Love, Hate, and Other Forms of Intimate Interdependence

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In an earlier paper (Deutsch, 1962) I indicated that intimacy is one of the types of social-emotional interrelationships. Intimacy, itself, comes in a variety of forms. The most common are found in promotive (cooperative) relations that are egalitarian. However, even though psychologists have paid little attention to the perverse forms of intimacy, it is well to recognize that contingent or negative intimacy also exists. Hate, as well as love, can be the shape that intimacy takes.

In this paper, I shall discuss the nature of intimacy and consider some of its varieties. My basic thesis is that intimate relations must be understood simultaneously from a developmental perspective as well as in terms of its current realities. Adult intimate relations, in part, are echoes and transformations of earlier intimate relations. Intimate relations at all ages share some features in common. They are interdependent, intense, and social-emotional in nature. By and large, in such relations the participants are bonded together into a strong we-unit by their intense interdependence but are, as a concomitant of the social-emotional quality of their relationship, also focused on the special, unique, irreplaceable features of the other and of the self. Intimate relations serve to reaffirm our personal significance and our connectedness and, in so doing, recapture feelings that have their origins in early childhood relations with our parental caretakers.

Below, in separate sections, I consider the social-emotional character of intimate relations and some of the different types of intimacy.

Social-emotional interdependence. In an earlier paper (Deutsch, 1962, 1965), I advanced the thesis that each type of social relation has specific types of cognitive, motivational, and moral orientations associated with it. In it, I contrasted the orientations associated with a social-emotional and a task interdependence. Here, I repeat the characterizations I made of the distinctive psychological orientations associated with these different types of interdependence.
A) Cognitive orientation. The basic scheme here has to do with the focus of involvement. In a task-oriented relationship, one expects the attention and the activities of the participants to be directed toward something external to their relationship, whereas in a social-emotional relationship, one expects much of the involvement to be centered on the relationship and the specific persons in the relationship. This difference in focus leads one to expect a relationship that is primarily task oriented to be impersonal in the sense that who is involved in accomplishing the task and the nature of the personal relationships among those working on the task are of less importance than the actual accomplishment of the task. In a task-oriented relationship people who can perform equally well on the task are substitutable for one another; the personal identity and the unique individuality of the performer have little significance in such a relationship.

In contrast, in a social-emotional relationship, the personal qualities and identity of the individuals involved are of paramount importance; people are not readily substitutable for one another. In Person-oriented terminology (Parsons, 1951), in a task-oriented relationship, one is oriented to the other as “complexes of performances” — that is, in terms of what the other does; whereas in a social-emotional relationship, one is oriented to the other as “complexes of qualities” — that is, in terms of what the other is. Also, in a task-oriented relationship, one’s orientation toward the other is “universalistic” — that is, one applies general standards that are independent of one’s particular relationship with the other; whereas in a social-emotional relationship, one’s orientation is “particularistic” — that is, one’s responses to the other are determined by the particular relatedness that exists between oneself and the other.

In a task-oriented relationship, one is oriented to making decisions about which means are most efficient in achieving given ends. This orientation requires an abstract, analytic, quantifying, calculating, comparative mode of thought in which one is able to adopt an affectively neutral, external attitude toward different means in order to be able to appraise precisely their comparative merit in achieving one’s ends. Other people are oriented to as instrumental means and become evaluated in comparison or competition with other means. In contrast, in a social-emotional relationship, one is oriented to the attitudes, feelings, and psychological states of the other as ends. This orientation requires a more holistic, concrete, intuitive, qualitative, appreciative-aesthetic mode of thought in which one’s own affective reactions help one to apprehend the other from the inside. Other people are oriented to as unique persons rather than as instruments in which aspects of the person are useful for particular purposes.

B) Motivational orientation. A task-oriented relationship tends to evoke achievement-oriented motivations. Achievement motivations have been discussed extensively by Murray (1938), McClelland et al (1953), Atkinson and Feather (1966), and Weiner (1974). Here, I wish merely to indicate that it consists not only of the egoistic motivations to achieve success and to avoid failure; motivations related to using one’s capabilities in worthwhile activities may also be involved. Additionally, since achievement motivation is often instrumentally oriented to serve an adaptive function in relation to an external environment characterized by a scarcity rather than an abundance of resources, it usually contains an element of motivation that is oriented toward rational, efficient accomplishment of the tasks. Further, since task-oriented relationships are primarily instrumental rather than consummatory in character, they require a motivational orientation that accepts delay in gratification and that obtains satisfaction from disciplined activity oriented toward future gratification.

A number of different motivational orientations are likely to be elicited in social-emotional relationships: affiliation, affection, esteem, play, sentiment, eroticism, and nurturance-succorance. The primary feature of these different need-dispositions as they are manifested in social-emotional relationships is that they are focused on the nature of the person-to-person (or person-to-group) relationships: They are oriented toward giving and receiving care; toward the attitudes and emotions of the people involved in the relationship, and toward the pleasures and frustrations arising from the interaction with the particular others in the given relationship. Although past experiences and future expectations may affect how one acts toward others and how one interprets the actions of others in a social-emotional relationship, such a relationship -- if it is a genuine one -- is not instrumental to other, future goals; it is an end in itself. In this sense, the need-dispositions in a social-emotional relationship are oriented toward current rather than delayed gratification.

C) Moral orientation. The moral orientation in a task-oriented relationship is that of utilitarianism. Its root value is viewed as essentially quantitative, as something that can be increased or decreased without limit (Diersings, 1952, p.35). A second element in this moral orientation is the means-end schema in which efficient
allocation of means to achieve alternative ends becomes a salient value. A third element is impartiality in the comparison of means so that means can be compared on the basis of their merit in achieving given ends rather than on the basis of considerations irrelevant to the means-end relationship. In Parsons' terms (Parsons, 1951), the moral orientation in a task-oriented relationship is characterized by the values of universalism, affectivity, neutrality, and achievement. In contrast, the moral orientation of a social-emotional relationship is characterized by the values of particularism, affectivity, and ascription (Diesing, 1962, p. 90). Obligations to other people in a social-emotional relationship are based on their particular relationship to oneself rather than on general principles; they are strongest when relations are close and weakest when relations are distant. In a task-oriented relationship, one strives to detach oneself from the objects of one's actions and to treat them as equal, separate interchangeable entities; in a social-emotional relationship, one is the focal point of a myriad of relationships that one strives to maintain and extend since action takes place only within relationships (Diesing, 1962, p. 91). Ascription is the opposite of achievement: it means that one's actions and obligations toward people spring solely from their relationship to oneself rather than as responses to something they have done.

In social-emotional relations, "need" and "equality" are the salient principles of distributive justice while "equity" is more apt to be the dominant principle in task-oriented relations. As Holmes (1983) has suggested, the application of the equity principle in intimate relations is likely to erode the particularistic trust that is central in positive intimate relations.

Intimate relations are not only social-emotional, they also tend to be informal rather than formal in character. That is, the activities, forms of relationship, and demeanor of the people involved in such a relationship are not primarily determined by social rules and conventions; the participants instead have the freedom to make and break their own rules to suit their individual and collective inclinations. In a formal relationship, one's moral obligation is to the form of the relationship rather than to its spirit. In contrast, in an informal relationship, one is morally oriented to its spirit rather than to its form, to the relationship itself rather than the rules that are supposed to regulate it.

Types of intimacy. Intimate relations can be classified in terms of many dimensions. I have selected several key ones to emphasize: Are the relations promotive or

contrent? Do the participants have equal or unequal power? Is the relationship sexual or non-sexual? And, are the participants committed to an enduring relationship?

Perverse, positive, and ambivalent intimate relations. Some may be surprised by my suggestion that intimate relations can be negative rather than positive in emphasis. Yet I believe that most of us would find in our circle of acquaintances at least one person who is involved in such a perverse relationship. In such a relationship, one's uniqueness and significance to the other is validated by the pain, torment, or rage that one can elicit from the other. The kind of person who is attracted to such relationships is one who has little confidence that his or her "good" self will have the capacity to elicit any meaningful responses from a significant other. Such a person has learned instead that his "bad" self will evoke a strong reaction from the other, bringing out the other's bad self which, in turn, provides support and justification for his or her own bad self. As a result of neglect and maltreatment, or observation of mutually abusive parents, some children appear to develop the view that the only close relations they can have with another, where they feel important and significant, are relations characterized by mutual abuse. Apparently, they prefer to be abused than ignored.

Hopefully, contrient or perverse intimate relations are infrequent; that they are not rare is evidenced by the many reports of spouse abuse. Promotive or positive intimate relations are undoubtedly more frequent. Yet even in such relations there is often ambivalence, a mixture of love and hate. Since in the social psychological literature concerned with intimate relations (e.g. Perlman and Duck, 1977; Sternberg and Barnes, 1980) there has been a relative neglect of ambivalence, in the following discussion I focus more on the ambivalent aspects of promotive intimate relationships rather than upon the purely positive features of such relations.

In Rogel's Thesaurus, hate and love are adjacent entries and there is little doubt that these two opposing emotions are often found together. Human infants are born with the potential to both love and hate. Evolution, through natural selection, has insured that all living creatures have the capacity to respond positively to stimuli that are beneficial to them and negatively to those that are harmful. They are attracted to, approach, receive, ingest, like, enhance, and otherwise act positively toward beneficial objects, events, or other creatures; in contrast, they are repelled by harmful objects and avoid, eject, attack, dislike, negate, and otherwise act
negatively toward them. This inborn tendency to act positively toward the beneficial and negatively toward the harmful is the foundation on which the human potential for love and hate develops.

Borrowing much from the object-relations school of psychoanalysis, I shall here provide a truncated outline of the sources of love and hate in human development. The original feelings of gratification and harmonious oneness with the world occurs in the womb and is reenacted by the infant with trustworthy maternal figures, who respond to its need for nourishment and comfort with warmth, love, and reliable care. Such beneficial experiences, repeated and over time, give rise to two complementary concepts: the good (idealized) other and the good (idealized) self. These are the seeds from which adult love and adult self-esteem ultimately develop; favorable circumstances are necessary for the seeds to germinate and grow into health maturity.

Inevitably, the infant's experiences are not only gratifying but they are also frustrating and harmful. Feeding is too little or too late; the parental figure is angry, anxious, rejecting, teasing, withholding, or not available. The infant feels the painful sensations associated with loneliness, emptiness, rage, and sadness. These harmful experiences, repeated and over time, give rise to two related concepts: the bad other and the bad self. These are the seeds of adult hate and adult self-destructiveness. There are a variety of forms of the bad other ("exciting," "rejecting," "persecuting," etc.) and of the bad self ("needy," "destructive," "persecuted," etc.); they will not be elaborated here. The concepts of good other, good self, bad other, and bad self are initially concrete and sensual (i.e., they are in terms of the stimuli and sensations immediately connected with the gratifying or frustrating experiences) rather than abstract-symbolic.

In the early stages of development, the conceptions of "good" and "bad" other and "good" and "bad" self are separate. In part, this results from lack of integration due to cognitive immaturity but it also represents an active splitting of the cognitive processes to prevent the good (other and self) from being overwhelmed by the bad (other and self). This active splitting sometimes is referred to as the "paranoid-schizoid" position: "paranoid" is used since the main anxiety is that the bad will persecute and annihilate the good; "schizoid" is used since the major defense is the active "splitting" of the ego so that the "good" and "bad" do not come into contact.

During this and subsequent periods of development, there is also employment of two mechanisms affecting self-control and social perception: introjection and projection. There is introjection or internalization of the good and bad objects: the internalized good parent provides support in the absence of the external parent and the internalized bad parent inhibits or punishes the "needy" or "rejecting" behavior of the bad self. There is projection or externalization of the good or bad self, or of the good or bad other, onto others or onto objects of the environment. Thus, the teddy bear in childhood and one's father/son or one's mother church in adulthood can serve as externalizations of the good parent and be important sources of self-support. Criticism or attack on these externalizations of the good parent or good self are apt to be viewed as attacks on one's vital parts. Projection of the bad self onto an adversary enables one to attribute to the other the evil we feel, but deny, in ourselves and to attack it there with exceptional vigor.

As cognitive and emotional development proceeds, the small child will attempt to bring his good and bad objects together and recognize his mother as a whole person and also realize that it is he, the same person, who loves his mother when she gratifies him and hates her when she frustrates him. How he deals with his ambivalence, his love-hate for the same person, and his sense of evil and goodness in himself will play an important role in determining the roles of love and hate in his later life. There will be little need for hatred if he has been helped to develop an integrated view of himself with sufficient confidence in the good aspects of himself to be able to have a constructive orientation to his own shortcomings. Such a perspective enables one to love others in their full reality, with awareness of their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

Unfortunately, some people are raised under conditions which are not conducive to such integrated perspectives of self and others. Their harsh circumstances, authoritarian family, or ethnocentric culture predispose them to continue the active splitting between the good and bad. The consequence is that there is an idealization of those individuals, groups, places, institutions, and values with whom one identifies and a denigration of those with whom one (or one's groups) are in conflict or potential conflict. Conflict facilitates the projection of parts of the split-off bad self or bad other onto those with whom one is in conflict.

Because the other is so important in intimate relations, one's experiences with the other may give rise to intense gratifications at some times but also to intense
frustrations at other times; feelings at both the negative and positive poles are apt to be stronger in intimate than in non-intimate relations. If splitting is still an active mechanism within the individual, he or she will "idealize" the other during periods of gratifying experiences (and see few of the other’s faults) and "demonize" the other during periods of frustration and conflict. The tendency to split the "good" and "bad," to black-white thinking, is active to varying degrees in all people. The degree of activity of this mechanism is a function of both present and past circumstances: the more difficult (i.e., frustrating, threatening, depriving, harmful) current circumstances are and the less successful has been the integration of the "good" and "bad" categories of the self and of significant others, the greater the tendency for active splitting. Thus, one could expect greater emotional swings in the intimate relations of people who are living in difficult circumstances and in people who have not resolved their ambivalent relationships with the significant figures of their past.

Equal and unequal intimate relations. Although intimacy is commonly described in the social psychology literature in terms of equal power adult relations, this is much too narrow a perspective. It can occur at all ages and in relations of unequal as well as equal power. Shaver, Hezan, and Bradshaw (1988) have gone as far as to suggest that all important love relationships — especially the first ones with parents and the later ones with lovers and spouses — are variants of a simple underlying attachment process and they have provided an impressive list of the behavioral and emotional similarities between the infant’s attachment to his or her caretaker and adult romantic love.

Even though there are undoubtedly similarities in the different types of intimate relations, it seems evident that intimacy will be affected by whether the relationship is one of equal or unequal power. Intimate attachments have their earliest roots in infancy when the child is completely dependent upon parental caretakers. Unequal promotive intimate relationships follow, in important aspects, the paradigm of the parent-child relation. The person with superior power is the protector, the caretaker, the one who is responsible, capable, strong, independent, rational, and the teacher; in contrast, the person with weaker power is dependent, vulnerable, deferential, emotional, compliant, receptive, emulating, admiring, and the follower. Until recently, marital relations have been mostly unequal in which males commonly had the superior power. Hence, it is not surprising that the traits associated with masculinity are those usually connected with superior power while those linked with femininity are those connected with inferior power.

In a promotive, egalitarian relation the key word is "mutuality." There is mutual affection, protectiveness, care-taking, care-receiving, helpfulness, responsibility, trust, openness, influenceability, and responsiveness. In a centrifugal, egalitarian intimate relation the key word is also "mutuality." There is mutual support for a relation of helpfulness, destructiveness, obstruction, suspicion, secretiveness, resistance, and rejection. In a centrifugal, unequal intimate relationship the person with superior power is the sadist, the bully, the tormentor while the person with inferior power is the masochist, the victim, the martyr. The sadist and masochist form an intimate dyad because they need one another to feel significant. The sadist obtains his sense of significance by his ability to inflict physical or psychological pain without suffering it; the masochist, from suffering unjustly.

Sexual and non-sexual intimate relations. Although sexual relations are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for psychological intimacy, it is evident that sexual forms of intimate relations may differ qualitatively from the non-sexual types. Before focusing on some of these qualitative differences, let me stress that intimate relations can be non-sexual — as in the preadolescent relations among chum and "best friends," the adult relations among close friends, the relations within a cohesive family, or in a man’s passionate love of God. I do not deny that, in the Freudian sense, some of these relations may involve a sexual sublimation. I also stress the reality that sexual relations can be non-intimate and intimate sexual relations can occur in relations that are otherwise non-intimate.

Such terms as "eros," "passionate love," and "romantic love" have been commonly employed to refer to sexually intimate relations. As Berscheid (1988) has pointed out, the definitive behavioral events in this category of intimacy have to do with sexual desire. Eros often accompanies or is accompanied by other forms of intimacy but it may occur alone. What, if anything, are the distinctive qualities of an erotic relationship? It cannot be simply the physiological satisfaction of the sexual drive as in a sexual orgasm; this can occur without intimacy or even without any awareness of the identity of one’s partner. Nor is eros merely a sense of shared intense pleasureable activity as in a good tennis game between familiar partners. In romantic love, mutually fulfilling sex has the quality of a sacred rite. It establishes or reaffirms the oneness, union, or we-ness of the sexually united partners even as it
affirms the completeness, identity, and significance of each of the partners in the dyad.

Sexual relations, in comparison with other forms of mutual activity (e.g., tennis, eating together, attending a concert), uniquely connects the present with one's early experiences as an infant and young child. As an infant, one's relations with caretakers are primarily physical and sensual. It is the physical contact with the caretaker that rebukes the infant of the we-ness, the bondedness, that it needs for security; it is the fondling, caressing, embracing, and the pleasure that the caretaker takes in its body that provides it with a sense of uniqueness, significance, and goodness. It is the physical responsiveness of the caretaker to the infant's needs and activities that provides it with a sense of pleasure, fullness, and relaxation. It is in these gratifying sensual interactions between the infant and his or her caretaker that its sense of bondedness is reaffirmed and of good self and good other are established.

Intimate sexual relations between adults involve many sensual activities reminiscent of early experiences with caretakers. I would suggest that such relations can thus become very profound symbols of secure bondedness to a significant other, of one's good self, and of the good nurturing other. It is this symbolic, ritualistic feature of sexual relations -- in addition to its inherent sensual pleasure and its procreation function -- which gives sexual relations their potentially unique psychological significance in intimate relations.

My preceding discussion raises more questions than I have time to consider or knowledge to answer. It is evident from everyday observation that continued sexual intimacy is not necessary to feel wholeness, bondedness, goodness, and the like. How do profound bonding and affirmation of the self and other occur in non-sexual relations? Does sexuality have important, symbolic, ritualistic functions only in certain types of personalities, at certain life stages, in certain types of cultures? There is evidence to suggest that romantic love blossoms more prolifically in adolescence and young adulthood; more in those with lower self-esteem, with an external locus of control, and dependency (Dion & Dion, 1980); more in cultures that emphasize individualism than collectivism (Bellah, 1985); and more when sexual expression and fulfillment are strongly restricted. Are there conditions under which sexuality loses its symbolic significance and comes to have only the significance directly associated with its current sensual gratification?

The endurance of intimacy. The endurance of an intimate relationship requires both the preservation of the relationship and the continuation of the sense of intimacy in it. Many relationships which were once intimate persist despite the disappearance of intimacy. Below I briefly consider, first, the persistence of relations and, then, the continuation of intimacy.

In analyzing the factors involved in the preservation of a relationship, it is well to distinguish between individual and dyadic factors. At the individual level, using a Lewinian analysis, one can distinguish between driving and restraining forces. Thus, what are the gratifications in the relationship and the apprehensions of being without the relationship that "drive" the individual to remain in it? What are the frustrations in it and the attractions outside of it that "drive" the individual to leave it? And, what are the commitments, irrevocable investments, social and economic costs, etc., which "restrain" the individual from leaving it? If the strength of the total forces pushing the individual outside the relationship are not greater than those of the driving forces pulling the individual into it plus the restraining forces keeping him or her in it then the individual will continue in it. Of course, as Kelley (1963) has pointed out, if there is considerable variability in the relative strength of the "pro" and "con" forces (e.g., due to emotional instability), a relationship may be broken off even though, on the average, the balance of forces favors its continuation. There are many specific factors which can influence the elements that determine the balance of forces affecting whether an individual will choose to stay in or leave a relationship. I shall not attempt to detail them here.

It is evident that for a dyadic relationship to survive it requires more than an individual's decision; it requires a joint one. One person can break up a dyadic relationship but it takes two to continue it. Enduring intimate relationships are delicately balanced and require continuous re-negotiation as different conflicts and problems emerge with changes in the partners' interests, abilities, and situations. The dyad's ability to resolve their inevitable conflicts constructively and non-defensively is helpful not only to the preservation of relations but to their continued intimacy.

Many close relationships that persist lose their sense of intimacy. They do so for many reasons. The overidealization of the other may be confronted by the other's mundane realities as the other becomes better known: the other's quirks, habits, mannerisms, and behaviors may become frustrating and irritating with more intimate
contact. The sense of oneness, union, harmony, and mutuality with the other may be
shattered by divergent interests, the involvements and activities of each outside of
the relationship, different biological and sexual rhythms, or by the stifling,
smothering sense of too much closeness. The sense of uniqueness and excitement may
be lost as encounters between oneself and the other lose their novelty and become
repetitive, habitual, and boring.

The preservation of intimacy in a relationship poses special problems. It requires
maintaining a delicate balance between idealization of the other and recognition of
the other's realities, between union with the other and maintaining separateness and
separate identities, and between the sense of familiarity and the sense of newness
and continuing development. Some couples maintain intimacy in cycles of separation
and reunion. Others do it through a shared external project. And still others do it by
joint voyages of emotional and psychological discovery as they explore their
perceptions and feelings with a continuing openness to each other's past life
experiences as these experiences reverberate into the present.

Concluding comment: I have advanced the view that adult intimate relations are
intense, social-emotional forms of interdependence that are, in part, echoes and
transformations of earlier intimate relations. The special character of intimate
sexual relations in forming a bridge between the present and early intimate relations
was discussed. The cognitive, motivational, and moral orientations associated with
social-emotional relations were characterized. Typical discussions of intimate
relations commonly focus on the promotive, egalitarian types of social-emotional
relations. It is overly restricting not to consider unequal relations as well as the
pervasive and continuous types and it is well to recognize that ambivalence is
characteristic of even promotive types of intimacy. I ended with a discussion of
some of the issues related to the endurance of intimate relations.