

- 2. Participants created new and positive love object experiences rather than repeating prior problematic love relations. In other words, the desire for better ways of relating to loved ones is actionable and a sense of stability can be generated even where early lives were not stable.**

The building block of stability is an attribute that can be associated with the past (i.e., that there was stability—or lack of stability—in the participants’ early lives with caregivers) as well as the present and future (i.e., that past experiences of stability might beget future stable experiences while past experiences of instability might beget future instability or might promote hard work in trying to create stable environments).

Some participants in the Phase III interview narratives described their parents as being idyllic (e.g., “And they were probably the most happily married couple that I know. They just happen to be my parents”). Other participants witnessed parental relationships that endured, but were deeply unhappy, or parental relationships that were ruptured and/or characterized by conflict (e.g., “Well, we’re both children of divorce. My mother was married [several] times and my [biological] father [several] times. I had no illusions, shall we say, about what it takes to make a relationship work”).

It was powerful that *many of the participants from the first group expressed confidence in the longevity of their own relationships based on the success of their parents’ relationships* (e.g., “I never had any thoughts when I was growing up that there would ever be a severing situation such as a divorce. When Dale and I settled in together a long time ago, I always expected permanence”). *Participants from the second group may have had some fear about history repeating itself, but persevered in their quest for long-term partnership by determining what to do or what to avoid in establishing and nurturing their own relationships* (e.g., “So, yes, my parents’ [bad] relationship did have an impact on the formation of my long-term relationships. And even though it was a negative environment, I still felt that I grew to know what to look for in a partner because of the negative example that I experienced”; “I do think that it makes me try harder, because I saw the pain my parents went through, and I didn’t care to have to go through that”).

The second group of *participants demonstrated a powerful ability to create new family/love object experiences rather than repeat what they described as past problematic love relations. In other words, the desire for a different way of relating to loved ones is actionable.* Accordingly, the report of participant couples that they both came from ruptured families did not impede their ability to employ techniques that yielded better interactions and a long-lasting and more satisfying relationship than those of their parents. Consciously, they were able to act as they wanted their parents to have behaved.

The objective data presents individuals who consciously utilized their past and present lives to support valued interpersonal relationships. The following participant narrative from Phase III illustrates tension between subjective report of the relationship

with primary objects, the potentially disruptive deficits of those objects, and his current behaviors that he believes support the outcome of a long-term relationship:

You know, they cared for me so well that, yeah, I think I treat my relationship the same way; I want to do everything possible for George. . . . They were both alcoholic . . . but even with that I was still first.

Notwithstanding participant report of the past negative effects of alcoholism, this participant described—in the present—an underlying sense of being cared for by his parents. He also described behaviors in the present that work in support of his relationship, linking those behaviors to the past. He has internalized and utilized his parents' positive attributes to the betterment of his current relationship.