

*Responding to Need in Intimate Relationships*

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One of the key markers of an intimate relationship is the expectation that partners will take responsibility for one another's welfare and will be mutually responsive to each other's needs. Moreover, a growing body of research indicates that responsiveness plays a critical role in the development and maintenance of secure and satisfying intimate relationships. Nevertheless, individuals differ considerably in their ability and willingness to provide responsive care to close others in times of need, and many intimate relationships fail to provide partners with the deep sense of emotional security that is necessary for optimal functioning. After all, responding to the needs of others is often a difficult task that involves a good deal of responsibility, as well as a substantial amount of cognitive, emotional, and sometimes tangible resources. Not everyone is equally skilled at providing effective care, nor equally motivated to do so. What are the personal and interpersonal factors that promote or interfere with effective caregiving in intimate relationships? What are the key features of responsive caregiving, and what kinds of skills, resources, and motivations are needed to be truly responsive to the needs of others? My lecture and chapter will present highlights from several studies that explore the interpersonal dynamics of caregiving in romantic couples. Using a variety of research methodologies, this work examines both the normative processes involved in responsive caregiving and individual differences in the willingness or ability to be an effective caregiver. In so doing, this research identifies a variety of cognitive and emotional factors that enhance or inhibit responsive caregiving in couples, which may help to explain both chronic individual differences and relationship-specific differences in this specific form of prosocial behavior within close relationships.