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A TRIBUTE TO CARYL RUSBULT: DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR

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## In the Pursuit of Science

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Everybody reading these remembrances knows that Caryl was among the most esteemed, most decorated, most influential scholars of close relationships our field has known. Fewer people know that she appreciated philosophy of science and loved the humanities, and even fewer are aware of the myriad ways that this appreciation and love influenced her scholarship. This remembrance employs some of Caryl's favorite quotations to discuss her approach to relationships science, an approach I imprinted on as a young scholar.

“Whoever, in the pursuit of science, seeks after immediate practical utility, may generally rest assured that he will seek in vain. All that science can achieve is a perfect knowledge and a perfect understanding of the action of natural and moral forces.”

—Hermann von Helmholtz

Caryl studied topics of immense practical importance, and she never shied away from emphasizing the applied value of her work. But she was, first and foremost, a basic, theoretically oriented scientist. She doggedly pursued truth not because of its “immediate practical utility,” but because of the inherent power, the visceral euphoria, of generating new knowledge. She conducted groundbreaking work on topics like relationship dissolution and domestic violence, and she was pleased on those frequent occasions when this work informed thinking beyond the ivory tower. However, for Caryl, discovering truth was the ultimate prize in itself. Those of us who trained under Caryl

as graduate students internalized this zest for basic science.

“The test of a man or woman's breeding is how they behave in a quarrel.”

—George Bernard Shaw

Caryl's groundbreaking work on close relationships started in 1980 with her articles introducing her investment model of commitment processes (e.g., Rusbult, 1980). Although few young scholars have launched their careers with such sparkling contributions, they were just the beginning; these initial fireworks exploded into a 4th of July extravaganza as the decade progressed. In addition to fleshing out the investment model (e.g., Rusbult, 1983), she developed her exit–voice–loyalty–neglect typology of responses to relationship dissatisfaction (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982), and she began her groundbreaking work on relationship maintenance mechanisms by demonstrating that highly committed individuals engage in motivated derogation of romantic alternatives (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989).

This work set the stage for the 1990s, when Caryl published several of her most innovative and influential contributions to relationship science. She launched that decade by examining how people “behave in a quarrel,” demonstrating the power of commitment to promote accommodating responses to potentially destructive partner behavior (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). I cut my teeth exploring related issues, investigating conflict behavior in my masters and doctoral projects (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Finkel,

Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002), both of which benefited immeasurably from Caryl's tutelage. In addition to this research on conflict behavior, Caryl conducted related work in the 1990s demonstrating that strongly committed people (a) are particularly willing to make personal sacrifices for the betterment of their relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997), (b) are particularly motivated to perceive their relationship as better than everybody else's (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995), and (c) are particularly likely to develop cognitive representations of their self as essentially embedded in (rather than independent from) their relationship (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998).

"I'm beginning to think that maybe it's not just how much you love someone. Maybe what matters is who you are when you're with them."

—Anne Tyler

As the 1990s drew to a close, Caryl published two of her most important articles. In one, she presented a broad, sophisticated framework establishing the interpersonal processes underlying the mutual influence of commitment and trust (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). In the other, she ingeniously borrowed Michelangelo Buonarroti's description of the sculpting process to achieve deep insight into human relationships (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). Recognizing that individuals almost always have discrepancies between their actual self (the person they currently are) and their ideal self (the person they aspire to become), Caryl demonstrated that close relationship partners can help individuals bridge that gap, promoting individuals' growth over time toward their ideal self. This work on the *Michelangelo phenomenon* has inspired me not only to work with Caryl to elaborate the model (e.g., Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009) but also to investigate diverse additional ways that interpersonal processes influence individuals' goals pursuit (e.g., Finkel et al., 2006; Fitzsimons & Finkel, in press).

"Perhaps I did not always love him so well as I do now. But in such cases as these a good memory is unpardonable."

—Jane Austen

In the 2000s, Caryl's third and final decade as a relationships scholar, she continued to venture into new territory. Among other contributions, she put a relational twist on classic research domains in social cognition and cognitive psychology. For example, she established the role that involvement in well-adjusted relationships has on individuals' attitudes (Davis & Rusbult, 2001), and she demonstrated that individuals' memories for relationship-relevant events are biased in prorelationship ways to the extent that the individuals trust their partner (Wieselquist et al., 2010). This *benevolent memory* research has inspired me to explore how diverse relationship characteristics can bias not only memories of the past but also affective forecasts for the future (e.g., Eastwick, Finkel, Krishnamurti, & Loewenstein, 2008).

"Only connect."

—E. M. Forster

Caryl built a career's worth of beautiful scholarship around the idea that close relationships "are both the foundation and the theme of the human condition" (Berscheid, 1999, p. 261). Caryl was, for three decades, a leading interdependence theory scholar because she recognized, as much as anybody, how essential relational processes are to the human experience. She lamented what she perceived as the overemphasis on individual differences in relationships research (including the enormous emphasis on attachment styles), stressing instead the primary importance of understanding situation structure and dyadic processes (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008).

Caryl has served as a role model to me in almost all ways since I started graduate school in 1997 as her pupil at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (affectionately known as *Carolina*). I have sought to emulate her emphasis on basic, theoretically driven science; her investigation of interesting research topics; and her deep appreciation for the importance of close relationships. More

recently, I have also sought to emulate her personal grace. If I ever face hardship anything like Caryl did with her cancer in the final 2–3 years—especially in the final 2–3 months—of her short life, I hope I face it with half as much dignity as she did.

In her waning months, Caryl thought about her forthcoming memorial services. Toward her goal of making them fun, happy events, she selected the music she wanted played. I listen to that playlist all the time these days. I reminisce nostalgically about the years Caryl and I spent together when I was in graduate school, and I find myself humming a line from one of the songs: “You must forgive me/If I’m up and gone to Carolina in my mind” (James Taylor). This one, too: “And I love her” (John Lennon and Paul McCartney).

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