 weeks). Afterward, participants described achieving a personal goal that did 29
30 not directly involve their partner, and answered questions regarding how 30
31 proud, excited, and happy they would feel about the achievement. They 31
32 then imagined telling their partner about their accomplishment, indicating 32
33 on the PRCA scale their partner's anticipated response. 33

34 As hypothesized, there was a significant condition \times self-esteem inter- 34
35 action. In the two threat-priming conditions, self-esteem was positively 35
36 associated with perceived partner responses: The higher a person's self- 36
37 esteem, the more actively constructive the perceived response to personal 37
38 goal achievement. In the neutral condition, self-esteem was unrelated to 38
39 perceived capitalization responses. Moreover, low self-esteem persons 39
40 imagined a less constructive response in the disagreement than in the neutral 40
41 condition. Thus, high self-esteem participants were better able than low 41
42 self-esteem participants to use perceived responses to capitalization 42
43 attempts as a means for moving beyond thoughts about a threatening 43
44 relationship event. 44

1 In Smith and Reis's (2009) second study (using data from the 2-week 1
2 daily diary study described earlier), participants reported on conflict and 2
3 capitalization experiences with a target person with whom they had a 3
4 meaningful relationship and with whom they were likely to communicate 4
5 every day over the 14 days of the study (55% = close friends; 30% = 5
6 romantic partners; 8% = other; 7% = relationship not identified). Smith 6
7 and Reis examined the interaction of trait self-esteem (assessed prior to the 7
8 diary study) and the prior day's conflict on perceived responses to commu- 8
9 nicating about today's positive events. This interaction was significant 9
10 (controlling for the positivity of both today's and yesterday's events). On 10
11 days following no conflict, self-esteem was unrelated to perceived responses 11
12 to capitalization attempts. On days following conflict, however, low self- 12
13 esteem persons perceived their partner's response to be more negative, 13
14 whereas high self-esteem persons perceived their partner's response to be 14
15 more positive. Thus, conflict appears to undermine low self-esteem persons' 15
16 ability to capitalize whereas it appears to enhance this ability among high 16
17 self-esteem persons. Of course, this study does not indicate whether this 17
18 difference was primarily a matter of motivated perceptual bias or whether 18
19 self-esteem influenced the nature of capitalization interactions. Prior 19
20 research on self-esteem and conflict interactions suggests that both processes 20
21 may be operative (e.g., Murray et al., 2003), but future research is needed to 21
22 determine whether this conclusion generalizes to capitalization. 22
23

24 **6.4. Bidirectionality: Iterative capitalization processes in** 24 25 **close relationships** 25 26

27 Our model of the capitalization process (shown in Fig. 4.2) depicts a 27
28 iterative process. By this term, we refer to the repeated and ongoing manner 28
29 in which the act of conversing with a responsive partner about personal 29
30 good news fosters perceived capitalization, and in which perceived capitali- 30
31 zation in turn influences relationship well-being and the likelihood of 31
32 such conversations. Although the studies presented in this chapter break 32
33 down this general model into several constituent processes, in everyday 33
34 life they are likely to evolve in a continuous, mutually interdependent 34
35 feedback cycle. 35

36 There are several reasons why it is useful to acknowledge the iterative 36
37 nature of capitalization. First, capitalization is not a random process. People 37
38 choose what to reveal to whom, and these choices reflect multiple factors, 38
39 including situationally based goals (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Miller & 39
40 Read, 1987), generalized expectations about others' responsiveness (Reis 40
41 et al., 2004), and relationship-specific expectancies about a particular part- 41
42 ner's likely responsiveness (Collins & Read, 1994; Simpson, 2007). 42

43 Second, experiences in one capitalization attempt are likely to influence 43
44 future capitalizations attempts. A supportive, encouraging response makes 44

1 future openness more likely, whereas a tepid or disparaging response dis- 1
2 courages future sharing. We see this part of the process as having both 2
3 general and relationship-specific components. Experiences in a given rela- 3
4 tionship may transfer to other relationships under a variety of circumstances 4
5 (e.g., similarity; Andersen, 2009), especially if repeated across multiple 5
6 partners. Of course, experiences with a given partner are most likely to 6
7 influence future behavior with that partner (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). 7

8 Finally, the partner's response, which is an important determinant of 8
9 perceived responsiveness, is influenced by the partner's prior experiences, 9
10 both with others in general and in a specific relationship with that discloser 10
11 but with their roles reversed. That is, in an ongoing, mutual relationship, 11
12 partners typically alternate playing the role of discloser and responder. 12
13 Partners can be expected to react to the other's accounts of good news in 13
14 a manner that reflects their experience of the others' response to their own 14
15 prior accounts of good news. In this way, perceptions may come to 15
16 influence reality: The perception of a partner's enthusiasm may foster 16
17 reciprocated enthusiasm, and the perception of disinterest may lead to 17
18 reciprocated disinterest. 18
19
20

21 **7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS** 21

22
23
24 Capitalization is a ubiquitous part of daily social life. After all, most 24
25 human experience takes place in a social context (Reis et al., 2000), and things 25 Au11
26 go right much more often than they go wrong (Gable & Haidt, 2005). 26
27 The research reviewed in this chapter has consistently shown that people 27
28 often turn to close others to share their good news. As we have shown, this 28
29 act of telling others and the response of those others has the potential to 29
30 multiply the benefits of positive events. These benefits are both personal and 30
31 relational. The personal outcomes linked to capitalization processes include 31
32 increased positive emotions, subjective well-being, and self-esteem, and 32
33 decreased loneliness. Relational outcomes linked to capitalization processes 33
34 include satisfaction, intimacy, commitment, trust, liking, closeness, and stabil- 34
35 ity. Among the mechanisms involved in capitalization processes that have been 35
36 identified to this point are increased memory for the event, augmented 36
37 importance of the event, perceptions that the partner understands, validates, 37
38 and cares for the self, and a possible upward spiral of positive emotions. 38
39

40 **7.1. Directions for future research** 40

41
42 Many important questions about capitalization processes remain to be 42
43 addressed, some of which we outline here. One important question con- 43
44 cerns expectations of responsiveness. When a positive event occurs, people 44

1 have a choice of whether to disclose that event and, if so, to whom. 1
2 Presumably, some partners are more likely to respond in an active– 2
3 constructive manner than others, and certain characteristics of situations 3
4 may make it more or less difficult for partners to provide an active– 4
5 constructive response (e.g., Carmichael, 2005; Tesser, 1988). But from 5
6 our analyses we know that on average people reap benefits when they 6
7 make a capitalization attempt, even if the response to that attempt is not 7
8 taken into account (e.g., Gable et al., 2004, Studies 1 and 4). It seems likely 8
9 that people choose to share good news with responsive partners and that 9
10 targets of capitalization on average tend to respond well. A future question 10
11 therefore is how do people know with whom to capitalize and under which 11
12 circumstances? Are there individual differences in the skills necessary to 12
13 disclose or respond effectively? Can one capitalize to too many people or 13
14 too often? In short, some people may be more efficient in their use of 14
15 capitalization as an emotion regulation strategy. 15

16 Another focus for future research concerns the types of event that create 16
17 opportunities for capitalization in the first place. The implications of the 17
18 content and context of positive events on capitalization processes need to be 18
19 examined. For example, many positive events are goal-relevant. But 19
20 because not all goals are created equal, not all positive events and the 20
21 capitalization attempts that follow are likely to affect outcomes in the 21
22 same way. For example, success on approach-oriented goals (striving for 22
23 desired, positive outcomes) is likely to lead to feelings of joy and excite– 23
24 ment, whereas success on avoidance-oriented goals (striving to avoid non– 24
25 desired, negative outcomes) is likely to lead to feelings of relief and calmness 25
26 (e.g., Carver, 1996). Furthermore, intrinsically motivated goals have been 26
27 shown to be more directly related to well-being than are extrinsically 27
28 motivated goals (Ryan et al., 1996). Following this research, we would 28
29 expect that the well-being effects outlined earlier will accrue more readily 29
30 to approach-oriented and intrinsically motivated goals than to avoidance– 30
31 oriented and extrinsic goals. 31

32 Another yet-unexplored area for future research concerns the effects of 32
33 responding to another person’s capitalization attempts on the responder. 33
34 Recent social support research indicates that providing support to close 34
35 relationship partners during stressful times is associated with a variety of 35
36 positive outcomes (see Thoits, 1995 for a review), including reduced 36 Au12
37 mortality (Brown et al., 2003). These findings mesh well with research 37
38 showing that providing benefits to a relationship partner (e.g., thoughtful 38
39 gestures, meaningful gifts) has positive implications for the benefit provider, 39
40 likely involving gratitude and expressed appreciation on the part of the 40
41 recipient (e.g., Algoe et al., 2009). If so, active–constructive responses 41
42 should be beneficial for the capitalization provider as well as for the 42
43 recipient. Furthermore as suggested earlier, successful capitalization may 43
44 encourage the recipient toward prorelationship behavior, thereby fostering 44
an upward spiral of mutual benefit to both partners.

1 Attention is also needed for the examination of the motivational under- 1
2 pinnings of capitalization. Situational and person factors both may interfere 2
3 with people's ability to support their partners' capitalization attempts, or to 3
4 perceive their partner's active-constructive support when it is offered. Some 4
5 evidence to this effect is already available, as described above—for example, 5
6 in how low self-esteem may interfere with the ability to recognize a partner's 6
7 encouragement (Smith & Reis, 2009) and in the envious feelings that may 7
8 arise when partners outperform oneself on self-relevant tasks (Tesser et al., 8
9 1988). Given the pervasive effects that situational and person factors have on 9
10 comparable interpersonal processes (e.g., social support, conflict regulation), 10
11 it seems likely that such research will reveal many important moderators. 11

12 Finally, also unexplored to date but potentially fruitful are intervention 12
13 possibilities. Most couples' interventions focus on problem-alleviation: Ident- 13
14 ifying dysfunctional patterns of interaction and providing means of rectifying 14
15 them (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). Based on recognition that an absence 15
16 of problems does not necessarily imply the presence of gratification, researchers 16
17 are now evaluating the impact of interventions focused more on the appetitive 17
18 than the aversive dimension (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 2009). Capitalization 18
19 seems a strong candidate for such an intervention, because of its focus on 19
20 responsive sharing of important self-relevant life events. 20

21 22 23 7.2. Conclusion 23

24 Positive events play an important role in personal and interpersonal well- 24
25 being. Although making the most of positive events is not traditionally 25
26 viewed as a form of coping, capitalization research indicates that people do 26
27 not just take positive events in stride—they “cope” with them. The capi- 27
28 talization process described in this chapter represents one of many possible 28
29 ways in which people can try to make the most of good fortune when it 29
30 happens.¹¹ Just as having supportive partners available when things go 30
31 wrong is beneficial, it is also valuable to have responsive partners when 31
32 things go right. 32
33

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43
44 ¹¹ Savoring and counting blessings are two other possibilities identified in the literature (Bryant, 1989; 43
Emmons & McCullough, 2003). 44

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