

Prologue

We get old and get used to each other. We think alike. We read each other's minds. We know what the other wants without asking. Sometimes we irritate each other a little bit. Maybe sometimes take each other for granted.

But once in a while, like today, I meditate on it and realize how lucky I am to share my life with the greatest woman I ever met. You still fascinate and inspire me. You influence me for the better. You're the object of my desire, the #1 Earthly reason for my existence. I love you very much.

John (*Johnny Cash's 1994 note to his second wife June*)

J.R. “Johnny” Cash (Feb. 26, 1932 – Sep. 12, 2003) was an American singer-songwriter, guitarist, actor, and author, and is widely considered as one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. The letter quoted above was featured in the 2011 book *House of Cash*, written by his son, John Carter Cash. The letter is regarded as one of the greatest love letters of all time (Cliff, 2015), and has received ample exposure and popularity. In his letter, Johnny celebrates many of the things he appreciates about his partner, June. For example, Johnny wrote that he and June could read each other’s minds and anticipate one another’s thoughts. He also indicates that he and June felt safe around each other and understood one another. Johnny also refers to June as a source of inspiration and fascination for him, and someone who challenged him to be the best he could be. In short, June was a source of security that allowed Johnny to explore the world, try new things, and fulfill his potential.

Cash did not have an easy life. After moving to Dyess, Arkansas at the age of 3, he spent the bulk of the next 15 years out in the fields, working alongside his parents, brothers, and sisters. At the age of 10 he was hauling water for a road gang, and at 12 years old he was moving large sacks of cotton. Hardship continued for Cash into young adulthood—even after becoming a famous musician, his hectic touring schedule and the pressures of fame took a toll. He became a drug addict, his first wife left him, and in 1966 he got arrested and almost died due to drug abuse. However, in 1968 he met June Carter and she turned his life around. One could say love saved his life. Johnny and June were married until May 2003, when June passed away due to complications from heart surgery. Johnny died a mere 4 months later. The official “cause of death” was attributed to complications from diabetes. Many people, however, believed that Johnny died from a broken heart—a theme featured in a song by McRae (2012):

I hear Johnny Cash died of a broken heart
To love like that that the thing just tears you apart

I aint expectin' much from this beat up world
But oh to have a love like Johnny Cash had for her

We chose to open our book with a love letter that Johnny Cash wrote to June because it highlights the powerful role that relationships can play in people's lives. When people have a stable, continuous relationship with someone who cares for them, they feel understood, supported, and able to thrive. But when those relationships are disrupted, people can feel lost and hopeless. In some cases, such as that of Johnny Cash, they may even lose their desire to continue on living.

Social scientists have been studying the role of relationships in people's lives for decades. One of the major theoretical frameworks in this area of research is attachment theory, a framework pioneered by John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, and their colleagues. Attachment theory emphasizes the close emotional bonds that people develop towards others in their lives, most notably parents and romantic partners. Moreover, the theory attempts to explain the role that these relationships play in our lives, how they develop, and how they affect human experience and behavior.

There has been an explosion of research on adult attachment over the past few decades. This has been both a boon and a bane. On the one hand, attachment research is alive and well; researchers are continuing to find inspiration in the theory and are continuing to refine our understanding of close relationships, interpersonal cognition, and personality development. On the other hand, the literature has grown so voluminous that there is no way for any one person to read, digest, and integrate it in meaningful ways. Our goal in writing this book is relatively modest. Namely, we wish to present a *concise* overview of attachment theory that hits upon the core concepts and reviews some of the active research areas with which we are most familiar. It is our hope that this book will serve as a useful introduction to attachment theory for curious readers, and provide a useful stepping stone between the core theoretical principles and the vast sea of empirical research that has developed over the past few decades.

There is no shortage of books on attachment these days. What does this book have to offer? Although there are many books on specific areas of research on attachment, such as attachment and psychotherapy (eg, Wallin, 2007), there are few books that are designed to provide a *broad* overview of the field. Feeney and Noller published one in 1996 that served as an outstanding introduction to the field for students and scholars alike. But the field has evolved considerably in the meantime, making that volume less relevant than it used to be. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007a) have also published an excellent book on attachment in adulthood. But that volume aims to be relatively comprehensive and, in our view, is best suited for researchers who want something more than an introduction to the field. Essentially what we wanted was a book that was up to date, like the Mikulincer and Shaver book, but written to be more of an introductory text, like Feeney and Noller's (1996) book. In short, we wanted something that might

be useful for those who are seeking brief answers to some of the many questions people often have about the field of adult attachment.

Accordingly, the book structure we adopted is similar to a *Frequently Asked Questions* page. Each book chapter begins with a question (eg, What is an attachment relationship?) that might be commonly asked in a class or seminar on attachment, and then attempts to answer it on the basis of theory and contemporary research. In some cases, it will be apparent that the answers are well understood. In others, we must confess that the field does not yet have good answers to those questions. We will try to be forthcoming in those cases in hope that doing so inspires others to tackle some of the issues themselves.

Whom is this book for? We wrote this book assuming that the primary audience would be advanced undergraduate or graduate students who want to learn about attachment theory and some of the research it has generated. This book might also be of interest to young researchers who study close relationships or personality and individual differences who are seeking a generative theoretical perspective with which to frame their research. Given that attachment theory has deep roots in ethology, cognitive science, developmental science, and information theory, our intuition is that there is something that will be of interest to scholars coming from diverse backgrounds in modern psychology.

We also wrote this book for researchers interested in psychopathology and its underpinnings, and clinicians and therapists who want to learn about attachment and its implications for mental health and psychotherapy. These implications include strategies for working with insecurely attached individuals as well as understanding some of the major pathways that link attachment insecurity to mental health problems. The book will be of interest to people who are not necessarily students, academics, or practitioners, but have a general interest in broadening their horizons on the topics of relationships and human behavior.

Readers who are familiar with adult attachment theory are likely aware of the fact that there are two research traditions on adult attachment. One has its origins in developmental psychology and uses the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) as the primary method for assessing individual differences in attachment patterns. The other has its origins in social and personality psychology and tends to rely upon self-report measures for assessing individual differences in attachment patterns. Throughout this book we focus on theory and research inspired by the social-personality tradition. We chose to limit the scope of our review in this way for at least two reasons. Most importantly, we have worked almost exclusively in the social-personality tradition ourselves, and, as such, believe we are better positioned to review that literature. But we also want to ensure that the book serves as a manageable introduction to adult attachment theory. And, if we did not constrain our review in some ways, we would not be able to achieve our goal of providing a succinct, yet informative, discussion of some of the core ideas in adult attachment theory.

WHAT DOES EACH CHAPTER OF THIS BOOK COVER?

Chapter: What is Attachment Theory? briefly reviews the history of attachment theory, and some of the core concepts that make the theory different from other theoretical perspectives. Chapter: What is an Attachment Relationship? addresses the question of what an attachment relationship is and how attachment bonds develop across the lifespan. Chapter: How do Individual Differences in Attachment Develop? discusses the role of early attachment experiences in shaping individual differences in attachment, how those differences are sustained across time, and how they may manifest in the context of adult relationships. Chapter: What Are Attachment Working Models? explains one of the most crucial concepts in attachment theory: internal working models. We discuss several theoretical perspectives on working models and highlight the ways they have been studied in contemporary attachment research. Chapter: How Are Individual Differences in Attachment Measured? reviews some of the most commonly used methods to assess individual differences in adult attachment. We also review what is known about how various assessment methods converge and diverge. Chapter: How Stable Are Attachment Styles in Adulthood? addresses the question of how stable individual differences in attachment are across time and what is known about factors that may promote stability and change.

Chapter: What Can Social Cognition and Priming Tell Us about Attachment? explains the contextual activation of attachment in adulthood. We specifically focus on the enhancement of attachment security (ie, security priming). We also review the various priming methodologies as well as the major findings associated with these socio-cognitive techniques. Chapter: What is the Attachment Behavioral System? and, How is it Linked to Other Behavioral Systems? reviews research on the interplay between the attachment behavioral system and other behavioral systems such as the caregiving, sex, and exploration systems. The chapter discusses the theoretical models related to the functioning of each behavioral system. We also review research demonstrating how changes in one behavioral system can influence the functioning of another behavioral system. Chapter: What are the Effects of Context on Attachment? describes various contextual factors that can influence individual differences in attachment. In particular we review the effects of factors such as: gender, culture, age, relationship status and length. The chapter also examines how the different stages of romantic relationships are contexts in and of themselves that are associated with adult attachment. Chapter: What can Neuroscience, Genetics, and Physiology Tell Us about Attachment? focuses on the neural, physiological, and genetic underpinnings of the attachment system, and the contribution of these factors to the development of attachment style. We review research conducted from both human and animal perspectives. In doing so, we highlight the similarities and differences that emerge from research findings using these distinct perspectives. Chapter: What are

the Implications of Attachment Processes for Psychopathology and Therapy? reviews research examining the associations between attachment and various forms of mental health problems and psychopathology. The chapter also discusses how attachment theory can inform therapeutic work. The *Epilogue* outlines our reflections on some of the major issues emerging from writing this book, and reviews some open questions in the field.