Intimate Relationships covers both classic and current material in a concise yet thorough and rigorous manner. Chapters range from attraction to love, attachment to jealousy, sexuality to conflict—all written in a warm, personal, and engaging voice. Topics are viewed from an interdisciplinary perspective firmly grounded in research. Examples and stories from everyday life lead into each chapter to stir a student’s engagement with the material, and critical thinking prompts throughout the text aid his or her reflection on the issues and theories presented. Each chapter is organized around major relationship issues and relevant theories, in addition to a critical evaluation of the research. When appropriate, the authors discuss and evaluate popular ideas about intimate relationships in the context of scientific research.

This Third Edition has been thoroughly updated and revised to include the latest findings and topics in relationship science, including the role of the Internet in today’s relationships. Students will benefit from a revised chapter on sexuality that reflects current views on sexual orientation and sexual pathways, as well as a forward-looking chapter on the evolution and diversity of relationships in the 21st century.

A companion website accessible at www.routledge.com/cw/erber provides instructors with PowerPoint presentations and a test bank, and provides students with flashcards of key terms as well as learning outcomes and chapter outlines for each chapter.

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Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. . . . Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.

—Aristotle

Aristotle wrote these words a long time ago. Chances are he intended his insights to apply to men and women alike. In any event, the idea that humans, by nature, are social creatures is as old as or older than civilization itself, and it permeates the social sciences to this very day (e.g., Aronson, 2011). And it’s likely that our social nature compels us toward activities that require the presence and cooperation of others to make them enjoyable or even possible. Dancing, playing ball, or going on a date are practically impossible to do if not for the presence of at least one other person. At the same time, the enjoyment from going out to dinner or taking a vacation is often diminished when not shared with others.

More importantly, there is reason to believe that most humans will not do well when they are deprived of contact with others. In the pilot episode of Rod Serling’s popular (shall we say, iconic?) 1960s TV show, The Twilight Zone, fittingly entitled “Where Is Everybody?” the protagonist found himself alone in a small town somewhere in America. Everywhere he went, he found tangible signs that other people had been there—a lighted cigarette in an ashtray, a steaming cup of coffee on a kitchen table, the receiver of a phone off the hook, and a partially eaten breakfast on the counter of a diner. Faced with all these traces of human existence, he developed the singular preoccupation of trying to find somebody—anybody, for that matter—to the point where he appeared to be losing his mind. Fortunately for the protagonist, the situation in which he found himself was an experiment conducted by the space program designed to test how prospective space travelers would fare in social isolation. In light of their observations, the researchers decided to terminate the experiment and concluded that prolonged social isolation was simply too much for any human to bear.

Interestingly, the idea of being completely isolated was intriguing and outrageous enough to resurface as the theme in at least one other episode of The Twilight Zone. In that particular episode, Archibald Beachcroft, a misanthropic office worker, was given the power to make anything happen by merely wishing for it. Granted such powers, his first wish (after making his landlady disappear) was for everyone to go away. And while the resulting situation was not one that was thrust upon him as part of a cruel experiment, he
quickly came to realize the difficulties of living a life of complete solitude. He was soon faced with the utter pointlessness of such seemingly trivial activities as shaving and going to work. Moreover, the elimination of the nuisance previously created by the presence of others came at the price of complete boredom. To alleviate it, he wished for diversions, such as an earthquake, which he found too exciting, and an electrical storm, which he found too dull. Another wish for everybody to come back and be just like him created a situation he quickly found intolerable, and thus, with his final wish, he asked for everything to be the way it used to be.

In Rod Serling’s fantastic explorations, the effects of objective social isolation on its protagonists resulted from an utter lack of interactions with others. It appears, however, that a lack of quantity doesn’t tell the whole story. In fact, lacking interactions of quality leads to the perception of social isolation. The resulting loneliness has a number of deleterious effects on physical and mental health. They are every bit as dramatic as the effects of objective social isolation dramatized in The Twilight Zone and include elevated blood pressure, reduced physical activity, depression, and—over time—decreases in life satisfaction and even IQ (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). Clearly, humans need others to survive and prosper! Put a different way, others help us meet specific needs. We review these needs in the next section.

The Need to Belong

One proposal (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Baumeister, 2011) suggests that our tendency to seek and maintain relationships of breadth as well as depth is caused by an underlying need to belong that complements our need to be different (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). According to this hypothesis, humans “have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and impactful relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Although this need to belong is to some extent innate, our evolutionary history may have done its part to make it a dominant form of human motivation. Forming social bonds may have important survival and reproductive benefits. Banding together in groups helps supply mates and enables the sharing of food as well as the care of offspring. Moreover, groups have a competitive advantage over the single individual when it comes to acquiring scarce resources and defending against predatory enemies. From this perspective, evolution has provided humans with a set of internal mechanisms that predispose them toward seeking relationships with others.

There is ample evidence supporting the belongingness hypothesis. First, it appears that social bonds among humans form quite easily, even in the absence of specific circumstances that might make these bonds particularly advantageous. For example, when people are assigned to be members of a group by some arbitrary criterion, they quickly develop strong feelings of loyalty and allegiance to the point where they discriminate against nonmembers in a variety of ways (e.g., Brewer, 1979; Sherif et al., 1961; Tajfel, 1970). Similarly, infants develop attachments to their caregivers long before they are able to figure out the benefits (Bowlby, 1969). People with a high need to belong are particularly attentive to social cues, such as another’s vocal tone and facial emotion (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). And there is evidence that the use of online social network sites, such as Facebook, is strongly motivated by the need to belong (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).
Ostracism

At the same time that humans form social bonds easily, they react to the loss of such bonds with a measure of distress. People often have a hard time leaving family, neighbors, and friends behind in order to go to college or move to a new city. Interestingly, they experience distress even when the separation has no practical or instrumental ramifications (e.g., the loss of neighbors). We feel bad when others ostracize us, that is, ignore or exclude us from membership in a group. In fact, as far as our brain is concerned, the pain stemming from rejection is experienced the same way as physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; McDonald & Leary, 2005). Just as important, being ostracized threatens a number of human needs—the need to belong prominently among them (Williams, 2007, 2009). And we don’t need to be rejected by an actual person or group to experience a threat to our belongingness need. Being excluded by a computer can lower levels of belonging (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004), and so can simply watching someone else being excluded (Graupmann, Pfundmair, Matsoukas, & Erber, 2016; Wesselman, Williams, & Hales, 2013). And finally, being rejected by a group we despise and don’t want anything to do with produces the same result (Gonsakorale & Williams, 2006).

The belongingness hypothesis is appealing for a couple of reasons. For one thing, the need to belong can explain a variety of important psychological phenomena. For another, the need to belong explains our tendency both to seek and maintain relationships of breadth as well as depth.

Distinct Relationship Needs

However, people may be attracted to relationships because they meet multiple psychological needs. And different relationships may meet different sets of needs. Weiss (1969) and Drigotas and Rusbult (1992) proposed five important needs that can be met only through close relationships with others. Table 1.1 provides a side-by-side comparison.

### Table 1.1 Needs Met by Close Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The need for <strong>intimacy</strong> compels us to share our feelings with another.</td>
<td>1. <strong>Intimacy needs</strong> are related to confiding in another and sharing thoughts and disclosing feelings to one’s partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The need for <strong>social integration</strong> requires someone with whom to share our concerns and worries.</td>
<td>2. <strong>Companionship needs</strong> are related to spending time and engaging in activities together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The need for being <strong>nurturant</strong> is best met by being with another whom we can take care of.</td>
<td>3. <strong>Sexual needs</strong> include the full range of physical activities from hand-holding to sexual intercourse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The need for <strong>assistance</strong> involves another who will help us in times of need.</td>
<td>4. <strong>Security needs</strong> pertain to the stability of a relationship and the extent to which one can rely on the relationship to make life more secure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The need for <strong>reassurance</strong> of our own worth requires that we are with someone who will tell us that we are important.</td>
<td>5. <strong>Emotional involvement needs</strong> involve the extent to which partners’ moods and emotions overlap and one partner’s affect influences the other’s emotional experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While distinct, the two proposals share some features, the need for intimacy being the most obvious. Regardless of which we draw upon, partners in a relationship generally experience a preponderance of positive emotions when they feel that their needs are being met. (Le & Agnew, 2001). We discuss the importance of partners meeting each other’s needs for the success of their relationship in Chapter 6.

The Inevitability of Social Relationships

Although need-based explanations for close relationships can be compelling, they are also somewhat problematic. To some extent, need-based theories often observe a behavior, such as people’s tendency to seek out others. They explain it as being caused by an underlying need, such as a need to belong, and then go on to predict the behavior based on the corresponding need. In other words, the argument takes on a somewhat circular nature, which detracts from its explanatory power. Of course, if we conveyed such reservations to someone who subscribes to theories that explain human behavior as being caused by needs, we would probably be asked what the alternatives are. This is not an easy task. However, one possibility would be to point out that interactions with others, and perhaps relationships as well, are an almost inevitable outcome not so much of human nature but human existence. Planet Earth is, after all, a heavily populated place, which makes a life of complete solitude almost impossible. Even if we built ourselves a log cabin in the most remote wilderness, it would be impossible to escape interacting with others entirely, if for no other reason than to buy food, clothing, and supplies.

In reality, most people spend their lives in a heavily populated social context. We are raised by one or more parents in a home that is part of a neighborhood and a larger community. We may have siblings and an extended family that descends upon us on holidays. And even before our proud parents bring us home from the hospital, we have been checked, assessed, measured, and poked by pediatricians and nurses. In due time, we go to school with other children and eventually are employed in a setting that usually features superiors, underlings, and coworkers. The point is that, whether we want it or not, relationships with others cannot easily be avoided, and it may be that this inevitability holds an important piece in solving the puzzle of why and how people initiate and maintain social relationships.

Some time ago, sociologist George Caspar Homans (1961) proposed a number of fairly straightforward principles with regard to the connection between social interaction and relationships. The first principle states that people with equal status are more likely to interact. Students, for example, are more likely to interact with other students than with their professors. Clerks are more likely to interact with other clerks than with their managers. Of course, if equal status were the only basis for interacting with others, there would be a copious number of possibilities. However, over time, we end up interacting with others who are similar to us, like students who have the same major or share a similar taste in music. This is the second principle. The third principle states that the more frequently we interact with others, the more we will like them. And finally, the fourth principle stipulates that frequent interaction and increased liking will result in increased sentiments of friendship.

Homans’ (1961) four principles do a decent job of explaining why people interact more, and perhaps form relationships more, with some but not others. They also
Intimate Relationships Yesterday and Today

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- How might the need to belong interact with Homans’ (1961) principles of exchange? Can you think of situations in which it might compel you to seek the company of a dissimilar other?

Intimate Relationships Yesterday and Today

The Way We Were

Intimate relationships can take on many different forms, but most Americans who are asked to describe the prototypical intimate relationship will probably respond by naming the heterosexual, married couple. This may sound biased or even discriminatory to those considering alternative forms of intimate relationships, but it is not entirely surprising. In fact, some estimates hold that roughly 90 percent of adults in the United States will get married at some point in their lives (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001). This certainty with which we believe we will someday get married may be traced back to a couple of factors that shape us in important ways. First, many people spend most if not all of their childhood exposed to Mom and Dad as the predominant model of adult intimate relationships. Even children who grow up in something other than the nuclear family often desire to have a more traditional relationship as adults. Moreover, there is a widespread belief that the family is an important aspect of the fabric from which our social culture is woven. During the 1980s and 1990s, politicians of all colors and backgrounds wore on their sleeves a concern with “family values.”

Thinking of family values conjures up the image of the traditional family as portrayed in such TV shows as Leave It to Beaver, which aired on network TV from 1957–1963. For the benefit of those readers who are either too young or have better things to do than watch reruns on cable or look for it on their favorite streaming device, it (as well as others of the same era) depicted the family in a fairly stereotypical way. There was Ward Cleaver, the husband and father who sprinted off to work early each morning. Then there was June Cleaver, the wife, homemaker, and mother who took pride in what she did. Both believed that their relationship would last forever, and together they worked hard to create a happy
home life for themselves and their two children, who were basically good kids who loved, honored, and obeyed their parents as they struggled to grow up. The children, Wally and Theodore, “The Beaver,” were expected to work toward starting their own families, of course modeling them after their own.

Historically, the so-called traditional American family as an institution was relatively short-lived. Its beginnings can be traced back to the industrial revolution of the 19th century. Prior to that, the home was the site of production, and every member of the family unit contributed productive labor toward tending the farm, raising cattle, or manufacturing goods. Compared to today, affection was less likely to be a basis for marriage, and relationships among family members were more formal, less companionate, and less child centered. The industrial revolution shifted the site of production to a physically separate workplace and brought about an increased specialization of husband and wife. In part because the woman has a biological advantage when it comes to rearing very young children, the husband became the provider and by necessity took on a reduced role in the family life. At the same time, the wife’s economic role decreased as increased emphasis was placed on her skills as a homemaker and mother. Finally, the return of huge numbers of soldiers from World War II triggered a housing boom, which created the suburbs (in which June and Ward Cleaver raised their children) and the generation known as the baby boomers.

**The Way We Are Now**

In addition to being short-lived, the image of the traditional family has also been culturally bound, as it is mostly descriptive of the white middle class. But even within this confine, since the 1970s, a number of important changes have taken place that had a profound impact on the traditional American family. Perhaps most dramatically, the Cleavers are now older when they get married, as many Americans put off marriage longer than their counterparts of the 1940s and 1950s. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2009 the median age of a first marriage was 28 for men and 26 for women, compared to 23 and 20 in 1950 (Kreider & Ellis, 2011).

Today, June Cleaver is also more likely to be employed outside the home, either in pursuit of a career or to contribute to the family income. Whereas in 1940, only 27.4 percent of women worked outside the home, by 2010 almost 59 percent of all women were part of the workforce. According to data compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor, a full 73 percent of employed women had full-time jobs. Of those, 41 percent worked in management, professional, and related occupations. Women accounted for a little over half of all workers in high-paying management, professional, and related occupations, earning 81 percent of what their male counterparts earned.

At the same time, Ward Cleaver is more likely to be an active participant in the affairs of the family. He and June will have gone to childbirthing classes together, and Ward was in the delivery room when both Wally and Theodore were born. Ward changed diapers, attends PTA meetings, and coaches his boys in AYSO even though he is clueless about the game of soccer. Wally and the Beaver have friends with whom they can communicate instantly via social media. They can share experiences, thoughts, and feelings quickly and easily on handheld electronic devices that rarely leave their sight. Thanks to those same devices, their friends can be virtually present at all times. And some of their relationships with friends may exist solely in the virtual world.
Finally, the nuclear family has been modified in yet another way. The almost universal introduction of no-fault divorce laws in the 1970s made it easier to get divorced—both practically and morally—and led to a dramatic spike in divorce rates throughout that decade. Among other things, this resulted in a proliferation of stepfamilies—or blended families—where at least one parent has children that are not genetically related to the other partner. By the mid-1980s, a full 46 percent of all marriages were marriages in which at least one partner had been married before, and roughly 16 percent of married couples included spouses with at least one child from a former marriage (Norton, 1987). According to the Stepfamily Association of America, at this time roughly one in three Americans is part of a blended family.

Changes in the age of first marriage, women's employment outside the home, and the existence of stepfamilies could be taken as indicators that the traditional family is still basically intact, having merely adapted to external pressures in relatively minor ways. However, other changes have led to alternative forms of relationships that for many have taken the place of traditional marriage and family.

Among those changes is the rising tide of singles. In 1970, 38 million adults 18 or older (28 percent) were divorced, widowed, or had always been single. By 2002, this number had jumped to 86 million, and singles accounted for more than 40 percent of the adult population in the United States. U.S. Census data indicate that by 2014 these numbers had jumped to 124.6 million singles, accounting for just over 50 percent of the population. At the same time, the percentage of married couples steadily declined from about 72 percent in 1970 to under 60 percent in 2002 (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). According to data (ironically) compiled by the Centers for Disease Control, marriage rates have continued to decline throughout the first two decades of the 21st century. For example, in 2009 a full 47 percent of women had never been married. The divorce rate may be an indirect beneficiary of marriage’s declining popularity as it, too, has steadily declined since its peak around 1980. The emergence of singlehood poses an important challenge to a culture that promotes and values marriage through a variety of mechanisms (DePaulo, 2006; DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

But even those who desire to become coupled often find unexpected twists and turns (and perhaps even potholes) on the road to couplehood. Consider, for example, the case of one of the authors’ students. Aixa took the authors’ course during her sophomore year in college in large part for very personal reasons. At the time, she was living with her African-American mother and her Latino father, who, after 20-some years of marriage, were contemplating a divorce. Matters were complicated by her mother’s chronic illness, which triggered frequent and often dramatic medical emergencies. After a great deal of contemplation, Aixa decided to escape the strained life at home by moving in with Ramon, her fiancé of six months. At first, life with Ramon was blissful. But less than a year after they moved in together, he lost his job and, in Aixa’s words, simply came apart. Unable to find another job he liked, Ramon became verbally and physically abusive to the point that Aixa decided to terminate the relationship. She subsequently moved back in with her parents, who by then had gotten divorced but nonetheless kept living together. Aixa is now dating again, although for the time being she is not looking for a serious relationship, which could get in the way of her aspirations to pursue a medical degree.

If nothing else, Aixa’s example is maximally removed from the Leave It to Beaver model of dating, marriage, and family. Life at home is not necessarily a safe haven from which to
explore the world, and it often provides models of relationships that are more frightening than soothing. As for dating, the rules of the game have changed to include arrangements that were unheard of 30 years ago. At the same time, the stakes are higher, and, as a result, the consequences of false starts can be profound.

Of course, it is one thing to lament that “things are different now.” Anyone with minimal observational skills can probably cite numerous examples of relationships that have strayed from the traditional trajectory. To make sense of it in a theoretical manner is an altogether different story, however, and it is not certain that anyone has a clear-cut answer. Instead, the state of affairs resembles a just-opened puzzle. We don’t quite know how the pieces fit together, and we are not even sure if the manufacturer included them all. In this particular case, the solution to solving the puzzle may begin with the recognition that relationships do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, how we think and feel about them along with our conduct is to some extent influenced by the larger physical and sociocultural context (Werner, Brown, Altman, & Staples, 1992).

Levinger (1994) identified three sets of interlinked social forces that have contributed to the changing landscape of close relationships:

1. First, historians and economists alike have long pointed out that Western societies have become increasingly concerned with issues of autonomy and personal control. Some (e.g., Dizard & Gadlin, 1990) have attributed this to the spread of commerce and industry, which operates by stimulation of consumer need. Commerce flourishes more easily when people have a sense of independence along with the ability to make choices in the marketplace. At the same time, this individualistic orientation toward independence and freedom of choice helps erode people’s dependence. As a result, elders try not to burden their adult children, parents put a greater emphasis on work and leisure often at the expense of not attending to their children’s support needs, and spouses develop careers independently from one another. It is possible to respond to these changes in vastly different ways. Some may be compelled to re-create rigid traditional forms of relationships (e.g., return to family values), whereas others may try to avoid any sort of permanent commitment (e.g., remain single, cohabitate). But regardless of which solution is adopted, everyone has become more preoccupied with the conduct of their relationships.

2. To some extent, the economic changes just described have empowered women to the point that their relationships with men are less and less defined in terms of “owner-property” relationships (Scanzoni, 1979a). Instead, male-female relationships have come to be more and more defined in terms of intimacy. Intimacy, by definition, implies equality, and this has put pressure on women to be more assertive and independent and pressure on men to be more sensitive and caring. Of course, at this point we are still short of having achieved complete gender equality. However, the notion that equality may be within reach may lead many to monitor their relationship more carefully. Such monitoring may paradoxically magnify even small inequalities and consequently lead to increased levels of dissatisfaction (Levinger, 1994). Interestingly, a process of this nature may help explain why wives in traditional marriages are often more satisfied with their relationship than wives with stronger expectations about equality (Hackel & Ruble, 1992; Peplau & Hill, 1990).

3. Finally, the increase in autonomy and independence and the push for equality have been accompanied by a reduction in the legal, economic, religious, and social
barriers against the ending of marriages. In some ways, the idea that marriages do not have to last “until death do us part” can lead to the perception of perpetual choice, and thus it promotes the possibility of exiting a relationship when careful monitoring suggests that its outcomes fall below one’s expectations. Of course, to see others get divorced further highlights exiting a relationship as a viable solution to marital dissatisfaction, which, among other things, shows that the microcontext of a close relationship (i.e., how individuals conduct themselves in it) can become part of a larger social force. The reduction in barriers against exiting a relationship and a corresponding reduction in barriers against entrance have triggered many to seek alternatives to marriage, including staying single and cohabitation. Just as importantly, they have provided a context that enabled people to have interracial and same-sex relationships.

These changes in relationships brought on by the changes in the macrocontext in which they take place are dramatic indeed, primarily in terms of the speed with which they happened. As late as 1967, a Columbia College male and a Barnard College female were denied graduation upon disclosing their unmarried cohabitation (Levinger, 1994). Miscegenation laws prohibiting marriage between people of different racial backgrounds were not finally abolished until that same year. And it was not until 1974 that psychologists dropped homosexuality from their compendium of psychological disorders.

Yes, a lot has changed over the past 30 years, but a lot has also remained the same. Just as they have done in the past, people will always fall in (and out of) love, except that they now have many more choices in terms of partners and the types of relationships they form. And although this can make things very complicated, the life of virtually any intimate relationship can be conceived of as unfolding in a predictable number of stages. In the sampling stage, people look at and compare characteristics of others to determine their suitability for an intimate relationship. In the bargaining stage, they exchange information about each other to determine whether they will be able to maintain a long-term, exclusive relationship. The commitment stage is marked by such behaviors as getting married, buying a house, and having children, with each behavior reducing the likelihood for alternative relationships. Finally, just as all close relationships have a beginning, they will eventually end as well, either through a breakup, divorce, or death. This is the dissolution stage, which has unique ramifications for all involved. This book is written as a journey that will take the reader through all these stages and discuss the rich history of research on all the things that matter to us when it comes to our relationships. After a brief detour into the methods social scientists use to study relationships, the journey will begin in earnest by looking at what research has taught us about how and why we become attracted to others in the first place.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

• Imagine that a time machine transported you into the 22nd century. Considering how relationships have changed in the last 50 years, what would you expect to find? What might be different? What might be the same?
Summary

Issues
- Humans need intimate relationships
- Changes in intimate relationships over time
  - Increase in age at which people get married
  - Rising number of women pursuing careers
  - Increasing number of second marriages, stepfamilies, blended families
- The enduring qualities of intimate relationships
  - People still fall in love, establish relationships, all according to a predictable pattern of sampling, bargaining, and commitment

Theories
- Intimate relationships meet a plethora of human needs
- Need to belong is a powerful motivator
- Changes in the macrocontext provide one explanation for the changing nature of intimate relationships

Research
- Much research over the past 40 years supports hypotheses suggested by need-based accounts of intimate relationships
- Research on the changing nature of relationships is necessarily descriptive; thus, many explanations are somewhat speculative, yet intriguing

Key Terms

*Need to belong*: leads to desire to form relationships of breadth and depth; it complements our need to be different.

*Ostracism*: being excluded from a relationship or from membership in a group.

*Singles*: people who are divorced, widowed, or have never married.
2 Methods to Study Relationships

In 1975, I and two of my colleagues at the University of Wisconsin, Mary Utne O’Brien and Jane Traupmann Pillemer, were collaborating on a major research program. We were attempting to determine the extent to which the major cognitive and emotional theories could tell us something about the nature of passionate love and sexual desire. We had a bit of money to work with since the National Science Foundation had awarded us a tiny grant designed to allow us to investigate the importance of social justice and equity in romantic exchanges. Then along came Wisconsin’s U.S. Senator William Proxmire, who awarded me what came to be a vastly publicized “Golden Fleece Award,” claiming I was “fleecing” taxpayers with my “unneeded” scientific research.


The Science of Intimate Relationships

Despite its inauspicious beginning, the scientific investigation of close relationships has thrived and grown. Indeed, we have come a long way from the days when a university professor could be fired for studying the seductive effects of whispering into someone’s ear. Furthermore, we have developed and refined several different methods for studying close relationships. However, before discussing these research methods, it might be worth noting that there are several assumptions (e.g., empiricism, determinism, testability, and parsimony) and goals underlying the conduct of scientific research. Although a complete discussion of these assumptions goes beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to address here one of the goals implicit in all methods of scientific research: objectivity. No matter the method—quantitative or qualitative, field or laboratory—researchers strive to collect objective, unbiased data. The goal of objectivity is what sets the scientific pursuit of knowledge apart from the layperson’s astute observations and interpretation of behavior. Data that are collected through objective methods result in a truer picture of the phenomena of interest. Objectivity helps ensure that a researcher’s beliefs, prejudices, or biases will not color either the collection or interpretation of the data. Thus, psychologists are careful to use objectivity and objective methods to gather evidence to support their claims.

Ironically, objectivity may be the most difficult goal to maintain when attempting to study highly personal topics such as love, partner selection, abusive relationships, and divorce, to name a few areas covered in this text. However, perhaps even more of an issue is the question of how best to study relationships. How does one go about studying something intangible, something that can’t be seen? For while it is easy to operationally define couple, so much of what truly defines and shapes relationships lies in the interactions that occur between people. This is more difficult to quantify and analyze. Of course this
problem is not unique to the examination of intimate relationships; however, it is probably especially acute in this arena. For example, observing couples may seem like a sensible solution to this problem, but exactly how does one go about observing a couple engaged in courtship or lovemaking or conflict? This book will cover a range of methodologies that relationship researchers use in their quest for the truth; however, the masterful researcher will recognize both the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each methodology. In other words, there is no single perfect way to study relationships. Instead, the canny investigator is careful to match the question to the method, the theoretical assumptions underlying the method to the relationship issue being studied (Duck & Montgomery, 1991).

Before plunging into a discourse on methodology, let’s back up a few steps and start at the very beginning. Basically, when psychologists are conducting a research study, they are testing a hypothesis, or the relationship between two or more variables. For example, we might want to test the following hypotheses: Blonds have more fun (or more formally, attractive individuals get more dates); insecurity leads to jealousy in romantic relationships; and people who are in love spend more time gazing into each other’s eyes.

However, before we hurry out the door to collect our data, we must first operationally define our concepts. That is, we must specify, in concrete, measurable terms, what we mean by “attractive,” “jealousy,” and “love.” We could operationalize “love” as a person’s score on a questionnaire or a person’s heart rate or pupillary dilation when gazing at or thinking about the target of his or her affection. Thus, operational definitions specify exactly how our concept should be measured and the process through which we will measure it. Further, it allows others to understand and replicate our efforts. Finally, these functions ensure objectivity in the measurement and investigation of our variables.

It is important to add, however, that although operationalizing our concept lends objectivity, clarity, precision, and the possibility of replication to our experiment, it also detracts from the depth and breadth of the concept being operationalized. For example, if we were to rely solely on a single operationalization of “love” (e.g., pupillary dilation), many would agree with the late Senator Proxmire’s criticisms regarding the sterility and futility of conducting a science of relationships. It’s clear that this definition alone doesn’t fully capture what most of us would call love. Thus, a single operational definition taps into a limited set of the relevant features of the concept and clearly doesn’t capture the entirety of the concept. It is for this reason that some researchers (e.g., Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991) suggest using multiple operational definitions to define complex concepts such as “love.” This caveat is probably even more important to topics of study in close relationships, in which many of the constructs are complex, broad, and therefore more difficult to operationalize. The practice of carefully defining and constructing our variables, formally identifying and measuring them, is indeed a first step.

Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis

Researchers interested in studying intimate relationships have a variety of methodological and statistical tools available to them. Many are used broadly throughout the social sciences to answer a multitude of questions. Some are more specific to research on dyads and relationships. Let us review both.
**Archival Research**

Once we have arrived at a suitable operationalization of our variables, we can proceed to the data collection stage of our study. However, at this stage, we have at our disposal many options on how to proceed. One method of investigation is **archival research**. This methodology uses already existing data that have been collected for purposes other than those of the archival researcher, who then reanalyzes them to address a whole new set of questions. There are many sources for archival data. One source, **statistical records**, includes information such as census data, school and hospital records, sports statistics, and business records. **Survey archives**, on the other hand, are archives such as those maintained by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and the University of Michigan, which compile the results of a variety of surveys and opinion polls. **Written records** or “personal accounts” such as diaries, journals, and letters are another source of archival data. Finally, **mass communications**, including newspapers and journals, radio and television broadcasts, and film, represent the last and richest category of archival data.

In order to examine our particular research question through this methodology, we could review TV footage of talk-show interviews involving couples. After gathering a sufficient number of these interviews, we would then submit them to a content analysis. A **content analysis** is a way of coding archival data into measurable units of analysis. Categories are developed by the researchers, and the data are then analyzed to establish the frequency of occurrence of data within those categories. Thus, in conducting archival research, investigators must (1) decide on a sampling strategy and the medium from which the data will be drawn, (2) determine what type of coding categories will be used, (3) establish **inter-rater reliability** measures for interpreting the data, and (4) analyze the coded data.

Some of the advantages of this approach are that it enables researchers to study phenomena that take place over long periods of time. For example, we could conduct an archival study on the nature of love by analyzing and comparing love letters written early in the century to more current romantic epistles.

The archival method also enables us to collect, economically, data that span broad geographical areas. We could tap into census data to get an idea of the changing composition of the American family, or we might analyze marriage announcements in newspapers from different cities across the country to get an idea of what might bring couples together. A final advantage of the archival method is that it allows us to examine the effects of nonmanipulable phenomena such as suicides, spousal abuse, natural disasters, accidents, and so on.

One of the major disadvantages of this method is that the researcher does not have control over the objectivity and accuracy of the data collection. Records may be incomplete, carelessly maintained, or biased. Codes for interpreting data may be lost, confusing, or incomplete. Further, inaccuracies in the interpretation of records may result from the passage of time. Finally, it is difficult to determine causality with this method.

**Systematic Observation**

Another method of data collection is through observation. There are many different ways in which we can observe human behavior and interaction: from naturalistic observations to laboratory observations, from unstructured observations to systematic and structured observations.
Indeed, in defining the different types of observation, we see how complex and varied observations can be. For example, although we generally tend to equate field or naturalistic observations as unstructured, we can impose structured observations in the field (e.g., observing personal space violations in a public restroom; Middlemist, Knowles, & Matter, 1977). Likewise, we can conduct fairly unstructured observations in the laboratory (e.g., observing children interacting in a free-play situation; Sillars, 1991).

Let’s examine this methodology via our question of whether we are attracted to others who are similar to ourselves. We might decide to answer this question by observing couples in a juice bar. We would position our researchers at the most secluded table and have them record the physical similarity and positiveness of the exchange between our targeted diners (i.e., men and women). Clearly, one of the advantages of this research method is that we have a high degree of certainty that the behaviors we observe are unaffected in any way by our presence. Our research participants, unaware of our presence or intent, behave in a natural way, in a natural setting. Further, since no manipulations are used to induce conversation in our couples, the treatment is also a natural one. The advantage of this naturalness, however, is offset by the utter lack of control we are able to exercise over this situation.

This lack of control reduces confidence in our results. For example, we have very little certainty that the diners we’ve observed are indeed couples. That is, although we observed men and women in the act of sharing a smoothie, we have no control over or knowledge of their actual relationship. We may be observing coworkers, friends, neighbors, siblings, or classmates. Thus, we clearly have poor control over the countless variables that may be influencing the situation or behavior. This is an important issue and one that we will return to later in this chapter.

Observations are usually conducted in a more controlled, structured manner than this example suggests. In fact, some observation methods are quite complex—a far cry from our fictitious juice bar study. For example, researchers in marital relationships (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1989) use an observational technique in which couples are seated at opposite ends of a table and are observed while they interact. While trained observers rate the couples on several behavioral dimensions, couples also record their own perceptions of the behaviors as well as their feelings about their interaction. Information is gathered on several levels, not only through observation, but also through self-reports and behavioral ratings. Further, the interactions and the data collection procedures are more structured and controlled.

William Ickes and his colleagues developed an ingenious method of making observations in the lab: the dyadic interaction paradigm (Ickes, 1982, 1983; Ickes, Bissonnette, Garcia, & Stinson, 1990). This method enables researchers to collect and analyze data on both overt behaviors as well as on thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions. In the dyadic interaction paradigm, participants’ interactions are videotaped surreptitiously while they are awaiting the arrival of the research assistant. The study, in other words, begins outside the lab proper, and the waiting room becomes the natural setting for the observation. This, however, is only the first component of the dyadic interaction paradigm. After the interactions between participants (e.g., strangers, lovers, friends, etc.) are videotaped, the interpretation phase begins. Participants are seated in separate cubicles where they report their thoughts and feelings while viewing the videotaped interactions. Thus, this paradigm yields a wealth of data on both the behavioral and cognitive components of social interactions that occur naturally.

Thus, in systematic observation, procedures for sampling and observing behaviors are developed to conduct an objective measure of behaviors and other observable
Methods to Study Relationships

phenomena. The advantage of systematic observation is its naturalness: naturalness in setting if conducted in the field, naturalness in behaviors that are observed, and naturalness in treatments. Some research questions can be addressed only through this method. Many treatments are impossible to manipulate in an experiment. We cannot, for example, manipulate things such as droughts, hurricanes, and earthquakes (i.e., forces of nature); crime, unemployment, and socioeconomic status (i.e., social forces); and introversion/extraversion, sociability, and sense of humor (i.e., person variables). Research questions dealing with topics such as these would be served well by either naturalistic observation or field experimentation. However, as mentioned earlier, the weakness of this methodology resides in the absence of control we have over other extraneous variables. This lack of control leads to problems in interpretation and, most importantly, to an inability to perform causal analyses.

Interviews and Surveys

By now, many readers might be thinking, “If you want to find out how similarity affects attraction, just ask!” Thus, we might conduct either an interview or create a survey to answer our question. Interviews can take place in face-to-face sessions or via the telephone, and their format can be either structured or open-ended. Although one of the most costly and time-consuming forms of collecting data, the main advantage of the interview is that it yields the highest quality data of any research methodology (Judd et al., 1991). Additionally, interviews usually have the highest response rate, and able interviewers who establish a good rapport with their respondents are able to elicit highly accurate answers from them. Further, during an interview, the interviewer can detect any confusion on the part of the participants and answer questions they may have. The disadvantages of the interview stem directly from its advantages. First, as already mentioned, interviews are costly. Second, the rapport established by the interviewer can lead to bias and experimenter demand. Respondents may frame their responses in ways they believe will please the interviewer. Finally, with regard to sensitive topics, the face-to-face interview might be less conducive to frankness and openness than other more anonymous and private data collection procedures.

In the survey method, questionnaires are distributed to large numbers of people who respond to questions in either structured or open-ended formats. Surveys address a wide variety of topics, ranging from self-reports of respondents’ behaviors, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and recollections of their past, to topics dealing with respondents’ assessments of issues, events, institutions, political candidates, and so on. For example, if we decide to use survey research to investigate the relationship between similarity and attraction, we might have our respondents evaluate their previous relationships and rate the degree of correspondence they feel existed with regard to their attitudes, beliefs, values, interests, and activities.

Survey research is an attractive alternative to the interview because of the low cost entailed in producing and reproducing the survey itself. Further, the ease of distributing and responding to surveys and therefore of collecting data from a large number of respondents makes surveys both time and cost effective. Another advantage is that survey respondents are anonymous and therefore more likely to reply honestly. A disadvantage of both the interview and the survey methods is their reliance on respondents’ self-reports, which can be unreliable. In their efforts to recall past events, respondents may reconstruct their memories in the process. Further, as psychologists (Nisbett & Wilson,
1977) have found, people really don’t have an especially good understanding of their own behavior. Although we think we have privileged insights into the whys behind what we do, we often make erroneous attributions and self-reports. Berger (1980; 1987) and Duck and Sants (1983) have made similar observations in studies involving interpersonal relationships and interactions. For instance, they find that in addition to overinterpreting participants’ self-insight, researchers are also overly confident in people’s abilities to have self-knowledge.

Other considerations to take into account when using surveys are decisions of how to construct the survey and who will receive it. In survey construction, researchers must exercise care in determining how to word survey items as well as how to arrange the items or questions. Not surprisingly, the manner in which questions are phrased makes a difference in how they’re answered. For example, we might ask the same question in two ways: “Do you approve of interracial relationships?” or “Do you disapprove of interracial relationships?” We may think we’re asking the same basic question (simply worded differently), but the differences inherent in these two sentences can make a world of difference when collecting survey data. Positively worded statements generally tend to prime approval-related thoughts; that is, they bring to mind thoughts that reflect the respondents’ positive feelings and beliefs about the topic. Negatively worded statements, on the other hand, tend to prime negative thoughts and lead to retrieval of negative information related to the question being asked.

Thus, one of the challenges for survey researchers is to ask (often sensitive) questions in as unbiased a manner as possible. Another challenge in the construction of surveys has to do with the sequencing of survey questions. Researchers (e.g., Schuman & Presser, 1981; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988) have found that different sequences of questions can have different effects on survey results. For example, Schwarz and Clore (1983) telephoned research participants and asked a series of questions in different orders. Participants phoned on fair, sunny days usually responded to the question “How satisfied are you with your life?” with a positive statement. Participants who were asked the same question on an overcast, dreary day responded more negatively. However, if participants—on either a sunny or cloudy day—were first asked about the weather (“How’s the weather down there today?”) and then asked about their life satisfaction, the so-called weather effect was gone. Indeed, Schuman and Presser (1981) found that order effects can be as large as 15 percentage points!

In general, context effects are more likely to be found when asking general questions (“Do you think it should be possible for individuals to be involved in romantic relationships with those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds?”) than when asking specific questions (“Do you think it should be possible for an Hispanic to be involved in a romantic relationship with an African-American?”) (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). Thus, when constructing a survey, we might want to start with general questions first and “funnel” down to the specific (Judd et al., 1991).

Imagine you were asked to answer several questions about a well-known actor (e.g., Angelina Jolie). The first item on the survey requests that you rate the sex appeal of the actor. The ensuing items ask you to give your opinion of a particular movie in which the actor starred (e.g., Lara Croft: Tomb Raider) and your evaluation of the person’s acting skills, his or her humanitarianism, his or her talent as a painter, and so on. According to research, another context-based bias called the halo effect might influence your answers to these questions. In this case, your response to the first question (i.e., the sex appeal of the actor) might color your responses to subsequent questions—whether or not these
questions have anything to do with the initial question. That is, an actor’s sex appeal, although good for box office power, may not necessarily have anything to do with the quality of a particular movie, the actor’s actual acting skill, or whether he or she cares about global warming or starving children. Nonetheless, if we are smitten by the actor, we might find ourselves giving rave reviews to his or her movies and lauding the actor’s art work.

In terms of our own research question, if in our attempt to discover the relationship between similarity and attraction, we were to ask first about the nature of the relationship or the respondents’ feelings toward their partners, we might find a bias in their response to our target question. Thus, survey construction and, more specifically, item ordering are important considerations when using survey methodology.

Still other drawbacks of survey methodology include its high boredom potential. That is, it can be fairly easy for respondents to become bored with and detached from the survey process. When this happens, respondents become disengaged and answer items in a careless or haphazard fashion, thereby threatening the internal validity of the survey. This drawback is not specific to survey research alone; however, the survey format makes this methodology more susceptible to this hazard.

**Interpreting Survey Data: Correlations**

Survey data can provide a wealth of information. Among other things, they allow us to see the extent to which two or more variables are associated with one another. This type of relationship is commonly referred to as a correlation. For example, returning to our ongoing research into the relationship between similarity and attraction, we might ask couples to answer two different self-report questionnaires: one that gathers information about their individual attitudes, beliefs, hobbies, goals, and economic and educational backgrounds, and another that asks them to rate their partner on several dimensions of attractiveness. Upon submitting this information to a correlational analysis, we would be able to get a picture of the relationship of these variables to one another. What is meant by this term, “relationship between variables”?

Several different outcomes are possible. First, the analysis can reveal that there is no relationship among the variables of interest; that is, changes in one variable are totally unrelated to changes (nonchanges) in other variables. A second outcome is called a positive correlation. This is the case when increases in one variable are related to increases in the other. Thus, if we found a positive correlation between similarity and attraction, we would conclude that the greater the similarity between partners, the greater the attraction, or as similarity increases, so too does attraction. A third type of correlation is a negative correlation. In this case, one variable increases in value or intensity while the other decreases. A negative correlation, in our example, would translate into the following: As similarity between partners increases, attraction decreases.

Correlational analyses are especially useful for investigating variables that cannot be manipulated: natural disasters, political events, personal attributes, births, deaths, suicides, disease, and the like. That is, variables that cannot be manipulated due to either physical impossibility or ethical reasons can be studied with the correlational method. Rather than physically manipulating the variables of interest, researchers simply measure them and then determine what type of relationship exists between them.

One of the main disadvantages of the correlational method is that it does not speak to the issue of the causal relationship among variables. Thus, while we can learn about the
degree to which variables are associated (positive, negative, none), we cannot know with any certainty that changes in one variable actually caused changes in the other. For a vivid illustration of this point, research conducted in third-world countries reveals a positive correlation between intelligence and height. This correlation could suggest that height causes one to be smarter. Or it could suggest that being smart causes one to be taller. Or it could suggest that a third variable may be responsible for changes in both observed variables (i.e., height and intelligence). Socioeconomic status is one candidate. Children growing up in wealthy homes not only eat their Wheaties every morning, but they actually attend school—good schools—and stay awake to learn. Wealth provides them with both nutrition and educational opportunities. On the other hand, children born to poverty not only miss meals but are probably also deprived of educational opportunities. Thus, poverty (or low socioeconomic status) leads to poor nutrition and health as well as poor educational opportunities.

**Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research**

- Senator Proxmire thought nobody would be interested in the science of intimate relationships except the researchers themselves. What do you think? List a few reasons why you think the general public would be interested in the results of such research and some reasons why it would not.
- Good rapport between interviewer and interviewee can lead to highly accurate responses. At the same time, it can produce biases and experimenter demand. How could you explain these very different outcomes? What do you think can be done to avoid biased answers?
- The idea that we have little insight into what motivates our behavior is counterintuitive and hard to accept. Yet scientific research supports it. Can you think of some sources of bias in our self-knowledge?
- Item ordering in a survey can influence the responses given by participants. If you were to conduct a survey, would it be better to ask questions about demographics at the beginning or at the end? Why?

**Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Research**

Surveys can be useful tools for the study of numerous relationship issues, such as how material wealth might be associated with relationship satisfaction. But their utility extends beyond making comparisons within a given sample at a single point in time. Researchers interested in studying the influence of age on relationship satisfaction, for example, have two choices. First, they can use a cross-sectional design that compares relationship satisfaction in two or more samples of respondents at varying ages (e.g., young adulthood, middle age, old age). However, any conclusions about the effects of age are necessarily limited because the samples were comprised of different people who may differ on a variety of other dimensions as well.

Longitudinal research avoids this problem by following the same individuals over a period of time—sometimes even across an entire lifespan. As such, they provide reliable indications about change occurring within the same group of people. Consequently, they are excellent tools for tracking the impact of maturation and life experiences on the
variables of interest. In perhaps the most ambitious longitudinal study to date, Lewis Terman, the famed and controversial pioneer of IQ testing, began a longitudinal study that tracked the lives and fortunes of 1,521 gifted children—“Terman’s Termites,” as they became known—from 1920 to 2005. At the study’s conclusion, many of Terman’s Termites were in their late 80s and had survived three successive project directors. This study has yielded a wealth of data on a broad range of developmental, cognitive, and social issues and has resulted in over a hundred published studies and dozens of books.

Experimentation

The mere mention of laboratory experimentation can conjure up images of the bespectacled scientist in his or her white lab coat, supervising mazes full of hapless rats or equally hapless college freshmen hooked up to electroshock devices. The gap between this image and our very personal, emotion-laden beliefs concerning our most intimate relationships is likely responsible for the cynicism that Senator Proxmire expressed for the seeming impossibility of studying relationships in a scientific manner.

Exactly how can the scientific approach deal effectively with issues of love, romance, divorce, jealousy, and marriage? Suppose that in our ongoing quest to determine the relationship between similarity and attraction, we decided to conduct an experimental examination of the topic. How might we accomplish this?

Three key elements of a successful experiment are control, random assignment, and comparison. Essentially, researchers attempt to hold all variables constant while allowing only the variable of interest (i.e., the independent variable) to fluctuate. Any changes observed in the behavior of interest (i.e., the dependent variable) can then be attributed to changes in the independent variable. Or, the independent variable is largely responsible for changes in the dependent variable: a causal relationship.

Control is an essential feature of the experiment, and this is one of the main reasons that many experiments are actually conducted in laboratories. The sterile surroundings of the typical lab setting facilitate the type of control that increases our confidence in our findings. Once outside the laboratory, a myriad of factors—factors beyond the researcher’s control—affect or have the potential to influence the behavior of interest. Although it is not impossible to conduct experiments outside the lab, greater care needs to be taken to protect the internal validity of the study.

Upon hearing the results of experimental research—such as that viewing pornography leads to dissatisfaction with one’s partner (Zillmann & Bryant, 1988)—many students often challenge the results with personal anecdotes illustrating how their friends are exceptions to the finding. Another kind of reaction falls under the rubric of “Who were the research participants?” Were there any Asians in the study? Were gays included in the sample? Were any depressed or introverted individuals in the experiment? What the student of experimental research should understand is that results represent a group outcome, an average score that comes to represent a range of scores. In response to “Who were the research participants?” questions, random assignment to condition should ensure that individual differences are distributed evenly across conditions.

Through random assignment (e.g., flipping a coin, drawing random numbers), everyone who participates in an experiment has an equal chance to be assigned to any of its conditions. Another way of explaining the function of random assignment is to imagine what would happen without it. Suppose, for example, that research participants in the pornography experiment were allowed to choose the condition in which they would participate.
Suppose, further, that devout, religious men chose to view the *National Geographic* videos, whereas the "party animals" and playboys selected the pornographic video condition. In this case, we have two variables covarying in a systematic fashion: type of video (pornography, nature) and research participant variables. It is impossible to decide what caused differences in relationship satisfaction (dependent variable). With random assignment, however, our devout research participants and our party animals would be evenly distributed across all conditions. Changes in the outcome can then be attributed to the independent variable or variables.

Finally, the idea of *comparison* is implicit in the two points already addressed. In the interest of making it explicit, experimental designs usually include two or more conditions. In the simplest two-group design, the outcome of one group (a control group or pretest) is compared to that of the treatment group (or a posttest). Other types of between-group comparisons include varying the level of the treatment (e.g., no pornography, three hours of pornography, six hours of pornography, etc.).

Now that we have all the elements of experimentation in place, let's apply them to our question regarding similarity and attraction. How can we study this issue in the lab? Suppose we were interested primarily in attitude similarity with an eye toward eliminating physical appearance from our equation. One possibility for testing our hypothesis might include the following. First, we might have our participants complete some type of attitude measurement instrument. Then, if we had the ability, technology, and skill, we could randomly assign participants to computer chatrooms occupied by a supposed cyberperson of the opposite sex who is attitudinally either similar or dissimilar to the participant. At the end of their dialogue session, we could measure several things: attraction, liking, intimacy of conversation, number of topics discussed, interest in actually meeting their cyberdate, and so on.

Thus, true experiments are attractive because they give researchers greater control over the variables of interest as well as control over unwanted variables. Further, as a result of this control, researchers are able to test the nature of causal relationships that may exist among variables. Not surprisingly, the drawbacks of the experimental method are the antithesis of those of the nonexperimental methods—that is, what experiments gain in control, they lose in real-world realism.

**Experimental and Mundane Realism**

As already mentioned in passing, the laboratory setting is usually sparse and sterile. Studies that attempt to investigate topics as hot and sexy as obsessions with secret lovers (Lane & Wegner, 1994; Wegner, Lane, & Dimitri, 1994) might include having participants play a game of Battleship while they use their feet to tap out coded communications with their partners—a far cry from clandestine meetings in smoke-filled bars and humid backseats. Yet, is such *mundane realism* truly essential to the successful experiment? Well, it depends.

The answer to this question hinges on whether the type of research is theoretical or applied. And, more precisely, it depends on the type of generalizability the researcher is seeking (Mook, 1980). For example, in basic, theoretical inquiry, researchers are interested in generalizing or inferring a general set of principles—their findings or a set of theoretically based predictions—to all humans and across settings. Applied researchers, on the other hand, are interested in generalizing results of their study to a specific setting or to a specific population of people (e.g., assembly-line workers in love, people who cruise leather bars, sex habits of the HIV positive, etc.). The aims of these two types of research differ, and so too does the importance of realism.
In the first case, that of theoretical research, because the goal is to generalize a set of principles, an exact duplication of the real world is less important than is experimental realism. This type of realism requires that experimental participants be fully involved and absorbed by the experiment and interpret the manipulations in just the ways the researcher had envisioned. In other words, the impact and experience of the experiment must be real and meaningful to the participant. This ensures that the variables of interest are interpreted correctly and that results therefore speak to the desired theoretical issues.

Whereas experimental realism is fundamental to theoretical research, mundane realism is key to applied research. Mundane realism refers to a resemblance to the real world. Because an applied researcher’s interest lies in generalizing results to specific settings or populations, obtaining as close a resemblance as possible to those settings or populations strengthens the generalizations that can be made.

In sum, the experimental method provides researchers with a powerful tool to test different predictions. Yet, despite its advantages, it too is not without its weaknesses. Thus, a more accurate view would be that all methods of data collection have both their advantages and disadvantages. And, returning to issues raised earlier in this chapter, perhaps the most important determinant of which methodology to use is the topic being addressed. With this in mind, the researcher as well as the consumer can weigh the pros and cons of the method against the question it is addressing.

Interpreting Experimental Data: Dyadic Effects

Our discussion of experiments has tacitly assumed the study of a single participant whose behavior is hypothesized to vary according to specific experimental manipulations. Studying couples in a similar way poses a problem because we are now looking at the behavior of two people who share a considerable level of interdependence. Their behavior is an outcome of individual, dyadic, and occasion-specific variables (Kenny, 1988, 1994). Self-disclosure, for example, can be viewed from the individual level (Harry discloses to everyone), the dyadic level (Harry discloses to one person in particular), and the occasion-specific level (Harry, along with everyone else, demonstrates a high degree of self-disclosure while flying on airplanes).

Kenny and Kashy (1991) have suggested that couples are marked by two types of interdependence. **Within-dyad interdependence** refers to what is shared or exchanged within the couple. It is a longitudinal measure of a single couple’s (dyad’s) interactions. For example, if Monique responds to Harry’s queries with impatience and aggravation, Harry might react with anger and defensiveness. Monique may in turn be hurt by Harry’s response and become withdrawn and hostile. This give-and-take demonstrates how one partner’s reactions are dependent on his or her partner’s preceding actions. **Between-dyad interdependence**, on the other hand, represents the degree of similarity or agreement at a single point in time when measured across several dyads or couples. Both types of interdependence are important for the study of relationships and require special statistical tools for the analysis and interpretation of data.

Collecting Couple Data

**Ethical Considerations**

At a minimum, all research with human participants requires researchers to put into place safeguards to minimize any potential harm. Moreover, current standards of ethics require
researchers to balance any physical and psychological risks to participants against the potential benefits to them or to society. No research with human participants is ever completely free of risk. Even studies that do not involve making participants believe they were delivering lethal electric shocks, as Stanley Milgram (1963) famously did, have the potential to threaten their privacy and the confidentiality of their responses. Procedures that deceive participants about the true nature of an experiment may also cause embarrassment. And while experiments have many advantages over other research methods, they do not lend themselves to the study of many relationship issues, ethically and otherwise. If we wanted to study the effect of infidelity on relationship quality, randomly assigning couples to cheat on one another would be as unethical as it would be impractical.

How can we decide whether a research project meets a high enough standard of quality to be considered ethically defensible? Minimizing the potential that participants are being put at unnecessary risk is key! Guidelines established by the American Psychological Association require that at a minimum researchers alert participants to any potential risks, obtain their informed consent, and allow them to withdraw their participation at any time with no penalty if they so choose. Researchers must also debrief participants about the nature and purpose of the research at the conclusion of the study, and they must put in place procedures to assure the anonymity and confidentiality of the data. At U.S. universities, institutional review boards scrutinize all research projects to assure their compliance with these safeguards, as well as with federal regulations.

Data Collection in Real Time: Recording Ongoing Interactions

Upon close inspection, most of the methods discussed thus far deal largely with two categories of social interactions, or domains of experience (Reis, 1994): the domain of reconstructed experience and the domain of exemplary experience. The third type of experience, that of ongoing social interactions and experiences, is, according to Reis (1994; Wheeler & Reis, 1991), woefully underrepresented in current approaches to the study of relationships.

Let’s take a closer look. First, the domains of reconstructed and exemplary experiences have been used extensively to study relationships. Any type of self-report measure that asks participants to recall particular events, thoughts, feelings, or relationships is asking for a reconstruction of the issue under scrutiny. And although this method might yield a lot of interesting information, there are some drawbacks to its usage. Cognitive and social psychologists have established that many factors affect recall: the way the question is asked, the context in which it is presented, the mood of the respondent when asked (e.g., Erber, 1991), and so on. Indeed, reconstruction of past events can be viewed as taking place within a frame of facts; however, like the artist who interprets reality, the details that are used to fill the frame may be generated not from actual events but from a variety of other influences. Thus, caution should be used when interpreting data gathered through the domain of reconstructed experience, and this should by no means represent the sole method for studying relationships.

If the domain of reconstructed experience is like a movie flashback in which respondents attempt to dredge up and analyze past experiences, the domain of exemplary experience is like a studio portrait of the participants. Just as we put on our best faces for that portrait, so too do participants in laboratory studies. Knowing that our behaviors are being studied and analyzed may increase self-presentation concerns: We might become extremely concerned about being perceived in the “right” way. In addition to capturing the best portrait, research in this domain also attempts to discover what is “typical.” Like the Norman Rockwell portraits of America and Americans in the 1950s, what is typical
may apply to many but certainly not to all. This approach fails to capture the details and minutiae of everyday experiences. Although problematic, this criticism is by no means an indictment against laboratory research, but merely a caution that this too should not be the only way to investigate ongoing close relationships.

Reis (1994) suggested that in the domain of ongoing social interactions, the humdrum everyday ebbs and flows of life are the stuff that define and influence interpersonal relationships. Unlike a flashback or a portrait, this domain is like a video camera running silently from the corner of the room. Participants forget its presence as it records the mundane, spontaneous aspects of their daily lives—not only the cataclysmic, distinctive, joyful, or otherwise significant life-changing events but also the “smaller” moments that fill in the gaps. Since relationships are defined by the social interactions that comprise them, then perhaps studying the continuous flow of interactions is what will ultimately reveal them to us.

Methods for studying this domain can be categorized into three types: interval, signal, and event recordings (Reis, 1994). In interval-contingent recordings, participants record their experiences at predetermined and (usually) regular intervals: every morning, every evening, after every meal, and so forth. Participants giving signal-contingent recordings report on their experiences whenever they are signaled by the researcher. Signals may include beepers, pagers, or telephone calls, with participants being signaled an average of 7 to 10 times daily. Thus, unlike the interval-recording method, reports collected via the signal-contingent method can be more numerous and their occurrence more random. Finally, the event-contingent recording methodology elicits participant reports after well-defined and predetermined events have taken place (e.g., after each friendship interaction). Once the event has occurred, participants make the appropriate recordings and perhaps complete short questionnaires about the event.

Diaries and logs enable us to tap into the domain of ongoing experience. Unlike the diary of archival research discussed earlier in this chapter, these types of recordings are structured, standardized, and goal directed (Duck, 1991). Wheeler and Nezlek (1977) developed the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR) as a structured means of capturing unfolding interactions and daily events. Not only does the RIR provide a means of collecting factual information (e.g., date, time, place of interaction, number of partners, length of interaction), but it also allows researchers to gather information about participants’ own insights and judgments regarding their interactions (see Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: ________________</th>
<th>Time: ________________</th>
<th>Length of Conversation: ________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initials:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex:</strong></td>
<td>No. of males:</td>
<td>No. of females:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature:</strong> Work</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Pastime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy: superficial</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disclosed: very little</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>a great deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other disclosed: very little</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>a great deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality: unpleasant</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>pleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction: less than expected</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>more than expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation: I initiated</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>other initiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence: I influenced more</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td>other influenced more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The potential for this methodology is exciting. Logs can be modified to fit a wide variety of research questions. Duck’s (1991) Iowa Communication Record (ICR) is another type of diary log. It is similar to the RIR in many respects; however, it focuses more closely on the communication process itself. Participants using the ICR will answer questions regarding the topic of their conversation, the quality of the conversation, and its impact, as well as what they were doing before and after the exchange. Thus, the ICR allows access to everyday talk—the conversations that really define our interactions and relationships.

The three domains of inquiry, although very different from one another, are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, data gathered across all three domains, together, should give us the clearest picture of the phenomenon under investigation. For example, data gathered via the domain of reconstructed experience tell us about how people understand and interpret their lives, whereas data gathered through experimentation (exemplary experience) tell us how people react in particular, specific situations. Finally, research conducted on ongoing experiences provides us with immediate and continuing data on people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Like converging operations, information assembled across the three domains should give us the most comprehensive and inclusive understanding of behavior (Reis, 1994).

Let’s now return to our investigation of similarity and attraction. If we were to apply this approach to our question, we would include our previously discussed survey study, along with our electronic laboratory investigation. However, to round out our investigation, we would now launch an investigation in the domain of ongoing experience. Perhaps an event-contingent recording would be best suited for our question; that is, participants would keep a log after each social interaction. In addition to gathering information about interpersonal similarity, we might ask our participants to evaluate the tenor of and their satisfaction with each social interaction. Together, data accumulated from these three domains give us the most complete picture of our question.

**Speed-Dating as a Research Paradigm**

You are walking across your college campus and see a sign, “‘New people I’ve met since Fall Quarter? Does my TA count?’—Rachel Class of ’06” (Finkel, Eastwick, & Matthews, 2007, p. 155). Would you suspect that by attending a speed-dating event you would actually be participating in a research project? Finkel et al. (2007), borrowing from procedures devised for a real-life dating service, developed a speed-dating paradigm to investigate romantic attraction. Speed-dating as a research tool enables researchers to expand their methodology to gather data from controlled but realistic settings. In this paradigm, equal numbers of males and females report to a comfortable setting where they interact for a predetermined (and short) period of time, usually between 3 to 8 minutes. Participant characteristics are collected and attraction measured after the brief interactions and longitudinally thereafter. This paradigm is exciting and innovative, further blurring the line between lab and field in its quest to uncover more truths about couples and their relationships.

**Data Collection in the Internet Age**

Social psychological methodologies have increasingly been adapted to take into account new technologies—both those developed specifically for computer-assisted research as well as those developed in the commercial sector to help people find dates. Online survey tools such as SurveyGold and SurveyMonkey enable researchers to gather data from participants worldwide. University and researchers’ websites host experiments of all types.
You may, for example, view demonstrations or participate in the latest research on facial attractiveness at www.faceresearch.org/demos/average. Another rather unique source of data has been virtual online worlds such as Second Life, in which people create avatars that inhabit and interact with each other in completely online settings. Avatars build homes, get jobs, and even wed one another. Researchers have even investigated how avatar attractiveness influences the behaviors of other avatars (Yee & Bailenson, 2007)! Finally, online dating services that make their data available to researchers have also opened up new windows into our understanding of relationships in both virtual and real-life settings.

**Meta-Analysis: The Analysis of Analyses**

Collecting data from couples is often the best way to answer many questions about important processes in intimate relationships. But this is not always the case. Imagine that you are a researcher interested in finding out whether similarity leads to attraction. Before deciding on how to study this question you conduct a search of the literature only to find out that there are already hundreds of published studies that have addressed this issue. To make matters more complicated, some of them seem to show that similarity does, in fact, increase attraction. Others, however, show no relationship, and still others seem to show that similarity decreases attraction. Faced with this state of affairs, you could devise an experiment that might include conditions under which similarity increases and decreases attraction. But this is a tall order. Alternatively, you could conduct a **meta-analysis** to make sense of the results of the many studies on your topic. Meta-analyses entail the analysis of many individual studies for the purpose of integrating and summarizing across them (Glass, 1976; Rudner, Glass, Evartt & Emery, 2002). Using this method, researchers typically identify the relevant collection of studies, describe their characteristics, and then calculate the average size or magnitude of the reported effects across all studies. The magnitude of the effect is called “effect size” and refers to the statistical strength of the relationship among research variables. One way to calculate the effect size is as a correlation coefficient that can range from −1 (indicating a perfect inverse relationship) to 0 (indicating no relationship) to +1 (indicating a perfect positive relationship). Thus, in a rapidly growing field, meta-analyses provide researchers with a way to summarize and organize findings from a wide array of individual studies. We will see the results of this data analysis technique in many chapters of this book.

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**Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theory, and Research**

- If longitudinal designs are superior tools to study relationship processes over time, what considerations might compel researchers to use cross-sectional designs instead?
- Take another look at the experiment on the effects of pornography on relationship satisfaction. How could you run this study so that it takes into account the personal differences between the devout and the playboys?
- Gathering data over the Internet has advantages such as speed, convenience, and the possibility to include participants from all over the world. Do you think these data are qualitatively different from data gathered through more traditional methods? What may be the possible drawbacks of collecting data over the Internet?


**Conducting Research on Relationships**

- It is difficult to maintain objectivity about such an inherently subjective and personal topic. Our methodologies provide tools to reinforce and maintain our objective search for answers.
- All research starts with an operationalization of constructs.
- What is the “best” research methodology?
  - Each method has its strengths and weaknesses: e.g., control versus naturalness.
  - The best methodology balances the pros and cons of methodology against the question being asked.
- There are many different ways to collect data: archival research, systematic observation, the dyadic interaction paradigm, interviews, surveys, cross-sectional designs, longitudinal designs, experiments.
- How are correlational designs and analyses different from true experiments?
- What is the difference between mundane and experimental realism?
- Couples—or dyads—present their own research challenges.
  - Researchers use special methodologies that are sensitive to effects arising out of (1) each individual’s unique contribution, (2) the effect of the interaction and interdependence at the dyadic level, and (3) the impact of the specific occasion.
- There are many ways to collect data of ongoing interactions: interval, signal, and event recordings (examples are diaries and logs such as the RIR and ICR).
- Speed-dating is a novel way to collect data on the initiation of attraction and relationships.
- Computer and web-based data collection techniques include the use of online surveys, access to Internet dating services, and studies of online virtual worlds.
- The growth of research on relationships and the corresponding accumulation of studies benefit from analyzing the analysis, which is known as meta-analysis.

**Key Terms**

*Hypothesis*: theory-based prediction about the relationship between two or more variables.

*Operational definitions*: specify how a concept should be measured and the process through which it will be measured.

*Archival research*: makes use of data collected for purposes other than of the archival researcher.

*Inter-rater reliability*: the degree to which different raters’ findings agree with one another.

*Correlation*: the degree to which two variables are associated.

*Longitudinal research*: designs that follow the same participants over a period of time.
**Internal validity:** represents the certainty with which the changes in the dependent variable can be attributed to the manipulation of the independent variable(s) in an experiment.

**Random assignment:** a method of assigning participants in an experiment in such a way as to ensure that every participant has an equal chance of being in any of the conditions of the experiment.

**Mundane realism:** the extent to which an experiment resembles the real world.

**Experimental realism:** the extent to which participants are fully involved and absorbed by the experiment and interpret the manipulations in the way the researcher intended.

**Meta-analysis:** a technique that statistically analyzes and summarizes results from many individual studies.
3 Physical Attraction

A thing of beauty is a joy forever.
—John Keats, “Endymion”

All the carnall beauty of my wife is but skin deep.
—Sir Thomas Overbury, “A Wife”

The two opposing views depicted at the start of this chapter illustrate both our absorption with beauty and our simultaneous misgivings with this predilection. Is it any surprise, then, that much of the early literature on intimate relationships was devoted to exploring the physical basis of attraction? That such issues can be investigated with relative ease did not hurt either. They are highly conducive to being studied in the context of tightly controlled laboratory experiments in which the physical attractiveness of another can be varied while everything else can be held constant. Any differences that are obtained on a dependent measure can therefore be attributed to the variations in attractiveness employed in the experiment. And even though there were reports as far back as the early 1970s indicating that understanding (initial) attraction between two people may tell us little about what happens in their (ongoing) relationships (Levinger, Senn, & Jorgensen, 1970; Levinger & Snoek, 1972), the field was relatively slow to shift its attention to issues going beyond attraction. Furthermore, despite the fact that many of the towering figures in research on physical attraction were women (i.e., Karen Dion, Ellen Berscheid, Elaine Hatfield), much of the early attraction research focused almost exclusively on heterosexual men’s perceptions of women’s attractiveness. And although more recent research has freed itself from its early androcentric bias, most of the current work is limited to cross-gender perceptions of attractiveness by heterosexual men and women.

These shortcomings aside, there is a second, and perhaps more compelling reason for starting this book by discussing physical attractiveness, and it has to do with its importance for the initiation of close relationships. Simply put, we are more likely to initiate relationships with people who have physically attractive characteristics. This could be due to a number of reasons. It could be that physically attractive individuals are simply more noticeable. In the course of any given day, we tend to encounter a large number of people—on the train, in school, at work or the grocery store, and at our favorite coffee shop. The vast majority of the people whom we encounter in these ways are quickly forgotten. It may be that attractive people catch our attention more than others—we look at them longer, think about them more—and therefore they have an edge over others when
we feel inclined to form a relationship of any kind. Of course, there is a problem with
this kind of reasoning. If relationship initiation were solely dependent on the salience of
another, unattractive people should have a similar edge, because standing out in context
often requires little more than that a person is different from the rest (e.g., Taylor, Fiske,
Close, Anderson, & Ruderman, 1977)! Moreover, our predilection to seek relationships with attractive others is still present
when their noteworthiness or salience is held constant, especially in dating relationships.
In other words, given a choice among several possible dates, we tend to prefer those
whom we perceive to be most attractive. This chapter addresses the importance of physi-
cal attractiveness in dating and beyond and discusses some of the explanations social
scientists have advanced to account for it.

Physical Attractiveness and Dating Choices

If you look at the profiles of your Facebook friends you may well find that many of your
opposite-sex friends are fairly good looking. This speculation is suggested by a recent
study (Wang, Moon, Kwon, Evans, & Stefanone, 2010) that showed we are more likely
to initiate such virtual relationships with others whose profiles include highly attractive
photos. This same study also found that no profile picture is better than one with an unat-
tractive photo.

This finding is not surprising in light of what we learned from a field experiment
conducted at the University of Minnesota (Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman,
1966) more than half a century ago. It was the first study to look specifically at the role
of physical attractiveness in the context of dating choices. More than 700 freshmen
participated in a “Computer Dance” held the week before classes started. Presum-
ably heterosexual research participants were told that if they chose to participate, they
would be assigned a date by a computer. Tickets could be obtained only by appearing
in person at the Student Union. When students came to pick up their tickets, they were
asked to show their photo ID to one person, sign for their tickets with a second person,
and pick up their tickets from yet a third person. As it turns out, the people handling
the ticket distribution were employed by the experimenters to rate independently the
physical attractiveness of research participants who were about to participate in the
Computer Dance. Participants were then randomly assigned a date of the opposite sex
with whom they spent the evening at the Computer Dance a few days later. During
intermissions, all research participants were asked to rate their dates on a number of
dimensions, including how attractive they thought their dates were, how comfortable
they were with their dates during the dance, and whether they would like to date their
partners again.

As anyone looking for a date to the senior prom might have guessed, the only predic-
tor for participants’ answers to these questions was the attractiveness of their dates.
How much the students liked their dates, how comfortable they felt during the date,
and how much they wanted to date the person in the future was solely determined by
their dates’ physical attractiveness. This finding was somewhat surprising, especially in
light of the observation that research participants’ responses were not at all influenced
by such variables as their own level of attractiveness, self-esteem, and general level of
aspiration.

Thus began psychology’s quest to shed light on the importance of beauty. To date, two
separate approaches suggest that, contrary to popular belief, beauty is more than skin
deep because it signals the presence of other important qualities. According to evolutionary psychology, beauty is an important and reliable indicator of health and reproductive success. According to research on the attractiveness stereotype, beauty is important because it conveys the presence of good dispositions and personalities, at least in the eye of the beholder. Because both approaches are to some degree informed by the physical features that comprise beauty, we first consider the standards for attractiveness.

Standards of Attractiveness: Bodies and Faces

Mirror, Mirror . . .

An early study that looked at the extent to which bodily features shape perceptions of attractiveness (Ford & Beach, 1951) looked at the value that 100 “primitive” cultures placed on body build for female beauty and found considerable cultural variation. A slim body was considered to be beautiful in 5 cultures, a medium body was considered beautiful in another 5, and a plump body was considered beautiful in 18 cultures. However, the vast majority of cultures did not consider body build to be particularly important. Results from a more recent comparison of 26 countries in 10 world regions suggest that although thinness is universally desired, it is considered especially important among those high in socioeconomic status with access and exposure to Western media and culture (Swami et al., 2010).

In addition to body build, cultural variation has been found for what parts of the body are important and how they should look. In the United States, for example, women's breasts, buttocks, and legs (large, firm, and long respectively) are regarded as the key (and most universally accepted) erogenous zones. For ancient Chinese, the emphasis was on small feet for women, while Japanese found the exposed nape of a woman’s neck especially arousing (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986a).

One need not journey across cultures to observe variability in standards for beautiful bodies. We can find as much variability over time within a single culture. The beauty ideals exemplified by the voluptuous women portrayed in Baroque paintings have little in common with the busty yet slim-waist ideals exemplified by Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in the 1950s and the tall and slender ideals exemplified by current supermodels, like Naomi Campbell, Candice Swanepoel, and Gigi Hadid. If there are any universals for bodily attractiveness, perhaps they lie not in absolute types but in relative features.

In terms of universal features of body types, men tend to value a waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) of 0.7 in women (Singh, 1993). Thus, body shape is more significant than absolute body size (e.g., thin, plump, buff): A plump body with a WHR of 0.7 (e.g., 70 inch waist, 100 inch hips) would be more attractive than a thin apple-shaped body (e.g., 35 inch waist, 30 inch hips). These preferences appear to be culturally universal, perhaps because WHR provides a reliable indicator of a woman’s health and fertility (Singh, Dixson, Jessop, Morgan, & Dixson, 2010). Considering these implications it is perhaps not surprising that even blind men prefer women with a WHR of around 0.7 (Karremans, Frankenhuis, & Arons, 2010). WHR is also important in men: Women tend to value a waist-to-hip ratio of 0.9 (Singh, 1995), and, by and large, like men with a muscular upper body (Franzoi & Herzog, 1987), although they favor moderately broad shoulders over more exaggerated features (Lavrakas, 1975).

Cross-cultural variations are less evident in evaluations of facial attractiveness. It appears that facial beauty, if not in the eye of the individual beholder, is in the eye of the
collective beholder. For both sexes, facial features and facial expressions appear to be important in determining another's attractiveness. For instance, one study (i.e., Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, & Wu, 1995) that looked at judgments of women's facial attractiveness across three cultures found that Asians, Latinos, and Whites favored many similar features. Further, regardless of whether the face in question was that of an Asian, Latina, or White woman, participants rated as more attractive those with large eyes, a small nose, and a small chin. Narrow cheeks, high eyebrows, and smiles were also important for men's judgments of women's facial attractiveness (Cunningham, 1986; Mueser, Grau, Sussman, & Rosen, 1984; Raines, Hechtman, & Rosenthal, 1990). In general, men and women alike rely on facial cues more than bodily cues when judging the attractiveness of a member of the opposite sex. However, the presence of an attractive body appears to be of heightened importance for men seeking a short-term relationship (Currie & Little, 2009). In the absence of specific dating goals, the presence of an unattractive body can decrease overall ratings of attractiveness even in the presence of an attractive face (Alicke, Smith, & Klotz, 1986). Women find large eyes, prominent cheekbones and chin, along with high-status clothing and indications of good grooming habits, characteristic of male physical attractiveness (Cunningham, Barbee, & Pike, 1990).

In addition to these gender specific features, men's and women's perceptions of an attractive face are influenced by averageness and symmetry. In a series of computer-assisted studies, Langlois, Roggman, and Musselman (1994) created “average” faces by mathematically blending, pixel by pixel, the images of 32 or more individual faces to create a single, composite face. In trial after trial, research participants found the composite or “average” face the most attractive—even more attractive than any of the individual faces from which the composite was constructed. One way to interpret this finding is that the averaging process created faces that approximated prototypes of human faces, representing their modal features. Participants responded favorably to these prototypes because they exemplify the most idealized forms of human facial configurations.

Facial averageness overlaps to some degree with facial symmetry. Average faces are more likely to be symmetrical for the obvious reason that the process of creating them is likely to yield a symmetrical figure (i.e., features that are evenly proportioned about the mean). Thus, it is not surprising to learn that symmetrical faces are perceived as more attractive than non-symmetrical or somewhat asymmetrical faces (Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005; Gangestad, Haselton, & Buss, 2006; Langlois & Roggman, 1990; Langlois et al., 1994). As we shall see, there is good reason to believe that facial symmetry has unique effects, despite its overlap with facial averageness.

What about same-sex attraction? Intuition would seem to suggest that gays and lesbians should be attracted to sex-typical features. Specifically, gay men should be attracted to men with masculine characteristics and lesbian women should be attracted to women with feminine characteristics. One study that examined gay and lesbian preferences as expressed in personal ads as well as by direct responses from a Chicago sample finds this to be the case, with some qualifications (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeyer, 1997). Gay men consistently searched for men who look and act masculine. In fact, masculine looking and straight acting were among the most common descriptors in the personals of gay men. Lesbian women consistently searched for feminine-looking partners and rejected potential partners with masculine characteristics, such as short hair, muscular build, and high waist-to-hip ratio. A look at male-to-male personal ads further suggests that gay men place a premium on physical appearance (Bartholome, Tewksbury, & Bruzzzone, 2000).
Physical Attraction

Evolution and Attractiveness

Evolutionary perspectives on human behavior look at psychological processes in terms of their adaptive value, especially when it comes to inclusive fitness (Hamilton, 1964), that is, the desire to pass one’s genes on to the next generation by way of reproduction or through ensuring the genetic survival of kin. Evolution has a way of selecting against maladaptive processes, selecting instead for those that aid in the survival of the species (Darwin, 1871). As it turns out, humans are not so much concerned with collective survival as they are with the survival of their own genes (Wilson, 1975). From an evolutionary perspective, dating is considered to be a precursor to mating. In other words, dating is a process of sexual selection with the ultimate goal of reproduction. Further, the nature of men’s and women’s parental investment (Trivers, 1972) is such that they play the dating game according to different rules. For reproduction to occur, males need to find females who are likely to produce viable offspring. Thus, men tend to look for cues indicative of women’s fertility (how likely she is to produce offspring) and reproductive potential (how long she will be able to produce offspring). These cues can be found in a woman’s physical appearance, specifically in those aspects that convey health and youth. Thus, men place a premium on physical features that signal the presence of both. These features include smooth skin, good muscle tone, lustrous hair, and full lips (Symons, 1979) along with the neonatal features of large eyes, small nose, and small chin (Cunningham et al., 1990).

Among other things, this perspective helps explain why men generally place a higher premium on physical attractiveness in their mates than do women. Because men can produce offspring until they reach a fairly old age, physical indicators of youth are of diminished importance. What is important instead is men’s ability to provide resources related to parental investment, such as food, shelter, territory, and protection. Among modern-day humans, resources typically translate into earning potential. As a result, women should be attracted to men with prominent cheekbones who have good grooming habits and wear high-status clothing. High cheekbones convey dominance; the high-status clothing in combination with the good grooming habits indicates that they are ambitious and industrious and otherwise conveys possession or acquisition of resources (Cunningham et al., 1990).

Speculations about the differential importance of youth and good looks versus ambition/industriousness were confirmed in a study that assessed the importance of these characteristics for men and women in 37 cultures from Belgium to Zambia (Buss, 1989). Men in all cultures preferred spouses who were younger than they, on average, of 2.66 years.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Women prefer men with a muscular upper body, but they prefer moderately large shoulders over very large ones. How could you explain this?
- Some experiments found that the participants considered faces mathematically averaged by a computer program more attractive than any of the individual faces from which they were constructed. Does this mean that an average-looking person will be preferred over an unusually beautiful one?
The preferred discrepancy was as low as 0.38 year in the Netherlands and as high as 7.38 years in Zambia. Women, on the other hand, preferred men who were on average 3.42 years older than they. In all but three cultures (i.e., India, Poland, and Sweden), men more so than women rated good looks as important. In all cultures, with the exception of Spain, women rated earning potential as significantly more important than did men. The highest ratings were obtained in the Netherlands and Great Britain and among South African Zulus. Analogous results were found for the evaluation of ambition and industriousness. On this variable, sex differences were obtained for 29 of the 37 cultures (in case you are wondering about the “deviant” cultures, they are Iran, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Colombia).

Of course, knowing that people find certain physical characteristics important falls short of telling us about the choices they would make. Eastwick and Finkel (2008) have argued that responses to paper-and-pencil surveys and ratings of photographs primarily capture people’s theories of what they think makes for a good romantic partner. When the researchers asked participants to list qualities of their ideal partner and then looked at the choices they made in a speed-dating setting, they found little correspondence between the two, especially in the choices women made. Moreover, physical attractiveness is strongly associated with relationship satisfaction for men and women alike (Eastwick, Neff, Finkel, Luchies, & Hunt, 2014), although some have argued that this is primarily the case for more short-term relationships (Meltzer, McNulty, Jackson, & Karney, 2014). It appears that women pursue a more complex mating strategy that includes both the pursuit of a good provider and the best genetic material possible (Haselton & Gangestad, 2006). And what are the indices of “good genes?” As we shall see, physical attractiveness might be one barometer for good genes.

The Importance of Averageness and Symmetry

As we saw earlier, average and symmetrical faces are perceived to be more attractive than their individual component faces. But they are not just more pleasing to the eye. Instead, we find averageness and symmetry beautiful because both are indications of overall phenotypic quality. As facial averageness and symmetry increase, the organism's health, fitness, and quality increases as well (e.g., Jones et al., 2001; Simmons, Rhodes, Peers, & Koehler, 2004).

Although averageness and symmetry are not one and the same, both mediate what we consider beautiful as well as why physical attractiveness is so important. Even slight deviations from bilateral symmetry can indicate developmental instability brought on by assaults to development from environmental stress and poor health (e.g., Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002; Hönekopp, Bartholomé, & Jansen, 2004).

In addition to indicating a healthy developmental environment and good pre- and post-natal nutrition, facial symmetry also signals good “genetic health” and quality. Researchers suggest that the greater an organism’s heterozygosity (or protein diversity), the greater its ability to resist parasitic infection (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1993). Theoretically, heterozygosity has several outcomes, including better health (i.e., immunity to illness) and a concurrent alignment of organism features that is closer to the population average. That is, the more genetically diverse the organism, the more likely it will resemble the population average as well as be able to resist a larger number of parasitic infections. Thus, being able to detect and appreciate a quality that reveals overall health and well-being confers important advantages for one’s inclusive fitness.
Physical Attraction

Table 3.1 Evolutionary Principles Guiding Perceptions of Attractiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Observations and Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elliot and Niesta (2008)</td>
<td>The color red amplifies men’s perceptions of women’s attractiveness and sexual desirability. Although culturally universal, it is primarily evident in perceptions of young women’s attractiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot, Tracy, Pazda, and Beall (2013)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schwarz and Singer (2013)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Durante, Li, and Haselton (2008)</td>
<td>Women prefer sexy clothing during high-fertility periods (i.e., ovulation). Effect was strongest for women who had an unrestricted sexual orientation, those who were sexually experienced, single women, and partnered women who were most satisfied with their relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangestad, Garver-Apgar, Simpson, and Cousins (2007)</td>
<td>Menstrual cycle: women prefer masculine men—i.e., men with deep voices and masculine faces—when they are ovulating (i.e., during the fertile phase of their menstrual cycle) and show a greater willingness to engage in sex with attractive men, including ones they don’t know well (sexual opportunism).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apicella, Feinberg, and Marlow (2007)</td>
<td>Hazda women find men with deep voices more attractive (furthermore, deep-voiced men have an average of two more children than their high-pitched counterparts).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Roney, Hanson, Durante, and Maestripieri (2006) | • Women viewing photos of men’s faces can accurately detect men’s testosterone level, which influences short-term attractiveness judgments.  
• They can also detect men’s liking for children and judge men who like children more attractive as long-term mates. |
| Feinberg et al. (2005)            | High-pitched female voices paired with feminine faces are more attractive than low-pitched female voices paired with either highly feminine or less feminine faces. |
| Gangestad and Scheyd (2005)      | Feminine female faces are perceived as more attractive because they may act as indicators of reproductive value.                                     |

this perspective, beauty is not something we enjoy for aesthetic reasons alone. Rather, it serves an important role in signaling the fitness and health of a potential mate. Take a look at Table 3.1 for another set of evolutionary principles guiding perceptions of attractiveness.

There is good empirical support for the idea that people use attractiveness to gauge another’s health and fitness. Research participants evaluating photos of attractive and unattractive people equate attractiveness with better health (Jones et al., 2001; Kalick, Zebrowitz, Langlois, & Johnson, 1998) and greater intelligence (Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002). But how accurate are our perceptions of the health of attractive others? Kalick and colleagues (1998) collected data from a longitudinal study in which
they had independent judges rate the attractiveness of participants’ faces. These ratings were then paired with actual health evaluations. No significant relationship was found between facial beauty and actual health. In fact, attractiveness actually interfered with participants’ ability to make accurate health assessments. At the same time, however, there is evidence to suggest that attractiveness is associated with intelligence (Kanazawa, 2010). This association might explain why women tend to find intelligent men appealing (Prokosch, Coss, Scheib, & Blozis, 2009).

Although high physical attractiveness may not be a reliable indicator of good health and genes, low attractiveness is associated with bad health and bad genes. Zebrowitz and Rhodes (2004) found a significant link between low levels of attractiveness and poorer health and lower intelligence but found no significant association between high levels of attractiveness and intelligence or health. Consequently, being able to detect and ultimately avoid bad genes and health may be even more adaptive than being able to detect and pursue good genes and health.

Cognitive Mechanisms

Given its importance for genetic survival, it is perhaps not surprising that evolution has provided us with a set of mechanisms that help us gravitate toward facial attractiveness. Specifically, symmetrical and prototypical stimuli are more easily processed than those that are asymmetrical and non-prototypical (Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004). Consequently, prototypical faces feel more familiar. And because familiarity leads to liking (Zajonc, 1968) in general, prototypical faces are liked better than faces that deviate from the prototype (Halberstadt & Rhodes, 2000).

Although prototypical faces may elicit liking because of their familiarity, a somewhat different causal sequence is equally possible. Monin (2003) suggested that familiarity leads perceivers to adopt a “warm glow” heuristic by which prototypicality leads to liking and liking leads to perceptions of familiarity. In other words, instead of proposing that prototype → familiarity → liking, the “warm glow” heuristic proposes that prototype → liking → familiarity: Good is familiar. That is, prototypes generate a positive affective response (Halberstadt & Rhodes, 2000), and this affect is used as information to assess familiarity (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). The good feelings generated by symmetrical (and therefore beautiful) objects and people become information that the objects or people must be familiar. It’s safe to say that beauty works in many and seemingly mysterious ways.

Evolutionary psychology provides a compelling account of why and how beauty matters for interpersonal choices. Yet it is not without its critics. For example, Eagly and Wood (1999) have argued that men’s preference for attractive, relatively younger women and women’s preference for older men with economic resources may reflect societal arrangements characterized by a division of labor rendering men as breadwinners and women as domestic workers. Compared to older women, young women often lack independent resources, making it more likely that they find the domestic role acceptable. Compared to younger men, older men are more likely to have acquired the economic resources to be optimal providers (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Support for this alternative explanation of the importance of female youth and attractiveness comes from a reanalysis of the Buss (1989) data. Across cultures, the value men place on physical attractiveness is equaled by the value they place on a woman’s ability to be a good cook and housekeeper (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Although this sociocultural view provides a plausible alternative explanation for
The Physical Attractiveness Stereotype: Beauty Is as Beauty Does

One of the reasons we seem so drawn to people high in attractiveness may be related to our propensity to make inferences about what physically attractive and unattractive people might be like. It appears that our perceptions of physically attractive others are to some extent shaped by a stereotype suggesting that attractive people are better people in terms of their personality. It is through this process that we judge a book by its cover: If it looks good on the outside, it must be good on the inside as well.

The “What Is Beautiful Is Good” Stereotype

The “what is beautiful is good” stereotype was discovered in a classic study in which male and female research participants looked at photographs of men and women of varying levels of attractiveness (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Research participants evaluated the personalities and quality of life of the men and women in the photographs. As one might expect, attractive people were perceived to be warmer and more sensitive, kind, interesting, strong, poised, modest, sociable, and outgoing than people who were merely average or low in physical attractiveness. Attractive people were also perceived to have happier marriages, better jobs, and more fulfilling lives. Subsequent decades of research have provided additional support for this set of findings (Langlois et al., 2000), and there is evidence that it extends to online dating profiles as well (Brand, Bonatsos, D’Orazio, & DeShong, 2012). No surprise here! There is reason to believe that “what is beautiful is
good” is a stereotype with a twist. All stereotypes involve associating categories with specific features and characteristics. The attractiveness stereotype may additionally contain an element of projection. That is, we desire to form and maintain close relationships with attractive others and then project those motivations onto them (Lemay, Clark, & Greenberg, 2010). Moreover, attractive people prompt us to give a closer look at their personalities, leading to impressions that are as positive as they are accurate (Lorenzo, Biesanz, & Human, 2010).

Given the positive characteristics with which we imbue physically attractive people, it is not surprising that they receive preferential treatment when it comes to dating. Additionally, simply being associated with a physically attractive person appears to turn us into better people in the eyes of others, although this is primarily true for men with attractive partners (Sigall & Landy, 1973). But discrimination on the basis of physical attractiveness is not limited to dating situations: Good-looking people enjoy a number of other advantages in how we perceive them. For example, we tend to think of attractive people as higher in status, especially those aspects that are inherited (Kalick, 1988). We tend also to evaluate the work of attractive people better than that of less attractive people, especially when that work is objectively poor (Landy & Sigall, 1974). This, along with the finding that we often think attractiveness is indicative of intelligence (e.g., Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004; Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002), may be some of the reasons why attractive people often have an edge in promotion decisions (Morrow, McElroy, Stamper, & Wilson, 1990).

**Cute Boys and Girls Are Better People, Too**

The attractiveness stereotype is by no means limited to adults’ perceptions of other adults. Adults also discriminate in favor of attractive children. Clifford and Walster (1973) showed research participants academic records that ostensibly belonged to an attractive or a plain-looking fifth grader. Cute boys and girls were perceived to be more intelligent and more likely to pursue and receive advanced degrees. Furthermore, research participants thought that the parents of attractive children were more interested in their children’s education than parents of plain-looking children. Not surprisingly, teachers are not exempt from this bias (Lerner & Lerner, 1977). In one particularly illustrative study (Ross & Salvia, 1975), elementary school teachers looked at files of an attractive or an unattractive 8-year-old boy or girl with an alleged IQ of 78. They were asked to make recommendations as to whether the child should be placed in a class for children with mental retardation. As one would expect, the unattractive child, as opposed to the attractive one, was more likely to be recommended for the special program, despite their identical records.

Differences in physical attractiveness also play a role in how punitive adults are toward children who make mistakes. Dion (1972) had male and female research participants observe an experimenter interact with a child who was made to appear either physically attractive or unattractive. Subsequently, research participants administered penalties to the child for incorrect responses on a picture-matching task (i.e., taking away one to five pennies for each error). Results indicated that the punitiveness of men was not influenced by the attractiveness of the child. Women, on the other hand, penalized the unattractive child more severely than the attractive child. A somewhat different pattern emerges in grocery stores.

In a recent news report, sociologist Andrew Harrell and his associates observed 426 parents interacting with their children in Canadian grocery stores to determine what factors
Physical Attraction influence shopping cart mishaps. Their findings were consistent with Dion’s (1972) work: Parents of unattractive children were more likely to let their children wander farther away from them and were less likely to buckle them into their shopping carts. However, unlike parents in Dion’s (1972) picture-masking task described prior, preferential treatment of attractive children was more noticeable in fathers than mothers. None of the fathers buckled in their unattractive children, while 15 percent of fathers buckled in their good-looking youngsters. On the other hand, mothers buckled up 2 to 4 percent of their unattractive children, while 12 percent secured their attractive children. It seems few parents observed basic shopping cart safety guidelines; however, unattractive children were left in even greater peril than their attractive counterparts.

Infants Prefer Beautiful Faces Not only do parents fall prey to beauty, but children also exhibit attractiveness biases—even before they are out of their diapers. Early research found that preschoolers as young as age 3 preferred to look at pictures of attractive children (Dion, 1977). However, not only did they prefer attractive faces, but they also indicated that attractive children were nicer, were more likely to own desirable toys, and would be more fun to play with. Further, preschoolers said that unattractive children were mean. The issue is twofold: What are the origins of both our standards of beauty and the attendant stereotype? Are humans born with the “golden rule” imprinted on our DNA, or is it learned? If learned, how quickly does the development of the physical attractiveness stereotype follow on the heels of our ability to perceive and distinguish attractiveness?

This is a difficult question to answer, in part because of the difficulty of testing infants and newborns. Researchers have found a preference for attractive faces in infants as young as 6 months old (Ramsey, Langlois, Hoss, Rubenstein, & Griffin, 2004) and perhaps even as young as 72 hours old (Slater et al., 1998). But even 3-day-old infants have had ample opportunity to see many faces and therefore to both categorize them and form prototypes, perhaps by way of averaging (Hoss & Langlois, 2003). Thus, the question of nature and nurture has yet to be fully answered. The latest word, however, is that there is tentative evidence that infants roughly 15 minutes old show no preference for beautiful faces (Hoss & Langlois, 2003), giving us at least one piece of evidence that infants are not born with the golden rule, but are equipped with the cognitive tools to quickly develop it.

Socialization The cognitive tools available to us as we enter the world become sharpened through the process of socialization. Our ability to distinguish attractive others from less attractive others may translate into vastly different expectations and may further contribute to the attractiveness stereotype. It may be that attractive people become better people by living up to our raised expectations, leading to real differences between those who are attractive and those who aren’t.

People also react toward attractive and unattractive others in very different ways and thus create a qualitatively superior reality for those who are good looking. For example, when attractive people need help, they are more likely to receive it than are unattractive people (Benson, Karabenick, & Lerner, 1976), especially when the emergency is perceived to be severe (West & Brown, 1975). It was perhaps for this reason that a special insert into
the owner’s manual of a 1964 Studebaker contained the following instruction for women who found themselves faced with a flat tire: “Put on some fresh lipstick, fluff up your hairdo, stand in a safe spot off the road, wave and look helpless and feminine.” Thus, the social reality we create for attractive people through our behavior manifests itself in many ways—some even more subtle than receiving help.

Reis and his colleagues (Reis, Nezlek, & Wheeler, 1980; Reis et al., 1982) asked male and female college seniors to keep track of their everyday social interactions over 15 days by completing the Rochester Interaction Record (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). Among other things, this measure asks participants to indicate the frequency, level of intimacy, and pleasantness of their interactions with members of the same and opposite sex. Participants’ own physical attractiveness had been independently assessed based on photographs. The analyses of participants’ records showed that physical attractiveness and gender strongly influenced many aspects of their social lives. For both men and women, physical attractiveness was positively related to the affective quality of their social experience. In other words, attractive participants perceived same-sex interactions as well as opposite-sex interactions as more intimate and pleasant than did unattractive participants. Attractive males, more so than unattractive males, tended to have more interactions with females and fewer interactions with males. No such effect was observed for females. Attractive males were more assertive in their interactions and lower in fear of rejection by the other sex than were unattractive males. Interestingly, attractive females, to a greater degree than their unattractive counterparts, were less assertive and less trusting of the opposite sex.

**Is the Attractiveness Stereotype Culturally Universal?**

Finding similar processes and mechanisms for behaviors across cultures is one way of inferring not only universality, but also a common origin for the phenomena in question. Thus, confirming the existence of the physical attractiveness stereotype across cultures would provide converging evidence that its origins evolved from common, adaptive processes that were somehow important to human mating success. Until recently, the attractiveness stereotype has been almost exclusively demonstrated in Western cultures. Some (e.g., Dion, 1986) have argued that its prevalence is due to the individualistic nature of the cultures in which it has been studied. In individualistic cultures such as the United States, identity is primarily based on personal attributes. On the other hand, in more collectivistic cultures, such as Korea and China, identity is based more on family and group ties (Triandis, 1994). This raises the theoretical possibility that in cultures in which identity is based on something other than personal attributes (such as appearance), the attractiveness stereotype may be less pronounced or absent entirely.

The evidence for this speculation is mixed. One study comparing Chinese and North American college students at a Canadian university found that Chinese students were less influenced by physical attractiveness in making inferences about the presence or absence of socially desirable personality traits (Dion, Pak, & Dion, 1990). However, when it came to speculating about desirable life outcomes, such as getting a good job, the judgments of both Chinese and North American participants were equally influenced by the attractiveness stereotype. Other studies (Wheeler & Kim, 1997; Zebrowitz, Montepare, & Lee, 1993) found that the attractiveness stereotype is just as prevalent in Asian (i.e., collective) cultures, although its content is somewhat different. It appears that in each culture
attractiveness is related to culturally ascribed and valued characteristics. For example, Western participants perceive attractive targets as stronger, more assertive, and more dominant; Korean participants perceive them as more honest and higher in concern for others (Wheeler & Kim, 1997). Thus, the attractiveness stereotype is, to some extent, culturally universal as well as culturally variable.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- The “what is beautiful is good” stereotype accounts for our proclivity to attribute positive characteristics to physically attractive people. How would you account for our tendency to judge a person more favorably simply because of an association with someone attractive?
- Some research suggests that infants as young as 72 hours old prefer to look at attractive faces. How would you explain this from an evolutionary perspective? Which explanation do you find more likely—one based on the evolutionary perspective, or one based on the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype?
- Attractive males have been found to be more assertive and lower in fear of rejection than their more plain-looking counterparts, while attractive females were less assertive and less trusting of men than the less attractive ones. How would you explain these differences?

“Don’t Hate Me Because I’m Beautiful”:
Some Ugly Truths About Attractiveness

The pervasiveness of the physical attractiveness stereotype could be taken to suggest that there is little hope for those of us with less-than-perfect physical appearances. However, consider the following.

To some extent, the advantages attractive people enjoy are not so much an outcome of a stereotype for beauty but may stem from a complementary stereotype for low attractiveness. Simply put, what is beautiful is good and what is ugly is bad. A number of research findings support the existence of a stereotype about ugliness. In one study (O’Grady, 1982), research participants’ risk assessments of mental illness were strongly influenced by the attractiveness of the person whom they rated: As the likelihood of risk increased, attractiveness decreased. This bias occurred regardless of whether research participants were told that the targets, all of whom were diagnosed by a psychiatrist, either had or did not have the illness. Furthermore, even when research participants were explicitly instructed that attractiveness was irrelevant to their “diagnosis,” they continued to attribute psychological disturbances differentially to unattractive targets (Jones, Hanson, & Phillips, 1978). This latter finding is of special importance as it suggests that the attractiveness stereotype is so ingrained that even conscious attempts to control it may fail to eradicate its application.

In real life, however, diagnoses about mental illness are usually made by trained professionals. Unfortunately, a study of incarcerated mental patients (Farina et al., 1977)
showed that unattractive patients received more severe diagnoses and remained hospitalized longer than physically attractive patients. The results of studies on the relationship between attractiveness and perceived risk for mental illness are mirrored by analogous findings in the legal domain. Research participants generally found attractive defendants less culpable and assigned them lighter sentences (Efran, 1974; Esses & Webster, 1988; Solomon & Schopler, 1978). Congruent findings were also obtained from real juries: Attractive defendants are acquitted more frequently than unattractive ones (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986a).

Despite the seemingly overwhelming evidence for a pervasive bias toward attractive people, there are indications that the underlying stereotype is perhaps not as strong as one would expect. Two meta-analyses of virtually all published studies on the attractiveness stereotype (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992) found the phenomenon to be most pronounced when investigators asked research participants to judge attractive people on dimensions related to their social competence (such as social skills). Judgments of intelligence and adjustment were less influenced by physical attractiveness, and there was no difference between attractive and unattractive targets on judgments of their honesty and concern for others. On the other hand, attractive targets are generally perceived to be less modest and more vain than their less attractive counterparts. These findings suggest that whether or not experimental investigations of research participants’ perceptions of attractiveness uncover differences depends to some extent on the nature of the questions that are asked. Along these lines, Dermer and Thiel (1975) showed participants pictures of people of varying levels of attractiveness, just as Dion et al. (1972) had done. However, this time, they asked participants to judge the targets in terms of how materialistic, vain, and snobbish they were, along with questions about their commitment to their marriage and level of sympathy toward oppressed people. As it turns out, research participants rated attractive targets less favorably on all of these dimensions. An anti-attractiveness bias is often present in organizational contexts involving evaluations. That is, when the person being evaluated is of the same sex as the evaluator, attractiveness hurts, rather than helps (Agthe, Spoerl, & Maner, 2010, 2011).

Even if one were willing to look at these findings as the exception to the rule, being physically attractive can sometimes be more a curse than a blessing. Just like everybody else, attractive people are aware of the prevailing stereotype and the corresponding reactions they receive from others. One consequence is that they have a harder time dealing with praise. When they receive praise for their performance on a task, they often cannot tell whether the evaluator is sincere (Sigall & Michela, 1976) and thus frequently discount the praise they receive (Major, Carrington, & Carnevale, 1984). Furthermore, some of the advantages physically attractive people enjoy in dating relationships can be offset by several distinct disadvantages. They often have a harder time starting relationships because their attractiveness scares people away. They sometimes have trouble maintaining relationships because knowing that they have many alternative choices may elicit feelings of jealousy (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986b). Finally, although attractive people, and women especially, have an edge when it comes to dating, same-sex peers often reject them as friends (Krebs & Adinolfi, 1975). Of course, difficulties like these are not likely to trigger a massive outbreak of sympathy for the plight of those who are beautiful. All things considered, the advantages of physical attractiveness are many and the disadvantages few.
Is Beauty Solely in the Eye of the Beholder?

While an ever-increasing volume of scientific research continues to confirm the advantages of possessing physical beauty, there is no need to rush out and schedule an appointment for plastic surgery or an extreme makeover. Other factors may also influence perceptions of attractiveness. Perceiving others does not take place in a psychological vacuum. Instead, our judgments of others’ physical attractiveness are often profoundly shaped by the context in which our perceptions take place, as well as by our dispositions, such as our moods and whether we are currently in a romantic relationship.

**Context Influences**

We are rarely alone. Do those around us influence how we are perceived? Research suggests that how attractive we perceive others to be depends importantly on the context in which we perceive them. For example, women rate men more desirable when they are shown surrounded by women than when shown alone or in the company of men. But men rate women less desirable when they are shown surrounded by men than when they are shown alone or in the company of other women (Hill & Buss, 2008).

More generally, attractiveness judgments also depend in part on the attractiveness of other people to whom we are exposed. Simply put, our perceptions of an average-looking person can be adversely affected if we had prior exposure to an extremely attractive person. Perceptual contrast effects of this nature are most pronounced when we are conscious of the prior stimulus (Martin, 1986) and when there is a large discrepancy between the prior stimulus and the one to be judged (Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983). In the domain of attractiveness judgments, this effect has been demonstrated in a number of experiments. In one study (Kenrick & Gutierres, 1980), male dormitory residents were asked to rate a photograph of an average-looking female. Half the participants made their ratings after watching an episode of *Charlie’s Angels*, a TV show that ran from 1976 to 1981 and featured three strikingly attractive women, while the other half made their ratings after watching other TV programs. As it turns out, men who had watched *Charlie’s Angels* rated the photograph as less attractive than men who had watched programs not featuring beautiful women. This contrast was subsequently replicated in more controlled laboratory settings as well (Kenrick & Gutierres, 1980, Studies 2 and 3).

Prior exposure to relatively unattractive others sends this contrast effect in the opposite direction: Research participants rate the photographs of an average-looking female as more attractive when it is presented after a series of photographs depicting faces low in attractiveness. Note that timing seems to be essential for this contrast effect to occur. It is primarily obtained when attractive or unattractive stimuli precede the one to be judged. When the same moderately attractive picture is embedded in a series of pictures either low or high in attractiveness, exactly the opposite effect is observed. Under these circumstances, the perceived attractiveness of the average-looking person is assimilated to the context. It is perceived as less attractive when it is embedded in a series of pictures depicting people low in attractiveness and more attractive when embedded in a set of photographs depicting people high in attractiveness (Geiselman, Haight, & Kimata, 1984; Wedell, Parducci, & Geiselman, 1987).

The lessons from the work on perceptual contrast and assimilation are straightforward: Attractive people are a tough act to follow. Massive beauty not only affects how attractive others perceive us, but also decreases perceptions of our own desirability as a
mate (Gutierres, Kenrick, & Partch, 1999). Consequently, if we are concerned with being perceived as attractive by others as well as ourselves, we are better off being surrounded by beautiful others.

Ironically, another way that context might help us amplify our attractiveness is to be involved in a relationship. The fact that a person is in a committed relationship marks them as a good romantic choice (Uller & Johansson, 2003). That is, being involved in a relationship provides information about a person’s commitment worthiness. In other words, it indicates a person’s relationship fitness, giving those outside the pair confirmation about the mated person’s “invisible” positive qualities. The problem, though, is that we are now setting our sights on someone who is already “spoken for.” Female mate-choice copying has been found in many animal species (e.g., Godin, Herdman, & Dugatkin, 2005; Höglund, Alatalo, Gibson, & Lundberg, 1995; White & Galef, 1999). Evidence for mate-choice copying (e.g., the “wedding ring effect”) has begun to emerge (e.g., Rodeheffer, Profttt Leyva, & Hill, 2016).

Social comparison explanations support the notion that context can influence perceptions of attractiveness—but in women only. In a set of clever studies, Graziano and colleagues (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, Shebilske, & Lundgren, 1993) led male and female participants to believe that many other people had rated the attractiveness of several different people depicted in photographs. Women were most influenced by the feedback of others—especially by the negative ratings of other women who had viewed the stimulus photos before them. Thus, there are many ways that attractiveness may be influenced by elements of our context—not only by those who surround us, but by whether we are in a relationship and by the opinions of others.

**Dispositional Influences**

Our perceptions and evaluations of other people are to some extent influenced by our transient moods. Generally speaking, we tend to look at others more favorably when we are in good moods and less favorably when we are in a bad mood (Erber, 1991; Forgas & Bower, 1987). This seems to include our perceptions of others’ physical attractiveness. In one study (May & Hamilton, 1980), female research participants rated photographs of men varying in attractiveness. They rated the photos while listening to either pleasant rock music, unpleasant avant-garde music, or no music at all. As one might expect, all photographs were rated as more attractive by research participants in whom a positive mood had been induced and less attractive by those in a negative mood, regardless of how attractive the men in the photographs actually were. More specific affective states can influence attractiveness judgments as well. For example, and perhaps not surprisingly, feeling disgusted lowers our perceptions of others who are objectively high in physical attractiveness (Phelan & Edlund, 2016).

As we have already seen, being involved in a romantic relationship shapes how those outside the relationship view us. How we view others is also shaped by whether we are presently involved in a romantic relationship. Relative to those not involved in ongoing dating relationships, people who are dating someone tend to perceive opposite-sex persons as less attractive (Simpson, Gangestead, & Lerma, 1990). This perceptual shift does not appear to be influenced by such extraneous factors such as self-esteem. Instead, it may be a powerful mechanism for the maintenance of relationships because it reduces our susceptibility to temptation. Interestingly, this effect can sometimes go in the opposite direction. Consistent with the findings on perceptual contrast, one study (Kenrick, Neuberg, Zierk, & Krones, 1994) reports that male research participants who
had been exposed to photographs of extremely attractive women evaluated their current relationship less favorably than participants who had been exposed to photos of average-looking women.

On the other hand, unattached people who desire a dating relationship seem to become less discriminating as they become progressively more desperate. For example, being on the receiving end of repeated left swipes on Tinder may result in an adjustment of standards. Supporting this idea is a classic study by Pennebaker and colleagues (1979). They had an experimenter approach patrons of bars in Charlottesville, Virginia, at 9:00 p.m., 10:30 p.m., and 12:00 a.m. and asked them to rate the collective attractiveness of the patrons of the opposite sex. As one might expect, men and women alike rated opposite-sex patrons as more attractive when the number of possible choices decreased as the closing time, 12:30 a.m., approached. Interestingly, this change in perceptions of attractiveness does not appear to be caused by increases in alcohol consumption or inebriation. Subsequent research suggests that these effects are not limited to Charlottesville, Virginia (Gladue & Delaney, 1990).

Although contextual and dispositional variables can often alter our perceptions of others’ physical attractiveness, the fact remains that it is of paramount importance for the initiation, progress, and maintenance of romantic relationships. How, then, can the rest of us ever hope to get a date?

Attractiveness and Dating: A Reprise

The idea that we base our dating choices solely on our dates’ physical appearance is somewhat disheartening. After all, it seems to fly in the face of such admonitions as not to judge a book by its cover and that beauty is only skin deep. However, as we have seen, the phenomenon has shown to be robust (e.g., Sprecher, 1989a) and universal (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986b). One frequently heard argument against the seeming importance of physical attractiveness for dating is that its role changes as people get older and as couples continue dating. Under such circumstances, people may become more realistic in their choices. Instead of reaching for the fairest of them all, they may look for others who match their own level of attractiveness. This idea that romantic couples in ongoing relationships are matched in their levels of attractiveness has received some empirical support (Murstein, 1972; Price & Vandenberg, 1979). And while some studies found support for this matching hypothesis among long-term, committed couples (Murstein & Christy, 1976; White, 1980), other studies suggest that matching may be especially important during the early stages of relationships (Feingold, 1988). There is even evidence that matching is important for same-sex friendships (Cash & Derlega, 1978), although once again men are more likely to base same-sex friendship choices on attractiveness than are women (Feingold, 1988).

One of the earliest and most dramatic demonstrations for the veracity of the matching hypothesis in the initiation of romantic relationships comes from a study (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971) that used the same Computer Dance technique (that we reviewed earlier in the chapter) with one major difference. Rather than being assigned a date, research participants could choose from several possible dates who varied in their level of attractiveness. As it turns out, research participants chose dates that matched their own self-reported level of attractiveness. This occurred regardless of whether participants thought their potential date might accept or reject them.

At first glance, the findings of this second Computer Dance study seem to be at odds with Walster and colleagues’ observation that the date’s level of physical attractiveness was the only thing that mattered. After all, people can’t very well seek the most attractive
dates and at the same time those who match them in attractiveness. However, a closer inspection of the results shows that the findings may be complementary rather than contradictory. Matching may most readily be observed in an initial dating choice when there is a range of potential partners, as was the case in the Berscheid and colleagues’ study. In support of this idea, Gomez and Erber (2013) found that matching determines success in speed-dating. On the other hand, when fate or a computer arranges a date with a highly attractive person, as was the case in the Walster and colleagues’ study, people tend to attempt to maintain that contact, especially after they already had some interactions with the date. In other words, matching may be a motive in achieving a date, whereas attractiveness may be a motive in holding on to that date.

Issues of timing and motivation aside, there appear to be few people who think of themselves as unattractive. In a survey of 2,000 men and women, Hatfield and Sprecher (1986b) found that most adults are quite happy with the way they look. Only 4 percent of men and 7 percent of women they surveyed indicated they were dissatisfied with their appearance. Similarly, the majority of people rate their partners as attractive or very attractive (e.g., Gagné & Lydon, 2004). From this perspective, the results of the two Computer Dance studies are quite compatible: People look for dating partners that match their own level of attractiveness, but since they think of themselves as pretty good looking, they tend to look for others who are similar on this dimension.

Alternatively, we can understand matching by considering people’s sense of self-worth along with their objective and physical attractiveness (Taylor, Fiore, Mendelsohn, & Cheshire, 2011). Our objective physical attractiveness may provide a lower limit for the physical attractiveness of a potential date that allows us to define potentially unattractive dates as attractive and desirable. At the same time, our subjective physical attractiveness may provide an upper limit that prevents us from seeking dates that are too attractive, that is, out of our league. Thus, the two limits work in tandem to generate a range of dating choices that result in most people dating others of similar, or matching, physical attractiveness (Montoya, 2008).

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**Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research**

- A study of patients in a mental health institution revealed that unattractive patients received more severe diagnoses and remained hospitalized longer than attractive patients. This was interpreted as a bias in favor of the attractive patients based on the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype. Can you think of an alternative explanation? What would be the implications of this explanation?
- Some research shows that attractive people often have a hard time starting a relationship because their beauty scares other people away. But evolutionary theory predicts that we tend to seek the most attractive partner. How would you reconcile the two?
- Context plays a role in our perception of attractiveness. Men perceive women as less desirable when surrounded by men than when surrounded by women or by themselves. On the other hand, women perceive men as more desirable when surrounded by women than when surrounded by other men or by themselves. What do you suppose drives these gender differences?
Physical Attraction

Summary

Issues
- Standards of physical attractiveness over time and across cultures
- The importance of physical attractiveness
- Defining the physical attractiveness stereotype and its origins
- Evolutionary explanations
- Cognitive processing of familiarity
- Social determinants of attractiveness perception
- The context of physical attractiveness: Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?

Theories
- Socialization and cultural variation on what comprises a beautiful body
- Evolutionary theories that explain the universality of many attractiveness features such as attractive faces and the physical attractiveness stereotype

Research
- Data from the “evolutionary files” show that beauty is universally important and perceived
- Average and symmetrical faces are perceived as more attractive and as honest indicators of reproductive health (Gangestad et al., 2006)
- Reproductive concerns, although important, are not the only motives in determining attraction
- Women pursue multiple motives in mate choice
- Being physically attractive has its benefits, such as being judged as having a better personality, doing better work, and being more deserving of promotions
- Being physically unattractive has its drawbacks, such as being judged by others to have poorer mental health, being more responsible for transgressions, and receiving harsher punishments
- Children as well as adults recognize and prefer attractive faces; both children and adults also discriminate in favor of physically attractive people (Ramsey et al., 2004)

Key Terms

Androcentric bias: considering the male experience as the norm, while the female experience is ignored or considered abnormal.

Prototypes: mental representations of categories, such as human faces, around their modal features.

Inclusive fitness: an organism’s desire to pass its genes on to the next generation through reproduction or ensuring the genetic survival of kin.

Parental investment: refers to the different reproductive goals of men and women.

Heterozygosity: an organism’s ability to resist parasitic infections; it is conveyed by facial symmetry.

“Warm glow” heuristic: a process by which prototypicality leads to liking and liking leads to perceptions of familiarity.

Sociocultural view: the theoretical claim that sex differences in physical attractiveness are best understood as stemming from the division of labor in industrialized societies.
“What is beautiful is good” stereotype: our proclivity to attribute a host of other positive qualities to physically attractive people.

Contrast effects: a perceptual phenomenon that explains why our perceptions of an average-looking person can be adversely affected if we had prior exposure to an extremely attractive person.

Matching hypothesis: a theoretical statement that explains why partners in established relationships are generally well-matched in terms of their physical attractiveness.
The physical attractiveness of another person is certainly a strong basis for the initiation of intimate relationships, as the previous chapter has shown. At the same time, the popularity of matchmaking services that tout the importance of compatibility suggests that attraction may be influenced by characteristics and processes that operate beneath the epidermis. In that regard, romantic relationships can be quite similar to same-sex friendships that are frequently based on principles that have very little to do with physical appearance. Of course, the question is: what are these principles? And exactly how do the 29 eHarmony dimensions of compatibility lead to success in long-term relationships? Over the years, psychologists have discovered a number of answers to these questions. Some of these answers were obtained by extending psychological theories to the issue of relationship initiation. Other answers were obtained by trying to make sense of seemingly odd and surprising relationship phenomena. This chapter looks at the kinds of answers generated by both sets of approaches.

Theory-Driven Approaches

Implicit Egotism

When asked to explain why we like the things we like, most of us would probably be tempted to point to specific features of items that are dear to us. In the process, we might ignore that many of our preferences are shaped by a variety of processes that operate outside conscious awareness. Chief among those is our proclivity to like things that are superficially associated with an aspect of ourselves. Such implicit egotism manifests itself in a number of ways. For example, we often like things for no other reason than their connection to letters in our names (Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002). In support of this idea, people tend to live in cities that resemble their names. There are a disproportionate number of Jacks in Jacksonville, Phils in Philadelphia, Virginias in Virginia Beach, and Mildreds in Milwaukee. Dentists in the United States are more likely to be named Dennis, Denise, and Dena. Likewise, hardware store owners are especially likely to be named Harold or Harris, and roofers are especially likely to have names like Rashid, Roy, or Ray.
Interpersonal preferences are similarly influenced by implicit egotism. Consider, for example, our colleague Christine who moved to Chicago, married Chuck, and had two children: Charlie and Cassandra. Archival studies show that her choices are no coincidence. People are more likely to marry others whose first or last names resemble their own. And experimental studies show that participants are more likely to be attracted than usual to participants whose experimental code resembled their own birthday and whose surnames shared letters with their own (Jones, Pelham, Carvallo, & Mirenberg, 2004). If these findings don’t match your experience, don’t be alarmed. Name-letter effects are generally small, and there is some disagreement about whether they exist at all (Pelham & Carvallo, 2011; Simonsohn, 2011).

Learning Principles

Social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram allow us to share our thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others who can respond to us without having to be physically present. Assume that you have a number of friends who reliably indicate their liking for the photos and videos you post. Chances are that your liking for these friends will be higher than those who don’t respond to your posts with a “like.” The reason is that being liked, or rewarded, for what we do makes us feel good. And these good feelings become associated with the person who delivers this kind of reward. This, in essence illustrates the principles of operant conditioning of liking (Skinner, 1938) which considers learning as resulting from associating behavior with its consequences.

Associations also figure prominently in the classical conditioning of liking that has its roots in Pavlov’s (1927) pioneering work on conditioning in animals. In the course of collecting saliva from his subjects (i.e., dogs), one of Pavlov’s lab assistants noticed an increase in the dogs’ rate of salivation not when they were presented with food, but just a little earlier, when he turned on the light in the lab. The unheralded assistant’s discovery changed the course of psychology forever.

Pavlov reasoned that salivation in response to food is something that neither humans nor animals can easily avoid. He called this reflexive response an unconditioned response (salivation) to an unconditioned stimulus (food). However, in the case of the lab light being turned on repeatedly and predictably just prior to each meal, Pavlov’s dogs learned an association between the two events (i.e., light and food). Pavlov termed the light-induced salivation the conditioned response to the light (i.e., the learned or conditioned stimulus). Note that the unconditioned stimulus and the conditioned stimulus refer to different events—namely, the food and the light.

How does classical conditioning operate in human romantic attraction? Essentially, it suggests that we will come to like those with whom good things are associated (Lott & Lott, 1974). That is, we should like someone better if we meet the person on a sunny day or in an interesting class rather than on a rainy day or in a boring class. Supposedly, the positive feelings induced by one’s surroundings become conditioned to the person in question, resulting in increased liking. Not surprisingly, numerous experimental studies support this seemingly commonsense idea (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Rhamey, 1965; Clore & Byrne, 1974; Lott & Lott, 1974).

At the same time, there is evidence for the idea that we will come to dislike others whom we meet under adverse conditions (Gouaux, 1971; Griffit, 1969; Griffit & Veitch, 1971; Veitch & Griffit, 1976). In these kinds of experiments, research participants typically evaluate fictitious others while they are in lab rooms ranging from hot and crowded to comfortable and roomy (Griffit & Veitch, 1971). Consistent with predictions from the
classical conditioning model, the fictitious strangers are evaluated less favorably as the conditions deteriorate. Again, it appears that the negative affect induced by the adverse situation becomes conditioned to the person being evaluated, leading to a decrease in liking.

One noteworthy feature of the studies on the conditioning of negative affect is their reliance on rating a fictitious rather than a real stranger. In the case of the Griffit and Veitch (1971) study, one might wonder what would have happened if the research participants had been asked to evaluate the other people who were in the room with them, rather than the “bogus stranger.” There is good reason to raise this question. In June of 2004, when the former World War II allies celebrated the 60th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, newspapers carried stories about friendships that had been forged among soldiers who participated in the Allied landing. In most cases, these friendships survived the test of time and geographical separation. What is equally remarkable is the fact that they developed among people who met each other in a highly aversive environment. At least one laboratory study (Rotton et al., 1978) reports increased attraction among research participants who met in an environment polluted by ammonium sulfide.

These kinds of phenomena are not overly conducive to an explanation in terms of classical conditioning, as it would predict that the negative affect induced by being fired at or inhaling polluted air would somehow carry over to the others present in the situation. Then again, the research using the aversive conditioning paradigm shows this happening primarily for fictitious strangers. Perhaps the soldiers on the Normandy beaches would have given less favorable ratings of their enemy’s kindness or Ronald Reagan’s acting ability had they been asked to do that. The people who share their fate are an entirely different matter. There is good reason to predict that adverse environmental conditions may actually lead to an increase in liking rather than a decrease, as predicted by classical conditioning. Experiencing fear and uncertainty heightens our need for affiliation (Schachter, 1959). The presence of others helps reduce both, and this may explain why we find ourselves more attracted to people with whom we share adversity.

It is possible to make sense of the competing predictions for the influence of adversity on liking of fictitious versus real strangers within the context of learning theory. Negative affect becomes associated with bogus strangers, just as classical conditioning would predict. Real strangers, however, have rewarding qualities because their mere presence can help us deal with whatever adverse conditions might be present. Our increased attraction to these people can be explained within operant conditioning as a result of escape conditioning (Kenrick & Johnson, 1979). In other words, we can come to like others because their presence can help us escape an aversive situation.

Of course, there is something unsettling about a set of theories that predict that we would be equally likely to be attracted to a stranger we meet at a bus stop on a balmy, sunny day (classical conditioning) or a cold, stormy day (operant conditioning). It appears that attraction will always increase unless the situation is neutral—that is, not perceived as either pleasant or unpleasant. It is hard to conceive of situations that are in fact truly neutral, and thus, the predictive power of learning theories is diminished by virtue of explaining too much. This does not mean that pleasant or aversive situations cannot lead to increased attraction to a stranger. Instead, it means that we may have to look elsewhere for an explanation.

**Attraction as Misattribution of Arousal**

If one accepts the prevailing view of humans as active information processors who try to explain their behavior in the context of the world around them (e.g, Fiske & Taylor,
Psychological Attraction

(1991), it becomes possible to reexamine why particularly pleasant as well as aversive situations might stimulate attraction to a stranger. Generally, this type of situation increases our level of physiological arousal—our general level of activation. And our subjective experience of this arousal depends on what kind of explanation or attribution we make for them (Schachter & Singer, 1962).

Inherent in this idea is the assumption that increases in physiological arousal—i.e., increased heart rate, perspiration, and breathing—are initially unspecific and equally characteristic of both positive and negative emotions. What ultimately determines how we feel depends on the type of attributions we make for our arousal, which, in turn, may be suggested by the situation. For example, if you notice an increase in arousal and realize that crummy weather has prevented you from your usual outdoor exercise routine, you may explain your arousal in terms of the weather and label it “irritation.” If, on the other hand, that same increase in arousal is coupled with the realization that spring is around the corner, you may label it “happiness.” The point is that arousal alone is not specific to any emotion. Rather, the subjective emotional experience is determined by cues in the situation as to the possible causes for our arousal (Schachter & Singer, 1962).

In many cases, the situational cues are unambiguous and readily available (e.g., winning the lottery, death of a pet). Further, we are also pretty good at figuring out what kinds of things make us happy, sad, and irritated. Thus, the process of labeling our arousal is not exactly a mysterious task, proceeding instead with apparent ease and even lack of awareness. Yet there are situations in which such labels or attributions can be harder to come by. This happens when situations contain multiple cues about the origin of one’s arousal. To return to our bus stop example, if we stand there alone, we may attribute our increased arousal to the fact that it is raining and our bus is late. If, on the other hand, someone whom we find attractive is also awaiting the bus’s arrival, things get more interesting: The presence of the other person adds a novel cue to explain our arousal: Instead of irritation... love at first sight!

Empirical support for the idea that attraction can result from misattribution of arousal comes from a field experiment on men who had just crossed either a shaky or a sturdy bridge (Dutton & Aron, 1974). The men were approached by a male interviewer or an attractive female interviewer who asked them to fill out a short questionnaire and gave them the opportunity to contact her (or him) in the future if they had further questions. The differences between the two bridges, and thus the two experimental conditions, were fairly dramatic in terms of their respective fear-arousing qualities. The shaky (experimental) bridge was a 5-foot-wide, 450-foot-long suspension bridge constructed of wooden boards attached to wire cables, crossing a 230-foot-deep canyon. It had a tendency to tilt, sway, and wobble. These characteristics, along with low handrails of wire cables, gave the impression that one was about to fall over the side at any moment. The sturdy (control) bridge was 10 feet wide, ran only 10 feet above a shallow creek, and was constructed of heavy cedar, making it wider and firmer than the shaky bridge.

The researchers were primarily interested in the number of research participants who accepted the interviewer’s phone number and availed themselves of the opportunity to call. Consistent with their expectations, 9 out of 18 participants who had crossed the shaky bridge ended up calling the attractive female experimenter. Of those who had crossed the sturdy bridge, only 2 out of 16 called. Hardly any of the research participants called the male experimenter regardless of whether they had crossed the shaky (2 out of 7) or the sturdy (1 out of 6) bridges. Evidently, participants who had crossed the shaky bridge attributed any residual arousal to the presence of the attractive female interviewer.
No such misattribution occurred when there was little arousal present to begin with or when the interviewer was male and thus provided a relatively poor cue to participants’ arousal. Figure 4.1 depicts the percentages of participants in the experimental conditions who called the experimenter.

Dutton and Aron’s (1974) finding that romantic attraction can be explained in terms of arousal brought on by external stimuli being attributed to a potential object of attraction has proven to be a fairly robust phenomenon. A number of experiments manipulating research participants’ level of arousal have yielded similar results. For example, male participants expecting a painful electric shock became more attracted to an attractive female confederate than did participants expecting to receive only a mild shock (Dutton & Aron, 1974, Experiment 3). Similar results were obtained in experiments that manipulated participants’ arousal through exposure to erotic material (Stephan, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971) or through unflattering feedback on a personality test (Jacobs, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971).

Perhaps the most revealing evidence for the notion that “adrenaline makes the heart grow fonder” comes from a study on young dating couples asked to rate (1) the extent of romantic love they felt for their partner and (2) the amount of parental interference to which their relationship was subjected (Driscoll, Davis, & Lipetz, 1972). Not surprisingly, from a misattribution view, the study found a positive relationship between the amount of love and the amount of parental interference. In other words, the more parental interference existed, the more couples felt that they were in love. According to data reported by Rubin (1973), dating couples from different religious backgrounds reported more romantic love than couples with similar religious backgrounds. Presumably, in both instances the arousal produced by parental interference or the conflict with respect to different religious orientations was attributed to the partner, resulting in more subjectively experienced love.

Some (Kenrick & Cialdini, 1977) have argued that increased attraction resulting from increases in arousal may just as easily be explained in terms of operant conditioning: Increases in attraction may be due to the other person’s fear-reducing qualities rather than to a misattribution of arousal produced by the situation. Thus, if the arousal can be explained easily as stemming from the anticipation of a painful electric shock, increased attraction to a stranger may in fact be the result of that person’s propensity to reduce fear. On the other hand, if the source of the arousal is ambiguous, increased attraction may be a result of misattribution (White & Kight, 1984).

So what about the men on Dutton and Aron’s (1974) shaky bridge? It appears that their attraction to the attractive female confederate was a result of misattribution and not operant conditioning for two reasons. First, the source of their arousal was probably at least somewhat ambiguous. It may have been due to the swaying of the bridge, but at the
same time, participants may have discounted this as a likely cause: After all, grown men are not scared of crossing a bridge open to the general public. Indeed, if crossing it were truly dangerous, it would have been closed. Second, participants’ increased attraction was limited to the attractive female interviewer whose presence could constitute a reasonable source of arousal. If operant conditioning were all that mattered, participants should have been just as attracted to the male interviewer because his presence should have been just as fear reducing as the presence of the female interviewer.

The misattribution view on attraction has some clear-cut implications about how one might want to proceed in the early stages of dating. Rubin (1973) pointed out that courtship experts in Roman times advised men to take their would-be lovers to the arena to watch the gladiators. Supposedly, the generalized arousal initially created by watching the contests would eventually be misperceived as having its source in the woman’s suitor and be labeled as love. The ancient Romans have been gone for a long time, leaving us with no solid evidence for how well it actually worked. Would contemporary women and men benefit from taking their dates to see a scary movie or competitive sporting event? The answer appears to be a qualified yes. First, there are indications that the arousal created by an exciting and competitive sporting event is most likely to carry over to a situation that bears some similarity (Cummins, Wise, & Nutting, 2012). In other words, it is more likely to influence a subsequent period of play rather than romantic pursuits. Moreover, watching a frightening movie may lead to attraction because the arousal it creates encourages women and men to behave in gender-stereotypic ways, promoting closeness and offering a prescription for interaction (Harris et al., 2000). Not surprisingly, then, taking a date to see a romantic movie appears to have similar effects on attraction (Harris et al., 2004).

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Classical and operant conditioning theories predict that attraction will always increase unless the situation is neutral—that is, not perceived as either pleasant or unpleasant. Yet we know that in reality we do sometimes take a dislike to some people. Can you think of a set of conditions in which conditioning will predict decreased liking for a stranger?
- Dating couples who come from different religious backgrounds and couples who suffer interference from parents report more romantic love. This finding is attributed to an increase in the overall arousal that is interpreted as love. Can you think of alternative explanations for this phenomenon?

Characteristics of Others (Part I): The Gleam of Praise

To this point, the discussion of the psychological bases of attraction has been limited to situational variables. Clearly, whether we come to like another also depends in large part on the nature of that individual’s behavior toward us. All else being equal, it is probably the case that we like those who act to reward us. Praise for our thoughts, emotions, and actions is one kind of reward that is specifically tied to others and may itself stem from a more general need for approval. From this point of view, it is probably fair to say that we like more those who praise us than those who derogate us or act indifferently toward
us. Based on this simple principle, Dale Carnegie (1936) advised that heaping praise on someone is the most foolproof means to ascertain that person’s friendship. In reality, the role of praise in interpersonal attraction is considerably more complicated than that. Several hundred years ago, Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1981) provided an important insight into this issue through proposition 44 of The Ethics.

Hatred which is completely vanquished by love passes into love: and love is thereupon greater than if hatred had not preceded it. For he who begins to love a thing, which he has wont to hate or regard with pain, from the very fact of loving feels pleasure. To this pleasure involved in love is added the pleasure arising from aid given to the endeavor to remove the pain involved in hatred, accompanied by the idea of the former object of hatred as cause.

With respect to the role of praise in attraction, Spinoza’s insight suggests that we would like others more who first derogate us and then subsequently praise us. Social psychologists have gathered evidence for this idea. Aronson and Linder (1965) created an experimental situation in which research participants overheard a confederate talk about them following several brief interactions. In one condition, the confederate consistently conveyed a positive impression of the subject (e.g., intelligent, good conversationalist, outstanding person). In another condition, the confederate consistently conveyed the opposite impression. Needless to say, there were marked differences in terms of how much participants liked the confederate in either one of these conditions, as one would expect. Most interesting, however, were the outcomes in which the confederate started out conveying first a negative impression and then changed it to become more positive. Under these conditions, participants liked the confederate even more than when she had been positive all along. Not surprisingly, when the confederate’s evaluation went from initially positive to negative, participants liked her even less than when she had consistently conveyed a negative impression.

Why would we like someone more who first thinks poorly of us and later becomes more favorable than someone who likes us all along? One reason is that we perceive the switch from negative to favorable evaluations as a relative gain just as Spinoza (1981) had suggested. By the same token, we like someone less who switches from a positive evaluation to a negative one. Compared to people who have hated us all along, we perceive the switch as a relative loss, which then adds to our dislike of that person. To some extent, these gain-loss effects may be due to the kinds of things we do when we receive praise from others. We often engage in an attributional analysis to discern the other person’s motives. Others may use praise to cull favors or gain approval from us. Not surprisingly, when we perceive praise as resulting from an ulterior motive, it leads to a decrease rather than an increase in attraction (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Jones & Wortman, 1973). Given these considerations, the realization that someone changes his or her mind about us in a positive direction may lend credibility to the praise and hence increase attraction. When this change occurs in the opposite direction, we may conclude that the initial praise was perhaps not sincere, and consequently attraction would decrease.

Dispositions on the part of those on the receiving end of praise further complicate the picture. Despite the appeal among laypeople and therapists (e.g., Rogers, 1961) that people are motivated by a need for approval, the idea has not figured very prominently in the psychological literature. In fact, when Murray (1938) proposed that there were 39 needs underlying human behavior, need for approval was not among them. It has been proposed
that, rather than seeking approval, people seek feedback that is consistent with their self-conceptions, even if these self-conceptions are negative (Lecky, 1945). This striving for self-verification implies that people with positive self-concepts prefer positive feedback, including praise. On the other hand, people with negative self-concepts prefer negative feedback (Swann, 1983). Consistent with this idea, people with positive self-views tend to choose partners who evaluate them favorably, whereas people with negative self-views prefer partners who evaluate them unfavorably yet confirm their own views of themselves (Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Similarly, married couples report a higher level of commitment when they feel their spouse really knows them, including their shortcomings and flaws (Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992).

**Characteristics of Others (Part II): Agreement Is Everything**

On some level, praise may be a specific, if exaggerated, form of agreement. Someone who compliments us on our choice of wardrobe or political opinions essentially communicates agreement about these choices. Obviously, disagreement can be detrimental for the initiation and maintenance of close relationships. If two people cannot agree on what comprises a fun date, their relationship is not likely to develop much further. A couple whose relationship is marked by frequent disagreements over issues of more or lesser importance is likely to experience conflict, which can turn in to dissatisfaction and to an eventual breakup.

Agreement, on the other hand, produces attraction, and attraction can produce agreement. This was first recognized by Heider (1958) and further elaborated on by Newcomb (1961) in their respective formulations of balance theory. According to this theory, to fully understand attraction in interpersonal relationships, one first needs to recognize that a relationship between two people involves sentiment relationships among three distinct units or elements. First, there is a relationship between a person (P) and another (O) characterized by mutual liking or disliking. Second, both P and O can have a relationship with regard to some issue (X), which could be an attitude, object, behavior, or personality trait. This unit relationship can take on many forms. It could involve perceptions of who is the best soccer player of all time (an attitude), a particular ice-cream flavor (an object), nose picking in public (a behavior), or honesty (a personality trait). The respective relationships could be marked by overt agreement (e.g., Pele is the best soccer player ever) or by mere association (e.g., the fact that P frequently picks his nose in public). These relationships among the elements of the P-O-X triad can be formally represented as triangles where a + denotes liking, agreement, or the presence of some attribute (see Figure 4.2).

By and large, people gravitate toward balanced triads. A triad is a state of balance when “the perceived units and the experienced sentiments coexist without stress” (Heider, 1958, p. 176). Formally, this is obtained when the multiplications of the signs result in a positive outcome, as is the case for Triad I, where two people like each other and evaluate something positively. Balance also exists for Triad II, where two people like each other and evaluate something negatively. In either case, the sentiment and unit relationships coexist in perfect harmony, and there is little reason for P and O to do anything other than to enjoy their relationship and reaffirm each other in their mutual dislike of some issue.

The story is different for Triad III. It is marked by a state of imbalance created by the fact that P and O have different sentiments about issue X. The resulting tension is hypothesized to motivate P to restore balance. This could be accomplished in a number of ways:
Figure 4.2 States of Balance, Imbalance, and Unbalance Among a Person (P), Another (O), and Sentiments Toward an Issue, Object, or Person (X)

(1) a change in P’s attitude toward X, (2) a change in P’s perception of O’s attitude, (3) a reduction in the importance P assigns to X, (4) a reduction in the attraction of P for O, and (5) a reduction in the common relevance assigned to X by both P and O (Newcomb, 1961). Which of these paths is chosen depends to some extent on the nature of the relationship and the situation. A change in P’s attitude toward X may be most likely when P is not heavily invested in X. On the other hand, if P has a strong and entrenched belief in X, a change in perception regarding O’s attitude may more easily restore balance. However, people tend to avoid states of unbalance, marked by a mutual dislike between P and O (Triads IV and V), and thus a reduction in the attraction of P and O may be the least likely way to restore balance (Tashakorri & Insko, 1981). This appears to be especially true for relationships that are formed in the absence of free choice (such as relationships among coworkers and tenants, for example). In such situations, we even tend to increase our attraction for people whom we initially disliked (Tyler & Sears, 1977).

Speaking of people we dislike, balance theory can explain why we sometimes like those who dislike the same people we do. Remember that people gravitate toward balanced triads. Our enemy’s (X) enemy (O) becomes our friend (Aronson & Cope, 1968) because in light of the shared dislike of X, balance can be obtained only by rendering the sign for the relationship between P and O positive (see Triad II). In a similar vein, balance principles can explain the unique experience of Schadenfreude, a German term for taking delight in another’s misfortune. If Lukas is poor and likes his neighbor who is rich, the relationship is imbalanced. Finding out that the neighbor lost her fortune in the stock market restores balance: The multiplication of the signs now results in a positive outcome, meaning that now Lukas and his neighbor share a common fate.
Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

• Striving for self-verification implies that people will seek feedback consistent with their self-image, even when it is negative. But self-enhancement theory predicts that we will try to enhance, or at least protect, our self-evaluations. How would you reconcile the two theories?

• According to balance theory, we tend to form balanced triads, but the way to achieve balance depends on a number of factors. How would you explain the influence of free choice on liking in this context?

Similarity: Do Birds of a Feather Flock Together?

The common observation that we like those who agree with us prompts the speculation that we might more generally be attracted to others who are similar to us in terms of their attitudes as well as their personal characteristics. In some ways, nothing could be truer. There is overwhelming evidence that we like others who are similar to us in age (Ellis, Rogoff, & Cramer, 1981), religion and race (Kandel, 1978), emotional experience (Rosenblatt & Greenberg, 1988), sense of humor (Murstein & Brust, 1985), intelligence (Lewak, Wakefield, & Briggs, 1985), performance and skill level (Tesser, Campbell, & Smith, 1984), and being a morning person versus an evening person (Watts, 1982). To some extent, similarity on such dimensions may promote the ease with which two people communicate and interact. Morning people and evening people may simply have a hard time coordinating their activities. The proposition that “Led Zeppelin was the greatest heavy metal band ever” is more likely to be endorsed by, shall we say, “mature adults.” Among people currently of college age this same proposition elicits condescending smiles at best and outright head shaking at worst.

The importance of attitude similarity for attraction was empirically established by Byrne and his colleagues (Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Byrne & Rhamey, 1965; Clore & Byrne, 1974). In a nutshell, the research testing the similarity-attraction hypothesis shows that a stranger with similar attitudes is liked more than a stranger with dissimilar attitudes (Byrne, 1961). Degree of attraction is determined not by the total number of agreements, but by the proportion of attitudes on which two people agree. In other words, a stranger who is similar to us with regard to 5 out of 10 attitudes is liked just as much as a stranger who agrees with us 50 out of 100 times (Byrne & Nelson, 1965). The degree of attraction is further determined by the magnitude of similarity. In general, a stranger who is similar to us on attitudinal as well as personality dimensions is liked more than a stranger who is similar to us on only one dimension (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965). Finally, proportion and magnitude of similarity combine multiplicatively to produce the highest levels of attraction.

It is hard to disagree with the notion that, all else being equal, we will be more attracted to people who agree with us than to people who disagree with us. At the same time, some research casts doubts on the pervasiveness of this phenomenon, and other research raises issues in terms of how the similarity-attraction relationship should be explained. Most of the experimental work in support of the importance of attitude similarity relies on paper-and-pencil measures of attraction. When behavioral measures of attraction are employed,
a somewhat different picture emerges. In one study (Gormly, 1979), research participants’ self-reports indicate that they liked attitudinally similar others more than attitudinally dissimilar others. However, when participants were asked to choose one of the two for a continued discussion, a whopping two-thirds selected the one whose attitudes were dissimilar to their own. A number of studies employing paper-and-pencil measures of attraction report findings that seem to qualify the similarity-attraction relationship in important ways. For example, similarity seems to matter primarily for people with favorable self-concepts (Leonard, 1975). In romantically tinged relationships, physical attractiveness is often more important than attitude similarity (Kleck & Rubenstein, 1975). When physical attractiveness is held constant, romantic settings can produce attraction to a dissimilar individual (Gold, Ryckman, & Mosly, 1984). Attitude dissimilarity leads to more attraction during the early stages of friendship formation than does attitude similarity, although established friends were most attracted to similar partners (McCarthy & Duck, 1976). In a similar vein, others (Sunnafrank, 1984) have argued that attitude similarity and attraction are mostly related in atypical communication settings, such as the psychological laboratory.

However, a more recent study of 291 newlyweds (Luo & Klohnen, 2005) suggests that similarity reigns when it comes to both attraction and relationship satisfaction in actual couples. Moreover, attitudinal similarity appears to be more important than being similar in personality. Specifically, similarity in attitudes along with religiosity and values predicted attraction better than similarity on dispositional dimensions such as personality traits and attachment styles. Similarity on dispositional dimensions was the best predictor of relationship satisfaction. A couple’s attachment style and their degree of Agreeableness and Openness (two of the Big Five personality dimensions) contributed significantly to relationship happiness. This is not entirely surprising if one considers that attitudes are much more amenable and susceptible to change than personalities. In the rub of day-to-day existence, having similar personalities eases interactions of all types and on all levels.

A more recent study provides a more clear-cut picture of similarity and dissimilarity in attraction. The extent to which similarity and dissimilarity increase or decrease attraction also depends on individuals’ commitment to their relationship (Amodio & Showers, 2005). Over a year’s time, dating partners reported on their commitment to and satisfaction with their romantic partners and indicated how similar they perceived themselves to be to each other. Level of commitment interacted with similarity in several ways as depicted in Table 4.1. As predicted, level of commitment to the relationship had an effect on the relative importance of similarity. However, when the researchers categorized couples along their level of commitment and degree of similarity they found two surprising results.

First, similarity was not universally beneficial. Although similar partners in committed relationships were highly satisfied with their relationships, similar partners in uncommitted relationships were not. Similarity paired with commitment was associated with stability and control of the relationship, accurate partner appraisals, and acceptance of one’s partner. However, although initially high, liking resulting from similarity in committed couples decreased over time. Similarity between less committed partners (i.e., relationships of convenience) resulted in low initial liking and even greater decreases over time. These individuals, although probably drawn together because of their similarities, did not like each other and used the relationship to meet other needs (Amodio & Showers, 2005).

Likewise, dissimilarity was also mediated by commitment. Dissimilar partners in highly committed relationships held unrealistic and idealized appraisals of their partner’s faults, turning a blind eye to troubling partner qualities. This strategy of imposing a false degree
**Table 4.1  Relationship Styles by Level of Commitment and Perceived Similarity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Similarity</th>
<th>Commitment to Relationship</th>
<th>Exploration</th>
<th>Fatal Attractions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Novelty seeking</td>
<td>Focus on positive “extrinsic” qualities (not on similarity) and reluctant to recognize negative partner attributes, qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similar to self-expansion (Aron &amp; Aron, 1997)</td>
<td>Liking: Moderate with no decrease over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liking: Moderate with no decrease over time</td>
<td>Liking: Moderate with substantial decreases over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Unattractive or little-liked partners bonded via similarity</td>
<td>Realistic appraisal of partner, recognition of both positive and negative traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liking: Low with substantial decreases over time</td>
<td>Liking: High with decreases over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Amodio and Showers (2005).

of similarity on the partner proved inadequate, and these relationships faltered over time. Dissimilar partners in low commitment relationships revealed a second noteworthy outcome: Although initial liking was only moderate, this group of couples had the most stable level of liking among all the groups! Amodio and Showers (2005) suggest that these couples are comprised of “Explorers” who view dissimilarity as growth opportunities and a chance for self-expansion (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1997).

Together, these findings suggest that similarity and dissimilarity interact with relationship type to produce attraction and repulsion. Specifically, it appears that “committed birds of a feather flock together.”

**Complementarity: Do Opposites Attract?**

Given the widespread support for the importance of attitude similarity, it may seem pointless to ask whether opposites attract. After all, they couldn’t both be true at the same time. Or could they? One could argue that complementarity may be important when it comes to meeting each other’s needs. A person who is shy and retiring might be better off with someone who is outgoing because of the complementarity in their respective needs. This general idea has intuitive appeal and, until recently, has been largely supported by observations from family therapists (Kubie, 1956; Mittelman, 1956). One of the early, more systematic and ambitious attempts to study the role of need complementarity comes from Winch (1958), who tried to reconcile the seeming importance of similarity with that of complementarity. He reasoned that similarity was perhaps most important for meeting someone in the first place: Someone who spends every weekend playing soccer is unlikely to meet someone who enjoys the theater. However, once two people have met on the basis of similar interests, whether their relationship succeeds depends in part on how they meet each other’s needs.

Winch went to Murray’s (1938) list of psychogenic needs and extracted those he felt were most relevant to human mate selection: abasement (a tendency to yield dignity and prestige), achievement, approach, autonomy, deference, dominance, hostility, nurturance,
succorance, recognition, status aspirations, and status strivings. In addition, Winch included the personality dimensions of anxiety, emotionality, and vicariousness. Two types of complementarity exist for these needs and traits. Type I complementarity exists when one partner is high on a need and the other partner is low (e.g., one partner is high on achievement and the other is low on this need). Type II complementarity exists when one partner is high on one need and the partner is high on a different need. This would be the case then one person is high in hostility and the other is high on abasement.

To find out about the dimensions on which couples might be complementary, Winch (1958) selected 25 married couples who attended Northwestern University. He assessed their needs and personalities through a battery of objective tests, the outcomes of which he subjected to a number of statistical procedures. His conclusions were that the couples did indeed show complementarity, especially on such needs as achievement-passivity, nurturance-dependence, and dominance-deference. He further concluded that most of the marriages he studied could be classified by the degree of dominance and nurturance present in the husband and wife. This combination of dominance-submissiveness and nurturance-receptiveness yields four categories of marriage, as depicted in Table 4.2.

Winch conceded that his classification scheme was not exhaustive enough to account for all types of marriages and that it had other shortcomings, as well. For example, it is impossible, in Winch’s system, to properly classify individuals and their relationships when opposing overt and covert needs come into play simultaneously (e.g., a person who is dominant and self-assured on one level, but who might be dependent and needy on another). Further, Winch’s sample of 25 couples was fairly small and perhaps atypical, given that the couples were comprised of married college students. Not surprisingly, subsequent tests of the complementarity model provided a mixed bag of evidence concerning its role in close relationships. Some early studies found support for Winch’s ideas in context of friendship choices (Schutz, 1958) and relationship development (Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962), while others found no evidence for complementarity in dating couples, newlyweds, and veteran couples (Bowerman & Day, 1956; Murstein, 1961).

Given the strong evidence for the importance of similarity and the relatively weaker evidence for that of complementarity, are we to conclude that birds of a feather flock

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2 Dimensions and Types of Complementarity According to Winch (1958)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nurturance-Receptiveness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husband nurturant/ Wife receptive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husband dominant/ Wife submissive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husband submissive/ Wife dominant</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
together and opposites don’t attract? The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, the similarity hypothesis has withstood the test of time very well. On the other hand, many of the inconsistencies in the findings regarding complementarity stem from disagreements over how to measure needs in the first place: Projective tests tend to tap into more **covert** needs, whereas objective, paper-and-pencil tests tend to tap into **overt** needs. Distinguishing between covert and overt needs helps clarify when and how complementarity matters. Someone with a covert need for dominance may not seek submissiveness from others at all times and under all circumstances, for example. Shawna may feel conflicted about her desire to dominate Tyrone and may therefore camouflage her wish behaviorally. Alternatively, Tyrone’s behavior may indicate that he does not wish to be submissive, which may lead Shawna to refrain from overt behaviors that would elicit such submissive behavior.

To predict attraction from need complementarity we need to take into account differences in interpersonal style and interpersonal goals. From this perspective, interpersonal behaviors **invite** complementary responses. Because people can refuse such invitations, one would expect to find the most satisfactory relationships when the wish of one partner to dominate is met by the desire of the other to be submissive. To test this idea, Dryer and Horowitz (1997) identified participants’ interpersonal style with regard to dominance. They were then paired with a confederate who interacted with them according to either a submissive or dominant style. Throughout the scripted interaction, participants used a button to indicate their satisfaction with their partner. As expected, participants who endorsed a dominant interpersonal style were happiest when the confederate had acted in a submissive fashion. Analogously, participants who endorsed a submissive interpersonal style were happiest when the confederate had acted in a dominant fashion.

Research on the mechanisms and outcomes of Thurberian complementarity in dating couples adds another qualification (Swann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2003). This type of complementarity can actually lead to relationship **problems** rather than to increased compatibility when dominance and submission are located in the wrong sexes. Retiring and verbally inhibited men who are paired with outspoken, verbally expressive women make for a precarious couple likely to see its relationship coming to an end. These men do not find their complement in their partner’s expressiveness, but rather are alienated by their criticalness. This alienation, in turn, exacerbates their verbal inhibition, and relationship satisfaction and quality suffer. Interestingly, this “precariousness” did not exist for couples in which women were retiring and verbally inhibited and their partners more expressive and critical.

Thus, while it is important to examine whether couples are complementary on particular dimensions, it is equally important to examine the specific processes that result from the complementarity. On the face of it pairing an expressive person with someone who’d rather listen seems like a good thing, but pairing outspoken and expressive women with verbally inhibited men is not.

Complementarity may have its most beneficial effects on close relationships when it comes to performance and expertise. Competing with one’s partner in a domain that is important to the self can have negative consequences for an individual’s self-esteem and may adversely affect the relationship (Erber & Tesser, 1994). At the same time, a close other who does well in a domain that is not important to the self provides for opportunities to bask in his or her reflected glory. From this perspective, as a couple Pat and Chris benefit from a balanced performance ecology where Pat outperforms Chris on dimensions relevant to Pat but not to Chris and where Chris outperforms Pat on dimensions relevant
to Chris but not to Pat (O’Mahen, Beach, & Tesser, 2000). One way to achieve this balance is to invoke complementarity (Beach, Whitaker, Jones, & Tesser, 2001). If Pat does better than Chris in their English courses while Chris does better than Pat in their Science courses, they can increase their happiness as a couple by convincing themselves that their strengths complement one another’s—Pat is a word warrior while Chris is a number wizard! Not surprisingly, then, romantic partners tend to think of themselves as complementary across a wide range of activities (Pilkington, Tesser, & Stephens, 1991).

Complementarity in a romantic partner’s expertise benefits couples because it allows them to make the most of their respective strengths. If Pat has a knack for finding the best bargains at the grocery store while Chris is an expert at removing even the most stubborn stain from their laundry, they will have lower grocery bills and cleaner laundry than if they are both experts at the same thing. Transactive memory systems of this sort further simplify a couple’s functioning because partners need only remember what the other knows and is good at rather than knowing everything themselves (Wegner, Erber, & Raymond, 1991).

Among other things, findings such as these indicate that the relationship between complementarity, attraction, and satisfaction is far more complicated than Winch (1958) had assumed. Further, complementarity seems to exert its strongest impact on performance dimensions. Research continues to support the importance of similarity for attraction and relationship satisfaction. Complementarity, although not unimportant, exerts its influence in more complex and indirect ways. Perhaps the idiom that “opposites attract” stems from the salience of a few couples who seem to defy similarity, rather than from a preponderance of this type of attraction and couple.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- In one study about liking (Gormly, 1979) the participants rated attitudinally similar others more likable than dissimilar ones. However, they chose the dissimilar ones for a continued discussion. The choice was considered a behavioral measure of liking. How would you explain the discrepancy between the two types of answers? Could the behavioral measure indicate something else besides liking? How would you design an experiment to test your hypothesis?
- Amodio and Showers’ (2005) study on liking found some surprising results about similarity and commitment. For example, they found that dissimilar couples low in commitment had moderate liking for each other, but their level of liking was the most stable of all. They dubbed this group the “Explorers.” Does this term suggest to you another variable that may interact with commitment and similarity to influence liking? What do you suppose such a variable might be?
- Similarity, dissimilarity, and complementarity are all concepts related to liking and attraction. What is the difference between dissimilarity and complementarity?
- Complementarity in expertise presents objective advantages for a couple. But merely thinking that they complement each other seems to promote satisfaction, which is why couples tend to think of themselves as complementary over a great domain of activities. Why do you think this type of complementarity is so important for satisfaction?
Phenomenon-Driven Approaches

To this point, our discussion of the psychological underpinnings of attraction has focused on phenomena that can be explained by extending existing theories into the realm of attraction. The following section looks at research that was primarily driven by the existence of relationship phenomena in need of an explanation. Specifically, it will focus on proximity, the hard-to-get phenomenon, and the allure of secret relationships.

**Proximity: Marrying the Boy or Girl Next Door**

That friendships, dating relationships, and marriages are not the result of random pairings was discovered long before psychologists embarked on systematically studying the psychological bases of attraction. As far back as the 1930s, there was evidence that people tended to marry those who lived in close spatial proximity. For example, one study (Bossard, 1932) revealed that of the first 5,000 marriages formed in Philadelphia in 1931, one-third of the brides and grooms had lived within 5 blocks of one another, and slightly more than half had lived within 20 blocks. Studies of friendship formation in college dormitories (Lundberg & Beazley, 1948; Lundberg, Hertzler, & Dickson, 1949) as well as studies in housing projects (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950; Nahemow & Lawton, 1975) showed that spatial proximity was the most important predictor of who became friends with whom.

There are several explanations for why something as seemingly trivial as spatial proximity might promote attraction. First, people who live in close proximity are likely similar on some important dimensions. For example, neighborhoods are often defined in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Thus, spatial proximity connotes cultural proximity (Hofstede, 2009).

Second, we may become attracted to others in close spatial proximity because of mere exposure. This idea has its roots in experimental demonstrations showing that people come to evaluate everything from a character in the Chinese alphabet to a political candidate more favorably the more they are exposed to it (Moreland & Zajonc, 1982; Zajonc, 1968). This mere exposure effect holds for attraction to other people, as well. In one study (Brockner & Swap, 1976), research participants were exposed to others who were either attitudinally similar or dissimilar at a rate of one, two, four, or eight times. Consistent with the mere exposure hypothesis, there was a tendency for the most frequently seen other to be rated more favorably. This effect was more pronounced when the other person was attitudinally similar, suggesting that mere exposure leads to more attraction primarily when the initial evaluation is positive or neutral (Grush, 1976).

Finally, being physically close to others provides increased opportunities for interaction, which can further promote attraction and liking. Of course, 21st-century information and communication technologies can foster attraction through virtual proximity (Coughlan, 2010, 2014). Text messaging, for example, can promote the formation of emotional bonds with others independent of their location. At the same time, there are some limits here as well. For obvious reasons, text messaging does not allow for the communication of emotions via nonverbal channels, like facial expressions and gestures. Although an ever-increasing supply of emojis remedies this shortcoming somewhat, there is reason to believe that—given a choice—people might still gravitate toward physical proximity. One study (Lomanowska & Guittton, 2012) had participants create avatars to navigate a virtual world (Second Life). Participants could place their avatars just about anywhere in a large and variable space and were able to communicate with other avatars through an instant
messageing system. As it turned out, avatar placement was not random. Rather, as the avatar population increased, the number of avatars within communication range (shout, talk, whisper) increased as well: 98 percent of avatars in regions with a population of four or more were within shouting, talking, or whispering distance of their nearest neighbor. In other words, participants chose close physical proximity in a virtual world!

Playing “Hard to Get”: Do We Love Those We Cannot Have?

Throughout the ages, one of the cardinal rules of dating held that a person who appears hard to get is a more desirable catch than a person who seems overly anxious to forge a union. There are at least two sets of social psychological theories that would similarly predict an advantage for those who play hard to get. Dissonance theory (Festinger, 1956) as well as personal equity theory (Seta & Seta, 1982; Seta, Seta, & Martin, 1987) hold that when one has to expend a great deal of effort toward achieving a goal, the goal increases in value, perhaps in part to justify the effort (Aronson & Mills, 1959). Alternatively, frustrated efforts may result in increased physiological arousal, which then becomes misattributed as love or desire (Dutton & Aron, 1974).

Interestingly, experimental investigations have shown the hard-to-get phenomenon to be more elusive than one might expect. In five different studies that varied the ease with which women were available for dating, Walster, Walster, Pilliavin, and Schmitt (1973) found no evidence for the idea that playing hard to get made the women more desirable dates. The reason for this became clear when the investigators looked at how the women were perceived. Both the easy-to-get woman and the hard-to-get woman were perceived to have interpersonal assets as well as liabilities. The easy-to-get woman was perceived as friendly, warm, flexible, yet unpopular and unselective. The hard-to-get woman was perceived as unfriendly, cold, rigid, yet popular and selective. Clearly, one woman’s assets were the other woman’s liabilities, and when research participants added them up, there was no difference in desirability. Interestingly, a sixth study showed that a woman who is selectively hard to get (relatively easy for the subject but hard for everybody else) was perceived to have no liabilities. She turned out to be the most desirable date because she was considered friendly, warm, flexible, selective, and popular. These findings suggest that playing hard to get is fraught with pitfalls, as it seems to work only when the game is played selectively. However, even when playing hard to get is done properly, motivational and affective dynamics between the “players” can undermine its efficacy. Specifically, Kalei playing hard to get with Brandon is likely to increase his wanting but decrease his liking for her if he is committed to seeking a future relationship with her. In the absence of such a commitment, Kalei playing hard to get will decrease both Brandon’s wanting and liking (Dai, Dong, & Jia, 2014).

The Allure of Secret Relationships

Frequently, an initial attraction for someone can be amplified by the need to keep it secret from others. This is often the case in settings that have institutional prohibitions against dating, such as universities and workplaces. When students fall in love with their teachers or when employees find themselves drawn to fellow employees, the resulting relationships may need to be hidden from others. At the same time, the allure of secrecy often renders the relationship more exciting than it would otherwise be.

Why would the need for secrecy increase attraction? There are two possible answers. First, keeping a relationship secret from others may produce additional arousal, which
can be misattributed to the object of one’s desires. Another answer can be found when one looks at the cognitive operations required to maintain a sense of secrecy. To hide a relationship from others requires that all thoughts about the other are banished from consciousness, especially in situations where one might be tempted to blabber about it. As it turns out, suppressing any kind of thought is more difficult than one might think. People may succeed for a time but usually at the expense of a massive rebound in which the suppressed thought returns with an even stronger force (Wegner, Schneider, Carter, & White, 1987). Moreover, the very attempt at suppressing a thought often renders it hyper-accessible to consciousness even during the suppression attempt, especially when attention needs to be allocated to other things (Wegner & Erber, 1992). Either way, suppressing thoughts about someone to whom we are attracted can well lead to a preoccupation with that person, resulting in increased attraction (Lane & Wegner, 1994).

This phenomenon is more than mere speculation, as the topic has been demonstrated in the psychological laboratory. In one study, for example (Wegner et al., 1994), mixed-sex pairs of research participants were asked to play a card game. One pair was asked to make foot contact under the table as a form of communication; the other pair received no such instructions. Furthermore, some research participants were told to keep the foot contact a secret from the other pair, whereas other research participants were not required to maintain secrecy. As one might expect, research participants who had been required to maintain foot contact in secrecy felt more attracted to their partners than any other group in the experiment. They were more likely to see themselves going out with their partner, to think their partner would be a good romantic match, and to feel close to their partner. Furthermore, these same research participants reported to have more intrusive thoughts about their partner at the conclusion of the experiment. These results suggest that having to keep a relationship secret can indeed increase attraction and that this increase is produced by a preoccupation resulting from the need to keep the relationship a secret.

However, this heightened attraction can come at a price. Studies that have looked at real couples found that the anxiety associated with concealing their relationship led to decreased levels of relationship satisfaction (Foster & Campbell, 2005) and decreases in commitment and self-esteem along with a higher incidence of health-related problems (Lehmiller, 2012).

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**Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research**

- According to the mere exposure effect we tend to like stimuli to which we have been exposed previously. From what you know, what mediates the effect of exposure on liking?
- Playing hard to get should increase desire in a suitor according both to popular belief and to some psychological theories. However, research found that some hard-to-get potential dates were not rated more favorably or regarded as more desirable. How do you account for the discrepancy? Under what specific conditions does playing hard to get increase attraction?
- How could you go about increasing your chances of initiating and maintaining an intimate relationship?
Psychological Attraction

Summary

Issues

- What are the factors that lead to liking? We discussed the following:
  - Praise and agreement
  - Proximity
  - Similarity vs. complementarity
  - Playing hard-to-get
  - Why are secret relationships so alluring?

Theories

- Implicit egotism
- Classical and operant conditioning—Praise
- Agreement
- Misattribution of arousal
- Balance theory
- Similarity
- Complementarity

Research

- Participants evaluate a fictitious target under either pleasant or aversive conditions—and both can increase liking
- In face-to-face research, participants showed increased liking for strangers when in aversive situations
- Explains increased liking for others under aversive conditions
- Participants do not break up with others with whom they disagree, but change their own attitudes to achieve balance
- Similarity of attitudes and other superficial characteristics leads to greater attraction
- Precarious couples (complementarity) are in doomed relationships (Swann et al., 2003)
- Similarity/complementarity is mediated by commitment—those in committed relationships who are similar may not be as happy as those in uncommitted relationships who are dissimilar (i.e., “Explorers”) (Amadio & Showers, 2005)
- Similarity on attitudes is important in the initial stages of relationships; similarity on personality dimensions is key to relationship satisfaction (Luo & Klohnen, 2005)

Key Terms

Implicit egotism: liking of things or people who are associated with ourselves in superficial ways.

Classical conditioning: a form of associative learning in which an unconditioned stimulus that evokes an unconditioned response is paired with a neutral stimulus. After repeated presentations, the two stimuli become associated such that now the initially neutral stimulus (now called a conditioned stimulus) will come to evoke the same response (now called a conditioned response) in the absence of the unconditioned stimulus.

Operant conditioning: a form of learning in which a behavior becomes associated with its consequences.
**Misattribution of arousal:** a theoretical model according to which undifferentiated physiological arousal whose source is ambiguous is attributed to the presence of an attractive person, which results in liking or attraction to that person.

**Self-verification:** people’s desire for feedback that is consistent with their self-conceptions, even when they are negative.

**Balance theory:** a theory that explains attraction in terms of people’s tendency to form balanced triads formed by a person P, the other O, and an issue X and their respective relationships.

**Similarity-attraction hypothesis:** a theoretical idea that holds that people are attracted to others with similar attitudes.

**Complementarity:** a characteristic of relationships in which partners complement each other in terms of their needs, personalities, performance, and expertise.

**Mere exposure:** a process through which people come to like stimuli to which they had been exposed previously.
5 Self-Presentation and Self-Disclosure

How to Impress Someone on a First Date

Prepare. Before the date do something that relaxes you, exercise, reading, yoga, singing your favorite song, whatever puts you in an easy going, happy mood. Wash yourself, put on antiperspirant/deodorant, brush your teeth, brush your hair, and don’t forget to wear clean clothes! Make a list of conversation starters and questions you can ask them if you’re having trouble finding a topic. Questions about their pet(s), taste in music, good books they’ve read lately, favorite thing to do outdoors, would you rather questions, are all good ideas. Remember these and read the front page of the newspaper, too.
—www.wikihow.com/Impress-Someone-on-a-First-Date

Anybody who has ever had a crush on someone will agree that attraction of some sort is a necessary but not sufficient cause for the initiation of an intimate relationship. Once two people’s eyes have met across the room, they still face a gargantuan task on their way to forming a relationship. Two interpersonal processes take center stage at this point: Through self-presentation, people communicate what they want the other to think of them, and through self-disclosure they reveal who they truly are. And all this is necessary just to get relationships started! In mature relationships there is a continued need to communicate—everything from emotions to such seemingly trivial matters as deciding who gets the kids ready for school in the morning.

Self-Presentation

Once mutual attraction is in place, people’s focus necessarily shifts toward becoming acquainted and getting to know each other. They may be initially motivated to create a favorable impression and to present a positive yet plausible image of the self. Of course, the ultimate goal of self-presentation is to elicit liking from another; therefore, self-presentation is more like creating a desired impression than a revelation of one’s true self. As Goffman (1959) pointed out, it frequently involves the “over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others.” In this process, people can employ one or more tactics, such as the following (Leary, 1995):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-descriptions</th>
<th>Describing oneself in ways that communicate a desired impression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude expressions</td>
<td>Expressing attitudes to convey the presence or absence of certain characteristics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attributional statements | Explaining past and present behavior in ways that elicit a desired image
---|---
Compliance with social norms | Acting in ways that are consistent with the prevailing norms of the situation
Social associations | Expressing associations with desirable others and disassociations with undesirable others
Changes in physical environment | Using and modifying aspects of one’s physical environment to elicit a desired impression

Perhaps the simplest way to create a desired impression is to use verbal *self-descriptions* of such things as likes and dislikes, accomplishments, family background, and personality characteristics. Usually this type of information is conveyed in face-to-face interactions, such as on a first date. However, it is just as easily conveyed in written form, which is perhaps why such self-descriptions are common in personal ads and online dating sites.

Given the importance of attitude similarity for close relationships, it is not surprising that people often volunteer information about their attitudes during the acquaintance process. Sometimes such *attitude expressions* are nothing more than self-descriptions (e.g., “I love soccer”). However, expressing attitudes often allows us to make further inferences about a person. For example, if we hear a person say that she is in favor of a law designed to reduce air pollution, we can safely infer that she is likely an environmentalist with generally liberal attitudes.

Sometimes people try to put past behavior in an appropriate context by complementing descriptions of their behavior with *attributional statements*. By and large, the types of attributions being volunteered are self-serving. Frequently, people try to convince others that a given behavior was due to positive motives (e.g., wanting to help someone) rather than ulterior motives (e.g., trying to look good in the eyes of others) (Doherty, Weingold, & Schlenker, 1990). Similarly, people tend to take credit for success (“I got an A in my psychology class because I worked really hard”) but refuse to accept blame for failure (“I flunked my physics course because the instructor hated my guts”) (Miller & Ross, 1975). When such attributions are volunteered in an interpersonal context, they can promote a positive impression and deflect a negative impression. Of course, under some circumstances, the opposite may also be true. By refusing credit for success, one can come across as modest, and by accepting blame for failure, one can create the impression of being magnanimous (Miller & Schlenker, 1985).

To some extent, people use *compliance with social norms* to control the impression they attempt to generate. This can manifest itself in a number of ways. Showing up for a date well groomed and well dressed indicates that we are sane and serious about the occasion. Furthermore, it may allow inferences about our level of good taste and socioeconomic status. Of course, the more general rule may be to match our appearance to the situation. A suit and tie may elicit a good impression when they are worn for a dinner in an expensive restaurant, but when the same suit is worn while attending a college football game, the wearer is likely to be perceived as goofy. In a similar fashion, we often try to match our emotional expressions to the situation. We express anger when someone tells us an upsetting story and delight when we hear about someone else’s good fortune, primarily because we know that these types of reactions are expected.

At times, people manage the impressions they create by pointing to their *social associations*. People generally like to be associated with others who are popular, successful,
and attractive if for no other reason than to bask in their reflected glory. This desire is so strong that it can sometimes be downright comical. For example, the wall behind a urinal in the men's room of a popular Chicago Little League ballpark holds a plaque bearing the inscription “Michael Jordan stood here, September 12, 1992.” Surely, to have used the same urinal as the six-time NBA champion and Presidential Medal of Freedom honoree has given many a young athlete (and perhaps their fathers, as well) a much-needed boost in self-esteem. People frequently tell about their personal associations, real or imagined, by dropping names (“I once auditioned for a role opposite Leonardo DiCaprio”) in order to gain esteem in the eyes of others. Sometimes these associations can be of a more symbolic nature, such as basking in the reflected glory of an athletic team by wearing team-identifying apparel (Cialdini et al., 1976). Regardless of whether the associations we brag about are real, symbolic, or imagined, we tend to mention them in order to create a favorable impression.

Finally, people vary aspects of their physical environment in the service of self-presentation. To some extent, such seemingly rational choices as where and how to live may be partly influenced by self-presentational concerns. For instance, some people go to great lengths to avoid living in the suburbs and would think nothing of passing up a bargain on a minivan because it would not fit the image they are trying to project. Similar self-presentational concerns may influence the choice of furnishings and coffee-table books. After all, our impressions of people who have Plato's Republic lying around the living room are likely to be quite different from those who keep stacks of Game Enforcer. The way people decorate their offices may be similarly influenced by self-presentational concerns. The professor whose office door is plastered with cartoons is perhaps not primarily interested in making her students and colleagues laugh. More likely, she wants to create the impression of a good-natured, likable person.

**Self-Presentation Norms**

The extent to which any of these self-presentational tactics lead to the desired outcome of creating a favorable impression depends on how their application fits with a number of self-presentation norms. First among the norms that guide self-presentation is decorum (Leary, 1995), referring to behaviors that conform to established standards of behavior. If nothing else, decorum may modify our emotional expressions. If, while sitting in a restaurant, our friend tells us a sad story about her life, we are likely to respond with an expression of sadness. At the same time, the setting prevents us from weeping uncontrollably. In fact, a complete emotional breakdown under these circumstances is likely to have counterintentional effects because of the norm violation it involves (Baumeister & Tice, 1990).

A general norm of modesty similarly constrains our choice of self-presentational tactics. It suggests, for example, that to avoid being perceived as bragging or showing off, name-dropping as a means to point out one's social associations should not be overdone. Similarly, modesty prescribes that one should not be overly self-aggrandizing in one's self-descriptions. A successful businessmanperson is generally better off saying that he makes a good living rather than revealing that he makes an obscenely huge amount of money. On the other hand, too much modesty has the potential to backfire. In general, slight modesty is more effective than extreme modesty. Doing well but downplaying the importance of one's performance (“Today I performed five brain surgeries, but it's no big deal”) does not lead to more favorable impressions. Downplaying one's accomplishments
is only effective when the other person is aware of them in the first place (Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

A norm of behavioral matching prescribes that two people’s self-presentations should match somehow. If someone is boastful, we are to be boastful in return. If someone is modest, we should likewise be modest. Finally, the norm of self-presentational consistency dictates that people should behave in ways that are consistent with their expressed attitudes and that this consistency manifests itself in a variety of situations and over time. People who say one thing one day and the opposite the next day tend to be perceived as weak, unreliable, and unpredictable.

As is often the case, how people go about presenting themselves to others is to some extent influenced by more or less stable dispositions. For example, people who fear negative evaluations may approach their self-presentation with an extra dose of caution (Leary & Allen, 2011). When adolescents engage in risky behaviors, like drinking, driving recklessly, or performing stunts, they often do so for self-presentational reasons (Martin & Leary, 2001). Older adults are especially likely to employ self-presentational tactics to create the impression that they are competent and self-reliant (Martin, Leary, & Rejeski, 2000).

**Self-Presentation in the Heat of the Interaction**

In many cases, self-presentational tactics are employed during a dyadic interaction such as a date. This poses some unique challenges for both the senders and the recipients of self-presentation. To the extent that self-presentation entails the undercommunication of certain facts, senders can find themselves forced to keep a tight lid on the kinds of things they want to conceal. As noted in the previous chapter, this can be a most daunting task, as it is notoriously difficult to suppress any kind of thought. People often succeed at keeping an unwanted thought out of consciousness for a period of time when they devote a considerable amount of effort to it (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). This depletion of cognitive resources can lead to outcomes quite contrary to the intended ones. For instance, when self-regulatory stores are depleted, our efforts at self-control are diminished, and we may find ourselves talking too much or blurt out inappropriate and embarrassing things (Vohs et al., 2005).

Another explanation for why self-presentation can backfire has little to do with depletion of resources. Working hard to keep unwanted thoughts out of consciousness can also lead to a massive rebound of the suppressed thought later on (Wegner et al., 1987). More important, when people’s attentional focus is divided between suppressing a thought and another task, such as engaging in a conversation with another, attempting to suppress a thought can make that thought hyperaccessible to consciousness (Wegner, 1994; Wegner & Erber, 1992). As a result, people often cannot help but blurt out the very thing they are trying to suppress. In the context of self-presentation, this means that we may often end up communicating those things we are trying to hide.

Whereas the attentional demands placed on a self-presenter by virtue of interacting with another can be detrimental, these same demands on a recipient’s attention can work to the sender’s advantage. In some ways, the goal of creating a favorable impression is directed at eliciting attributions of positive personality traits (e.g., warm, honest, kind, witty, etc.). In listening to a self-presentation, the recipient’s focus of attention is necessarily directed toward the sender. As research on impression formation has shown (e.g., Storms, 1973; Taylor & Fiske, 1975), focusing attention on a person (as opposed to the situation) in
Self-Presentation and Self-Disclosure

itself can lead to dispositional, or personality, attributions. Furthermore, it generally takes less effort to generate dispositional attributions than situational attributions. In forming impressions of others, we often rely on implicit personality theories that inform us about which traits and behaviors go together. Thus, when someone tells us that she went out of her way to save a neighbor’s cat from drowning, we can instantly infer that the person is helpful as well as kind. Situational attributions are harder to make for two reasons. First, situational information is generally difficult to come by. Second, even when it is available, recipients may be preoccupied with self-presentational concerns of their own, thus depriving them of the attentional resources needed to take situational information properly into account (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988).

Detecting Deceit in Self-Presentation

Two people who meet for the purpose of creating a favorable impression with one another find themselves in a somewhat paradoxical situation. While they are trying to generate favorable impressions of themselves, they are to some extent aware that this may be the other person’s goal, as well. From this perspective, people may be motivated to find out just how truthful the other is in presenting himself or herself. This is often hard to figure out from verbal descriptions alone, unless they are particularly outrageous (“I used to date Orlando Bloom, but I got bored with him very quickly”). Instead, we often have to rely on nonverbal cues to detect whether someone is telling the truth or lying to us. Nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions) are difficult to control, and thus people’s thoughts and feelings may leak out despite their best efforts to conceal them (DePaulo, 1992). If anything, the higher the stakes, the more likely that leakage will occur (DePaulo, Lanier, & Davis, 1983). One way in which this manifests itself is through inconsistencies among different channels of nonverbal communication (DePaulo, Stone, & Lassiter, 1985). For example, a person may look us straight in the eye while telling us about his occupational accomplishments, thus conveying openness and honesty on his face. If, at the same time, the person shifts his body around nervously, we can infer from the discrepancy between facial expressions and postural movements that he may be lying.

Furthermore, deceit is reflected in people’s speech. The pitch of their voices tends to rise (Zuckerman, Spiegel, DePaulo, & Rosenthal, 1982), and they engage in more sentence repair (Stiff et al., 1989). Interestingly, the more motivated people are to lie about something, the more likely it is that their true thoughts and feelings will leak out through their nonverbal behavior (DePaulo, 1992). Of course, detecting deceit requires that we pay attention not only to what people say to us but also to their nonverbal behavior. Therefore, the successful detection of deceit may be impaired when we are preoccupied with our own self-presentation.

Virtual Self-Presentation

Impairments of this kind matter little when we connect with others from afar and within the comforts of our home through social networking sites and online dating services. As of January 2017, 1.87 billion people worldwide have profiles on Facebook. If you’re one of them, reflect on your own profile for a moment. What is it that you are trying to communicate about yourself? Is it some idealized version of you that does not accurately reflect who you are? Or does it represent your best shot at presenting what you are truly like? If you
are like most people, your profile will likely correspond to how your close friends perceive you, that is, who you really are (Back et al., 2010). In other words, Facebook profiles tend to be accurate representations of their owners' personalities. And judging by the results obtained with a German sample, this is especially true for people who are extroverted and open to experience (Back et al., 2010). Online self-presentation, like that on Facebook, has a couple of advantages over face-to-face self-presentation. First, it allows for selective self-presentation because it is more controllable and thus can be more aligned with specific self-presentational goals (Walther, 2007). Second, to the extent that self-presenters are motivated to craft a flattering version of themselves that's vetted for attractiveness by a network of friends, looking at one's own profile can enhance self-esteem (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). This boost, however, comes with a price tag as it seems to impair cognitive performance. In one study (Toma, 2013) participants who had spent some time looking at their Facebook profile performed worse on a task involving mental arithmetic than participants who had inspected the profile of a stranger.

Although profile pictures on Facebook play an important role in the initiation of close relationships, as we have seen in Chapter 3, they really take center stage when it comes to online dating services like Tinder and Match.com. They have proliferated in recent years, and people seeking relationships have flocked to them in ever increasing numbers (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Although facilitated by computer-mediated communication, the competition for dates remains stiff. Attractive profiles that paint the most desirable portrait of users would go far in securing a date, thus inviting a measure of deceit when we feel that we may be falling short. Inspections of online daters’ profiles (Toma & Hancock, 2010) suggest that daters low in attractiveness were likely to enhance their profile photographs and lie about their physical descriptors (height, weight, age). Men tend to exaggerate claims about their height, while women give inaccurate information about their weight (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008).

Online daters also realize they must tread the fine line between impression management and attracting someone who will like them for who they are (Toma et al., 2008; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006). To this end, many have learned to attend to an assortment of small cues they use as possible “windows” into the true character of the other person (Toma et al., 2008). For instance, some online daters screen profiles for misspelled words or poorly written passages, viewing them as clues to a person’s educational attainment (Ellison et al., 2006). How do we successfully convey who we are to interested others . . . and keep them interested?

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Dating via the Internet permits self-presentation in areas that are easily and immediately verifiable upon meeting in person, such as physical characteristics. How would you explain the fact that in spite of this some people still chose embellishment over complete honesty?

Models of Self-Disclosure

It probably goes without saying that relationships cannot survive very long on good impressions alone. In fact, self-presentational concerns may be an outright hindrance
for the further development of a relationship. For example, if two romantically involved people refuse each other access to their homes out of fear that the decor may not match the image they worked so hard to convey, trouble is likely to ensue. The point is that relationship development is closely tied to changes in communication. Research confirms that the most satisfied couples move from self-presentation and self-enhancing communications to self-verifying ones as their relationships mature (Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006). That is, we eventually have to go beyond merely coming across as likable and instead reveal a sense of who we really are. This is accomplished through self-disclosure, a process that has been defined as “what individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others (including thoughts, feelings, and experiences)” (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993, p. 1). Self-disclosure in developing relationships follows a fairly predictable path, which has been captured by several theoretical models.

Self-Disclosure as Social Penetration

According to social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), we can look at self-disclosure in terms of the number of topics that are covered (its breadth) as well as the personal significance of the topics (its depth). Early in a relationship, self-disclosure may be limited to a few superficial topics, often indicating simple preferences (“I like Lite beer”). As the relationship develops, self-disclosure becomes more intimate (“Sometimes I have too many Lite beers”) to the point of being very intimate (“When I drink too many Lite beers, I go crazy”). At the same time, the number of topics covered in self-disclosure increases, too. To some extent, the course of self-disclosure resembles a wedge that becomes deeper through the increasing levels of intimacy and wider through the increasing number of topics covered, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

Social penetration theory predicts that as a relationship develops, self-disclosure goes from narrow and shallow to broad and deep. This raises two important issues. First is

![Figure 5.1 The Social Penetration Model of Self-Disclosure](image-url)
the question of causality. One could argue that increasing self-disclosure causes a relationship to develop further. However, one could just as easily argue that self-disclosure is a result of relationship development. In other words, the closer two people become, the broader and deeper their self-disclosures will be. The solution to this apparent riddle is that both processes are possible, which has led some (Derlega et al., 1993) to propose that self-disclosure and relationships are mutually transformative. That is, self-disclosure increases as a relationship develops and relationships develop partly as a result of self-disclosure.

The second issue relates to what happens to self-disclosure over time. By virtue of employing the analogy of a wedge, social penetration theory implicitly suggests that the increase in self-disclosure over time is gradual and linear for some time before eventually leveling off. However, this is not necessarily the case. Instead, the rate of change in breadth is not the same as the rate of change in depth. People tend to increase the number of topics they talk about before they increase the intimacy of their self-disclosures. Once the increase in topics levels off, intimacy increases sharply (Brehm, 1992). At the same time, couples on the verge of a breakup tend to decrease the number of topics on which they self-disclose but actually increase the intimacy of their self-disclosures (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1984).

Furthermore, no two relationships develop at the same rate. In some relationships, self-disclosure may increase gradually, but instead of leveling off, it might actually decrease. Research on couples who have been together for some time supports this idea. For example, Huston, McHale, and Crouter (1986) found that couples became less disclosing after just one year of marriage. At the same time, in relationships that fall under the general heading of “love at first sight,” self-disclosure may develop almost immediately and increase sharply rather than gradually. In fact, couples who show this pattern of self-disclosure are more likely to stay together than couples who follow a more gradual pattern (Berg, 1984; Berg & Clark, 1986; Berg & McQuinn, 1986). Of course, one does not know whether the longevity of such relationships is due to the particular pattern of self-disclosure or something else. It appears, however, that couples self-disclose more rapidly when the reality of their relationship fits their ideal of a relationship fairly well (Berg & Clark, 1986).

Self-Disclosure Reciprocity

Whatever the exact time course of social penetration and depenetration, how do people manage how they self-disclose as couples? Unlike self-presentation, self-disclosure involves two people interacting with one another face-to-face, by text messaging, or through some other medium. Two people manage to increase or decrease their levels of self-disclosure through self-disclosure reciprocity (Berg & Archer, 1980, 1982). This strategy is akin to a tit-for-tat, whereby people tend to match the other’s self-disclosure in terms of its intimacy and valence (Taylor & Belgrave, 1986). In other words, highly intimate self-disclosures are reciprocated with intimate self-disclosures, whereas self-disclosures low in intimacy are reciprocated in kind. Similarly, positive self-disclosures (“I’m thinking of getting a puppy”) are reciprocated with positive self-disclosures (“I like dogs”), whereas negative self-disclosures (“My dog just died”) are also reciprocated in kind (“I once had a hamster that drowned”). Thus, one important function of the reciprocity norm is that it regulates how people go about disclosing to one another (Derlega, Harris, & Chaikin, 1973).
Additionally, there is evidence that responding to another's self-disclosure in kind is associated with attraction (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Berg and Archer (1980) exposed research participants to a taped interaction that had allegedly taken place between two strangers. One of the strangers disclosed items that were either low or high in intimacy. The other stranger (a) responded in kind, (b) responded to a highly intimate disclosure with a disclosure low in intimacy, or (c) responded to a disclosure low in intimacy with a highly intimate disclosure. Research participants were asked to indicate how much they liked the stranger who responded to the initial self-disclosure. As predicted, liking was strongly determined by the extent to which the responding stranger matched the other's initial level of self-disclosure (see also Chaikin & Derlega, 1974). Moreover, matching the valence of self-disclosures also impacts liking. Apparently, reciprocating a partner's good news with happiness and enthusiasm had beneficial effects in the form of increased feelings of intimacy and greater marital satisfaction (Gable et al., 2004).

These findings are important because they suggest that self-disclosure by itself does not produce attraction. Rather, attraction appears to be a result of following a tit-for-tat strategy by which people match each other's levels of self-disclosure. Of course, people could pursue a matching strategy simply to follow a perceived norm of reciprocity. On the other hand, the extent to which someone matches or mismatches another person's level of self-disclosure itself conveys information. According to Berg and Archer (1982), there are at least three different aspects to self-disclosure. Through descriptive intimacy, people convey factual information, which, among other things, can be used by the other to form an impression. Through evaluative intimacy, people express strong emotions and judgments, which can help in being liked by the other. Finally, and most importantly for the present purpose, through topical reciprocity, people convey that they are responsive and flexible. In other words, by sticking with the same topic in response to another’s self-disclosure, one elicits positive attributions about one’s personality, and this in turn can lead to an increase in attraction. Switching to a different topic, on the other hand, may lead to negative attributions and a resulting decrease in attraction. This makes a great deal of sense. Imagine, for example, that during the course of a first date, we reveal that we like animals. If our date responds by subtly switching the topic of conversation to the Chicago Bulls, Bears, and Cubs, we are likely to think of them as unresponsive, inflexible, and self-centered.

The world of relationships would be a simple place if building intimacy could solely be achieved based on reciprocating disclosures at matching levels of intimacy, positivity, and topicality. But the process of getting to know one another is a bit more complicated. For example, many believe that sharing their vulnerabilities with their lover is a part of the “romantic relationship script” and essential to intimacy. However, this type of self-disclosure might actually backfire! Instead of becoming closer, partners who share their vulnerabilities can become more insecure about their relationship (Lemay & Clark, 2008). Insecure partners who share their insecurities with a partner often believe it diminishes them in the eyes of their partner. This belief causes disclosers to discount the authenticity of their partner’s assurances and to reject their affirmations. In the end, they can become even more insecure about their partner’s regard (Lemay & Clark, 2008).

Another commonly shared misconception is that the disclosure of our values provides an effective way to reveal our innermost selves to a date or romantic partner. Ironically, our perception that value disclosure or revelation (e.g., “I think education is the most
powerful tool for ending poverty and discrimination”) will make a lasting impression on our dates is not supported by research (Pronin, Fleming, & Steffel, 2008). Those who receive value revelations do not find them to be especially useful or revealing. Why the disconnect? It seems that the intensity with which we hold our most cherished values leads us to add significance to their disclosure (Pronin et al., 2008). Although observers hear the revelation, they do not have access to the discloser’s affective link to the value. We will see a similar type of asymmetry of sender-receiver interpretations of self-disclosures in our discussion of individual differences.

**Individual Differences in Self-Disclosure**

Altman and Taylor’s (1973) social penetration model as well as Berg and Archer’s (1980, 1982) topical reciprocity model are to some extent idealizations of the self-disclosure process. Neither one takes into account important individual differences that can lead to considerable variations in how mutual self-disclosure unfolds.

**Gender-Related Differences**

Men and women are not alike when it comes to self-disclosure. Although both sexes are similarly willing to disclose their emotions, women tend to be more willing to disclose about feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, and their greatest fears (Rubin et al., 1980; Snell, Miller, & Belk, 1988). This general tendency of women to disclose more information of a more intimate nature is somewhat attenuated when they expect to interact with the recipient of their disclosure. Under these circumstances, women’s self-disclosures become less revealing and less intimate, whereas men’s self-disclosures become more revealing and intimate (Shaffer & Ogden, 1986). It appears that women avoid self-disclosure primarily to avoid personal hurt. When men avoid self-disclosure they often do so strategically—that is, to maintain control over their relationships (Rosenfeld, 1979).

Most of these sex differences are not so much related to gender per se, but more to differences in expectations of what constitutes proper behavior for men and women. U.S. culture has assigned women the role of socioemotional specialists. As a result, men and women alike expect females to disclose more than males. In support of this contention, men and women alike tend to rate males who fail to disclose as better adjusted than males who disclose information about personal problems. The opposite is true for perceptions of women who either disclose information about personal problems or fail to disclose it (Derlega & Chaiken, 1976). Furthermore, men who are particularly high in masculinity are less willing to disclose intimate information, especially to other men, but men with a more feminine orientation generally disclose more intimate information, spend more time doing it, and expect intimate disclosures in return, particularly when they are disclosing to a woman (Winstead, Derlega, & Wong, 1984).

**Self-Monitoring**

Regardless of gender, the degree to which people monitor their behavior in the context of a social situation has an impact on self-disclosure. In general, **high self-monitors** like to adapt their behavior to the demands of the current social situation. **Low self-monitors**, on the other hand, do relatively little in terms of modifying their behavior in light of
situational constraints (Snyder, 1987; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). As a result, high self-monitors tend to look for cues about appropriate behavior by inspecting the behavior of others, and they tend to act differently when in different situations and with different people. Low self-monitors are guided more by their “true” attitudes, beliefs, and feelings, and they would be reluctant to change the way they do things just to please another. Not surprisingly, when asked to disclose personal information to another, high self-monitors are more prone to reciprocate the intimacy, emotionality, and descriptive content of another’s disclosure than low self-monitors are (Shaffer, Smith, & Tomarelli, 1982). Apparently, high self-monitors use the other’s lead to decide on what constitutes the proper level of self-disclosure.

Shaffer, Smith, and Tomarelli’s (1982) findings are certainly consistent with the generally hypothesized differences between low and high self-monitors. However, Ludwig, Franco, and Malloy (1986) found that low self-monitors followed the reciprocity norm more closely than high self-monitors, who always disclosed at a high level of intimacy regardless of their partner’s behavior. How can this apparent mystery surrounding these contradictory findings be resolved? One possibility is that differences in the ways high and low self-monitors reciprocate another’s self-disclosure may be influenced by whether they expect to interact with the other in the future. Remember that high self-monitors want to please others, perhaps with the ultimate goal of being liked. Thus, it may be that high self-monitors are particularly likely to reciprocate to another’s self-disclosure when they expect to have contact with that person in the future. To test this idea, one study (Shaffer, Ogden, & Wu, 1987) varied the prospect of future interaction along with an initially high or low level of disclosure intimacy. Results showed that high self-monitors reciprocated their partner’s self-disclosure only when they expected to meet that person again. This difference was not observed when there was no prospect of future interaction. Under these circumstances, both low and high self-monitors followed the reciprocity rule equally.

Self-Consciousness

A concept that appears superficially related to self-monitoring is self-consciousness. It describes our tendency to focus our attention inward—toward our feelings, goals, and values (e.g., “I want to be a rocket scientist”). Once we focus our attention on ourselves, we compare them with our current state. If we discover a large enough discrepancy (e.g., “I flunked all my physics courses”), we are likely to adjust our behavior so as to bring our current state more in line with our goals and values. Self-consciousness takes on two forms (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Private self-consciousness refers to our tendency to reflect on private aspects of ourselves—that is, the extent to which our behavior corresponds to how we would like to act. Public self-consciousness describes the extent to which we reflect on how we might appear in the eyes of others. Both types of self-consciousness can vary situationally. Seeing ourselves in the mirror or listening to a tape of our own voice generally raises our levels of both private and public self-consciousness. Additionally, there are chronic differences between people’s level of self-consciousness in the absence of such devices. Either way, heightened self-consciousness is hypothesized to lead to an inspection of our behavior and a subsequent adjustment of that behavior if necessary.

To date, research has shown that self-consciousness can affect self-disclosure in a couple of ways. One study (Archer, Hormuth, & Berg, 1982) shows that research
participants who were asked to disclose intimate information about themselves became more reluctant disclosers when they did the task while sitting in front of a mirror. Apparently, the increased public and private self-consciousness induced by the presence of the mirror made research participants watch more closely how their disclosures might compare with their own standards and the kind of impression they wanted to convey. With respect to reciprocity of self-disclosure, a slightly more complicated picture emerged from a study that looked at research participants who were either high or low on private and public self-consciousness (Shaffer & Tomarelli, 1989). Research participants who scored high on one aspect of self-consciousness and low on the other tended to reciprocate the level of intimacy of another's disclosure. Research participants who were uniformly low or high on both private and public self-consciousness did not follow the reciprocity norm to the same extent. Apparently, research participants who were concentrating on both aspects of the self had suffered from some sort of attentional overload that prevented them from paying attention to the level of intimacy of the other's self-disclosure.

**Anxiety, Trust, and Machiavellianism**

The number of personality dimensions on which people differ is almost endless. Consequently, a thorough treatment of how they might affect various aspects of the self-disclosure process might fill volumes. In the interest of brevity, the remaining discussion will focus on a few personality dimensions that are particularly obvious or particularly intriguing.

Not surprisingly, people who are highly anxious are concerned with self-protection. They feel vulnerable enough as it is and thus tend to disclose at a moderate rather than a high level of intimacy, regardless of whether the other person discloses information high or low in intimacy (Meleshko & Alden, 1993). This pattern of disclosure might be the result of self-protection or the result of self-perception processes. For instance, fear of rejection leads people to amplify the significance of their disclosures (Vorauer, Cameron, Holmes, & Pearce, 2003). That is, because of the internal struggle to get beyond their inhibitions (for example, fear and anxiety) in order to express themselves, people who fear rejection perceive their disclosures as having added meaning and extra import.

To the extent that some of the anxiety is tied to the face-to-face nature of an interaction, are socially anxious people helped by using online social sites, texting, and instant messaging? Do the reduced audiovisual cues of computer-mediated communication help overcome the inhibitions typically experienced in face-to-face interactions among those who are anxious? The evidence is a bit mixed. Although some (Schouten et al., 2007; Valkenburg & Peter, 2009) have reported findings that are consistent with this idea, others have painted a more nuanced picture. A study of 280 adolescents (Pierce, 2009) found that socially anxious participants who indicated they were not comfortable talking with others face-to-face preferred talking with others online or by text messaging. However, participants low in social anxiety with no issues related to talking with others had an easier time making friends online. Sex differences also emerged. Compared to males, females reported more social anxiety and feeling more comfortable interacting with others online or by text messaging.

People with a high level of generalized trust are in some ways the opposite of people who are socially anxious. Not surprisingly, they approach others without the notion
that they might get hurt and tend to reveal more information, especially information of an intimate nature (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). Of course, a high level of interpersonal trust may be detrimental when one discloses to another who uses self-disclosure as a means of manipulating others for the purpose of interpersonal control. Rather than presenting an honest and accurate image of themselves, people with such Machiavellian tendencies disclose strategically to control the behavior of the other and ultimately their relationship (O’Connor & Simms, 1990). Interestingly, some researchers have reported this type of strategic self-disclosure to be prevalent among women (O’Connor & Simms, 1990), yet others have shown it to be more prevalent among men (Dingler-Duhon & Brown, 1987), suggesting that it is perhaps more a question of personality rather than gender.

**Context Influences on Self-Disclosure**

At this point, there is probably little doubt that self-disclosure is important for the initiation of close relationships, particularly those that are intimate in nature. However, this is by no means the only context in which self-disclosure takes place. Absence of self-disclosure, either by choice or for lack of opportunity, is associated with loneliness (Berg & Peplau, 1982; Davis & Franzoi, 1986). Males and females alike suffer from loneliness in the absence of opportunities to self-disclose to members of the opposite sex. However, a lack of self-disclosure to same-sex friends is associated with loneliness among women (Solano, Batton, & Parish, 1982).

To the extent that self-disclosure to friends and peers can buffer the possible effects of lack of self-disclosure to intimate partners, one might ask if self-disclosure in these types of relationships would perhaps unfold in different ways. After all, self-disclosure in ongoing friendships, for example, does not serve the purpose of getting to know one another. Rather, it appears that self-disclosure is volunteered for social support and coping (Pennebaker, 1989, 1995). From this point of view, one would not expect reciprocity to matter much. Consistent with this idea, it appears that intimacy of disclosure is most closely associated with friendship. It is important to note that it is the psychological closeness rather than the physical closeness of friends that is responsible for this relationship. We generally disclose intimate information to those who are psychologically close to us, whereas we disclose nonintimate information to those who are close in terms of their proximity (Rubin & Shenker, 1978).

Intimate self-disclosure to an acquaintance or even a stranger is considered to be inappropriate, which is perhaps one reason why we generally avoid it. In fact, people who violate this implicit norm are frequently perceived as maladjusted (Chaikin & Derlega, 1974). This does not mean we would never disclose intimate information to a stranger under any circumstance. If this were the case, most experimental studies of self-disclosure would have failed miserably and most daytime TV talk shows would have gone off the air long ago. Intimate self-disclosure to a stranger is more likely to occur when the stranger is physically attractive, especially in the absence of a strong need for approval (Brundage, Derlega, & Cash, 1977). Our transient moods further affect our willingness to disclose intimate information. People in good moods tend to be more willing to disclose intimate information, whereas people in bad moods are more reluctant to do so (Cunningham, 1988).
Finally, alcohol consumption seems to promote willingness to disclose personal information, especially for men. However, to some extent this is more due to how intoxicated people believe they are. In one study (Caudill, Wilson, & Abrams, 1987), men who believed that both they and their partner were drunk showed an increase in self-disclosure even when no alcohol was consumed. At the same time, women who believed they were drunk showed a decrease in self-disclosure. It may be that the women who believed they were drunk reminded themselves of their heightened vulnerability and thus decided to exercise caution.

**Self-Disclosure in Mature Relationships**

Advice columns in newspapers and magazines are filled with letters from spouses complaining that they and their partners do not talk anymore. Specifically, the common complaint is about the absence of intimate self-disclosure. The frequency with which such complaints are volunteered testifies to the importance of self-disclosure for marital satisfaction (Hendrick, 1981). However, that intimate self-disclosure would decrease with the length of relationship is not entirely surprising. After all, intimate self-disclosure is a means to get to know the other person. People in long-term relationships tend to know their partners fairly well and need little information to know how they feel about things (Rauers, Blanke, & Riediger, 2013). Consequently, in mature relationships there may simply be less need for self-disclosure. Then again, if this were true, one would expect fewer complaints about the lack of intimate self-disclosure on the part of long-term husbands and wives.

Most intact long-term relationships are not entirely devoid of intimate self-disclosure. However, compared to self-disclosure to a prospective date, there is a shift in terms of the type of intimate information that is disclosed. Relative to strangers, spouses tend to reveal more descriptive intimacy but less evaluative intimacy, although this is more pronounced for husbands than for wives, who prefer disclosures high in evaluative intimacy (Morton, 1978). Contrary to popular belief, there is little difference in terms of the sheer amount of information that husbands and wives disclose to one another. For both, the amount of information disclosed becomes less with age and with length of relationship (Antill & Cotton, 1987). This does not mean that people will necessarily become unhappy with their relationship over time. Instead, there is evidence that marital happiness is determined by the perceived discrepancy in the partner’s affective disclosure. Marital satisfaction decreases as this discrepancy increases (Davidson, Balswick, & Halverson, 1983). The intent and valence of self-disclosure are equally important for marital satisfaction. Honest and positive self-disclosures result in more happiness than disclosures aimed at gaining control of the relationship (Dickson-Markman, 1984).

The picture of a mature relationship marked by a decrease in self-disclosure and a preponderance of self-disclosures high in descriptive intimacy can change quickly and dramatically in response to stressful events. People who are distressed tend to be preoccupied with their problems to the point where their thinking becomes overwhelmed by them. This can trigger a need to confide in others, spouses included (McDaniel, Stiles, & McGaughey, 1981). Such confessions often make people feel better because, by virtue of confiding in someone, they have transferred some aspects of their problem to the other
person (Pennebaker, 1990). Because the need to confide does not depend on where the stress comes from in the first place, this perspective suggests that self-disclosure, especially the type high in evaluative intimacy, may be especially prevalent in relationships that are marked by turmoil. Once the relationship stabilizes, one can expect a return to lower levels of self-disclosure high in descriptive intimacy.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- As a relationship develops we probably do not abandon the goal of making ourselves liked by the other person. Yet at some point we make the move from strategic communication specifically aimed at eliciting liking (self-presentation) to open communication (self-disclosure). What do you think helps prompt us to shift?
- One explanation for gender-related differences in self-disclosure is that women avoid self-disclosure in order to protect themselves, while men avoid it to maintain control over the relationship. In what ways do you think avoiding self-disclosure can help men maintain control of their relationships?
- Being deprived of opportunities to self-disclose to members of the opposite sex results in loneliness. Do you think this indicates the existence of a “need to self-disclose”? What other explanations could you generate for this link?
- People in good moods are more willing to disclose intimate information, while people in bad moods are reluctant to do so. What do you think causes this pattern of mood influences on self-disclosure?

Summary

### Issues
- How do people increase their chances of maintaining attraction and interest?
- How do they get to know one another?
- How do couples manage self-disclosure?

### Theory
- Theories of self-presentation hold that people try to communicate a positive yet plausible image of themselves
- Self-presentation tactics include self-descriptions, attitude expressions, attributional statements, compliance with social norms (e.g., decorum, modesty, behavioral matching, social associations, and changes in environment)
- Balance between presenting a positive image while avoiding outright deceit
- Two models of self-disclosure
- Social penetration model emphasizes moving from superficial to intimate disclosures
- Reciprocity model focuses on matching the level of intimacy in each other’s disclosures
Research

- Nonverbal cues such as body posture, facial expression, touch, gaze, grooming, and gestures signal interest and are used in flirting (Patterson, 1987)
- Breaking eye contact, closed body posture, not smiling, and not touching convey disinterest (McCormick & Jones, 1989)
- Opening lines are crucial to initiating a relationship, with most people preferring innocuous or direct remarks over cute and flippant ones (Kleinke, Meeker, & Staneski, 1986)
- Modesty—refusing credit for success and accepting responsibility for failure—can create a good impression (Miller & Schlenker, 1985)
- Maintaining self-presentation depletes cognitive resources and diminishes our capacity for self-regulation; resource depletion may lead to paradoxical outcomes such as talking too much or too loud or saying embarrassing things (Vohs et al., 2005)
- Trying hard to present oneself in a certain light requires a certain amount of suppression, and suppression can lead to a rebound and communicating the very things we are trying to hide (Wegner et al., 1987)
- Online daters use self-presentation to manage their impressions: Men portray themselves as slightly taller than they are in reality, and women portray themselves as weighing slightly less (Toma et al., 2008)
- Research on the social penetration model of self-disclosure suggests that breadth and depth of disclosure appear to increase at a somewhat different rate, with the rate of breadth changing faster than the rate of depth; also, there are substantial variations from one couple to the next
- Research on the reciprocity model shows that reciprocating another’s self-disclosure within the same topic and with the same level of intimacy and valence connotes sensitivity and likeableness
- As relationships mature, the intimacy of self-disclosure does not decrease; instead, it increases in descriptive intimacy while it decreases in evaluative intimacy
- A variety of individual differences, including gender, self-monitoring, self-consciousness, anxiety, trust, fear of rejection, and Machiavellianism, as well as differences due to the context in which self-disclosure takes place, influence the course and outcome of self-disclosure

Key Terms

Self-presentation (sometimes also called impression management): behaviors aimed at creating a favorable yet plausible image of the self, with the goal of eliciting liking from another.

Self-presentation norms: constraints upon our self-presentations such as decorum, modesty, and behavioral matching.

Social penetration theory: the development of self-disclosure in terms of number of topics covered (breadth) and the personal significance of the topics (depth).

Self-disclosure reciprocity: a strategy in which people tend to match the other’s self-disclosure in terms of intimacy and valence.
Self-Presentation and Self-Disclosure

Descriptive intimacy: aspect of self-disclosure through which people convey factual information.

Evaluative intimacy: aspect of self-disclosure through which people express strong emotions and judgments.

Topical reciprocity: sticking with the same topic in response to another self-disclosure.

Self-monitoring: a disposition that compels some people to adjust their behavior to the situation in order to manage their public image.

Self-consciousness: a disposition to focus our attention inward, toward our feelings, goals, and values.

Private self-consciousness: a disposition toward reflecting on whether our behavior corresponds to how we would like to act.

Public self-consciousness: a disposition toward reflecting on how we might appear in the eyes of others.
6 Fairness and Equity

Summer Gift-Giving Season or Ochūgen

In summer, there is a custom of sending a gift, called ochūgen, to those to whom we are indebted. The season for sending ochūgen varies between regions, but usually it falls in July and August. During this period, people wrap food items, seasonings, or household goods in noshi, paper tied with a red and white bow, and send them to any relatives and acquaintances who may have helped them in the past year. Children may send ochūgen to their parents, but only after they grow up and leave home. Family members who live together do not send ochūgen to each other. The origin of this custom is a Chinese Daoist festival. In Daoism, people ward off evil by making offerings at jōgen (January 15th), chūgen (July 15th) and kagen (October 15th). Among them, chūgen became popular as a gift-giving occasion because it overlaps with the bon festival, when many people travel to visit one another.

—Cross Currents, www.crosscurrents.hawaii.edu

The kinds of interactions we have with close others can vary greatly from one relationship to another. The relationships we maintain with our friends are different from those we maintain with our romantic partners, and both are different from our relationships with our parents and family. Even within a single relationship, our interactions are prone to change over time. A dating relationship in its early stages is qualitatively different from an established-long term relationship in many ways, and the kinds of things we do with our friends will change as we move from adolescence to adulthood. Despite these differences, some (e.g., Levinger & Huesman, 1980) have argued that it is possible to view them all from one single theoretical viewpoint—social exchange theory. This viewpoint proposes that all human interactions can be construed in terms of exchanges of mutually rewarding activities. It assumes that, although the rewardingness of various activities will be different from person to person and on different occasions, people will conduct their relationships so as to maximize rewards and minimize costs.

The idea that close relationships can be conceptualized in terms of interpersonal exchanges is at once compelling and controversial. It is compelling because of the simplicity of its assumptions that seem to be borne out by the relationship phenomena discussed in the previous chapters. Remember that people often desire others who match their level of attractiveness. From the perspective of exchange theory, what people are doing in this process is trading levels of attractiveness so as to gain a fair exchange. People who desire others with similar attitudes and beliefs may similarly be trading mutual agreement. The importance of a reciprocity norm during self-disclosure in its early stages further suggests the operation of exchange principles.
Exchange theory is controversial because it suggests that there is little difference in how we conduct our relationships with close others and strangers. In both cases, we attempt to maximize our gains and minimize our costs. Of course, to do this successfully we need to monitor closely what we put into a given relationship and compare our inputs to what we get out of it in return. Many find such a materialistic, tit-for-tat approach inappropriate to explain what happens between close and intimate others. Moreover, the story at the beginning of the chapter suggests that matters of exchange in intimate relationships can often become very complicated.

To appreciate fully both the strengths and shortcomings of exchange theory for the explanation of various processes in close relationships, it is necessary to examine the predictions it makes regarding what types of commodities people exchange, how they decide whether their relationship is fair and equitable, and how they react to inequities. As it turns out, there are several different perspectives, each looking at different aspects of the exchange.

The Nature of Resources Exchanged

Rewards and Costs

What is it that people in casual as well as close relationships exchange? On the most abstract level, people exchange rewards. By definition, a reward is anything a person values, and thus rewards can take on many forms, ranging from money to hugs. As a rule, people tend to place greater value on things they don’t have than on things that are in ample supply. Finding a $20 bill in the laundromat will be more rewarding for a college student, for instance, than it would for a baseball player with a multiyear, multimillion-dollar contract. Similarly, a hug will mean more to someone deprived of physical affection than to someone who receives hugs and kisses all day long.

Of course, the flipside of rewards are costs. Giving another person any kind of reward is usually associated with a variety of costs. Because engaging in one activity usually precludes some alternative activity, opportunity costs are almost always incurred. For example, spending an evening talking about one’s relationship can be quite rewarding, but it may come at the expense of not being able to go to a movie with friends. Of course, the cost of an activity is directly related to the desirability of the alternative activity. If the alternative to talking about one’s relationship is to watch the grass grow, the costs for the activity are fairly low. Apart from the unavoidable opportunity costs, most activities tend to become more costly as they are repeated over a period of time (Secord & Backman, 1964). Frequent exchanges of the same commodity may lead to fatigue in one person and satiation in the other. Remember that the value of a reward decreases once there is no shortage of it. This decrease in value, coupled with an incremental increase in the cost associated with the production of the reward, further increases the total cost of the activity. Because relationships change over time, new activities need to be substituted for older ones to avoid fatigue and satiation and to provide appropriate rewards.

Variety of Resources Exchanged

To talk about exchange exclusively in terms of reward and cost does not really tell us about the specific types of resources, or commodities, that people exchange. In both casual
and close relationships, people can exchange a wide variety of resources that fall into six distinct classes: (1) love, (2) status, (3) information, (4) money, (5) goods, and (6) services (Turner, Foa, & Foa, 1971). These resource categories can be distinguished in terms of how concrete and particularistic they are, as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Goods and services are more concrete than money, and all three are more concrete than love, status, and information, which are relatively more abstract. Furthermore, some resources are more particularistic; that is, their reward value depends on the person who is providing them. Love is perhaps the most particularistic of all resources, simply because finding love in all the wrong places is generally not very rewarding. Money, on the other hand, may be the least particularistic of all resources because, by and large, its value is the same regardless of who gives it to us (not withstanding drug money or blatant bribes).

Given the differences in the nature of interpersonal resources, one can expect that different rules apply to the exchange in casual as opposed to close relationships. For one thing, it may be that different resources are exchanged. Just as nobody would expect to find love at the hardware store, few would probably expect their loved ones to provide them with roofing nails. More importantly, exchanges among strangers are more constrained. The general expectation is that the exchange will involve resources from the same class or from proximal classes. The clerk at the grocery store can rightfully expect the appropriate amount of money in exchange for a packet of cream cheese. Likewise, the mechanic can expect the appropriate amount of money in exchange for repairing the brakes on our car. People in close relationships have a little more leeway in how they conduct their exchanges. They can trade resources from proximal as well as distal classes. For example, a friend may offer us money, a dinner, or a whole lot of praise in exchange for a little help with her overdue homework. In light of the variability of exchanges possible in close relationships, some (e.g., Scanzoni, 1979b) have gone so far as to propose that intimates spend a great deal of time negotiating the values and exchangeability of certain types of behaviors. Although it is not clear whether relationships can be entirely defined by that, it is clear that a certain amount of negotiation does at least occasionally take place.

Determining What Is Fair: Equity Theory

Assuming that people in close relationships find ways to decide on the types of resources they wish to exchange, the question becomes: How do they decide if they are getting what they deserve? Some (Homans, 1961) have phrased the answer simply in terms
of interpersonal profit: “The open secret of human exchange is to give the other man behavior that is more valuable to him than it is costly to you and to get from him behavior that is more valuable to you than it is costly to him” (p. 62). This idea, then, proposes that two people will seek maximum gains at minimal cost. Others have argued that people will focus on fairness. Specifically, equity theory (Adams, 1965; Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973, Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978) proposes that people scrutinize their outcomes relative to their inputs and then compare the result to their partner’s inputs and outcomes by applying the following formula (Adams, 1965):

\[
\frac{O_A - I_A}{I_A} = \frac{O_B - I_B}{I_B}
\]

\(I_A\) and \(I_B\) represent the respective perceptions of the inputs from Person A and Person B. \(O_A\) and \(O_B\) represent the respective perceptions of the outcomes Person A and Person B are receiving. Inputs describe participants’ contributions to the exchange that entitle them to rewards and thus can be considered the costs of the relationships. Outcomes describe the positive or negative consequences participants perceive to have received as a result of the exchange. In principle, a relationship is considered to be equitable when the ratio of inputs to outcomes of Person A equals the ratio of inputs to outcomes of Person B. In other words, people feel like they are getting a fair shake out of their relationship when their partner puts in as much and receives as much as they do.

**Establishing Whether There Is Equity**

Of course, one might ask just how people go about determining the magnitude and value of their inputs as well as those of their partner. According to the theory, equity is in the eye of the beholder. In order for the formula to work, two people need to agree on how they assess one another’s inputs and outcomes. This may be more easily said than done. Inequity can be fairly easily determined when there is a wide gap between two people’s inputs. For example, if one person spends an hour cleaning the kitchen after dinner while the other person plays basketball for an hour, it is pretty clear who incurred more costs. It may be more difficult to make the same determination when one person washes the dishes while the other person takes out the garbage. One could argue that it may be more costly to do the dishes if it requires more time than taking out the garbage, creating a temporary sense of inequity. But if disposing of the garbage should involve going out in the rain or having to talk with one’s least favorite neighbor, the equation is quickly thrown out of whack because of the increase in cost stemming from getting drenched or having to listen to deliberations about power tools.

Admittedly, the example of cleaning up after dinner is a mundane one. However, it illustrates the difficulties in assessing what is equitable. If it is hard to determine equity regarding two people’s contributions to a simple task, it may be next to impossible to determine if one’s relationship as a whole is equitable. For one thing, assessing equity requires people to scrutinize the many aspects of their relationship at any given point in time. For another, people need to keep track of their inputs and outcomes as well as those of their partner over long periods of time. Even if people were inclined to do that, and there is reason to believe they frequently don’t (Clark & Mills, 1979), there may still be
a problem in terms of the value two people put on their respective inputs and outcomes (Hatfield et al., 1979). A person who puts little stake in an impeccably clean house will likely place little value on his or her partner's painstaking clean-up efforts. Because of this, the gains provided by a clean house will be perceived as relatively low, and, as a result, the other's input tends to be devalued. Of course, the reverse is true for someone for whom a clean house is of paramount importance. Because the gains are fairly high, the other's input will increase in value.

**Do People Really Seek Equity?**

Given the many problems in deciding what is equitable, one might well ask if people do, in fact, apply an equity rule in determining what is fair in their relationships. One way to figure this out is to look at how well research supports this idea. According to Clark and Chrisman (1994), there is little research that directly examines the extent to which people in ongoing relationships apply an equity rule. However, there is research broadly concerned with the effects of equity on relationship satisfaction and stability, which allows an indirect evaluation of the idea that people would seek equity in a relationship (e.g., Lloyd, Cate, & Henton, 1982; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985; Sprecher, 1988).

To date, the evidence for the importance of equity is somewhat mixed. In one study (Sprecher, 1986), research participants who were involved in a dating relationship were asked to indicate their level of commitment to the relationship, their experience of positive and negative affect over the past month, whether they or their partner contributed more to the relationship, and who seemed to be getting a better deal out of their relationship. Consistent with predictions from equity theory, research participants who felt that they and their partner were getting an equally good deal out of the relationship and contributed to it equally reported a higher level of commitment and a preponderance of positive emotional experiences. Similarly, Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) found that married couples who reported their relationship as equitable were more committed to their relationship than couples who felt their relationship was inequitable. Additionally, Lloyd et al. (1982) found that perceived equity was associated with higher relationship satisfaction among serious as well as casual daters.

More recently, in a 5-year longitudinal study of 101 romantic couples, Sprecher (2001) found that most participants felt their relationships were equitable. They also found a strong correlation between global measures of equity and specific equity dimensions, perhaps because similarly anchored scales were used for both. Equity was found across specific dimensions of love, status, money, services, goods, information, and sexuality. Partners did not feel overbenefitted or underbenefitted in these areas of their lives. However, couples perceived equity to be relatively low when it came to money, perhaps reflecting the practice of most men paying for the expenses related to their dates. Sex differences were found in terms of feelings of inequity. To the extent that there was inequity in the relationship, women were more likely to feel overbenefitted, while men were more likely to perceive themselves as being underbenefitted (Sprecher, 2001). Finally, this study did not find that equity increased over time, as the theory suggests.

Thus, there appears to be some evidence that perceived equity is related to happiness as well as relationship satisfaction and stability. However, to conclude from these studies that people may, in fact, apply an equity rule to evaluating the quality of their relationship would be premature. Virtually all the studies in support of this idea used a global measure
Fairness and Equity

of equity (e.g., “Are you getting a better, worse, or equally good deal from your relationship as your partner?”). When dating couples are asked to rate the extent to which there is equity on specific dimensions of relationship inputs and outcomes, levels of equity no longer predict relationship satisfaction. Others (Clark & Mills, 1979) have even found that subscribing to a principle of equitable exchange can be downright harmful for the further development of a relationship. Specifically, people in close relationships who feel like they are being repaid for every benefit they award to the other end up being less attracted to that person. More importantly, and contrary to what equity theory predicts, people in a close relationship often avoid keeping track of their respective inputs (Clark, 1984; Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989).

Reactions to Inequity

The preceding discussion of the difficulties inherent in deciding what is equitable suggests that people in close relationships may be less motivated to achieve and maintain equity at all times. At the same time, it is reasonable to expect that glaring inequities may not go unnoticed. Theoretically, a relationship can be marked by inequity in either one of two ways. A person may find herself underbenefitted. Her outcomes, relative to her inputs, may be lower than that of her partner. Another person may find himself overbenefitted. His outcome, relative to his inputs, exceed those of his partner. According to the theory, both situations should have negative emotional consequences. This is fairly obvious in the case of the person who finds herself underbenefitted. She is likely to feel exploited, unhappy, and angry, and her satisfaction with the relationship may be low. Contrary to what intuition might suggest, the person who finds himself overbenefitted is not much better off. If nothing else, the person should feel guilty about getting more than his fair share. Both types of inequity, along with their respective emotional consequences, should lead to attempts to make the relationship more equitable. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. People might simply try to convince themselves and their partner that they are getting more or less out of the relationship than they actually do. Or they might try to convince themselves that their partner is getting more or less than he or she does.

Alternatively, people who find themselves in an inequitable relationship may attempt to restore equity behaviorally. An underbenefitted member of a couple may decide to decrease her inputs, whereas an overbenefitted member may increase his inputs. Or the couple may choose the somewhat more difficult option of asking each other to increase or decrease their inputs. Of course, symbolic attempts at restoring equity through changes in the perceptions of inputs may be more successful than actual behavioral attempts, as it is generally easier to change one’s perceptions than one’s actual behavior.

There is some evidence for some of the predictions equity theory makes about the emotional and behavioral consequences of inequity. Overall, underbenefitting inequity leads to greater distress then overbenefitting inequity (Sprecher, 2001). Further, several studies have shown that being underbenefitted results in feelings of unhappiness and anger, whereas being overbenefitted results in feelings of guilt. Still others (Sprecher, 2001) find gender differences in which underbenefitted men experience anger and depression while their female counterparts experience primarily frustration. Moreover, it is women’s feelings of being underbenefitted that are most likely to lead to relationship disruption (DeMaris, 2007). Although this finding suggests that perceived inequity contributes to marital dissatisfaction (DeMaris, 2007), there is also evidence that the opposite may occur. Marital
distress can compel partners to begin scrutinizing their relationship outcomes, which may result in perceptions of inequity or unfairness (Grote & Clark, 2001). Of course, realizing unfairness may lead to a further deterioration of the relationship.

These issues aside, equity is generally associated with happiness and contentment (Hatfield et al., 1979; Walster, Walster, & Traupman, 1978). However, these particular findings were obtained by asking research participants first about how equitable or inequitable their relationship was and then asking them to indicate how content, happy, angry, and guilty they felt. It is never clear just how much people’s self-reports can be trusted (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), and, in the case of these studies, some extra caution should be warranted, especially since no attempt was made to disguise their purpose. It may be that responding to the questions made salient norms about how one ought to feel in cases of inequity (e.g., “I get more out of this than my partner, so I had better feel guilty”); thus, the results may be partially due to the demands inherent in each study.

Longitudinal studies have attempted to push our understanding of equity beyond that obtained via paper-and-pencil measures. van Yperen and Buunk (1990) followed the relationships of 736 married Dutch couples for a year and found that equitable relationships were more comfortable and satisfying. And contrary to Sprecher’s (2001) findings, relationships that did not dissolve over the course of the study became more equitable over time.

Empirical tests of the predictions made by equity theory about behavioral avenues toward the restoration of equity provide a mixed bag of evidence. Reasoning that underbenefitted members of couples may call in the chips in order to restore equity, one study (Hatfield et al., 1979) hypothesized that dating couples in which the male partner is underbenefitted would have sex more frequently than couples in which the male partner is overbenefitted or couples who have an equitable relationship. The general idea is that there is a double standard suggesting that men are supposed to have sex and women are supposed to dispense it cautiously. Therefore, if a man finds himself shortchanged, equity can be restored by an increase in the frequency with which the couple has sex because it requires an increase in the woman’s input to the relationship, which should lead to an increase in the man’s outcomes. At the same time, couples in which the man is overbenefitted should have sex less often because women may now withhold sex to restore equity.

Those who find this line of reasoning less than compelling may be reaffirmed by the results of the study, which showed that couples who felt that their relationships were equitable had sex more frequently than any other set of couples. Although this finding is inconsistent with the specific predictions of the study, it does make a great deal of sense, perhaps even from an equity point of view. Remember, couples who feel that their relationship is equitable are generally happier than couples who feel there is inequity. And while happiness is not a prerequisite for sex, common sense suggests that it promotes its enjoyment.

To sum up, at some point, equity theory appeared to be a promising approach to finding out how two people may evaluate their relationship outcomes, including a seemingly easy-to-use formula. In its heyday, some (e.g., Hatfield et al., 1979) felt that equity theory might someday become the foundation for a general theory of human behavior. However, support for its major predictions has been hard to come by. This, combined with a more general distaste for a theory that proposes people would keep track of relationship inputs and outcomes in an almost bean-counting fashion, has put equity theory’s seeming promise in perspective.
Evaluating Relationship Outcomes: Comparison Levels

The difficulties with equity theory aside, it is probably fair to say that people will evaluate their relationship at least occasionally. Most people have a pretty good idea of how satisfied or dissatisfied they are in their relationship. Of course, if such evaluations are not based on rules of equity, one must ask just how people go about making these types of assessments.

The Thibaut and Kelley Model

One approach (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) proposes that people evaluate their relationship against two standards. The first standard is a comparison level (CL) that summarizes what people expect to get or deserve from a relationship. This comparison level may be an idealized standard, such as perpetual romance, or it may be a more realistic standard comprised of past relationship experiences, cultural ideas, or social comparison to one’s siblings or friends. From this latter perspective, comparison levels can change over time. A series of highly satisfying relationships is likely to increase one’s CL, whereas a series of bad relationships is likely to decrease it. The extent to which people are satisfied with their relationship is then a function of their current outcomes compared to their expectations (CL). When the outcomes exceed the CL, people will be satisfied with their relationship; when the outcomes fall below, people will be dissatisfied. The degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is determined by the magnitude of the discrepancy between outcomes and CL.

In Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) original proposal, the CL was considered a universal quantitative standard against which outcomes are compared. Thus, if Ashley expects five units of companionship and Derek provides eight units, she should be quite satisfied with her relationship. However, the issue becomes complicated when one takes into account people’s mental models of relationships—that is, the kinds of things they idiosyncratically expect from their relationship. As it turns out, people vary widely in terms of the characteristics their ideal relationship should have (Rusbult, Onizuka, & Lipkus, 1993). On the surface, Ashley may be quite satisfied with the level of companionship Derek provides, but if she really values passion and intimacy and her outcomes on these dimensions fall
below her CL, she will likely be somewhat unhappy. After all, even though companionship may be a good thing, it does not really compensate for a perceived lack of intimacy and passion. Thus, in order to determine whether someone is satisfied with a relationship, one needs to take into account both the quantity as well as the quality of what is received.

In addition to comparing relationship outcomes to a general comparison level, people use a comparison level for alternatives (CL\textsubscript{Alt}). In this comparison, people contrast their current relationship outcomes with the outcomes they could obtain from a possible alternative relationship. If the current outcomes exceed the CL\textsubscript{Alt}, people are somewhat dependent on their partners and their relationship will be relatively stable. On the other hand, if the outcomes are lower than the CL\textsubscript{Alt}, a person may decide to leave a current relationship in favor of the alternative. Of course, a person’s CL\textsubscript{Alt} may fluctuate, as its level depends on the availability of possible alternatives, which may vary over time and across situations.

The two comparison levels produce at least four different kinds of relationships, depending on how one’s current outcomes stack up against the CL and the CL\textsubscript{Alt}, as depicted in Table 6.1. Level 1 shows a person in a relationship marked by attractive stability. The person’s outcomes from his current relationship exceed both his CL and his CL\textsubscript{Alt}. He should be highly satisfied with his relationship, but also fairly dependent on it, because his outcomes from an alternative relationship would be much lower than his current outcomes. Level 2 shows a person in a relationship marked by attractive instability. The person’s outcomes exceed her expectations, but she could do better by leaving the relationship in favor of the alternative possibility. Level 3 shows a person in a relationship marked by unattractive stability. The person is unhappy because he is getting less from his current relationship than what he expects, but by leaving it, he would be even worse off. Level 4 shows a person in a relationship marked by unattractive instability. What this individual gets from her current relationship falls below her expectations and what she could get from an alternative relationship. According to comparison level theory, it is a pretty safe bet that the relationship will end soon. In fact, there is ample research suggesting that, compared to individuals whose relationships persist, those whose relationships end often report lower satisfaction along with more attractive alternatives (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985; Simpson, 1987).

Interestingly, our evaluations of possible alternatives appear to decrease as our commitment to a relationship increases. You may recall from Chapter 3 that people in exclusive dating relationships tend to perceive opposite-sex persons as less attractive than people who are dating more casually or not dating at all (Simpson et al., 1990). It turns out that this effect is not limited to perceptions of physical attractiveness, but instead extends to other characteristics, as well (Rusbult, 1983). This tendency to devalue possible alternatives is strongest among those who are committed to a relationship and are presented with an extremely appealing alternative. Furthermore, this devaluation is more closely related to commitment rather than satisfaction per se (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989).
Fairness and Equity

The Investment Model

What creates commitment in the first place? This question has been addressed by a model that extends interdependence models in two ways. Specifically, the investment model (e.g., Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Rusbult, 1983) suggests that attraction and dependence are to some extent influenced by the level of investment one has in a relationship. Alina becomes increasingly dependent on Michael to the extent that the relationship is rewarding, that there are few alternatives, and that she feels bound by the relationship (i.e., is highly invested in it). The confluence of these forces leads to relationships marked by increasing cognitive interdependence. As Alina and Michael become increasingly committed to continuing their relationship, foreseeing an extended future, they are likely to engage in more frequent relationship-relevant cognitive activity (e.g., Wegner et al., 1991), and the nature of their identity and self-presentation is likely to shift, as well (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1997). In other words, Alina will come to view herself as part of a unit. Interestingly, this link between commitment and interdependence is strongest in romantic relationships (Agnew et al., 1998), suggesting that it is a unique mechanism that sustains exclusivity—a relationship feature that is more important in romantic relationships than in friendships.

It is all too easy to construe commitment and investment in terms of extemporaneous markers such as marriage. However, they are present to varying degrees in all close relationships—straight and gay alike (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Rusbult, 1983). It appears from these observations that investment is a state of mind one brings to a relationship. Recent work has extended our understanding of the types of investments on the level of commitment to a relationship. Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) distinguished investments in terms of their timing (past vs. planned) as well as their materiality (tangible vs. intangible).

Money spent on a relationship would be an example of a past tangible investment whereas time spent in a relationship would be an example of a past intangible investment. Planned investments represent the goals and investments to come, such as getting married, buying a home, having children, or retiring to Hawaii. Data from five studies using diverse samples of dating and married couples, college students, and an older non-college population supported the idea that both the materiality and the timing of investments mattered. Intangible past investments and planned investments contributed significantly to strengthening commitment. Higher levels of planned investments also serve as a buffer to relationship dissolution and are also more likely to impede, after dissolution, the establishment of new relationships (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008).

Understanding what leads to increases in commitment is of obvious importance as it has been implicated in many important relationship functions—most notably decisions on whether to leave or stay (e.g., Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Le & Agnew, 2003; Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend, & Agnew, 2006). A meta-analysis testing the investment model assessed the degree to which relationship satisfaction, the presence of relationship alternatives, and investment size predict commitment and subsequent relationship duration (Le & Agnew, 2003). Relationship satisfaction was a better predictor of relationship duration than the presence of alternatives and investment size, although all three predicted commitment. Finally, the causal arrow points in both directions as commitment predicts relationship satisfaction in married couples (Givertz, Segrin, & Woszidlo, 2016) along with decisions to stay or leave (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). We revisit the role of commitment on how partners make decisions of this kind in Chapter 13.
In conclusion, the research based on Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) theory does a good job of describing how people evaluate their relationships and in predicting the consequences of certain types of comparison outcomes. People are undoubtedly happy with their relationships if they exceed their expectations, and people become dissatisfied when their relationships fall below their expectations. The theory suggests reasons why many people remain in relationships with which they are unhappy and further suggests reasons why some people may walk out of what seem to be perfectly good relationships. Still, some scholars seem troubled by the suggestion that people apply some sort of calculus involving a comparison of their relationship outcomes. After all, such a notion seems to imply that there is little difference in how we conduct ourselves in close relationships and casual relationships. The following section considers a somewhat radical approach that emphasizes the differences in the norms guiding our relationships with close others and strangers.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Can you find commonalities between variants of social exchange theory discussed at the beginning of this chapter and the Thibaut and Kelley model?
- Some research shows a tendency among those in committed relationships to devalue alternatives, especially extremely appealing ones. To make things more interesting, this tendency is not directly related to relationship satisfaction, but with commitment. How would you explain these findings?
- Some research found that intangible and planned investments have a greater influence on relationship stability than tangible and past investments. This conclusion seems a little counterintuitive, especially since one would expect investments that have already been made to weigh more heavily. How would you explain these findings?

Close Relationships as Communal Relationships

Some (Clark & Mills, 1979) have argued that our relationships with close others are fundamentally different from those we have with casual acquaintances or strangers. According to this view, for example, relationships with our employers and those who provide us with goods and services are based on exchange principles. We expect our employers to compensate us adequately for the amount of effort we put into our jobs. When we realize that we are getting less than we can reasonably expect, we become unhappy and, depending on the availability of alternatives, might decide to take our skills elsewhere. When we pay $50 for a concert ticket, we expect the band to show up, start on time, and play for more than 45 minutes. When we lend our chainsaw to a neighbor across the street, we often do it with the expectation that someday he will let us borrow his jumper cables. In all these examples, people exchange things with the expectation of getting something in return, either immediately or in the near future.

Other types of relationships are not as easily captured in terms of exchange. For example, precisely what do teachers and their students exchange? If it is a tradeoff between effort and grades, what are the teacher’s contributions to the exchange? What is the nature
of the exchange that takes place between parents and their children? Historically and culturally, children were often expected to provide for their parents once they reach old age. However, this type of exchange has in many cases given way to employer-sponsored retirement funds, social security, and nursing homes. Of course, one could argue that raising children has its own rewards. Then again, how many smiles and coos do we expect in return for changing one messy diaper?

Faced with such difficulties in conceptualizing a variety of relationships in terms of exchange principles, Clark and Mills (1979) proposed that close relationships may best be considered communal in nature. In communal relationships, giving and receiving benefits are guided by different norms and principles, which render them qualitatively different from exchange relationships.

Giving and Receiving Benefits

In exchange relationships, benefits are given either in exchange for past benefits or with the expectation of receiving benefits in the future. This is why we often feel compelled to return favors when we are dealing with relative strangers or casual acquaintances. Such considerations do not matter in close relationships. Instead, the giving of benefits is, or should be, guided by the other’s needs or our desire to please the other (Clark & Mills, 1979). For example, in deciding on a wedding gift for a couple of friends, we carefully examine what they would like and need by consulting their registry and making a choice accordingly. It matters little what they have given us for our own wedding. Moreover, if we find that a close other responds to us by returning favors and assistance in a tit-for-tat fashion, we are likely to experience a measure of discomfort, and we may even like him or her less.

These assertions about a need-based norm regarding the giving and receiving of benefits in close relationships have received a fair amount of empirical support. One of the first investigations was designed to test the idea that in exchange relationships, benefits are given in exchange for receiving past benefits or with the expectation of future benefits. In communal relationships, on the other hand, benefits are given according to the other’s needs, without consideration of past or future benefits (Clark & Mills, 1979). In this study, male research participants were led to believe that they could expect either an exchange or a communal relationship with a female confederate who posed as either married or new in town and thus anxious to meet people. Participants then worked on a task that required them to create as many words from a set of letters as they could for points from the experimenter. While doing the task, they were under the impression that the confederate was in another room doing the same task but using fewer letters. Because that essentially made the confederate’s task harder, the experimenter gave research participants the opportunity to send any extra letters to the confederate if she so requested through an elaborate message system. This manipulation allowed research participants to give benefits to another with whom they expected either an exchange or communal relationship. In addition, the confederate responded to research participants’ benefits in one of two ways. She sent research participants a note, thanking them for the letter, and included a letter from her set in return. This essentially communicated that she was desiring an exchange relationship. Alternatively, she sent research participants a note containing a simple “Thank you” without returning the favor. At the end of the experiment, research participants were asked to indicate their liking for the confederate.
The results of the experiment were in line with what Clark and Mills (1979) had predicted. Research participants who expected an exchange relationship with the allegedly married confederate liked her most when she followed exchange-based norms—that is, when she returned research participants’ favors. On the other hand, research participants who expected the possibility of a communal relationship with the single woman liked her most when she followed communal norms—that is, when she offered no repayment. Moreover, when the confederate violated the norms of the type of the expected relationship by either following communal norms in the exchange situation or exchange norms in the communal situation, research participants’ liking of her decreased substantially (see Table 6.2).

There are several reasons that may lead to decreased liking for someone who violates our expectations about the rules in which people in exchange and communal relationships are to conduct themselves. In exchange relationships, giving a benefit comes with the expectation of repayment, ideally in the form of a comparable benefit. At the same time, receiving a benefit creates an obligation to respond with a comparable benefit. When this expectation is violated, people will feel shortchanged and exploited, just as equity theory would predict. However, this same expectation is not only absent in communal relationships, but it may be downright absurd (e.g., Mills & Clark, 1994). In its strongest form, it would suggest that if Jennifer gives Jason a three-pack of Under Armour briefs for his birthday, Jason is to reply in kind (three thongs from Victoria’s Secret?). At the very least, this type of gift exchange is likely to leave Jennifer with a sense of bewilderment at Jason’s lack of originality. Things do not become much better if Jason decides on a gift that simply costs as much as the underwear and is thus comparable in value. After all, it is considered tacky to leave the price tag on gifts (partly because it creates the impression that we expect future, comparable repayment).

Our expectations of what should happen in a communal relationship can influence how we perceive others, how we behave toward them, and how much we like them. That is, holding a communal orientation also has the power to break down barriers and facilitate the development of interdependence (Lemay & Clark, 2008). In other words, it is relationship promoting. For example, research participants who perceived themselves to have a high degree of communal responsiveness projected this orientation onto their partners. Believing their partners to be equally communal, participants reacted with relationship-promoting behaviors such as greater self-disclosure, caring, and positive views of their partner (Lemay & Clark, 2008).

Of course, the differences in the norms guiding the giving and receiving of benefits in exchange relationships, as opposed to communal relationships, should be reflected in terms of how much we like someone who either follows or violates the respective rules. Moreover, one would also expect to find differences in terms of how closely people keep track of their inputs in casual and close relationships. Specifically, one would expect people

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<td>Lower levels of liking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confederate follows communal norms</td>
<td>Liking high for this confederate</td>
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The first study was similar to the procedure used by Clark and Mills (1979). Pairs of strangers were led to believe that their partner desired either an exchange or communal relationship. All research participants then worked on a joint task for which they expected a reward. The task consisted of circling numbers that were arranged as a matrix; the reward would be given according to how well the pair (rather than the individuals) performed. To complete the task, research participants could choose pens that were the same color as or a different color from the one their partner used. As expected, research participants who considered the relationship with their partner as an exchange relationship chose the different color pens significantly more often (87.5 percent of the time) than what one would expect by chance. Apparently, their choice was motivated by a desire to keep track of each other's inputs in the service of dividing the joint reward proportionately. At the same time, research participants who desired a communal relationship chose the different color pens significantly less often than what one would expect by chance (12.5 percent of the time), presumably because they felt compelled to obscure any differences in the respective inputs. Similar results were obtained in the second study, when the behavior of friends, who should think of their relationship as communal in nature, was compared to the behavior of strangers, who should think of their relationship as an exchange relationship.

For the same reason that keeping track of inputs becomes unimportant for communal relationships, keeping track of the other's needs increases in importance. This should be true regardless of whether the other person has an opportunity to reciprocate for a benefit in kind. Instead, the giving of benefits in communal relationships should be exclusively guided by an orientation toward the other's needs. This should not be the case in exchange relationships, where reciprocation, expected or actual, should determine the willingness to give a benefit. These hypotheses were confirmed in a study (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986) that employed a paradigm similar to the one used by Clark and Mills (1979). The main difference was that instead of actually returning benefits, research participants had a chance to check on whether their partner needed help under conditions of reciprocation or no reciprocation. As it turned out, research participants who expected an exchange relationship checked more often when they knew the other might reciprocate, whereas for research participants who expected a communal relationship, the possibility for reciprocation did not influence the frequency with which they checked for calls for help. Another way to look at relationship orientation is in terms of stable individual differences. In other words, people chronically differ in the extent to which they approach relationships in an exchange or communal fashion. Toward that end, Mills and Clark (1994) developed a scale to measure these individual differences. It is depicted in Table 6.3.

**Controversies Surrounding the Communal-Exchange Distinction**

Despite the impressive amount of research in its favor, the distinction between exchange and communal relationships is not without its critics. One frequent argument claims that the distinction is based on research conducted in somewhat artificial laboratory settings in which the type of relationship is experimentally manipulated. However, this argument is not particularly compelling in light of the fact that studies that looked at the
behavior of friends (e.g., Clark, 1984; Clark et al., 1989) have, by and large, obtained results that are consistent with those studies that manipulate the type of relationship experimentally.

A second issue relates to whether communal relationships are really exchange relationships with an extended time perspective. In other words, people in communal relationships may not expect immediate repayment or reciprocation, but instead expect the giving and receiving of benefits to be equitable in the long run (Batson, 1993). However, this idea is not easily reconciled with the findings showing that people in communal relationships do not keep track of their inputs. Without such knowledge, it is unclear how they would determine what to expect in the future (Clark & Mills, 1993).

A final and related criticism holds that the etiquette of the exchange is what sets communal relationships apart from exchange relationships (Batson, 1993). You expect the mechanic who worked on your car to present you with a bill for his services, but you probably don’t expect your date to directly “pay” for dinner with affection. However, the main reason for not holding this expectation is that a communal orientation prevents you from seeking this kind of quid pro quo while at the same time allowing you to anticipate exchanges of affection at a future point in time (Clark & Mills, 1993).

**Communal Orientation and Relationship Satisfaction**

It appears, then, that the distinction between exchange and communal relationships is a meaningful one both in terms of its theoretical and empirical foundations. By adopting a communal orientation, partners in a close relationship respond to each other’s needs, as we
have seen. Their responsiveness is in large part a matter of projection. Essentially, people project their own care and supportiveness for their partner onto the perceptions of their partner’s care and supportiveness for them. And the projected perceptions of responsiveness promote satisfaction with the relationship (Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007). Further contributing to relationship satisfaction may be that partners in a communal relationship are more willing to express positive and negative emotions, which is associated with more liking for the other (Clark & Taraban, 1991).

Of course, it is entirely possible that responsiveness may have at least some limits. For example, whether or not one responds to another’s need may to some extent be determined by its perceived legitimacy. Most people are probably somewhat reluctant to accommodate their partner’s need for “more space.” It is also possible that people for whom equity is highly salient, perhaps because they are deprived of it at work and elsewhere, might seek it in their close relationships in a compensatory fashion. None of these issues is likely to shatter the usefulness of the distinction between communal and exchange relationships. In fact, research (Bartz & Lydon, 2006) has found predicted patterns of preferences for either communal or exchange norms that cleave along the lines of an individual’s attachment style. Securely attached individuals were more comfortable in communal situations while avoidantly attached individuals actually disliked others who attempted to respond according to communal norms.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Some relationships are difficult to capture in terms of the exchanges they entail. Relationships between teachers and student are a case in point. Do you think they fit better with the exchange or the communal type? How would you describe them?
- In communal relationships benefits are given according to the other’s needs, without consideration of one’s own benefits. How can you reconcile that with what you know about the need to belong, the need for intimacy, and the need for affiliation?
- Do you think the orientation could change from communal to exchange in a romantic relationship? What could cause such a shift? What might be the consequences?

Summary

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Research

• A great deal of research supports equity theory, although results are frequently based on self-reports
• At least one study failed to support predictions regarding attempts to restore equity
• Comparison level theory has been supported by several studies that showed that satisfaction combined with dependence are important to stay/leave decisions
• Commitment is an important mediator of perceptions of the attractiveness of alternatives
• A meta-analysis of studies on the investment model supports the roles of relationship satisfaction, availability of alternatives, and investments into the relationship in predicting commitment and stay/leave decisions (Le & Agnew, 2003)
• Studies in which participants’ expectations for communal vs. exchange relationships were manipulated demonstrated that both types of relationships are guided by different principles regarding the giving and receiving of benefits (Clark & Mills, 1979)

Key Terms

Social exchange theories: a set of theories proposing that all human interactions can be construed in terms of exchanges of mutually rewarding activities.
Reward: in social exchange theory, anything a person values.
Equity Theory: a theory that proposes that individuals in relationships seek a ratio of inputs to outcomes that is equal to their partner’s.
Thibaut and Kelley Model: this model predicts that satisfaction and stability of a relationship are determined by the way people compare their relationship to two standards—a comparison level, and a comparison level for the alternatives.
Comparison level: standard of comparison that summarizes what people expect to get from a relationship.
Comparison level for alternatives: standard of comparison between current relationship outcomes and outcomes from a possible alternative relationship.
Investment model: suggests that attraction and dependence are influenced by the level of investment one has in a relationship.
Communal relationship: type of relationship in which benefits are given according to needs, without consideration of past or future benefits.
Exchange relationship: type of relationship in which benefits are given either in exchange for past benefits or with the expectation of future benefits.
7 Love and Emotion

When “Love Marriage” Needs a Little Help

After decades of fixing arranged marriages for their children, Indian parents are taking on a new challenge: trying to orchestrate their kids’ love marriages. A new generation of young Indian professionals has refused to follow the arranged-marriage route, with its emphasis on caste, family ties, wealth and skin color—with the blessings of their parents.

But as these kids tread toward their 30s, some parents say they fear their offspring’s chances of finding a marriage partner are evaporating entirely. These parents, while trying to respect their children’s wishes, are trying other measures, like pushing their offspring to singles networks and online dating sites.

Take Pramodini Srinivasan, a former trainer in the information technology industry and now a writer for a wellness Web Site. Ms. Srinivasan has a Bangalor-based nephew who is nearing 40 and Bangalore-bred son in London who is hitting 30. Both are indifferent to marrying within their traditional south Indian community.

But neither has made any headway in finding a wife on their own, even though Ms. Srinivasan has declared that she would be happy for them to fall in love and marry.


Few relationship issues have fascinated people as thoroughly and consistently as love. Songwriters, philosophers, poets, and even religious scholars have speculated on the antecedents, features, and consequences of love. Some have suggested that love is a many-splendored thing; others have offered that love hurts and stinks; and still others have focused on the nature of different types of love, such as platonic love, brotherly love, and Christian love. For most Westerners, love is considered a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for marriage, whereas other cultures have traditionally awarded it a more secondary consideration.

Psychologists, in general, and social psychologists, in particular, entered the study of love at a relatively late stage. This is not surprising in light of the various paradigms that dominated the discipline at one point or another. Freud’s seemingly obsessive preoccupation with sex as a major motivator of human behavior compelled him to define love as a compensatory mechanism that kicked in whenever the desire for a sexual union was blocked. Presumably, sexual frustration of this sort leads to idealization of the other person along with a feeling of falling in love (Freud, 1922). For the behaviorists, with their exclusive focus on stimulus-response connections, sex was important for the experience of love in a very different way. Specifically, Watson (1924) considered it an innate response elicited by the cutaneous stimulation of the erogenous zones. Finally, social psychologists
of the 1950s and 1960s treated love as an attitude that predisposes one to think, feel, and act toward another in certain ways (Rubin, 1970).

Presumably, if Ivanka thinks that Jared is a pretty neat guy, she will have positive feelings about him and may consequently entertain a proposal for a dinner date with some degree of seriousness. Such a sequence of events is suggested by one prominent view (e.g., Breckler, 1984; Eiser, 1986) that looks at attitudes as consisting of three components: (1) a *cognitive component*, which consists of everything we know and believe about an object or a person; (2) an *affective component*, which describes our feelings toward the object or person; and (3) a *behavioral or conative component*, which contains our behavioral intentions toward the object or person.

Thus, someone with a favorable attitude about broccoli is likely to have favorable beliefs about it, along with positive feelings and an urge to consume it whenever the opportunity presents itself. Similarly, if Fred has favorable beliefs about Linda, then he is likely to have positive feelings about her, along with a tendency to seek out her company. Note that there is an underlying assumption of consistency here. Favorable or unfavorable beliefs about an object or person usually fall in line with positive or negative feelings and their corresponding behavioral intentions. As it turns out, this assumption is more troublesome than one might suspect. Frequently, our belief about the healthiness of broccoli does not translate into liking, much less into a desire to eat it, and the same can hold for our attitudes about people (e.g., Tesser & Shaffer, 1990). As a result of such complications, research on attitudes became more preoccupied with resolving issues of consistency among its components than with delineating the nature of their affective components.

In defense of academic psychology, it is important to note that laypeople appear to be just as confused about the nature and meaning of love. Visitors to the United States are frequently struck by the effusiveness with which Americans express what appear to be simple preferences. We claim that we *love* (or hate) skateboarding, arugula, and mojitos when in fact we merely *like* (or dislike) them. This seems to imply that love is simply intense liking. Then again, people often go to great lengths to assure us that they like us but not necessarily love us. The suggestion to “just be friends” is not really an indication that a reduction in love should ensue but instead implies that liking should be the predominant sentiment in the relationship.

Liking and Loving: A Conceptual Distinction

Given the profound implications of labeling one’s feelings for another as “love” rather than “liking,” psychologists were eventually forced to abandon the idea that love was nothing more than intense liking (Heider, 1958). Interestingly, the first crack at differentiating between the two types of sentiments came out of an attempt to develop attitude scales that would distinguish the extent to which a person *likes* another and the extent to which a person *loves* another. Specifically, Rubin (1970) developed two attitude scales to measure love and liking. A few samples follow:

**Liking Items**

1. I think that ___ is unusually well-adjusted.
2. I think that ___ is one of those people who quickly wins respect.
3. I think that ___ and I are quite similar to each other
4. I have great confidence in ___’s good judgment.
Love Items

1. If I could never be with ___, I would be miserable
2. I feel very possessive toward ___.
3. I would do almost anything for ___.
4. I feel I can confide in ___ about virtually everything.

A look at the items of both scales shows several things. First, liking appears to be a matter of favorable evaluation of the other (e.g., “I think that ___ is unusually well-adjusted”), respect for the other (e.g., “I think that ___ is one of those people who quickly wins respect”), and the perception of similarity (e.g., “I think that ___ and I are quite similar to each other”). Love, on the other hand, seems to consist of an affiliative and dependent need component (e.g., “If I could never be with ___, I would be miserable”), an exclusiveness and absorption component (e.g., “I feel very possessive toward ___”), and a predisposition to help (e.g., “I would do almost anything for ___”).

To further explore the differences between liking and love, Rubin administered both scales to 158 dating couples and asked them to respond once with their dating partner in mind and once with a close same-sex friend in mind. The finding from this study corroborated many of Rubin’s speculations about the differences between liking and love, although there were a few surprises, as well. First, the two scales were only moderately correlated, suggesting that although liking and love often go hand in hand, they are not the same thing. As we all know, we can like others without loving them, and sometimes we may love others without really liking them all that much. Along these lines, participants liked their dating partners only slightly more than their same-sex friends, but they loved their dating partners much more than their friends. Somewhat surprisingly, scores on the love and liking scales were more highly correlated for men, suggesting that men are perhaps more confused about the true nature of their feelings, whereas women are prone to make more subtle distinctions. Finally, women tended to like their boyfriends more than they were liked in return. This difference was almost entirely due to differences in the ratings of task-related dimensions, such as good judgment, intelligence, and leadership potential. Keep in mind, however, that this study was conducted over 40 years ago. It may be that in these days of increased gender equality, this type of finding may no longer be obtained.

The Prototype of Love

In thinking about the differences between love and liking, Rubin (1970) was initially inspired by the writings of anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists. Their speculations about the nature of love became the basis for many of the items that subsequently formed the love scale. In using this approach, Rubin ended up with a sample that was strongly biased in favor of highly educated academics marked by peculiar ways of thinking.

But what about people whose thinking has not been contaminated by years of intellectual immersion in an academic discipline? Would they think of love in the same way as a psychologist or an anthropologist? Maybe. Maybe not. What love is in most people’s minds may be an empirical question. To that end, all one would need to do is to ask a sufficient number of people to list the features of love as they see it and look for a consensus about which features are considered more or less central by most people.
This would establish a prototype of love; that is, the results would yield the features most commonly associated with love. Fehr (1988) took this very approach by first asking a large number of undergraduate research participants to list as many features of love as they could think of in 3 minutes. This procedure resulted in a list of 68 features that were listed by two or more people. Fehr then asked a second group of undergraduates to rate each item on the list in terms of how central this feature is to love, using an 8-point scale ranging from 1 (“extremely poor feature of love”) to 8 (“extremely good feature of love”). The 10 most central and 10 least central features are listed in Table 7.1.

The picture of love painted by this study is slightly different from that of Rubin. On the one hand, Rubin’s predisposition to help seems to be reflected in “Concern for the other’s well-being” and “Supportiveness.” Similarly, Rubin’s affiliative and dependent need appears to be reflected in “Want to be with the other” (not shown in Table 7.1). On the other hand, “Friendship” and “Respect,” which were among Fehr’s most central features of love, had been classified by Rubin as being part of liking. However, before we can brand academics as sadly misguided in their thinking, we need to acknowledge one possible shortcoming of Fehr’s (1988) study. It may be that participants’ responses were at least partly influenced by their normative expectations regarding what love should be rather than what love is. This could explain why “Sexual passion” (not shown in Table 7.1) was rated as a peripheral rather than a central feature of love.

These shortcomings aside, it is probably safe to conclude that for most people love is a curious mixture of trusting, caring, helping, wanting, and commitment. With this in mind, we can now look at some theories that deal with the issue of how this particular emotion comes about in the first place.

Causal Theories of Love

The Evolution of Love

Love is generally considered a uniquely human emotion. If we adopt this view, the human capacity to experience love may be related to reproduction and genetic survival.
Humans face some unique reproductive challenges that have required unique adaptations. Compared to other primates, human offspring are weak, slow to develop, and dependent on adult caretakers until well into their teens (Martin, 2003; Hill & Kaplan, 1999). At the same time, human offspring are weaned at a much earlier age than most other primates, which allows for shorter intervals between births. One adaptation to the challenges of raising several highly dependent children at the same time is bi-parental care (Pillsworth & Haselton, 2005). Simply put, two parents are better than one at providing for high-maintenance offspring. Fathers in particular provide nutritional and social resources, protection against predators, and models for learning (e.g., Marlowe, 2003).

Successful bi-parental care requires a strong parental investment on the father’s part, which in turn requires a high degree of certainty regarding a child’s paternity (Trivers, 1972). Pair bonding provides a basis for that certainty, maximizing the parental investment on the father’s part. Love enables pair bonding and, along with commitment (Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001), provides the emotional glue to hold the bond together (Pillsworth & Haselton, 2005).

To the extent that love is part of an adaptation to evolutionary pressures, one would expect to find corresponding processes in the human brain (see Table 7.2 for a listing of the specific neurological substrates of lust, romantic love, and attachment). A study that looked at what happens in the brains of participants as they thought about their romantic partner identified dedicated neurotransmitters that correspond to our experience of three different processes common in the experience of love: lust, romantic attraction, and attachment (Fisher, Aron, Mashek, Li, & Brown, 2002). Lust and sexual attraction were associated with high levels of androgens and estrogens. Attraction and romantic love were associated with high levels of dopamine and norepinephrine along with low levels of indoleamine and serotonin. Finally, attachment was associated with processes involving oxytocin and vasopressin (Fisher, 2000; Fisher et al., 2002). More recently, oxytocin has been implicated in parental, romantic, and filial attachment in humans (Feldman, 2012), and many of its effects appear to be mediated by increasing perceptions and behaviors related to trust (Bartz, Zaki, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2011). At any rate, from an evolutionary perspective, lust, romantic attraction, and attachment

| Table 7.2 Neurological Substrates of Lust, Romantic Love, and Attachment |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Process**                 | **Neurological substrates**                                      |
| Lust (sexual attraction)    | **Androgens:** testosterone, estrogen—sex drive, libido         |
|                             | **Dopamine:** pleasure/reward system                              |
|                             | **Serotonin:** modulates anger, aggression, body temperature,    |
|                             |                     mood, sleep, appetite                                |
|                             | **Norepinephrine:** fight-or-flight system, modulates alertness,|
|                             |                     arousal, influences reward system                  |
| Romantic love               | **Oxytocin:** letdown reflex (lactation), uterine contractions,  |
|                             |                     released during orgasm, involved in social bonding,|
|                             |                     trust formation; in humans, released during hugging,|
|                             |                     touching                                       |
| Attachment                  | **Vasopressin:** involved in aggression, blood pressure regulation,|
|                             |                     temperature regulation, released during sex, supports pair |
|                             |                     bonding, induces male-to-male aggression          |
are the processes that regulate the emotional function of mating, reproduction, and parenting respectively.

Specific hormonal fluctuations have also been linked to the experience of love. Marazziti and Canale (2004) compared the neurobiology of men and women who had recently fallen in love (i.e., the “love group”) to those of single men and women and long-term couples. They found that men in the love group had lower levels of testosterone than either single men or those in long-term relationships. Conversely, women in relationships had higher testosterone levels than women from the other groups. It appears that this “hormone equalizing” serves to create greater similarity between the couple and further enhances continued pair bonding.

Finally, it appears that evolution has provided us with another foolproof mechanism for the experience of love and the success of pair bonding. Regions of the brain associated with dopamine also overlap with those rich in oxytocin and vasopressin receptors, which have long been associated with the reward centers of the brain (Curtis, Liu Aragona, & Wang, 2006; Aragona et al., 2006; Aron et al., 2005). Take a look at Table 7.2 for a comprehensive list of the neurological substrates of love: As far as our brains are concerned, experiencing love is rewarding!

Love as Misattribution of Arousal

Evolutionary principles provide a compelling yet somewhat distal explanation for why and how humans experience love. Misattribution theory (Schachter & Singer, 1962), which we discussed at length in Chapter 4, provides a more proximal account. As you may recall, within the framework of this theory, any emotion is a result of a change in the level of physiological arousal (e.g., increase in heart rate, perspiration, pupil dilation, etc.) that becomes labeled according to the cues available in the situation. And although no single study has explored the effects that misattribution of arousal may have for the specific experience of love, it is safe to speculate that any arousal-producing event or situation has the potential to at least intensify feelings of love. Trouble at work or school, parental or social disapproval (e.g., Driscoll et al., 1972), and the need to keep a relationship a secret (Lane & Wegner, 1994; Wegner et al., 1994) are but a few factors that may serve as sources of arousal with similar effects, as long as there is at least some ambiguity about the origin of the arousal in the first place.

Love as Preoccupation With the Other

The misattribution perspective on love primarily takes into account the importance of unexplained arousal, and it awards thinking a somewhat subsidiary status, as it limits its role to the task of explaining the arousal. However, it may be the case that thinking, particularly thinking about the other, may be an important component for the generation and subsequent intensification of subjective feelings of being in love. To outside observers, people who are in love often appear as though they have lost their minds. Not only do they go around with strange smiles on their faces, but they also seem to have a hard time concentrating on the most elementary tasks of life, such as working and enjoying time with their friends.

There is, of course, a good reason for this. People in love simply cannot help thinking about the object of their love at practically all times. But given the pervasiveness of this
preoccupation, it may be that thinking about the other has a causal effect on the experience of love. If nothing else, thinking about the other may intensify feelings of love in ways similar to how our evaluations of a variety of things seem to change the more we think about them. If, for example, we just left a movie theater with a sense of disappointment, further thinking is likely to increase our bad feelings. By the same token, if we liked the movie, thinking about it more is prone to increase our initial liking. Presumably, continued preoccupation with the movie brings to mind thoughts that are largely congruent with our initial evaluation, and thus additional thinking is likely to further polarize them (Tesser, 1978).

That this type of reasoning may explain the intensification of love over time is suggested by the results of a study in which members of dating couples recorded how often they thought about their partner over a period of two weeks (Tesser & Paulhus, 1976). Additionally, research participants in this study also reported on how much they felt they were in love at the beginning and end of the two-week period, using the love part of Rubin's liking and loving scales, as well as the number of dates during that time. Finally, research participants were asked to keep track of any discoveries they made about the other that could give rise to decreased feelings of love (e.g., strange and intolerable personal habits). This measure served as an indication of the reality constraints within which research participants thinking about the other took place. The general idea was that discovering that their partner is an alcoholic or an ax murderer might substantially alter the nature of research participants thoughts about their partner and ultimately attenuate the love they feel.

The results, as expected, showed that the frequency with which the members of the couples thought about each other was strongly correlated with their subjective experience of love. This manifested itself in a couple of ways. First, the frequency of thought at Time 1 (the beginning of the two-week period) was highly predictive of how much in love research participants felt at Time 2 (the end of the two-week period). At the same time, how much in love research participants felt at Time 1 predicted the frequency of thinking at Time 2. In other words, the more participants felt in love, the more they subsequently thought about the other, with the ultimate outcome of intensified feelings of love. Not surprisingly, dating frequency and love were positively correlated, but encountering reality constraints was negatively correlated with love. This latter finding is important for it suggests that love is not totally blind. Obsessive preoccupation with the other may to some extent border on idealization, but discovering things that we dislike about the other seems to impose an important constraint on this process. Furthermore, it suggests that obsessive thinking may have its most profound impact when we are lacking a lot of information about the other, perhaps because the relationship is in its very early stages and little self-disclosure has occurred, or perhaps because the lovers are kept apart by circumstances (Beach & Tesser, 1978).

Intense preoccupation with another person may be part of a motivational state that drives the preoccupied person to seek the companionship of or union with the target of their desire. Rempel and Burris (2005) suggested that specific situations create these motivational states or drives that compel us to seek proximity to a loved one. They identify unique sets of circumstances that trigger the experience of six types of love: erotic love, dependence, enrichment, companionate love, regard, and altruistic love. This drive approach suggests that there are different types of love. Their scheme corresponds with much of what researchers on type theories have proposed.
Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- The results of Fehr’s (1988) study may be partially attributed to participants being influenced by normative expectations about love. If that is the case, how might participants from non-Western cultures respond? How would their answers speak to the universality of love?
- If love is an evolved mechanism meant to ensure successful bi-parental care for the children, what implications does this have for single parenthood?
- Beach and Tesser’s (1978) model of love as preoccupation with the other predicts that the more you dwell on your love, the more it intensifies. Can you think of circumstances where this would not be the case? Can you think of circumstances where the opposite might happen?

Type Theories of Love

In some ways, causal theories of love focusing on the role of arousal and obsessive thinking are neat and tidy theories as they isolate some of the factors that help translate attraction into love and lead to a further intensification of love. The tidiness of such mini-theories (Bentler & Huba, 1979), however, is not without its cost. For one thing, cynics might object to these theories as treating love as a “secondhand emotion,” originating primarily from physiological arousal and obsessive thinking. For another, by focusing primarily on increases (or decreases) in the experience of love, these theories look at love mostly in terms of its quantitative aspects. At the same time, they devote little or no attention to the qualitative differences in the experience of love from one person and one relationship to the next. Obviously, the kind of love we have for our siblings is different from the kind of love we feel for our romantic partners. Moreover, in reviewing our past intimate relationships, we often remember qualitative differences in infatuation, companionship, and the like rather than differences in the amount of love we felt for another. That love has many manifestations, even in the context of intimate relationships, has been addressed by various theories stressing individual differences in love. Common to these approaches is the theme that there are different types of love that vary more or less systematically among people.

The Colors of Love

In many ways, the intellectual godfather of all individual difference approaches to love is John Lee’s (1973, 1988) typology of love as colors. By drawing on the color metaphor, Lee was able to come to some interesting assumptions about possible differences in love styles among people. First, just as we have different color preferences, we have idiosyncratic preferences for different love styles. Second, just as we prefer different colors for our wardrobe and our home, we prefer different love styles for different people. Third, just as color preferences change over time, preferences for love styles as well may change as we get older, perhaps as a result of our relationship history. Finally, just as
primary colors can be mixed to produce new ones, primary love styles can be mixed to produce secondary ones.

Armed with this set of assumptions, Lee went on to examine everything that had been written about love by poets, philosophers, and social scientists throughout history. Using the conclusions from his readings as a framework from which to understand people’s experiences, he collected structured accounts of how people experience love. On the basis of his combined analysis, Lee (1973) initially identified 12 different love styles that characterized the way most people experience and think about love. Eventually, this initial classification was pared down to six different love styles, composed of three primary love styles and three secondary love styles, which represented mixtures and compounds of the primary styles. In order to correspond to the different types of love described in the classical literature, Lee gave them Greek and Latin names rather than the names of colors.

Primary Love Styles

The first love style Lee identified was Eros, which describes the passionate love often caused by a strong attraction to the physical attributes of the other. Eros is love that is certainly not blind. Moreover, people characterized by this love style tend to think that finding the perfect mate is the most important thing in life. Once they have found their mate, the relationship is frequently characterized by a strong desire for abundant physical and verbal acknowledgments of their love. The polar opposite to Eros is Storge, a kind of companionate love style that develops out of friendship and interaction. It is most common in agrarian societies, where partner choice is limited by virtue of people’s proclivity to stay in one place for most of their lives, and is less typical for societies with high mobility. Unlike Eros, overt expressions of love and passion are rare; instead, the focus in Storge is on commonly shared interests. In addition to Eros and Storge, there is Ludus, which describes a sort of playful love mostly for the short term. Ludus lacks a “falling in love with all its trimmings” element as well as commitment in either time or exclusivity and thus is characteristic of people who prefer to remain single.

Secondary Love Styles

Mixing the proper amounts of Eros and Ludus results in a love style called Mania, the kind of dependent and possessive love characterized by obsessive preoccupation and intense jealousy. Similar to Eros, Mania requires constant and tangible assurances of love, but just like Ludus, there is no preference for any particular type of person. As the term implies, lovers characterized by Mania appear to have lost their senses as they vacillate between demonstrating their love and getting control of the relationship. As such, manic love has an element of pathology, which is further amplified by the tendency of manic lovers to project desired qualities onto their partner of choice.

Mixing Storge and Ludus results in the very different love style of Pragma, which describes a love style anchored around matters of logic and practicality. For pragmatic lovers, finding the compatible mate is first and foremost a practical problem that can be solved through effort and persistence. Just like Storge, Pragma tends to develop slowly, as pragmatic lovers are wary of warning signs. And, like Ludus lovers, pragmatic lovers
are restrained about commitment and the future, at least until they find the right partner. Sexual compatibility is considered to be important, but it is perceived to be a matter of sharpening skills rather than chemistry. Not surprisingly, pragmatic lovers like to join organizations, such as singles clubs, to find a partner.

Finally, mixing Eros and Storge yields Agape, a form of love that is selfless, giving, and altruistic. Lovers characterized by Agape consider love as a duty to respond to the needs of the other, even if their love is not reciprocated. And while Agape is espoused in the New Testament as the ultimate form of love (1 Corinthians 13: 4–7), it is perhaps the least common form of love in adult romantic relationships. Instead, it may be descriptive of the kind of love parents have for their children.

Research on Love Styles

Lee’s typology certainly has face validity, as most of us are able to sort ourselves and our love styles into one of his categories. Thus, it is not surprising that social scientists were quick to explore its utility and apply it to a variety of relationship phenomena, including partner choice, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability. Facilitated by Hendrick and Hendrick’s (1986) 42-item Love Attitude Scale (LAS), several studies revealed generally positive correlations in the love styles of two partners, especially on Eros (Davis & Latty-Mann, 1987; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). Of course, there is always the chicken-and-egg problem with interpreting correlational research: Are matching love styles the basis of choice, or do partners in a relationship come to share each other’s views?

The results on the relationship between love styles and satisfaction are less difficult to interpret. Consistent with the importance people generally place on passion and altruism, Eros and Agape are generally associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas Ludus and satisfaction tend to be negatively correlated (e.g., Bierhoff, 1991; Davis & Latty-Mann, 1987; Hendrick et al., 1988; Levy & Davis, 1988). Further, matching levels of Eros and Agape, along with Pragma, seem to predict relationship stability as well as the number of children a couple has (Bierhoff, 1991). However, as was true for partner matching, the question of whether love styles themselves or outcomes of the love styles (i.e., commitment, investment) predict stability more directly remains an open one.

In some ways, the interpretational ambiguities inherent in much of the research on love styles are mirrored by a number of conceptual ambiguities surrounding the very concept itself. As some (e.g., Clark & Reis, 1988; Davis, Kirkpatrick, Levy, & O’Hearn, 1994) have pointed out, Lee’s theory is essentially a descriptive typology of relatively complex syndromes containing components that are not necessarily found together in ways that an ideal type would suggest. What is lacking is a sense of which of the various components are more or less central to the various love styles. This lack of specificity, moreover, makes it difficult to assess the degree to which any one person matches each style. Lee’s theory is also silent on the issue of how different love styles evolve in the first place and how they change over time. However, because of the inductive way in which Lee generated his theory, further theorizing may not lead to answers to these questions: The lack of theoretical guidance makes it difficult to modify the theory in ways necessary to provide a maximally useful framework from which to understand just why and how “love is a many-splendored thing.”
A Triangular Theory of Love

Despite its shortcomings, Lee’s (1973, 1988) typology has been influential in setting the stage for other typologies of love that, although still primarily descriptive in nature, avoid some of the problems inherent in Lee’s theory. Working in a less inductive manner, Sternberg’s (1986, 1988) triangular theory of love proposed that love consists of three basic ingredients: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. The intimacy component refers to feelings that promote closeness, bondedness, and connectedness and includes such feelings as concern for the welfare of the other, subjectively experienced happiness, positive regard, sharing, support, mutual understanding, and intimate communication. The passion component refers to sources of arousal that promote the experience of passion, such as sexual needs and needs for self-esteem, affiliation, submission, dominance, and self-actualization. Finally, the decision/commitment component refers to the decision that one is in love with the other and the commitment to maintain that love.

Intimacy, passion, and commitment follow a unique time course as a relationship develops. In successful relationships, intimacy increases steadily, much in the way as self-disclosure increases. Conversely, dying relationships are characterized by a decrease in intimacy. Passion develops rapidly in the beginning of a relationship and is eventually replaced by habituation. However, drastic decreases or even a loss of passion may lead to a somewhat cyclical pattern by returning a relationship to its beginning. Of course, the larger question is: Where do increases and decreases in passion come from in the first place? One possibility is that passion is a function of intimacy. At the early stages of a relationship, passion will be high because of initial increases in intimacy (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999). Simply put, learning about another, sharing experiences, and finding out that the other person cares about you are arousing and thus provide the basis for passion. By the same token, as two people reach the point where they feel they know everything about each other, have run out of new experiences to share, and feel they understand each other completely, passion decreases accordingly.

The temporal pattern of decision/commitment depends somewhat on the success of a relationship, which to some extent is influenced by the development of intimacy and passion. In successful relationships, with rapidly increasing passion along with gradually increasing intimacy, commitment initially develops somewhat slowly. Dramatic events, such as having sex for the first time or moving in together, generally mark a drastic increase in commitment. Once couples are established because they are married, own a home, and have children, commitment levels off primarily because it reaches a ceiling; that is, it cannot increase any further.

The three components of love are present in all close relationships to various degrees. Assuming that in any given relationship, intimacy, passion, and commitment can be either low or high, Sternberg (1986) came up with eight forms of love that are characteristic of qualitatively different relationships. Consummate love describes the kind of relationship in which all three components are present, and consequently is the type of relationship for which many strive, yet few achieve. Realistically, most romantic relationships may be lacking in one or more components (see Figure 7.1).

Sternberg’s (1986; 1988) typology is useful in understanding how different forms of love result in qualitatively different relationships. However, at this point, there is little if any research supporting its utility in explaining relationship satisfaction and stability.
Nonetheless, one could argue that people will be happy with their relationship if it meets their mutual expectations. For example, two people may be satisfied with a relationship low on commitment as long as they both agree that commitment is not important. Mismatches in expectations as to the relative importance of any of the love components is likely to lead to conflicted relationships. Further, Sternberg felt that all three components were of equal importance to relationships, and hence one might also assume that relationships slanted toward one component may be under pressure to achieve a more balanced state.

**Passionate Love and Companionate Love**

The eight different types of relationships described by Sternberg (1986; 1988) represent the range of theoretical possibilities created by the varying levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment. By themselves, they give no indication of which ones are more likely to occur empirically. Some (Hatfield, 1988) have argued that most close relationships fall into one of two categories: passionate and companionate love.

**Passionate love** is characterized by an intense longing for a complete union with the other and is represented by both the unadulterated passion of infatuation and the intimate passion of romantic love in Sternberg’s typology. According to Hatfield, passionate love comes in

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**Figure 7.1** Sternberg’s (1986) Triangular Model of Love
two forms. Reciprocated passionate love creates a sense of fulfillment along with feelings of elation and perhaps even ecstasy on the part of both members of the couple. Unrequited passionate love often results in feelings of emptiness, anxiety, and despair on the part of those whose love is rejected. As it turns out, unrequited love is difficult for the would-be lover as well as the rejecter. Would-be lovers often look back on the relationship with a mixture of positive and intensely negative emotions. They feel that the love had been mutual, that they had been led on, and that the rejection had not been communicated clearly. Contrary to what one might believe, rejecters are by no means better off. Looking back on the relationship elicits mostly negative emotions. And while rejecters feel morally innocent, they feel guilty over their inability or unwillingness to return the other's love. At the same time, however, they perceive any attempts on the part of the would-be lover to keep the relationship going as intrusive and annoying (Baumeister & Wotman, 1992; Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993).

Hatfield (1988) proposed that passionate and companionate love have a lot in common with attitudes to the extent that they contain cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Passionate love, for example, entails intrusive thinking, a general preoccupation with the other, and an idealization of the other and the relationship. Emotionally, passionate love includes attraction, especially of a sexual nature, and both positive feelings and intensely negative feelings when things are amiss. Additionally, there is a longing for reciprocity and a desire for complete and permanent union. Behaviorally, passionate love compels actions toward determining the other's feelings, a proclivity to study the other person, and a desire to do things for him or her.

Companionate love, on the other hand, lacks some of the longing of passionate love and instead describes the attraction we feel toward another person with whom our lives are deeply intertwined. Cognitively, it entails sharing information about one another—even if it is embarrassing. The emotional component is characterized by the possession of intimacy rather than the longing for it, while behaviorally the continued proximity creates a sense of comfort rather than arousal. Although both types of love feel great, many are loathe to imagine spending a lifetime being in companionate love rather than being madly, passionately in love with their partner.

However, successful relationships probably have elements of both in the sense that for many people their lover is also their best friend. Moreover, as relationships mature, they may undergo a transformation from being primarily passionate to being primarily companionate. After all, as Sternberg (1986) has argued, passion is subject to habituation, and the focus of a relationship may shift as a result of specific events. It is thus not surprising that life satisfaction, or our subjective well-being, is more closely linked with companionate rather than passionate love (Kim & Hatfield, 2004).

How well does this distinction between passionate and companionate love explain differences in relationship satisfaction and stability? One could argue that the experience of passionate love is perhaps more rewarding in part because of the overwhelming experience of longing for a union with the other. One could further argue that companionate love may be more predictive of success in the long term because it lacks the emotional turmoil often created by the experience of passionate love. Unfortunately, there is little research that addresses these issues, although one study (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995) reports that women who experienced a great deal of passionate love were happier, more satisfied with their relationship, and more excited about their relationship than women who experienced little passionate love. Interestingly, these same associations were not found for men, suggesting perhaps the existence of gender differences in love.
Individual Differences in Love

Gender

Whether the experience of love is different for men and women has been a matter of almost perpetual debate. Newspaper advice columns as well as talk shows are flooded with complaints from people who feel their partner does not love them. Frequently, such complaints are based on a perceived lack of companionship, intimacy, or sex. Keep in mind, however, that for every person who registers complaints about his or her love life, there are probably thousands who appear to have no problems in this regard. Not surprisingly, then, research on gender differences paints a somewhat sketchy and inconsistent picture. It appears that for every study that reports gender differences on such measures as Rubin’s Love Scale (Black & Angelis, 1974; Dion & Dion, 1975), romanticism (e.g., Sprecher, 1989b), or passionate love (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995), there are an equal number of studies that fail to find gender differences (cf. Cunningham & Antill, 1981; Hatfield & Rapson, 1987; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986a; Rubin, 1973). Thus, it appears that any effects of gender on the specific experience of love may be mediated by other variables.

Age and Relationship Duration

Age is one variable that may affect the experience of love among men and women. Surprisingly, there is reason to believe that even very young children can experience feelings akin to Hatfield and colleagues’ passionate love (Diamond, 2001). Children aged 4 to 18 who completed the Juvenile Love Scales, a children’s version of the Passionate Love Scale, indicated that they experienced just as much passionate love as 18-year-olds (Hatfield, Schmitz, Cornelius, & Rapson, 1988). The only exception to this pattern was the finding that boys around the age of 12 reported experiencing little in the ways of passionate love, perhaps because they are at an age where they tend to be uncomfortable or even disinterested with

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Lee’s typology of love has been criticized for describing syndromes that contain components not necessarily found together in ways that an ideal type would suggest. Do you agree or disagree with this criticism? Can you provide an illustration for your position?
- Kim and Hatfield (2004) found that life satisfaction is more closely linked with compassionate rather than passionate love. However, Aron and Henkemeyer (1995) found that women who experienced more passionate love were happier and more satisfied with the relationship than women who experienced less passionate love. How could you explain these seemingly contradictory findings?
- Elements of passionate as well as companionate love are usually found together in most successful relationships. Moreover, as relationships mature they are thought to go from being primarily passionate to being primarily companionate. Do you think that movement in the opposite direction, from primarily companionate to primarily passionate, is also possible?
anything having to do with girls. On the face of it, the finding that even young children can experience passionate love may be taken as an indication that Freud was perhaps correct in proposing that there is sexuality in childhood. However, there is a more likely explanation. Hatfield, Brenton, and Cornelius (1989) found that among children, passionate love was correlated with dispositional anxiety as assessed by the trait part of Spielberger's (1966) state-trait anxiety scale. Thus, it may be that in an attempt to explain anxiety-related arousal, highly anxious children imitate adult models by attributing it to passionate love.

Comparisons of romantic experiences among young adults, their parents, and their grandparents suggest an influence of age on a romantic view of life (Hieger & Troll, 1973). Whereas young adult women were more romantic than males, the exact opposite was found when the researchers looked at the entire sample. Furthermore, the grandparents in the sample were less romantic than the young adults.

This finding is interesting for a couple of reasons. For one thing, it appears that young couples are more inclined than older couples to engage in behaviors indicative of passion and romanticism, such as embracing and kissing in public and holding hands. For another, one theory (Berscheid, 1983) suggests that the experience of love and other emotions in relationships decrease over time. This is the case because of the kinds of things that bring about emotions in the first place. According to Simon (1967) and Mandler (1975), emotions result from interruptions of ongoing behavior. Many activities we perform throughout the day are either so well practiced (e.g., driving a car) or so engrossing (e.g., reading a novel) that performing them results in little or no emotion. However, when they are interrupted by external events, such as a text message notification on your phone, or a fiery car crash in the next lane, a variety of emotional reactions can occur.

Couples whose relationships have reached a state of maturity have usually found ways to handle the chores of everyday life, perhaps relying on a transactive memory or a more general division of labor (Wegner et al., 1991). Furthermore, such chores as getting the kids ready for school, shopping for groceries, and preparing meals often require highly interdependent and sequential contributions from both adults. For example, Jane can load the kids in the van for the trip to school only after John has made sure that they are properly dressed; Bob may be able to fix dinner only if Ann made a stop at the grocery store on the way home from work. According to Berscheid (1983), there is little room or cause for strong emotions when things go smoothly. However, when these interdependent sequences of behaviors are interrupted because John sleeps through his alarm or Ann has to work late, considerable emotion can result. Although these examples suggest a potential primarily for the experience of negative emotions, the theory predicts the occurrence of positive emotions, as well.

Moreover, it predicts a steady decrease of love over time. Basically, falling in love constitutes a major interruption in our lives and thus results in strong emotional experiences. As the focus of a relationship shifts toward raising children and making ends meet, the experience of love is somewhat diminished, although the potential is still there. It generally diminishes again once the kids leave the house and financial security has been achieved. Under these circumstances, people's lives become less intertwined, thus decreasing the potential that interruptions will lead to the experience of love and other emotions.

Several things are appealing about Berscheid's approach to love and emotion in close relationships. The theory appears to explain the data reported by Aron and Henkemeyer (1995) fairly well, and it provides hope for those whose lives revolve around dirty diapers, night-time feedings, and providing taxi service to ballet lessons and basketball games. Equally important, it suggests that apparent decreases in love, passion, and romanticism
may not be an inevitable outcome of age per se, but instead of relationship duration. This is important in part because there is little we can do about getting older, yet we can arrange our relationships in a way that they can provide us with the experience of love over a lifetime.

**Love Over Time: Does It Get Better or Worse?**

It is disheartening to think that the love two people have for one another would decrease as their relationship matures beyond its early tumultuous stages. Interestingly, Berscheid’s theory is not the only one that makes precisely that prediction; it is implicit in at least one other theory. Aron and colleagues (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) conceptualized “falling in love” as a process by which the self is expanded to include another person. This means that forming a close relationship with another involves integrating the other’s perspective, resources, and characteristics into the self, resulting in self-expansion. Of course, as people get to know each other more and more as their relationship matures, opportunities toward self-expansion may decrease at the same rate. To the extent that self-expansion and love are linked, reduced opportunities for self-expansion may be accompanied by decreases in love.

Fortunately, these somewhat dire predictions about decreases in love as relationships mature are not well supported by actual data. Tucker and Aron (1993) reported results from a study that measured the amount of passionate love couples experienced at three important transition points: Before and after they got married, before and after they had their first child, and before and after the children were old enough to leave home. The amount of passionate love declined steadily over time and from before and after the transitions, suggesting that the relationships took on a more companionate nature. However, these decreases were relatively small. Even couples who were contemplating or experiencing the “empty nest” still reported at least moderate amounts of passionate love.

Further, the human mind seems to have found important mechanisms to offset these small decreases in passionate love and in fact to keep love alive. One study in particular (Sprecher, 1999) asked members of 101 heterosexual dating couples two sets of questions at varying intervals over a 4-year period of time. First, at each wave, couples were asked to report their perceptions about how their feelings of love, commitment, and satisfaction had changed since the last data collection. Second, couples also responded to “objective” measures of their current levels of love, commitment, and satisfaction. The results from those couples who were still together at the conclusion of the study (roughly 40 percent) showed an intriguing pattern. In terms of their perceptions of change, most couples reported increases in their feelings of love, commitment, and satisfaction. In addition, the objective measures yielded no increases over time. In other words, even though respondents were no more in love with their partner 2, 3, or 4 years after the relationship began, they felt as if they were!

**Beyond Love: A Quick Look at Guilt**

Love, in its many manifestations, is undoubtedly of paramount importance for close relationships. Feelings of increasing love are associated with the initiation of close relationships, whereas decreasing feelings of love are often precursors for their termination. Of course, continued feelings of love for the other also help maintain a relationship even in times of conflict and turmoil. However, it appears that guilt provides love with a powerful
ally in this process. Just like shame, the experience of guilt is promoted by interpersonal contexts. Whereas shame mostly results from failure combined with a concern with others’ evaluations, guilt usually stems from moral transgressions involving harm to others (Baumeister, Reis, & Delespaul, 1995; Tangney, 1992), especially valued partners in close relationships (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that guilt is commonly found in relationships that are communal in nature (Baumeister et al., 1994), generally as a result of neglecting the other, skipping out on obligations, and selfish actions.

Interestingly, guilt may be more than just the emotional price one partner pays for committing a variety of transgressions against another. Instead, it appears that guilt may be a powerful mechanism in the maintenance of close relationships, as it can help restore power among the powerless (i.e., the victims of transgression). In other words, guilt can pave the way toward influencing the behavior of the transgressor in terms of eliciting apologies and promises involving corrective behavior in the future. This perspective suggests that victims of interpersonal transgressions are not as poorly off as they may seem, as long as the perpetrators experience feelings of guilt over their transgression. And because guilt is caused by harming a close other in the first place, only the most cynical may be exempt from its experience.

So where does this all leave us? In 1975, the late U.S. senator William Proxmire bestowed the Golden Fleece award for wasteful spending of tax dollars on the National Science Foundation because it had funded a study on why people fall in love. This dubious honor appears to have become somewhat of a rallying cry for social scientists interested in close relationships. Theorizing and research on love have proliferated ever since. Although a lot of it has, in fact, added to our understanding of the role of love in relationships, numerous questions remain unanswered. In light of this, many researchers have recently come to conceptualize love as a form of attachment much like the attachment infants have to their caregivers. We will look at this perspective more closely in the next chapter.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Some researchers believe that emotions result from interruptions of ongoing behavior. According to this theory, established couples experience a decline in love due to the fact that they established smooth routines of interactions and work. To the extent that this is true, how could you go about fanning the flames of romantic love?
- Although various theories predict a decrease in love over time, a longitudinal study involving 101 couples (Sprecher, 1999) revealed that at the end of the 4-year span of the study the surviving couples felt more in love than at the beginning of the study. How would you reconcile the empirical finding with the theoretical predictions?
- According to the research on unrequited love, rejecting another’s love is associated with feelings of guilt. Could this same guilt compel a person to have a relationship with another in the absence of romantic feelings? What might motivate the aspiring lover (that is, the one who loves more) to seek and maintain the relationship?
Summary

Issues
- Defining love
  - The difference between liking and loving
  - Different forms and types of love
  - Love and the brain connection

- The relationship of love to satisfaction and relationship stability
- The relationship of gender differences and age to the experience of love
- The impact of guilt on close relationships

Theories
- Rubin (1970, 1973) first to propose a conceptual distinction between liking and loving
- Fehr (1988) defined love by specifying its prototypical features
- Love as the misattribution of arousal
- Causal theories of love that emphasize the importance of physiological arousal and cognitive preoccupation with the other
- Type theories of love
  - Lee (1973) identified six forms of love based primarily on an analysis of literature
  - Sternberg (1986) suggested that three components of love—intimacy, passion, and commitment—combined to form eight types of relationships
  - Hatfield (1988) elaborated on the differences between passionate and companionate love
- Rempel and Burris (2005) conceptualize love, like hate, as a motivational state with specific triggers and goals

Research
- People distinguish between liking and love
- People experience love in vastly different ways as suggested by the various typologies
- Specific neurotransmitters and brain regions correspond to the experience of three different types of love: lust, passionate love, and attachment (Fisher et al., 2002)
- Both physiological arousal and cognitive preoccupation with the other as important causal factors in the experience of love
- Role of love in relationship satisfaction and stability is less clear
- Individual differences in the experience of love as well as gender and age differences cloud the relationship between love typologies and relationship stability and satisfaction
- Guilt may be important for the maintenance of close relationships once transgressions have occurred (Baumeister et al., 1994)

Key Terms

Eros: a passionate love style, often caused by a strong attraction to the physical attributes of the other.

Storge: a companionate love style, based on friendship and commonly shared interests.

Ludus: playful love, mostly for the short term.
Mania: secondary love style, resultant from mixing elements of Eros and Ludus; characterized by obsessive preoccupation and intense jealousy.
Pragma: practical love, resulting from mixing Storge and Ludus.
Agape: secondary love style, derived from Eros and Storge, characterized by giving, selflessness, and altruism.
Triangular theory of love: a model of love according to which love consists of three basic ingredients: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment.
Passionate love: a form of love characterized by an intense longing for a complete union with the other.
Companionate love: the attraction we feel toward those with whom our lives are intertwined.
Transactive memory: a shared system for encoding, storing, and retrieving information that is greater than the individual memories.
Guilt: social emotion resulting from moral transgressions that involve harming others.
Shame: social emotion resulting from having done something dishonorable, improper, or ridiculous.
Ask the Therapist . . .

Q: I’m studying psychology at my university, so I know for sure what my problem is in relationships. I have an anxious-ambivalent adult attachment style. So far this has ruined a number of my relationships but not all of them. I know I’m anxious-ambivalent because thinking about the women in my life is the first and last thing I do in the day. If I have nothing better to think about, I’m thinking about my relationships. If I don’t have a relationship at the time, I’m mentally searching through my known relations looking for the next. I’m jealous, worry about being dumped, and take heartbreak hard.

My life feels on-track when I am in a relationship, but I rarely feel comfortable in it lasting. I felt comfortable in my last relationship, which ended about 3 weeks ago, and now I’m worried I’ll never learn to control my anxieties. You could say success in relationships is my life-goal.

So what strategies can I employ to overcome these issues? I’m open to almost everything except medication.

—Dr. Marie Hartwell-Walker, PsychCentral, November 3, 2008

For many of us, falling in love triggers an almost inexplicable desire to spend most, if not all, of our time with the person toward whom our feelings are directed. When we are with those we love, the world seems like a safe and rewarding place. When we are without them, it seems cold and possibly dangerous, and we long for the moment when we are once again reunited with our loved one.

Admittedly, this description of some of the feelings that go along with being in love may not apply to everyone, and it is probably somewhat exaggerated. However, the truth of the matter is that some aspects of our adult romantic relationships bear an almost uncanny resemblance to the relationships we had with our caregivers when we were infants. In other words, the emotional bonds between adult romantic partners can be understood in terms of the nature and quality of the emotional attachment that exists between infants and their caregivers.

To understand the nature of adult attachment and its ramifications for individuals and their relationships, it is first necessary to take a closer look at what developmental psychologists have uncovered about the nature of children’s attachments to their caregivers. Attachment research has its origins during World War II. As a result of the massive destruction and loss of life, many social service agencies began to wonder about the ramifications of the lack of maternal care. In 1950, the World Health Organization asked John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist, to undertake a study of the mental health problems of children who had been separated from their families and were cared for in hospitals, nurseries, and orphanages. His systematic observations of these children who had either lost their
Attachment

parents or were otherwise separated from them resulted in a general theory of attachment, which was published in three volumes over three decades (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980).

While attachment research was sparked by observations of families disrupted by World War II, its theoretical origins can be traced to modern evolutionary theory (Simpson, 2002; Fraley, 2002). As Bowlby observed, mother-child proximity along with sensitivity to the “environment of evolutionary adaptedness” are essential for genetic survival (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Infants can contribute to this by voicing distress when separated from their caregivers and vigorously demanding their return. This Bowlby considered a good strategy to ensure the survival of a young and helpless newborn. How does this attachment system operate?

Patterns of Attachment in Infancy

According to Bowlby’s theory, all children develop an attachment to their caregivers. Bowlby characterized this attachment as an internal working model that children use as a standard to guide their interactions with their caregivers as well as other adults more generally. What differs from one child to the next is the extent to which the child is attached as well as the quality of his or her attachment. Children with a secure attachment form a mental representation of their caregivers as a secure place from which to explore the world and as a source of comfort in times of distress. Children with an anxious attachment form a generalized expectation that their caregivers cannot be reliably counted on to provide comfort in times of distress. And children with an avoidant attachment do not think of their caregivers as a source of comfort at all.

To test Bowlby’s speculations about the different forms of attachment, Mary Ainsworth and colleagues (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) devised the “Strange Situation,” an experimental paradigm that allows for the observation of children’s behavior in response to being separated from their mothers. A typical experiment contains the following sequence of events. The mother and her 12- to 18-month-old child arrive at the laboratory, set up as a playroom, and are initially greeted by a stranger. The stranger leaves and mother and child spend a period of time together, during which the child can play with a number of toys (i.e., explore the unfamiliar environment). Then, without warning, the mother leaves, the stranger reenters, and, after a short period of time, the mother returns. Because virtually all children below the age of 18 months show distress when their mother leaves suddenly and unannounced, researchers are able to observe a child’s behavior while playing, when a stranger offers comforting, and when the mother returns. Children’s behavior under these circumstances falls into three categories that relate to the different types of attachment Bowlby had initially proposed. A securely attached child plays comfortably with the toys as long as his or her mother is present. When the mother suddenly leaves, the child becomes visibly and vocally upset. He or she is unlikely to accept the stranger’s invitation for comforting but calms down quickly and resumes playing once the mother returns. About 65 percent of U.S. middle-class children show this pattern of attachment. An anxiously attached child is more reluctant to play and instead prefers to stay close to his or her mother at all times. When the mother leaves, the child becomes very upset and does not calm down when the mother returns. Instead, the child seeks renewed contact with the mother yet simultaneously resists her attempts at comforting. About 23 percent of U.S. middle-class children show this pattern of attachment. An avoidantly attached child resembles a securely attached child to the extent that he or she does not worry about where the mother sits while they are playing. The child may or may not cry when the mother leaves, but when the child does cry, he or she readily accepts the
stranger’s attempts at comforting. When the mother returns, the child might look or turn away from her instead of seeking closeness and comfort. About 12 percent of U.S. middle-class children show this pattern of attachment.

Finally, although secure attachment has been linked to many positive outcomes, it should be noted that the different attachment orientations represent an infant’s adaptation to its environment (Simpson, 2002; Belsky, 1999). As such, all types of attachment are beneficial at least in their immediate context. For example, avoidant attachment may be particularly adaptive in an impoverished environment where gaining self-reliance and independence can mean the difference between life and death. Moreover, to the extent that attachment systems are adaptive, one might expect to find evidence of it across people and species—perhaps in physiological structures. As we discussed in Chapter 7, the human brain has dedicated systems and neurotransmitters such as oxytocin and vasopressin that are uniquely associated with attachment processes (Fisher et al., 2002). Let’s look more closely at the mechanisms by which attachment patterns develop.

**Causes of Different Attachment Patterns**

How do differences in attachment come about in the first place? It appears that they result from a complex interaction among specific characteristics of the mother (or, more generally, the caregiver), innate characteristics of the child, and the larger cultural context. In general, mothers of securely attached children tend to be more involved with their infants, more responsive to signs of distress and feeding needs, more appropriate in responsiveness, and more positive in their emotional expression (Isabella, 1993). Most of the research attempting to pinpoint the child’s contribution to attachment has focused on the child’s temperament. Granted, it is intuitively plausible that mothers would have a harder time responding appropriately and positively to children who are fearful or who get upset at the drop of a hat, but the evidence to date is somewhat inconclusive. Although some studies show an effect of temperament on subsequent attachment (Miyake, Chen, & Campos, 1985), others fail to demonstrate it (Vaughn, Lefever, Seifer, & Barglow, 1989; Diener, Nievar, & Wright, 2003; Roisman & Fraley, 2008).

It is difficult to disentangle the contribution of an insensitive mother’s parenting style from that of a dispositionally difficult child. Does a mother’s insensitivity elicit difficult behavior from her child? Or does a difficult child frustrate the mother who then responds with non-optimal responses (Diener et al., 2003)? One way to answer such questions is to look at twins sharing their developmental environment along with varying levels of genetic material. In a study based on a diverse sample of 485 same-sex twin pairs, Roisman and Fraley found that attachment security was primarily the product of shared (home) and non-shared environmental features (e.g., school) and less of the genetic characteristics of the children (Roisman & Fraley, 2008). Thus, it seems natural that variations in attachment patterns should reflect both factors in the immediate environment (e.g., maternal factors) as well as those in the broader social and culture milieu.

In this regard, Ainsworth (1967, 1982) suggested that while the distinct patterns of attachment are to some extent culturally universal, there is also evidence that attachment patterns can be greatly influenced by the unique childrearing practices of a culture. For example, among Israeli children who grow up in kibbutzim, where they are cared for primarily by adults other than their parents, a smaller percentage of 14-month-olds were classified as securely attached (37 percent compared to 65 percent in the United States). One study of German children (Grossmann, Grossmann, Spaengler, Suess, & Unzner, 1985) found that a
mere 33 percent of 1-year-olds could be classified as securely attached, whereas a whopping 49 percent tested as avoidantly attached. However, this should not be taken as evidence that half of German mothers are insensitive and uncaring. Instead, the large proportion of avoidantly attached infants may be the result of childrearing practices revolving around the idea that children, like clothing and kitchen floors, should be *pflegeleicht* (i.e., easy to care for). More specifically, it appears that avoidant attachment may result from the pursuit of creating independent, nonclingy infants who do not make too many demands on their parents.

Among children raised in traditional Japanese families, where the mother stays home to care for them, one finds a high proportion of anxiously attached infants but virtually no avoidantly attached infants. This pattern may be due to the fact that traditional Japanese mothers rarely leave their children in the care of anyone else and instead raise them in ways that promote a sense of dependence. For example, it is not at all uncommon for children to sleep in their mother’s bed until the time they start elementary school. Naturally, if such children are put into the “Strange Situation,” they are more than likely to become extremely upset.

Stressful environments, such as those created by poverty, also impact attachment patterns (Diener et al., 2003). A study of 101 mother-child pairs from low-income families revealed that the strongest predictors of attachment security were maternal and contextual characteristics (as opposed to individual child dispositions). Two specific maternal characteristics that correlated with lower levels of attachment security were maternal depression and the mother’s perception that her child was “difficult.” Maternal sensitivity, on the other hand, and the mother’s support of play and provision of toys and playthings were associated with high levels of attachment security (Diener et al., 2003). Taken together, these factors suggest that maternal sensitivity along with an enticing environment combine to promote the development of a secure base both in terms of approaching the maternal secure base and exploring the environment beyond her.

**Adult Attachment**

Developmental psychologists generally agree that acquired patterns of attachment—whether secure, anxious, or avoidant—are relatively stable over time (i.e., over a period of at least several months). This sounds like an awfully short amount of time. However, there is evidence that a secure attachment evident at ages 12 to 18 months can become less so, or even turn into an anxious attachment, as a result of external stressors, such as unemployment, prolonged illness, or conflict within the family (Lyons-Ruth, Repacholi, McLeod, & Silva, 1991; Main & Weston, 1981). Of course, the reverse is also true. As stressors that may have contributed to an anxious attachment are removed, attachment patterns are likely to become less anxious and even secure. The observation that attachment is somewhat malleable, however, should not be taken as an indication that it can fluctuate wildly throughout infancy and early childhood. Instead, because optimal attachment develops during a relatively short, sensitive period, shifts in attachment should primarily be observed if the presentation or removal of family stressors falls within that period.

If anything, attachment patterns are generally fairly stable and appear to be present through adulthood (Bowlby, 1982; Fraley, 2002; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). Of course, in adulthood, the partner in a close, intimate relationship becomes a person’s attachment figure, completing a period of transition in which the attachment figure is transferred from parent to peer (Kerns, 1994). In other words, the attachment styles that marked infants’ relationships to their mothers should be evident in the sense that adults can be attached to their romantic partners in a secure, anxious, or avoidant way. Note that Bowlby
had good reasons to advance this idea. After all, he conceived of attachment as “inner working models” of the self and social relationships. Not surprisingly, then, research that has looked at adult attachment has found ample support for Bowlby’s (1982) notion and has provided important insights into the importance and ramifications of adult attachment patterns. Before jumping into a review of the relevant research, it is important to keep in mind that until recently, much of the research has been correlational and retrospective in nature.

In one of the first studies of adult attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), over 1,200 adults (with an average age of 36) responded to a questionnaire that appeared in the Rocky Mountain News. It contained a total of “95 questions about your most important romance.” The crucial question asked respondents to describe their feelings about relationships (see Figure 8.1). Respondents who indicated that they found it easy to get close to others, were comfortable depending on them, and did not fear abandonment were classified as securely attached. Those who indicated that they were reluctant to get close and worried about the other’s love were classified as anxiously attached. And finally, those who reported that they were uncomfortable being close and felt that they had problems trusting their partner as well as reciprocating with their level of closeness were classified as avoidantly attached.

The nature and scope of this study revealed a wealth of data about the importance of attachment in romantic relationships. To begin with, the percentages of adults who displayed the three attachment styles were remarkably similar to the percentages usually obtained when one looks at the attachment styles of infants. Specifically, 56 percent were characterized by a secure attachment (compared to 65 percent of infants); 19 percent were characterized by an anxious attachment (compared to 23 percent of infants); and 25 percent were characterized by an avoidant attachment (compared to 12 percent of infants). Moreover, the different attachment styles were associated with markedly different experiences of love. Secure lovers characterized their most important relationship as happy, friendly, and trusting. They further emphasized that they were able to accept and support their partner unconditionally. Anxious lovers reported their experience of love as being marked by obsession, desire for reciprocation and union, and emotional ups and downs, along with extreme sexual attraction and jealousy. Finally, avoidant lovers’ most important relationship was characterized by fear of intimacy, emotional ups and downs, and jealousy (in the absence of sexual attraction). Given these qualitatively different experiences, it is not surprising that the duration of secure lovers’ most important relationship was markedly longer (about 10 years) than those of anxious and avoidant lovers (6 years and 5 years, respectively).

Secure: I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

Anxious: I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn’t really love me or won’t stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.

Avoidant: I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely and difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

Figure 8.1  Adult Attachment Styles According to Hazan and Shaver (1987)
Finally, Bowlby’s (1982) speculations about the transfer of attachment from the mother to the adult romantic partner received some support, as well. Instead of recalling childhood memories, respondents answered a series of questions about their parents’ general behavior toward them during childhood as well as their parents’ behavior toward each other. Compared to insecure respondents, secure respondents reported generally warmer relationships with both parents and between their parents. Anxious respondents recalled their fathers, in particular, as having been unfair, and avoidant respondents described their mothers as cold and rejecting. Of course, it would be impossible for most adults to recall the exact nature of the attachment they had with their caregivers at the tender age of 18 months. Thus, rather than having to rely on dimmed recollections and reconstructions of the past, researchers are increasingly turning to other methodologies to fill this gap.

A meta-analysis of 27 longitudinal studies provides even more compelling evidence for the continuity between childhood and adult attachment patterns (Fraley, 2002). All longitudinal studies in this analysis initially measured attachment in 12-month-old toddlers, and then at a second time, ranging from 1 month to 15 years later. Fraley (2002) also contrasted a **prototype model** that assumes that attachment is relatively stable across a person’s lifespan against a **revisionist model** that looks at attachment as flexible, changeable, and susceptible to environmental modifications. Although the meta-analysis supported the prototype model, it also revealed plasticity, suggesting “**stable instability**” (Fraley, 2002). That is, while there may be some relationship-specific fluctuations, the general pattern remains stable. Fraley and colleagues also found support for the prototype model when they looked at daily fluctuations in attachment representations over a 30-day period in one sample and weekly changes over the course of a year (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011).

Hazan and Shaver’s work proved to be a launching pad for many exciting tests of both the conceptualization and measurement of attachment orientations. Diverging from the original approach that viewed attachment categorically (i.e., one of three different types), Bartholomew (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) proposed a dimensional model in which attachment is determined by the valence of beliefs people have of themselves (i.e., model of self) and others (i.e., model of others). According to this “**self-other model,**” the positivity of beliefs of self and others forms four general orientations: **secure, preoccupied, dismissing,** and **fearful** (see Table 8.1). The secure orientation in the self-other model maps onto Hazan and Shaver’s secure attachment style. Further, the “preoccupied” orientation corresponds to Hazan and Shaver’s ambivalent attachment style, and the “fearful” orientation describes the avoidant attachment style. Dismissing style, however, has no equivalent in Hazan and Shaver’s framework. Rather it adds a dimension that contributes to a better understanding of attachment in adults (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999). Further, research also suggests that attachment styles do not conform to strict typological categories and are more accurately captured by dimensional models that vary along a continuous scale (Fraley & Waller, 1998). You will see many studies that use the Hazan and Shaver measure and many more recent studies that use dimensional measures such as the self-other model.

One way to conceptualize the self-other model of attachment is in terms of anxiety and avoidance as its underlying dimensions. Anxiety (or anxiety monitoring) is the affective mechanism that determines how one reacts to the perceived availability or unavailability of an attachment figure. The avoidance dimension reflects the behavioral components of attachment regulation, that is, whether one seeks out or withdraws from attachment figures (Crowell et al., 1999). Anxiety and avoidance combine in unique ways to yield four attachment orientations, as Table 8.2 shows.
Table 8.1 A Dimensional Model of Attachment

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<th>Model of Other (Avoidance)</th>
<th>Model of Self (Dependence)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Positive (Low)</td>
<td>Positive (Low)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secure.</strong> “It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t worry about being alone or having others not accept me.”</td>
<td><strong>Preoccupied.</strong> “I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don’t value me as much as I value them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative (High)</td>
<td>Negative (High)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dismissing.</strong> “I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient. I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.”</td>
<td><strong>Fearful.</strong> “I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Items from Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) Relationship Questionnaire (RQ).

Table 8.2 Two-Dimensional Model of Individual Differences in Adult Attachment Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoidance</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>Dismissing-avoidant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>Fearful-avoidant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Crowell et al. (1999).

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Why might a casual observer think that an avoidantly attached male toddler placed in the “Strange Situation” is a “good boy”? Why is this little boy’s behavior not necessarily indicative of optimal parenting? How might the development of this attachment style have been adaptive for him?
- What are the implications of research showing that the human brain has specific neural pathways and neurotransmitters associated specifically with attachment? Moreover, what does the existence of three separate neurological systems for lust, romantic love, and attachment say about our traditional views of love and romance?
- Research suggests that attachment style is determined largely by a person’s environment (such as interactions with caregivers, richness of environment) than by their individual or genetic characteristics. What does this mean for clinicians and community psychologists who wish to improve the mental health of children growing up in impoverished communities?
From Infant Attachment to Adult Attachment: Models of Transition

In light of the close correspondence of infant and adult attachment, it is reasonable to ask about the mechanisms that might be responsible for this continuity. At this point, there are several tentative answers in the form of broad theoretical perspectives.

One perspective (Kerns, 1994) emphasizes the importance of infant attachment for interactions with peers throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Once children are able to interact with peers, the immediate importance of the parental attachment figure becomes somewhat diminished. At the same time, the various developmental stages carry with them different friendship goals that require different skills. It is with regard to these goals and skills that early attachment has its effects. Kerns’ (1994) model of attachment transition is intriguing primarily because it focuses equally on the effects of attachment on subsequent developmental periods. Thus, the model suggests that the transition is not simply a matter of near-magical transference but rather a result of a snowballing of attachment effects over the course of development. In other words, adult attachment styles observed at age 21 did not become fixed at age 1. Instead, the level of continuity is determined jointly by interactions in infancy as well as interactions throughout the remainder of childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, there is evidence that during adulthood, attachment styles may continue to perpetuate themselves by influencing everyday social activities. Consistent with this idea, one study using a diary approach (Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996) found that avoidantly attached adults experienced lower levels of intimacy, less enjoyment, lower levels of positive emotions, and higher levels of negative emotions, particularly in opposite-sex interactions.

Further support for the idea that adult attachment styles are the result of individuals’ developmental histories comes from a study that looked at 18-year-olds who had been tracked longitudinally since birth (Fraley, Roisman, Booth-LaForce, Owen, & Holland, 2013). As expected, individual differences in their (adult) attachment style could be traced to their caregiving environments, their emerging social competence, and the quality of their best friendships.

A second perspective, rooted in the psychodynamic tradition known as object relations, proposes that early interactions between parents and children become the basis for more generalized expectations about the nature of close relationships. Moreover, these expectations incorporate both sides of the interaction (e.g., aggressor and victim; nurturance and succorance), thus providing the child with a repertoire for interactions with others in general (Osofsky, 1982). This perspective suggests that adult attachment incorporates both aspects of the infant attachment (i.e., child and parent) and thus can help explain why avoidant lovers, for example, would be both distrustful and fearful of another’s attempts at being close.

A third approach proposes that emotional experiences and expressions may provide the mechanism for attachment transfer across development. A longitudinal study tracked 78 individuals over 28 years (Simpson, Collins et al., 2007). It found that attachment at 12 months of age reliably predicted social adjustment in elementary school, friendships in high school, and romantic experiences in adulthood. Although the correlational nature of this study prevents conclusions about the nature of the causal link between attachment in infancy and adult working models, it contributes to the converging evidence for the role of emotions in the transfer of attachment from infancy to adulthood.

Finally, although participants’ attachment styles remained stable across situations and over the 28-year span of this study, the authors found additional evidence for the plasticity of attachment. This plasticity allows for the possibility that adult attachment is comprised of a general model that applies to other people and a model that applies specifically to one’s partner (Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000). General models of attachment are
the sum of all relationship experiences and are more predictive of a generalized sense of well-being and self-esteem. Partner-specific models, on the other hand, are more accurately predictive of specific relationship outcomes such as satisfaction, love, and happiness.

From a social-cognitive perspective (e.g., Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006), attachment is transferred by way of schematic processing in which the activation of existing mental models influences the reactions to specific attachment figures like close friends and romantic partners. Moreover, attachment can be transferred either in a global fashion so that attachment-related expectations are applied to new targets regardless of how much they resemble previous attachment figures, or it can be transferred in a more specific fashion such that attachment is transferred only to targets that resemble previous attachment figures. To test these differing perspectives, Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006) conducted a two-part study. In the first session, participants gave a description of their most significant past romantic partners along with completing measures assessing their own attachment style. At a second session a couple of weeks later, the same participants rated personal ads—one that was constructed to resemble the former romantic partner, and one that was unlike. Participants’ ratings of the personal ads indicated that both general and specific transfer processes were applied (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006).

Overall, participants applied the same mental model to attachment figures who were both similar and dissimilar, thus supporting the notion of a global transfer of attachment. However, there was also evidence for a specific transfer in which attachment was applied to an even greater degree to similar targets, providing support for the specificity of transfer (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006). So, can people’s attachment styles change? Can an insecure person become more secure as a result of being with a secure partner (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994)? Perhaps transferred attachment marks a relationship during its early stages. As the relationship develops, the plasticity of attachment (Fraley, 2002) enables romantic partners to build trust (or lose it) and develop more relationship-specific expectations.

The self-perpetuation of attachment may come full circle when one considers the implications of different attachment styles for attitudes about and relationships with children. One study (Rholes, Simpson, & Blakeley, 1995) found that, compared to securely attached adults, avoidant college men and women were less certain about having children and whether they would be able to relate to young children. Anxiously attached men and women desired to have children but felt unsure about their parenting ability. Among those who had children, avoidantly attached mothers reported that they lacked a feeling of closeness toward their preschool children, and they behaved less supportively toward them in a teaching task than did mothers who were securely attached.

Consequences of Adult Attachment Styles

It’s intriguing to think that the quality of our attachment to our caregivers when we are little manifests itself in our attachment to our romantic partners when we are adults. And the study of the processes and mechanisms through which it occurs is quite fascinating. However, understanding adult attachment is also important because of its potential to help explain how we live our lives and how we experience our romantic relationships.

Attachment Style and Emotional Control

To the extent that secure attachment comes with a predilection to look at one’s partner as a source of comfort, one would expect the different attachment styles to be related to a more
general ability for emotional self-control. In support of this reasoning, Feeney and Kirkpatrick (1996) found a marked difference in how secure, anxious, and avoidant individuals responded to stress when their partner was either present or absent. Compared to secure research participants, anxious and avoidant individuals showed increased levels of physiological arousal (indicative of anxiety) when they had to complete a stressful task (counting backward by 13 as quickly and accurately as possible) in the absence of their partner. Moreover, this increased level of anxiety persisted when they tried to do a similar task in the presence of their partner. These results suggest that secure attachment comes with a generalized anxiety-reducing tendency, whereas insecure attachments produce anxiety related to separation in a stressful situation. Moreover, the observation that the presence of one’s partner does little to reduce the anxiety levels of insecure individuals in a stressful situation suggests an approach-avoidance conflict that is likely brought on by the generalized expectation that the other cannot be counted on as a source for emotional support (Carpenter & Kirkpatrick, 1996).

Studies that look at support seeking and support giving among individuals with different attachment styles lend further support to the idea that those who are securely attached are more likely to seek and receive support from their partner when confronted with an anxiety-provoking situation, such as prolonged or drastic separations, Fraley and Shaver (1998) studied couples waiting at an airport. They asked those couples who were separating to complete a questionnaire designed to assess the length of their relationship, their attachment style, and their degree of distress. Then, unobtrusively, the researchers observed the couples’ behavior. Not surprisingly, most couples engaged in some form of proximity maintenance. That is, they held onto, followed, and searched for their partners more than couples traveling together. Couples who had been together for a relatively short period of time stayed especially close together. Anxious women who had reported a great deal of distress on the questionnaire also exhibited a great deal of proximity maintenance behavior. But fearful women pulled away from their partners even though they had reported a high level of stress on the questionnaire. Both these findings are consistent with attachment theory. Oddly enough, anxious and avoidant men failed to exhibit a similar behavior pattern in this situation. Their behavior may have been more constrained by the airport’s public setting.

Studies in laboratory settings that create anxiety-provoking situations have found similar results (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). Securely attached women in stressful situations used their partner as a source of reassurance and comfort. Avoidant women looked for emotional support from their partner when their anxiety level was low, and anxious women did not seek support from their partner, regardless of the level of anxiety they experienced. Presumably, this lack of support seeking among anxious women may be due to an internal conflict with regard to proximity needs. Although they might need and desire comfort and reassurance, they also know that their partner is not consistently available to provide it. Thus, the need for proximity becomes associated with anger and resentment, which is likely to add to the level of stress already experienced. Not surprisingly, then, when the researchers looked at the behavior of the male partners, they found that secure men offered greater reassurance, comfort, and support than anxious and avoidant men.

Of course, findings like these should not be taken as an indication that individuals with insecure attachment styles are unable to control emotions such as fear and anxiety. Instead, it appears that such individuals may have an edge in the self-control of such emotions because they have learned that their partner cannot be relied on as a source of comfort and reassurance. Consistent with this idea, one study (Feeney, 1995) found that a proclivity for emotional self-control was most pronounced among couples in which both partners endorsed insecure attachment styles. Moreover, insecure individuals tend to use
Facebook more frequently, and at times when they are experiencing negative emotions (Oldmeadow, Quinn, & Kowert, 2013).

Much of the early research on attachment involved measuring attachment styles and comparing their effects on a number of dependent variables. To the extent that unmeasured variables associated with attachment may be at least partly responsible for any results, that approach is problematic. For example, if we assume that securely attached individuals are happier than anxiously attached individuals, differences in happiness, rather than differences in attachment, may be responsible for any differences in results. However, more recent research that uses priming procedures to elicit a sense of security or anxiety in participants has not supported this alternative explanation.

For example, Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) primed a “secure base schema” by subliminally exposing some participants to words like closeness, love, hug, and support. They primed other participants with words that had positive connotations unrelated to security (for example, happiness, honesty, luck, and success). Finally, they primed a third group of participants with neutral words (for example, office, table, boat, and picture). They then asked all participants to form impressions of two people, one of whom was identified as an in-group member and the other as an out-group member. As expected, participants in whom a secure base schema had been primed provided more favorable evaluations of the out-group member than participants who had been primed with positive or neutral words. How can we explain these effects? Using a similar procedure, Mikulincer, Hirschberger, Nachmias, and Gillath (2001) found that priming a secure base schema produces increased empathy—a quality that may have affected participants’ evaluation of the out-group member.

Conversely, when participants in another study were primed with the names of an attachment figure (i.e., a “security-providing” person), they behaved in proximity-seeking ways: They were more self-disclosing, sought support, and were quicker to identify “security” words (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002; Gillath et al., 2006). Responses, however, were also consistent with attachment style. For example, avoidance was negatively correlated with willingness to self-disclose, while attachment anxiety was associated with quicker responses to self-disclose and support seeking (Gillath et al., 2006).

Attachment Style and Partner Choice

In light of the observation that the seeds for adult attachment are sown as far back as infancy, one might ask whether adults choose partners with similar attachment styles. At least two answers are possible. On the one hand, based on the importance of similarity for attraction, one might argue that individuals would seek others with similar attachment styles. Consequently, if one drew a random sample of couples, one would expect to find secure-secure attachments, somewhat reflective of the base rates. On the other hand, one could argue that a secure attachment is something of an ideal type of a relationship that everyone would seek regardless of his or her attachment style. From this perspective, the same random sample might yield a relatively higher number of couples in which a secure partner is paired with either an anxious or an avoidant partner.

Not surprisingly, the evidence appears to come down in favor of the similarity hypothesis. One study (Frazier, Byer, Fisher, Wright, & DeBord, 1996) independently looked at participants’ attachment styles in relation to the attachment styles of those they were presently dating as well as their preference for partners with different attachment styles. The results on both measures were overwhelmingly in favor of the similarity hypothesis. Secure individuals tended to date and prefer partners who were also secure, whereas anxious and avoidant participants tended to date partners with similar attachment styles.
Another study that looked at the specific dimensions underlying the different types of attachment provided similar results (Collins & Read, 1990). Participants who reported that they were comfortable getting close were more likely to be with a partner who was equally comfortable with closeness. Those who felt they could depend on others tended to be dating a partner who felt similarly. Furthermore, participants who were comfortable with closeness tended to be dating partners who felt they could depend on others and were much less likely to be dating partners who worried about abandonment. However, there was no evidence that those who worried about abandonment were with partners who shared their anxiety in this regard. Among other things, this latter finding suggests that couples in which both partners have an anxious attachment style may be empirically rare.

Perhaps there are good reasons why one would not find many couples in which both partners are anxiously attached. Although the individuals may initially be drawn to one another on the basis of similarity, the reality of their relationship would likely render it highly unstable. Remember that on an individual level, Hazan and Shaver (1987) described anxious attachment as a preoccupying and painful struggle to find a union with the other. This may be difficult when the union is sought with a securely attached other and next to impossible when it is sought with someone who is similarly preoccupied with obtaining love and holding on to it. At the same time, an anxious person concerned with dependability and commitment may find that an avoidant partner who is concerned about too much intimacy and commitment displays a relationship orientation consistent with his or her expectations. Likewise, for an avoidant person, the distrust and demands for intimacy by an anxious partner may confirm his or her relationship expectations. It is perhaps for these reasons that several studies found anxious women who were dating avoidant men and anxious men who were dating either anxious or avoidant women (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990).

These considerations aside, if given a choice of dating someone who is securely or insecurely attached, whom would you pick? This is not a trick question even though the answer seems almost too obvious. Considering all the positive and desirable characteristics that come with secure attachment, choosing anyone else would seem foolish, especially if things like physical attractiveness were the same for all choices. It is thus not surprising that research consistently shows people selecting secure individuals as their first choice of a romantic partner (e.g., Klohnen and Luo, 2003).

However, if we’re all attracted to secure individuals, how do the insecure attract dates and form relationships with them? The short answer is that attachment insecurity comes with beneficial features that may override or balance out its drawbacks in the short run (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2010). For example, because anxious people are preoccupied with their own emotions and vulnerabilities, they may be hypervigilant with regard to potential partners’ interest, care, and support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). And this hypervigilance may come across as attractive if others perceive it as being caring or attentive. Their attempts to minimize emotional distance may also elicit a positive reaction, at least at the beginning. And because they tend to be on the neurotic side, they may at first come across as fascinating. Avoidantly attached others may gain a temporary advantage because they may come across as independent and self-sufficient. And because they tend to suppress negative thoughts and emotions, interactions with them may be more pleasant and upbeat.

Attachment Styles, Relationship Satisfaction, and Stability

Our speculations are supported by studies that looked at the quality of people’s ongoing relationships (as opposed to one’s “most important relationship,” as Hazan and Shaver
had done). Several studies report that, compared to people with secure attachment styles, those with anxious and avoidant attachment styles tend to have relationships marked by less trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Kane et al., 2007). They report less satisfying sexual relationships, higher levels of sexual dysfunction, and lower motivations for sex (Gentzler & Kerns, 2004; Stefanou & McCabe, 2012). As one might expect, attachment avoidance is related to less positive feelings toward cuddling in adult and parent-child relationships (Chopik et al., 2014) and lower levels of sexual satisfaction in married couples of all ages (Butzer & Campbell, 2008). A study of coupled gay men (Starks & Parsons, 2014) showed that securely attached partners had the highest self-reported level of communication and were most likely to have sex at least once a week. Avoidantly attached partners reported more casual unprotected sex, compared to all other attachment styles.

Interestingly, lack of commitment and interdependence are particularly descriptive of avoidant attachment styles, whereas lack of trust is more descriptive of anxious attachment styles (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Simpson, 1990). Moreover, people with anxious and avoidant attachment styles report their relationship as a source of more frequent negative emotions and less frequent positive emotions; the reverse is true for those with secure attachment styles (Fuller & Fincham, 1995; Simpson, 1990). Not surprisingly, both partners in a relationship tend to be particularly dissatisfied when either partner suffers high anxiety over abandonment (anxious attachment) or low comfort with closeness (avoidant attachment) (Jones & Cunningham, 1996). Although perceptions of a partner’s capacity for caregiving are one important mediator of satisfaction (Kane et al., 2007; Simpson, Winterheld, Rhohes, & Oriña, 2007), attachment styles predict the type of support being sought. Securely attached individuals seek emotional support; insecurities are primarily interested in instrumental support, such as advice and direction (Simpson, Winterheld et al., 2007). In terms of providing support, securely attached individuals have an edge because they are more caring, empathetic, altruistic, and compassionate (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005).

Given the implications of different attachment styles for relationship satisfaction, one might suspect that attachment styles also have at least indirect implications for the stability of a relationship. Specifically, one might expect relationships characterized by secure attachments to be relatively more enduring, especially when both partners are securely attached, than relationships in which one or both partners are anxiously or avoidantly attached. Establishing theoretical and empirical links between attachment styles and relationship stability is important, as it may help shed light on the more general relationship between relationship satisfaction and stability. As discussed in Chapter 6, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) suggested that the two are somewhat independent of one another. Whereas satisfaction is determined by a comparison of one’s outcomes to one’s expectations, stability is determined by a comparison of one’s outcomes to the possible alternatives.

Consistent with this idea, there is evidence that not all couples who stay together are in fact happy and not all unhappy couples break up (e.g., Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981). This suggests the intriguing possibility that attachment styles may help predict why some relationships persist even though they appear to be doomed when one applies the yardstick of satisfaction. Similarly, attachment styles may help predict why relationships marked by relatively high degrees of satisfaction might nonetheless break apart. For example, an anxious individual’s preoccupation with reciprocation of affection along with a concern about abandonment may motivate special efforts to maintain the relationship even though it may fall well short of expectations. Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, may be compelled to break up out of a fear of becoming overly dependent, even though the relationship goes swimmingly.
There is evidence in favor of both sets of speculations. Remember that in Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) study, secure respondents reported that their current relationship had lasted longer (10 years) than those of anxious (6 years) and avoidant respondents (5 years). Additionally, secure respondents were less likely to be divorced (6 percent) than anxious (10 percent) and avoidant respondents (12 percent). That these differences may be due to the different qualitative nature of relationships based on various attachment styles is suggested by a study that tracked couples over a 4-month period (Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1994). In this particular sample, secure individuals reported consistent levels of relationship satisfaction, relationship costs, commitment, and trust. Anxious and avoidant individuals, on the other hand, evidenced decreasing levels of satisfaction, commitment, and trust, along with increasing relationship costs.

However, the results from a couple of studies (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Kane et al., 2007) suggest that the relationship among attachment, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability might be more complex. For instance, one study (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994) which tracked well over 300 heterosexual dating couples over a period of 3 years found that the effects of some attachment styles on satisfaction depend to some extent on gender. Whereas securely attached individuals displayed high levels of satisfaction and stability, anxious and avoidant attachment styles had some interesting effects. In couples in which the woman was anxiously attached, both partners tended to be unhappy with their relationship. In couples in which the man was avoidantly attached, the men (but not the women) rated their relationship negatively. At the same time, however, the relationships of avoidant men and anxious women were remarkably stable over time. Interestingly, even though the sample of couples was large, there were no couples in which both partners were anxiously or avoidantly attached.

Similarly, other researchers (e.g., Kane et al., 2007) found that men reported being less satisfied when their romantic partners were high in attachment anxiety. Women, on the other hand, were more dissatisfied when their male partners were high in avoidance (Kane et al., 2007). Another way to assess satisfaction is to examine how couples fare in stressful situations such as during conflicts. Research measuring physiological stress reactivity by way of salivary cortisol levels also found that attachment style interacted with gender to predict stress reactivity (Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006). For instance, men paired with securely attached women had lower cortisol levels that decreased during and after performing a conflict task. However, men paired with insecure women had significant increases in cortisol levels prior to and during the conflict. Interestingly, women’s cortisol levels, reactivity, and recovery were not constrained by their partner’s attachment style. Compared to women, men’s reactions to conflict are more dependent on their partner’s attachment style.

Among other things, these findings seem to preclude any generalizations about which attachment styles might be superior or inferior for a relationship. Instead, it seems that what impact attachment styles may have on relationships in general depends on the particular relationship stage as well as gender. This appears to be especially true for couples in which at least one partner’s attachment is insecure. Because of the nature of their working models of relationships, anxious individuals expect their partners to avoid intimacy, withdraw, and be rejecting. Thus, choosing an avoidant other confirms anxious people’s expectations about the nature of relationship. Avoidant individuals expect others to be demanding and clingy, and thus choosing an anxious other confirms their expectations in a similar fashion. By the same logic, a partner with a similar insecure attachment style violates one’s expectations, thus helping explain why it is hard to find anxious-anxious and avoidant-avoidant couples.

But why would relationships between anxious women and avoidant men be just as stable as those of secure men and women? The answer to this question may be related to the unique gender stereotypes in U.S. culture. Women are generally expected to seek and maintain intimacy...
and to be the general caretakers of relationships. It may be that anxious women, for whom the possibility of abandonment is a central concern, are more motivated to initiate processes that would hold the relationship together, thus accounting for the relatively high temporal stability in their relationships with avoidant men. This process may further be aided by the relatively low expectations that avoidant men have for their partners and their relationships.

Of course, the observation that relationships between anxious women and avoidant men can be surprisingly stable should not be taken as an indication that they are marked by happiness and bliss. Instead, it appears that they are lacking in trust, which, according to some (Holmes & Rempel, 1989), is one of the most sought-after qualities of close relationships. Trust in one’s partner is one of the cornerstones for the development of intimacy (Sternberg, 1986), and it is necessary for the development of commitment and feelings of security (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). It appears that securely attached individuals may have an edge when it comes to trusting their partners. In one study using a diary technique (Mikulincer, 1998), securely attached partners remembered more relationship episodes marked by trust and reported adopting more constructive coping techniques in response to violations of trust (e.g., talking to their partner) than their anxious and avoidant counterparts. Not surprisingly, anxious and avoidant individuals remembered fewer relationships marked by trust. Further, anxious individuals tended to respond to violations of trust with rumination and worry; avoidant individuals responded with attempts to distance themselves from their partner. Interestingly, whereas achieving intimacy was considered important by everyone, regardless of attachment style, anxious individuals were struggling to attain a sense of security and avoidant individuals were attempting to gain control over their relationship.

Research on attachment theory continues to expand in new and exciting directions. As we have already seen, researchers have systematically tested many of the assumptions and tenets initially set forth by Bowlby. As we will see in the coming chapters, there are few issues or topics in intimate relationship research that have not been revisited and reviewed through the lens of attachment theory.

**Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research**

- How would you explain your classmate’s observation that he started out life with an **anxious** attachment orientation but that his fantastic, caring, compassionate, and loving girlfriend and her equally supportive family have given him a secure attachment? Has this tiger changed its stripes?
- Given that adults’ attachment orientation is reflected in their attitudes towards having children as well as in their beliefs about their competence as parents (Rholes, Simpson, & Blakeley, 1995), what might expectant parents with insecure attachment styles do to prevent transmitting their attachment orientations to their newborn child? Do you think it’s possible to change the pattern of parent-child interactions?
- Securely attached people are generally happier and more compassionate, handle conflict better, and are more trusting of others. On the other hand, insecurely attached people experience greater stress, distress, distrust, and dissatisfaction with their relationships. How can you reconcile the poor relationship outcomes that attach to insecurely attached individuals with the idea that attachment styles are adaptive?
### Summary

#### Issues
- What are the manifestations of attachment in infancy and early childhood?
- How does attachment form?
- To what extent does attachment to romantic partners resemble earlier attachment patterns?
- How does infant attachment get transferred into adult attachment?
- What are the ramifications of different attachment styles for adult romantic relationships?

#### Theory
- Attachment as an evolved and adaptive process that correlates with unique brain systems
- Developmental theories stress the importance of mother-infant interactions in attachment formation
- Adult attachment patterns and measurement
  - Typological framework of Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposes three attachment styles
  - Dimensional models (e.g., self-other model) propose two attachment dimensions that yield four different attachment orientations
- Transitional models explore how attachment is transferred across attachment figures (i.e., from mother to lover); we consider the possible role of the following:
  - Developmental tasks in the transfer of attachment
  - Object relations based on expectations for others
  - Emotions in transferring attachment
  - Cognitive processes such as mental models of attachment
- Adult attachment styles have predictable effects on emotional control, partner choice, relationship satisfaction, and stability

#### Research
- Attachment theory grew out of Bowlby’s observations of children whose lives had been disrupted by World War II
  - Early research found that children could be categorized as one of three attachment styles: secure, anxious, avoidant
  - A twin study found that attachment orientation is the result of environmental factors such as parenting and not due to genetically determined features of the child
  - Cross-cultural studies from Israel, Germany, and Japan find that differences in parenting styles result in different attachment patterns
  - Stressful environments also produce predictable differences in attachment patterns
- Hazan and Shaver (1987) found adult distribution of attachment patterns were similar to infant patterns and that attachment style predicted relationship satisfaction
- Fraley’s (2002) meta-analysis of longitudinal studies tested attachment stability across the lifespan and found evidence for both stability and flexibility (“stable instability”)
• Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006) found that participants applied general mental models and partner-specific mental models when meeting new people.
• Couples waiting in airports behave differently depending on their attachment orientation (Fraley & Shaver, 1998).
• Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) successfully elicited attachment consistent behaviors by priming a “secure base schema”.
• Relationship satisfaction and stability were predicted by attachment style and gender (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).
• Attachment orientation also mediates stressful responses to conflict (Powers et al., 2006).

**Key Terms**

**Secure attachment:** mental representation that children form of their caregivers as sources of comfort and a secure place from which to explore the world; this child is easily comforted by caregivers. In terms of the self-other model of attachment, securely attached people have positive mental models of self and other; this person is comfortable being close to and depending on others.

**Anxious attachment:** mental model of caregivers as unreliable and unable to provide comfort in times of distress; this child remains distressed, even when caregivers attempt to comfort her.

**Avoidant attachment:** mental model of caregiver is that of someone who does not provide comfort at all; this child is not distressed when left alone and ignores the presence of caregivers.

**Preoccupied attachment:** negative mental model of self and positive mental model of others; this person desires emotional intimacy but is anxious about being loved and valued.

**Dismissing attachment:** positive mental model of self and negative mental model of other; this person prefers independence and being self-sufficient more than being in close relationships.

**Fearful attachment:** negative mental models of self and other; this person is uncomfortable being close to others, distrusts others, and fears rejection and being hurt by others.

**Prototype model of attachment:** view of attachment style as being relatively stable across a person’s lifespan.

**Revisionist model of attachment:** perspectives of attachment as flexible, changeable, and susceptible to environmental modification.

**Stable instability:** the idea that general attachment patterns remain stable over time while there are relationship-specific fluctuations.

**Secure base schema:** the internal representation of the “secure base,” or mental representations related to security and secure attachment.
Americans born in the 1980s and 1990s (commonly known as Millennials and iGen) were more likely to report having no sexual partners as adults compared to GenX’ers born in the 1960s and 1970s in the General Social Survey, a nationally representative sample of American adults (N = 26,707). Among those aged 20–24, more than twice as many Millennials born in the 1990s (15%) had no sexual partners since age 18 compared to GenX’ers born in the 1960s (6%) . . . Americans born early in the 20th century also showed elevated rates of adult sexual inactivity. The shift toward higher rates of sexual inactivity among Millennials and iGen’ers was more pronounced among women and absent among Black Americans and those with a college education. Contrary to popular media conceptions of a “hookup generation” more likely to engage in frequent casual sex, a higher percentage of Americans in recent cohorts, particularly Millennials and iGen’ers born in the 1990s, had no sexual partners after age 18.

—Twenge, Sherman, and Wells (2017, p. 433)

In the minds of many, love and sex are often closely connected. In fact, studies that explore people’s attitudes about the role of sex in a dating relationship find that affection for the partner is the most frequently cited reason for having sex (e.g., Robinson & Jedlicka, 1982; Sherwin & Corbett, 1985), especially for women (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994). This is hardly surprising in light of the fact that sexuality is perhaps the one feature that sets romantic relationships apart from other close relationships (Scanzoni et al., 1989). We can share intimate details with our friends and be strongly committed to our relationships with family members, but sex is something that is supposed to be shared specifically with the one(s) we love in a romantic way.

Attitudes About Sex: An Evolving Story

How do Americans feel about sex? The General Social Survey tracks attitudes about non-marital sex (i.e., premarital sex, sex among adolescents, extramarital sex, and same-sex relationships) on a near-annual basis. Responses from 33,380 adult Americans collected between 1972 to 2012 reveal trends toward greater overall acceptance of non-marital sex, with the greatest change occurring in the 2010s and thereafter (Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2015). However, this trend was not in the same direction for all questions. Although attitudes increased in permissiveness toward premarital sex, sex among adolescents, and same-sex relationships, they decreased—below 1970s levels—in acceptance of extramarital sex. See Table 9.1 for these trends.

How can we explain this increased permissiveness? It could indicate a time period effect (i.e., all people change), a generational/cohort effect (a new cohort drives change),
Sexuality

A statistical analysis isolated the impact of each factor and revealed that generational effects were driving changes in sexual attitudes and behaviors. Thus, it appears we are lurching toward more permissiveness in our sexual attitudes and greater acceptance of a wider range of non-marital sexual behavior not because of changes in culture or deepening wisdom of earlier generations, but because of the increased openness and optimism of today’s young adults.

**Sexual Behavior**

**A Brief History of Research on Sex**

Despite its ubiquity in intimate relationships, sex is something Americans have historically approached with a sense of ambivalence. Many cultures consider sex a fact of life like eating and drinking (Mead, 1963), but in the American way, it is best done in an environment marked by darkness, drawn curtains, and hushed silence. Thus, it is not surprising that academic research on sex was slow in coming.

Collectively, we first learned about human sexual behavior through the work of Alfred Kinsey. A professor of zoology at Indiana University who specialized in the sexual behavior of the gall wasp, he was asked to deliver a lecture on the biology of sexual behavior for a colleague who had to leave town that day. Not wanting to deliver a lecture on the gall wasp to students in a course on human sexuality, and being a conscientious scholar, he went to the library to prepare for his lecture. Although he came across an abundance of research on the sexual behavior of all sorts of animals, he found virtually no research that was specific to the biology of human sexual behavior, and thus he decided to start his own research. He began by distributing questionnaires about sexual behavior to students in a course in human sexuality, and being a conscientious scholar, he went to the library to prepare for his lecture. Although he came across an abundance of research on the sexual behavior of all sorts of animals, he found virtually no research that was specific to the biology of human sexual behavior, and thus he decided to start his own research. He began by distributing questionnaires about sexual behavior to students in a course as well as students in classes taught by supportive and friendly colleagues. He eventually expanded his efforts to include fraternities, parent-teacher associations, and just about any group willing to support his efforts. Several years and roughly 18,000 respondents later, Kinsey published his findings in a book titled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Five years later, he published a follow-up titled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1953).

### Table 9.1 Changes in Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex of American Adults From 1972–2012

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premarital sex</td>
<td>33,267</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen sex</td>
<td>21,758</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex activity</td>
<td>32,006</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extramarital sex</td>
<td>33,380</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>−0.24*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Response scale 1–4, where 1 = always wrong, 2 = almost always wrong, 3 = wrong only sometimes, and 4 = not wrong at all.

Cells with dashes indicate either that the question was not asked or that there were fewer than 100 participants.

**d** difference in SDs comparing the early 1970s to the 2010s.

*p* < .05 or less, *t*-test comparison of early 1970s to 2010s.

Source: Adapted from Twenge et al. (2015).
Sexuality

Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Together, both volumes have become widely known as the Kinsey Report.

The twin volumes provided such a provocative look into what goes on in bedrooms across the United States that they became the major compendium of everything we always wanted to know about sex. Despite its widespread popularity, however, Kinsey’s work was not without its detractors. The primary message of the Kinsey Report—that sex was perfectly natural—was comforting and well received by most. More specific results invited controversy, though. For example, some took the finding that 50 percent of all men reported to have had extramarital affairs as a hint that the breakdown of the moral order was near and the end of the world was just around the corner. And some feared that the publication of such findings would further contribute to this breakdown. After all, reading about the prevalence of extramarital affairs might give men the idea that it is perfectly normal and thus drive even the most devoted suburban husband into infidelity.

Whether or not these fears were justified is not clear. What is clear, however, is that men and women differ markedly in their sexual motivation. Men’s sexual motivation is stronger than that of women by any measure. Compared to women, men desire more frequent sexual intercourse, think about sex more often, have more intense sexual fantasies, masturbate more frequently, and are willing to make sacrifices for sex (Baumeister, Catania, & Vohs, 2001). For women, sexual motivation is marked by a high degree of erotic plasticity. That is, their sexual response is more affected by cultural, social, and situational factors. As such, women’s sexual motivation is often tied to a specific partner with whom they enjoy pleasurable and satisfying sex (Baumeister & Stillman, 2006). Once the partner is lost, sexual motivation is greatly reduced (Kinsey et al., 1953)

Sexual Behavior in the United States Today

Social scientists like to study attitudes because they help predict behavior. In line with that, Twenge et al. (2015) reported that the increased permissiveness in attitudes toward

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total no. sex partners since 18</td>
<td>24,247</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>11.22</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With casual date/pick-up</td>
<td>3,795</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With acquaintance</td>
<td>3,796</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With others/not regular partner</td>
<td>3,694</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid for sex</td>
<td>24,774</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>−0.09*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cells with dashes indicate either that the question was not asked or that there were fewer than 100 participants. d difference in SDs comparing the early 1970s to the 2010s.
p < .05 or less, t-test comparison of early 1970s to 2010s.

Source: Adapted from Twenge et al. (2015).
non-marital sex resulted in corresponding changes in sexual behavior, mostly unfolding in the 2010s. Six percent of the 2012 respondents said they were more likely to have sex with a person who was not their regular partner compared to only 1.6 percent who endorsed this item in 1988–1989. Interestingly, though, 2012 respondents were less likely to have paid for sex than were respondents in 1988.

Attitudes toward sex have loosened (Twenge et al., 2015), and behaviors are slowly following suit. But that tells us little about the ways in which we experience sex with our partners. Somewhat surprisingly, it seems that many of the problems couples had in the 1950s and 1960s (Masters & Johnson, 1966) persist to this very day. For example, 40 to 44 percent of men and women reported feelings of extreme physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction (Wylie, 2009), yet only 29 percent of the women reported always experiencing orgasms as a result of intercourse, compared to 75 percent of the men (Michael et al., 1994). Moreover, the most frequently cited “sexual problem” is still premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction for men and lack of interest and relationship problems for women (Wylie, 2009). One possibility for this discrepancy may be a continued insistence on vaginal intercourse, at 85 percent for heterosexual males and 84 percent for heterosexual females (Wylie, 2009), as the preferred sex act.

### Sexual Satisfaction

**Sex Around the World**

Much of what is true about sex in America also holds for sex around the world, as evidenced by a comprehensive study—the Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors (GSSAB) in which 27,500 adult men and women from 29 countries reported on their sexual behaviors and attitudes via survey and face-to-face and phone interviews (Laumann et al., 2006) Respondents revealed their feelings of sexual satisfaction, general happiness, physical and psychological health, relationship status, sexual practices, and sexual attitudes. (See Table 9.3 for a summary of the global variety of sexual practices.)

Worldwide, women reported a lower degree of sexual satisfaction than men—a pattern consistent with that found in the United States. Women specifically cited a lack of interest in sex (31 percent), an inability to achieve orgasm (22 percent), an inability to enjoy sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Practice</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Incidence</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving/receiving a massage</td>
<td>Greece/South Africa</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving oral sex</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual fantasies</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing sexy underwear</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving anal sex</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone sex</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bondage/S&amp;M</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Wylie (2009).
(21 percent), difficulties lubricating (20 percent), or painful sexual intercourse (14 percent) as interfering with their sexual satisfaction. However, among all respondents the degree of sexual satisfaction also depended on specific patterns of sexual interactions that vary along gender and the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism.

Common to all patterns, sexual satisfaction was positively correlated with happiness for both men and women. However, men and women from countries that place a premium on gender equality (for example, the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Western European countries, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) expressed higher levels of sexual satisfaction than participants from countries marked by male-centered sexual interaction patterns (for example, Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Turkey, Malaysia, and Thailand). One reason for the lower levels of sexual satisfaction among the latter group may be that it appears to place a premium on the importance of sex, perhaps raising unrealistic expectations. Respondents from a third group that combined male-centeredness with collectivism (for example, China, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, and Thailand) showed the lowest levels of sexual satisfaction, this perhaps due to the belief that individual gratification adds little to the values espoused by collectivistic cultures.

Sexual Satisfaction, Relationship Satisfaction, Intimacy, and Commitment

Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, Campos, and Altemus (2006) suggest that romantic love and sex are independent and that love, rather than being a prelude to or basis for sex, enhances commitment and therefore long-term relationship stability. Sex, they found, was negatively correlated with commitment. That is, while love serves to ensure long-term commitment and stabilize relationships, sex is better viewed as a short-term mating strategy. Further, in the absence of love, sex actually functions as a deterrent to relationship stability. But what if the sex is great?

Many studies confirm that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are positively correlated and that this is true for both heterosexual and same-sex partners (Laumann et al., 2006; Sprecher, 2002; Schwartz & Young, 2009). What contributes to the concordance between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction? In addition to gender equality, frequency of sex is considered by many to be a predictor of sexual satisfaction (Laumann et al., 2006). That is, frequency may be correlated with satisfaction perhaps due to the fact that having more sex also increases receptivity, desire, and ability to achieve orgasm (Schwartz & Young, 2009). However, frequency of sex is not consistently associated with relationship satisfaction (Hicks, McNulty, Meltzer, & Olson, 2016), and the frequency of sex declines over time (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Greenblatt, 1983; James, 1981). It may be tempting to conclude that this decline is perhaps due to decreases in vitality and virility as a function of age alone. However, increases in other life commitments (Greenblatt, 1983) as well as pregnancy, childrearing, and job demands (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1992) may affect sexual frequency even more profoundly. However, once such stressors are removed, the decline in the frequency of sex levels off and may even rebound. Perhaps this is one reason for why older adults have sex with about the same frequency as younger adults. A recent survey (Lindau et al., 2007) indicated that adults aged 57 to 85 had sex about two to three times a month, and half of them disclosed they had had oral sex. To the extent that sexual activity declined, it was linked to deteriorating health and, more importantly, to the lack of a partner. Yet even older adults with diminished sexual function continue to consider sex to be an important part of their lives and their relationship (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004).
In addition to sexual frequency, other determinants of sexual satisfaction include what might be referred to as “cherishing” one another. These include communication intimacy, affection, cohesion, respect, and mutual goals (Schwartz & Young, 2009). In fact, one study found that the strongest predictor of sexual satisfaction was what they termed “emotional investment” (Waite & Joyner, 2001). For women, the link between relationship variables and sexual satisfaction is even more pronounced (Basson et al., 2003). That is, a woman’s sexual desire is less likely to be triggered by physiological drives for sexual fulfillment and much more likely to be triggered by relationship qualities such as partner tenderness and the lack of male anger. Numerous studies support this notion, highlighting the powerful impact of respect, fair treatment, and egalitarianism on women’s sexual satisfaction (Bridges, Lease, & Ellison, 2004; Schwartz & Young, 2009). Interestingly, egalitarianism benefits the sexual satisfaction of both men and women (Laumann et al., 2006; Schwartz & Young, 2009). Finally, the positive association among sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, love, and commitment also has been found to be true for premarital couples (Sprecher, 2002).

**Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research**

- One of the findings of the Kinsey Report was that 10 percent of all males were exclusively gay. How would you explain why this estimate is viewed as too high by some and too low by others? Can this matter be settled objectively, scientifically?
- The insistence on vaginal intercourse as the preferred sex act is thought to create problems in the way we experience sex. At the same time, we as a species are supposed to be adaptable, yet we persist in less than optimal approaches. What do you think is responsible for this situation?
- It seems that both the over-valuation and the under-valuation of sex result in lower sexual satisfaction. What might be the mechanism behind this phenomenon?
- Some research suggests that sex and commitment are negatively correlated (Gonzaga et al., 2006). Other research links the first sexual encounter between two partners with an increase in commitment (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). How could these seemingly contradictory findings be reconciled with each other?

**Sexual Communication**

The research on sex discussed thus far is largely descriptive in nature. Although it is informative with respect to many factual aspects of sex (frequency, satisfaction, etc.), it tells us little about why we have sex in the first place. Nor does it tell us how we go about having sex.

**Flirtation**

Sex can be initiated by something as direct as a request to “watch Netflix and chill” or perhaps more subtly via flirtation. The point of flirtation is to stimulate sexual interest, but its purpose is not necessarily to have sex.
Assume for the moment that two people flirt with the explicit purpose of communicating and stimulating sexual interest. How do they go about doing it? It is generally considered uncool to blurt out, “I find you very attractive and want to have sex with you right here and now!” If anything, such a blunt communication is likely to put the other person off and thus might well produce counterintentional results. As it turns out, people frequently employ more subtle, nonverbal cues when flirting with another. Among these nonverbal involvement cues are gaze, body posture, facial expressions, touch, and grooming gestures (Patterson, 1987). Some have argued that what sets these behaviors apart from other nonverbal behaviors, such as scratching and self-touching, are their propensity to signal submissiveness and affiliation (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1974; Givens, 1978). For example, an unsolicited and unexpected compliment in a bar is likely to be interpreted as flirtation, especially when the delivery of the compliment involves a level of effort, such as crossing the room (Downy & Damhave, 1991).

People flirt for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes they do it to communicate or stimulate sexual interest; on other occasions, they do it to pass the time or to find out if they are still able to stir sexual interest in another. Consequently, the pleasures derived from flirting can be manifold and may be somewhat independent of whether or not sex is the ultimate outcome. In fact, researchers (Hall, Carter, Cody, & Albright, 2010; Hall & Xing, 2015) have identified five distinct flirting styles. Those who believe men should make the first move while women passively await their advances tend to embrace the traditional style. Flirting in this style follows traditional gender roles. Similarly, the polite style focuses on propriety and generally follows a rule-governed approach to flirtation. It emphasizes proper manners and polite, nonsexual talk. Those who embrace the physical style of flirtation are comfortable with their sexuality and with using nonverbal, physical cues to express their desire. Further, they excel at both conveying their intent to others as well as at detecting flirtations from others. Similar to this group, people who use playful flirtation styles lack concern for tradition or politeness. Their instrumental approach highlights the fun of the behavior itself, and flirtation is used as a means of self-enhancement rather than for attaining a partner. Finally, sincere flirts seek to establish an emotional connection and to convey their genuine attraction to a potential partner. This is probably one of the most effective flirtation styles, and research on opening lines confirms that most people prefer innocuous or direct remarks to cute and flippant ones (Kleinke et al., 1986).

Initiating Sex

Flirting aside, a more realistic way to think about sexual communication might be in terms of interactions between two people that take place in a social context. From this perspective, we can look at sex as something that two people negotiate with the help of their sexual communication system. A sizeable part of this system is verbal in nature (Victor, 1980). Talking about past sexual experiences and simply voicing sexual interest can often suffice to initiate a sexual encounter. Expressing sexual preferences and fantasies as well as voicing sexual pleasure can shape the experience in important ways. However, such verbal expressions are often preceded or accompanied by a number of nonverbal signals, such as reducing interpersonal distance and increasing eye contact and touch (McCormick, 1979; Perper & Weis, 1987). During the early part of a relationship, men and women alike tend to rely heavily on nonverbal signals, ostensibly to fend off the possibility of rejection or its potential impact (Perper & Weis, 1987). At the same time, men and women often interpret the meaning of such symbols in vastly different ways. Men tend to think of women who
reduce interpersonal distance, maintain eye contact, and touch them as sexy, seductive, and promiscuous, and men thus experience a heightened level of sexual attraction. The same is not true for how women perceive the corresponding behaviors in males (Abbey & Melby, 1986; Perilloux, Easton, & Buss, 2012).

In light of the observation that men tend to over-perceive sexual intent on the part of women, it is perhaps not surprising that men are also more likely to initiate sex. This appears to be true for marital and cohabiting relationships (Brown & Auerback, 1981; Byers & Heinlein, 1989) as well as dating relationships (DeLamater & MacCorquodale, 1979), although there is evidence that women become more comfortable about initiating sex as a relationship matures (Brown & Auerback, 1981). Of course, the existence of sex differences in the likelihood to initiate sex raises an interesting question in terms of how the initiation of sex proceeds among gay and lesbian couples. Although it appears that the partner who is more emotionally expressive is the one who usually initiates sex in both gay and lesbian couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), a recent study of sexual communication and repertoires suggests that that there are in fact more similarities and very few differences between heterosexual and nonheterosexual couples (Holmberg & Blair, 2009).

How do we go about initiating sex? In dating couples, the initiation of sex is often more than just a matter of negotiation via the sexual communication system. The first time a couple has sex often has special meaning and significance. For one thing, it is usually accompanied by strong emotions and thus remembered in vivid detail for a long time. For another, the first time marks a significant turning point, as it generally results in an increase in commitment (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Consequently, couples tend to give consideration to multiple factors before deciding to have sex.

Why do we have sex? The short answer to this question is that there are many reasons. One study (Meston & Buss, 2007) uncovered 237 different reasons for having sex, including love, lust, money, and pragmatic considerations. Further, these reasons were statistically clustered into four global categories that, together, include 13 sub-categories of reasons for having sex. The four global categories are (1) physical reasons (with the following four sub-factors: pleasure, stress reduction, desirability, and experience seeking), (2) goal attainment (with four sub-factors: resources, revenge, social status, and utilitarian), (3) insecurity (with the following three sub-factors: duty/pressure, self-esteem boost, mate guarding), and (4) emotional reasons (with two sub-factors: love/commitment and expression). Notice that sex stemming from love is only one of the 13 sub-factors in this taxonomy, suggesting that love and sex are relatively independent experiences. There are some marked differences in the kinds of reasons, depending on gender and relationship duration. For example, women, more than men, tend to cite affection for their partner as an important reason for having sex—a finding that was also reported by Michael and colleagues (1994). The same is true for sexually inexperienced couples, whereas arousal-related factors are more important for sexually experienced couples.

Whereas men are, by and large, more likely to initiate sex, women often find themselves in a position to have to resist sexual advances. Although this may sound like a stereotype, there are sound evolutionary reasons for women’s reluctance to engage in sex. It may represent a form of error management by which women try to reduce the likelihood that they may produce offspring with a partner who does not improve their inclusive fitness (Haselton & Buss, 2000). Perhaps this is why, compared to men, women are both more comfortable saying no (Grauerholz & Serpe, 1985) and more likely to say no to a partner who wants sex (Clark, 1990; Clark & Hatfield, 1989). How do people go about telling their partners they don’t want to have sex? One study (Perper & Weis, 1987) found two
Sexuality

general categories of rejection strategies. A strategy aimed at avoiding proceptivity entails avoiding or ignoring an unwelcome sexual advance. By using a strategy aimed at incomplete rejection, a woman may indicate that she is not ready to reciprocate at this time because it is too early in the day or the relationship, for example.

The preponderance of these two strategies illustrates that rejecting another’s sexual advances is not an easy thing to do. People who find themselves in such a position are often motivated to avoid hurting another’s feelings by directly rejecting attempts at initiating sex, although it appears that direct rejection is both more common and more acceptable in long-term relationships (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Cupach & Metts, 1991). In married or cohabiting relationships, there is always tomorrow, and thus rejection, even when it is direct, is less threatening to both partners than it might be in more casual dating relationships. Of course, the use of an indirect rejection strategy is not without its downside. Because of their indirectness, such strategies can often be misinterpreted by the recipient as something other than rejection and thereby result in conflicted sexual interactions.

Sexual Pathways

Regardless of how one looks at the relationship between dating and sex, it is clear that being sexually active is a common reality in dating. On the other hand, it appears that there is no set way by which couples decide when the time has come. Instead, the decision to have sex depends in large part on whether a couple feels that the time is right, which itself is likely based on one’s perception of “couplehood.”

Extradyadic Sex

Although being part of a couple helps, there are many alternative pathways to sex. Some do not even include “couplehood,” at least in the traditional sense. Although most couples consider sexual exclusivity part and parcel of a successful relationship, others do not. This is evidenced by the prevalence of extradyadic relationships. Some studies estimate the rate as high as 25 to 50 percent for married men and 15 to 26 percent for married women (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953; Laumann et al., 1994). And when asked about having engaged in extramarital sex in the previous year, 6 percent responded in the affirmative (Twenge et al., 2015). Further, Schmitt and Buss (2001) estimate mate poaching—attempting to steal a person away from his or her partner—occurrences as high as 60 percent for American men and 53 percent for American women. Given the high proportion of individuals admitting to poaching, it should not be surprising that extradyadic relationships are prevalent and common.

Extradyadic sex is widespread and common not only in humans, but also in animal species that practice monogamy (Fisher, 2011). The prevalence of infidelity among humans has led researchers to modify their views on monogamy, referring to it instead as “social monogamy,” in which couples practice all features of monogamy, such as childrearing and social behaviors, save for sexual fidelity (Fisher, 2011). This conceptualization of monogamy is more consistent with actual sex practices and behaviors observed by researchers.

The pervasiveness of infidelity has stimulated research on the evolutionary underpinnings of extradyadic sex (Haselton & Gangestad, 2006, Pillsworth & Haselton, 2006; Pillsworth, Haselton, & Buss, 2004; Fisher, 2011). According to this perspective, women pursue a dual mating strategy aimed at finding a male who will be a good provider for
their offspring and provide the best genetic material available. As a result, women in committed relationships are particularly likely to seek extradyadic sex with a man who has masculine features around the time of ovulation. In other words, women’s and men’s desire for sex outside of their relationship may be equally motivated by concerns with their inclusive fitness. Men benefit in this regard from having sex with many different women. Women benefit from having sex with men who are good providers and men who have good genes.

Evolutionary perspectives also suggest biological universals to explain infidelity. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, women whose immune system genes (major histocompatibility complex) are similar to their partners are more likely to engage in infidelity (Garver-Apgar, Gangestad, Thornhill, Miller, & Olp, 2006). Walum and colleagues (2008) identified a biological predictor of “partner bonding.” Men with one 334 allele scored lower on the bonding scale. Men with two 334 alleles scored even lower. Men carrying this allele were more likely to experience relationship disruptions and marital crises, and these outcomes were even greater in men with two 334 alleles. Thus, this genetic factor may mediate infidelity via the disruption of bonding and relationship maintenance. Discovering the possible evolutionary and biological mechanisms of extradyadic sex clearly responds to the universality of these behaviors but also introduces the question of how temperamentally fit we as a species are for exclusive and long-term monogamy.

Serial Monogamy

As popular sex-advice columnist Dan Savage has advocated, humans are not built to be exclusively monogamous (Oppenheimer, 2011). Perhaps he is not so far from a behavioral truth. Together with the prevalence of infidelity, divorce patterns worldwide suggest a pattern of serial monogamy, or moving from one monogamous relationship to the next. In fact, divorce, as tracked across 53 cultures from 1947 to 1989, falls into three patterns. Incidence of divorce is highest among (1) couples with only one child, (2) couples aged 25–29 who are at the peak of their reproductive capacity, and (3) couples who have been married for roughly 4 years (Fisher, 2011). It appears that for individuals who are of maximum reproductive capacity, relationships last just long enough to raise children past weaning (i.e., the worldwide average age of weaning is 4.2 years) before moving on to a new childbearing relationship. The impetus, whether conscious or not, is that individuals can improve their reproductive success (and with it their inclusive fitness) by increasing the genetic variability of their offspring.

Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM)

In consensual non-monogamy, partners agree to extradyadic romantic and sexual relationships. That is, partners have explicit non-monogamy agreements. There are several different relational structures of CNM relationships, among them the primary/secondary model in which there is a main relationship—the primary partnership—with other relationships secondary to it. In triads and quads, three or four individuals comprise the primary partnership, while one individual who is equally involved with two partners comprises the V-Structure model (Mogilski, Memering, Welling, & Shackelford, 2017). Some common forms of CNM practices are open relationships, polyamory, and swinging. In polyamory, a couple agrees to participate in extradyadic romantic and sexual relationships, whereas in
swinging, couples agree to have sex with others (e.g., partner swapping, sex with multiple partners, etc.). This usually occurs in the context of parties and gatherings set up for this express purpose. And although swinging may conjure up images of raucous and hedonistic revelries, in reality swingers negotiate rules of engagement in which activities and expectations are mutually agreed upon, perhaps even via a written contract.

By some estimates, 4 to 5 percent of Americans identify themselves as practicing consensual non-monogamy (Moors, Conley, Edelstein, & Chopik, 2014). From a sociological perspective, polyamorous relationships are more prevalent in cultures with greater wealth and lower mortality rates (Schmitt, 2005) or contexts that favor short-term mating strategies. And to the degree that men are more likely than women to have an unrestricted **sociosexual orientation** (i.e., ability to have sex without commitment or intimacy, Baumeister et al., 2001), it should not be surprising that gay men are most likely to have CNM relationships that work to the primary partnership’s satisfaction (Schwartz & Young, 2009).

Relative to individuals in exclusively monogamous relationships, those in polyamorous relationships experience greater openness in communication and higher levels of trust, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction (Mogilski et al., 2017; Moors et al., 2014). Those practicing CNM also report lower levels of jealousy and mate retention behaviors as well as positive feelings toward secondary partners (Moors et al., 2014). In fact, polyamory involves high levels of closeness and self-disclosure regarding extradyadic sexual desires and behaviors, with some characterizing it as an ethical and responsible non-monogamy (Anapol, 1997). Although these research results paint a glowing picture of polyamorous relationships, they are not without problems. For example, many of the benefits of CNM accrue asymmetrically to the primary partner, who is likely to be viewed as more supportive and desirable. Although secondary partners are considered more adventurous, they are also more likely to be considered a short-term partner (Mogilski et al., 2017) to whom fewer resources and mate retention strategies are given. Thus, positive gains in primary relationship satisfaction are frequently associated with satisfaction loss to secondary ones.

Why consensual non-monogamy? According to clinical psychologist Elizabeth Sheff (2016), CNM provides relief for “failed monogamists” who struggle mightily with faithfulness and fidelity—even with a partner whom they love. CNM offers these individuals a way to escape the guilt and shame associated with the betrayal and hurt caused by infidelity and subsequent failed relationships. Thus, instead of changing their stripes, some individuals may satisfy their social and sexual needs in an open and honest relationship format. Clearly, CNM relationships help individuals satisfy sexual or interpersonal needs not met by the primary relationship. Evidence in support of this is that secondary partnerships are frequently same-sex relationships. In a roundabout way, both exclusive monogamists and consensual non-monogamists are doing the same thing. Both are practicing pluralistic mating strategies that include both long-term and short-term strategies. For monogamists, short-term strategies may include infidelity or serial monogamy. In CNM, both long-term (primary relationship) and short-term (secondary relationship) strategies co-occur and are done so with transparency (Mogilski et al., 2017).

Before you decide to try out CNM based on these findings, you may want to consider research that suggests it is neither equally appealing to all, nor plausible for many. To the point, survey respondents who had never engaged in CNM relationships and who were high in avoidance were more likely to have positive attitudes toward CNM, while
those high in anxiety were more likely to have a negative view of it. Men also had more positive attitudes toward CNM (Moors et al., 2014). This pattern suggests that the perceived flexibility of open relationships appeals primarily to those who like to avoid commitment and who have an unrestricted sociosexual orientation. Likewise, survey respondents who were in CNM relationships were also more likely to be male. However, unlike those who had never engaged in CNM, consensual non-monogamists were lower in avoidance and were also likely to demonstrate secure attachment styles (Moors et al., 2014). Finally, research suggests that there is continuing social stigma attached to the practice of polyamory (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013), as the majority of Americans continue to value, prefer, and promote monogamy as the gold standard for intimate relationships.

Asexuality

According to the Asexual Visibility and Education Network “an asexual person is a person who does not experience sexual attraction.” Although there is no doubt they exist, it is less clear whether asexuality should be considered a sexual orientation. This is not an entirely academic issue because what constitutes the basis for asexuality matters when we try to estimate the number and proportion of asexuals. For example, when the National Survey of Family Growth poll defined asexuality as “never having had sex in one’s lifetime,” 5 percent of females and 6 percent of males endorsed this item (Poston & Baumle, 2010). However, when Bogaert (2006b) made a person’s subjective notion of their sexual attraction the basis of sexual orientation, the percentage of respondents who identified as lacking sexual attraction to any gender in a British sample dropped to just 1 percent.

It should be noted that asexual individuals do not perceive the absence of person-oriented sexual attraction as distressing. Nor does its absence preclude participation in romantic or affectional relationships with others. That is, asexual individuals may engage in romantic relationships, but generally have lower levels of sexual activity (0.2 per week versus 1.2 week) and participate in sexual activities in order to satisfy their partners (Bogaert, 2006b; Brotto, Knudson, Inskip, Rhodes, & Erskine, 2010). Understanding asexuality as a sexual orientation is a new and growing area of research exploration.

Other Pathways to Sex: Hookups and Friends With Benefits

Sexual pathways continue to evolve. Casual sexual relationships and experiences are by now widespread at least among college students (Rodrigue et al., 2015). Including hookups, there are five pathways that define casual sexual encounters: (1) one-time sexual encounters, (2) sex with a former romantic partner, (3) relationships based primarily on sex, (4) relationships based on intimate and sexual partnerships in which there is no intent to become a couple, and (5) sex with friends with the intent of maintaining friendship status (i.e., friends with benefits) (Rodrigue et al., 2015).

Hookups are, by now, quite common on college campuses. A term that once meant a “spontaneous get-together/getting together on the fly” now refers to a casual, usually one-time-only sexual encounter between acquaintances or even strangers (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). Hookups can but need not include sexual intercourse, and prevalence rates among young adults are between 50 to 80 percent (Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2010). An examination of college students’ accounts of what
compelled them to hook up reveals that one underlying factor may be social. Pluralistic ignorance fueled by campus sexual norms suggesting there is nothing wrong with it contributes in large part to participation in hookups (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Lambert et al., 2003). Generally, both men and women who had “hooked up” thought others were more comfortable with hookups than they were themselves (Lambert et al., 2003). However, this false consensus may also explain why some men and women felt that hooking up made them feel a part of the in-group and in synchrony with mainstream campus life (Lambert et al., 2003).

Consistent with this view, college students who felt lonely and had symptoms of depression at the start of the semester experienced positive gains in well-being after having engaged in penetrative hookups (Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2011). Students who felt less lonely and less depressed at the start of the semester and who engaged in penetrative hookups felt worse than their classmates who did not hook up. Perhaps lonely students use hookups to feel a part of the in-group, while students who are already connected to friendship groups experienced dissonance.

Given the typical college campus’ social atmosphere, it is not surprising that alcohol plays a large role in hookups. And for women, its role is even greater. Perhaps women need the facilitative and disinhibiting assistance of alcohol because they are not completely convinced of the merits of hooking up. In fact, women generally enjoy hookups less than men, desiring instead more intimacy or long-term relationships (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Lambert et al., 2003; Owen et al., 2010; Allison & Risman, 2013). In one study (Owen et al., 2011), heavy alcohol consumption was associated with hookups involving penetration whereas moderate alcohol consumption was associated with hookups not involving penetration. Interestingly, those who did not use alcohol did not hook up. However, in spite of findings that alcohol frequently fuels casual sexual encounters, the strongest predictor of hooking up was whether or not an individual had hooked up before (Owen et al., 2011).

It is estimated that roughly 60 percent of college students have had sex with a friend, known as “friends with benefits” (Bisson & Levine, 2009). Research suggests that one of the primary attractions of this type of relationship is the ability to have commitment-free sex with a trusted and well-liked partner. Given that some key parameters of friendship are different from those of romantic relationships (e.g., friendships do not include exclusiveness, absorption, and passion), is it possible to navigate the blending of the two? Can individuals avoid the complications that sex might introduce into a platonic friendship? Communication would seem to be key to making this relationship work. However, although those who have sex with friends are concerned with the sexualization of their friendship, very few share their trepidations with each other or bother to negotiate the terms of their evolved relationship (Bisson & Levine, 2009).

Just as in hookups, having friends with benefits results in a similar pattern of gendered experiences and attitudes. Whereas both men and women seem equally committed to their friend relationship, motives for entering a sexual relationship differ. Women are more motivated to have sex with a friend out of a desire for a stronger emotional connection. Men are more likely to be motivated by sex itself. Further, while men are generally happy to see the sexual friendship continue, women are more likely to hope the relationship might either revert to a platonic friendship or evolve into a bona fide romantic relationship (Lehmiller, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2011). It seems that the benefits of commitment-free sex are too often accompanied by complications and baggage that may challenge the core of the friendship.
Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Both women and men use nonverbal signs in the early stages of negotiating a sexual encounter, but it seems they perceive these signals differently. Where do you think this discrepancy is coming from?
- How does men's tendency to over-perceive sexual interest fit with researchers' depiction of men having an unrestricted sociosexual orientation and women having a restricted sociosexual orientation?
- Given the variety of sexual relationships and what we know about success rates of long-term monogamous relationships, why are we culturally bound to the idea of lifetime monogamous commitments? Why is relationship success still measured against the standard of long-term monogamy?

Same-Sex Attraction

Scientific understanding of sexual orientation and same-sex attraction progresses in spite of a political and moral climate often opposed to it. Although marriage equality is now the law of the land, bias still exists, with many countries holding even more extreme and intolerant attitudes toward non-heterosexuality. What does science tell us?

Sexual orientation emerges early. One of the most reliable correlates of adult homosexual behaviors is childhood gender role nonconformity (Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Bailey et al., 2016). Little boys who engage in gender nonconformity do things such as play with dolls, have long hair, and avoid rough and tumble play. Conversely, gender nonconforming girls may be found playing sports, dressing like boys, and avoiding girlish pursuits such as playing with dolls and wearing makeup. Gender nonconformity emerges as early as preschool, with most retrospective accounts of the awakening of same-sex interest as early as age 10 (Bailey et al., 2016). These findings and others like them suggest that explanations of non-heterosexuality cannot rest solely on social causes but rather must include biological factors and other epigenetic and developmental variables.

Biological Essentialism

Some who feel that sexual orientation is more than an arbitrary, culture-bound notion to distinguish among types of people have looked for biological mechanisms that might bring about heterosexual and same-sex preferences. To date, they have provided evidence that sexual orientation may be coded genetically, or determined by prenatal hormones and brain neuroanatomy. Evidence in support of biological essentialism, that is, the idea that same-sex preferences are inherited comes from studies that compared the incidence of homosexuality among monozygotic and dizygotic twins. One study of gay men (Bailey & Pillard, 1991) found that 52 percent of monozygotic (MZ) twin brothers were gay, compared to only 22 percent of dizygotic twin brothers. In a comparable study of lesbian women (Bailey, Pillard, Neale, & Ageyi, 1993), 48 percent of monozygotic twin sisters were gay, compared to only 16 percent of dizygotic twin sisters. These studies fall short of pointing to a genetic marker for homosexuality as MZ twins should have a much higher rate of concordance (Bailey et al., 2016). Further, although this and studies
like these confirm the impact of non-genetic factors in determining homosexuality, they nonetheless point to a genetic influence. After all, monozygotic and dizygotic twins share the same environment and learning experiences, but monozygotic twins also share the same genetic makeup.

Hormonal influences were among the earliest biological variables implicated in the development of sexual orientation. One of the oldest hypotheses held that gay men had too little and lesbian women had too much testosterone. However, this does not appear to be true for adult men and women (Gartrell, 1982). Instead, it appears that prenatal exposure to unusually high or low levels of androgens can masculinize or feminize the brain, which may then lead to same-sex preferences. However, this conclusion has been demonstrated only with rats and only with regard to their mating postures. Thus, the idea that human males prenatally exposed to unusually low levels of testosterone and human females prenatally exposed to unusually high levels of testosterone will develop homosexual preferences is somewhat speculative (Ellis & Ames, 1987; Bailey et al., 2016). In general, although support for the role of hormones is not strong, it is too soon to reject it as a potential explanation. These hypotheses await better techniques and methodologies to test them (Bailey et al., 2016).

Neuroanatomical differences in the brains of gay and heterosexual men constitute a third set of biological variables that have been implicated in the development of same-sex preferences. For example, some have pointed to differences in the hypothalamic structures of gay and heterosexual men (LeVay, 1991), whereas others have found differences in the anterior commissure (Allen & Gorski, 1992) and in the size of the suprachiasmatic nucleus (Swaab & Hoffman, 1990). However, before we start looking in our biology books for maps to locate these particular brain structures, we have to keep in mind the correlational nature of this evidence. It may be possible that these differences developed prenatally or during the early years of life and subsequently led to same-sex preferences. However, it is equally possible that these differences came about as a result of being gay to begin with.

Gay Brothers, but Not Lesbian Sisters:
Impact of Environment on Development

If Anthony Bogaert could rewrite the script of the classic western *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (or at least its title), it would have to be called *Five or Six Brides for Seven Brothers*. According to his research on the “fraternal birth-order effect,” the greater the number of older biological brothers, the higher the probability that younger brothers will be sexually attracted to other men (Bogaert, 2006a). Each older brother, according to his research, increases the chances of same-sex attraction by 33 percent. By these calculations, the seventh brother would have a roughly 8 percent chance of same-sex attraction—a much greater probability than the 2 percent base rate for a first-born son and the general population. This has been one of the most consistent findings on male homosexuality (Bailey et al., 2016).

What contributes to this pattern? Blanchard and colleagues (Blanchard & Sheridan, 1992; Blanchard & Bogaert, 1996; Bogaert, 2003; Bogaert, 2006a) hypothesize that a maternal immune response to male fetuses may be at the root of this effect. For example, he found that older adopted brothers do not exert a birth-order influence on younger brothers, suggesting that this effect is driven by physiology and not context or environment. That is, an interaction of male-specific proteins secreted by male fetuses
Sexuality in utero may change the maternal uterine environment for subsequent male fetuses. This explanation suggests that male fetal proteins trigger the release of maternal antibodies in response. The fact that no birth-order effect was found for girls and sisters—because female fetuses do not trigger the maternal immune response—also bolsters support for a physiological link. That is, the lack of a birth-order effect for sisters is consistent with research findings that mothers’ wombs do not “remember” female fetuses in the same way that they “remember” male fetuses (Gualtieri & Hicks, 1985). While the 33 percent per brother increase in probability is dramatic, researchers hasten to point out that the fraternal birth order accounts for just one in seven cases of homosexuality (other estimates are as high as 28.6 percent, Blanchard & Bogaert, 2004). Finally, the fraternal birth-order effect does not account for cases in which first-born sons are gay and cases in which monozygotic twins’ sexual orientation are discordant (Bailey et al., 2016).

Female Sexuality and Sexual Fluidity

A genetic study conducted on 5,799 3- and 4-year-old twin pairs found slightly different results. Knafo, Iervolino, and Plomin (2005) tested fully gender-atypical boys and girls (i.e., feminine boys and masculine girls) as well as partially gender-atypical boys and girls (high or moderately high in both masculinity and femininity). The results of their investigation revealed larger effects for shared environmental than for genetic influences for all groups except for the fully gender-atypical girls. That is, for masculine girls who were also low in femininity, genetics accounted for most of the variance. Thus, while female homosexuality may not be explained by the aforementioned brain and hormone explanations nor by the birth-order mechanism, it does not mean there are no heritable components to same-sex preferences in females. What is clear, however, is that there are multiple causal pathways to explain same-sex preferences and that explanations that consider both heritability and environment as well as the interaction of the two will most likely be fruitful in leading to a more accurate understanding of the etiology of same-sex preferences.

A further consideration is women’s erotic plasticity and the possible fluidity of sexual orientation. Savin-Williams (2016) contends that sexual orientation might be viewed as differences along a continuum rather than as discrete categories (e.g., heterosexual, lesbian, gay). In support of his position, Savin-Williams identifies “in-between” sexualities that run along a continuum from primarily straight to primarily gay/lesbian with in-between orientations such as “mostly straight,” bisexual, and “mostly gay/lesbian.” Knafo and colleague’s (2005) research presented prior is consistent with this conceptualization. Their identification of “partially gender atypical” children corresponds with this view.

Finally, Diamond’s (2003) biobehavioral model of sex and love provides a biologically based interpretation of the broad variety of affectional bonds observed in real-world relationships. The model builds on neuroscience breakthroughs identifying separate pathways and unique neural systems for the testosterone-based lust system and vasopressin- and oxytocin-driven attachment (e.g., Marazziti, Akiskal, Rossi, & Cassano, 1999; Fisher, 1989). The independence of these systems accounts for instances such as those in which children develop intense romantic infatuations (attachment system) with others in the absence of sexual desire (lust system). However, in addition to the independence of attachment from lust, both have also evolved in distinct ways.
Sexual desire is a “targeted” system in which desire or sexual orientation is specific and stems from both heritable and environmental determinants. The result is that individuals develop specific preferences for same- or opposite-sex partners. On the other hand, the attachment system is presumed to operate on a different genetic platform, one that is not targeted. That is, the adult attachment system is considered an outgrowth of the infant-parent attachment model that is not geared toward a specific gender/target and lacks an affectional orientation (Diamond, 2003). Insofar as attachment is linked to romantic attraction, we can experience romantic feelings toward either same-sex or opposite-sex individuals.

A final premise of the biobehavioral model is that the causal paths of love and desire are bidirectional: Love can lead to sex, but sex can also lead to love (Diamond, 2003). The reciprocal effect of love and sex is possible because oxytocin mediates attachment/pair bonding as well as sexual responsiveness. Thus, even commitment-free sex—such as occurs with friends with benefits—may trigger romantic feelings, and even love, via the repeated release of oxytocin. Although many of the premises of this model await empirical support, it comes much closer to describing the subtleties and nuances of sexual relationships, identities, and behaviors, and recognizing the causal pathways of the myriad biological and contextual factors and their interactions.

Research presented in this text provides a deeper understanding of human sexuality. Unfortunately, these new insights do not seem to be reflected in many U.S. sex education curricula. For example, according to the Guttmacher Institute’s (2016) Fact Sheet, only 22 states presently require sex and HIV education. Compared to 2006–2010, fewer teens in 2011–2013 received birth control instruction while more were taught abstinence only. See Table 9.4 for the outcomes of abstinence-only sex education compared to sex education that includes instruction on birth control.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- There are two social constructionist models of sexuality: one that places sexual orientation on a continuum anchored on each side by exclusive homosexuality and exclusive heterosexuality, respectively, and another one according to which homoeroticism and heteroeroticism are distinct and should not be merged into a bipolar continuum. Which model makes more sense to you, and why?
- Our neural systems for sexual desire and attachment have evolved to operate relatively independently of each other, yet to influence each other. What are the evolutionary advantages afforded by this development?
- Virtually all minority groups face prejudice, but homosexuality seems to elicit the most virulent response. What do you think is causing this situation?
- Table 9.4 contains some facts about sex education in the United States. Based on these facts, how successful would you say sex education is? Is there any reason to believe that sex education in its current form might reduce prejudice against gays and lesbians?
### Table 9.4 Facts and Stats About Sex Education in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>• Incidence of sexual intercourse by age 18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 6 in 10 teenaged women</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 5 in 10 teenaged men</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 1995–2002: 10% decline in incidence of sexual intercourse in teens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>aged 15–17</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• U.S. teens’ levels of sexual activity comparable to Canadian,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>English, French, and Swiss teens; however, U.S. teens more likely</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to have shorter, more sporadic relationships and less likely to use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>contraceptives.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pregnancy</strong></td>
<td>• 1990–2002: Overall decline in pregnancy rate in women aged 15–19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1990: 117 pregnancies per 1,000 teen women</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2002: 75 pregnancies per 1,000 teen women</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• U.S. still among highest in teen pregnancies in the developed world—</td>
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<td></td>
<td>twice as high as England, Wales, Canada; eight times higher than</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Netherlands and Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>**Sexually Transmitted</td>
<td>• Annually, about 9 million new STIs occur in U.S. teens and young</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infections (STIs)</td>
<td>adults; rates in Canada and Western Europe much lower</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abstinence Only</strong></td>
<td>• 2002: 1/3 of teens received no instruction on contraception</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2002: 21% of females and 24% of males received only abstinence only</td>
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<td></td>
<td>messages and no formal instruction on contraception; in 1995 only</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%–9% of teens received only abstinence instruction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• No evidence that abstinence only programs delay teen sex; evidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>suggests they may deter contraceptive use and increase unintended teen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pregnancies and STIs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sex Education</strong></td>
<td>• Between 1995 and 2002, 14% of decline in teen pregnancies was due</td>
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<td>to teen abstinence or reduction in frequency of intercourse; 86% of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the decline was due to an increase in contraceptive use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Evidence shows that comprehensive sex education programs that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>include both abstinence message and contraception instruction can</td>
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<td></td>
<td>delay onset of sexual activity, reduce number of partners, and increase</td>
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<td></td>
<td>contraceptive use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2006: Not a single federally funded program that supports both</td>
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<td></td>
<td>abstinence and contraceptive education</td>
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### Summary

**Issues**

- Early work focused on patterns of sexual behavior and functioning
- Review of sexual practices around the world
- Current work focuses on sex as part of social interactions
  - Topics include communication and sexual interaction
  - Reactions to rejection
- How couples decide to have sex
- Link between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction
- Multiple pathways to sex that include a variety of nonmonogamous relationships
- Same-sex relationships
Theories

- Sexual communication theories: Explain the importance of verbal and nonverbal signals in communicating sexual intent
- Biological essentialism: Biology and biological mechanisms as explanations for the origin of homosexuality
- Biobehavioral model of sex suggests that love, sex, and romance can operate independently of each other

Research

- Descriptive research suggests that sexual behaviors of Americans are relative conventional and unchanged until the 2010s
  - Sexual relations develop gradually and with a fair amount of exclusivity
  - Majority of couples begin sexual relations after they believe they are in love with one another or after about a month of dating
  - Current generation demonstrates more accepting attitudes and broader range of sexual behaviors
  - Correlational research suggests a positive relationship between sex and relationship satisfaction
  - Commitment and intimacy are positively correlated with sexual satisfaction
  - Extradyadic sex is prevalent and takes many forms
  - Consensually nonmonogamous relationships are frequently satisfying and are typified by openness, trust, and communication
  - Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction
  - Reasons for engaging in as well as outcomes of hookups and sex with friends differ for men and women
  - Research supports the notion that homosexuality is the result of an interaction of biology and nurture
  - Love can occur without sex, sex can occur outside of love, and we can love a same-sex other without being gay
  - Abstinence only programs not as effective at stemming teen sexual activity, unwanted pregnancies, and the transmission of STIs; combination of abstinence message along with instruction on contraception most effective

Key Terms

Erotic plasticity: the extent to which sexual motivation is influenced by cultural, social, and situational factors.
Avoiding proceptivity: rejecting unwelcome sexual advances by ignoring or avoiding them.
Incomplete rejection: saying no to sex by postponing it until some condition is met.
Extradyadic relationships: sexual involvement with someone other than an established mate.
Serial monogamy: moving from one monogamous relationship to the next.
Consensual non-monogamy: a relationship in which partners agree to extradyadic romantic and sexual relationships.
Polyamory: Couples agreeing to engage in extradyadic romantic and sexual relationships.
Sociosexual orientation: individual differences in the tendency to have casual, uncommitted sexual relationships.
Asexuality: Lacking sexual attraction to any gender.
Hookups: a dating practice involving a casual, usually one-time-only sexual encounter.
Friends with benefits: a dating practice involving commitment-free sex with friends and acquaintances.
Biological essentialism: a theoretical position regarding sexual orientation that emphasizes the role of such biological factors as genes, hormones, and neuroanatomy.
Biobehavioral model of sex and love: theoretical model according to which attachment behavior and sexual behavior are controlled by separated, yet interacting, brain structures.
Oxytocin: a neurotransmitter involved in the regulation of the attachment system.
If you want to start a conversation with a girl, first you have to say something like, “hi.” If she says “hi” back, you are off to a good start. It’s good to let the girl start off the conversation. You want her to talk. If she doesn’t talk then you have to . . . If she doesn’t want to talk to you, then either she is shy or she doesn’t like you. You might want to get out of there and try another day.

—Alec Green, *How to Talk to Girls*, pp. 32–33

Problem with your relationship? For those who eschew the Internet’s ready advice, a cruise down the aisle of any bookstore will reveal a plethora of books aimed at helping the love-lorn sort out all nature of relationship dilemmas. Alec Green was 8 years old when he wrote his. A good number of books cite communication as the root cause of most relationship problems. Deborah Tannen followed up on her *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990) with 11 sequels full of advice on how men and women can improve communication and have healthy, mutually rewarding relationships. John Gray’s wildly successful *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* (1992) triggered 13 equally successful sequels (from *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom* to *The Mars and Venus Exercise Solution*). None of them proposed that the battle of the sexes had turned into intergalactic warfare. Rather, they echoed in a much-amplified voice what researchers in psychology have known for some time. First, there are relatively stable differences in the ways men and women communicate. Second, these gender differences have traceable origins. Third, gender-based communication differences are at the heart of most relationship problems.

**Sex Differences in Communication**

Men and women differ on numerous dimensions in the ways they communicate. Some of these dimensions have less to do with *what* they say to each other than with *how* they do it. To illustrate some of these differences, consider the following scenarios.

As Norm enters his favorite sports bar after work, he notices that his friend Cliff is already seated on his favorite bar stool—the one closest to the TV that shows the baseball game. Norm sits down alongside him. They are both fixated on the TV screen, although their bodies are turned toward each other ever so slightly in order to have equal access to the bowl of Beernuts that sits between them on the bar. The following conversation begins to unfold:

*Norm:* Man, I’d like to have your job. How do you manage to get out of work so early every day?
Cliff: Hey, I’m in my cubicle by seven in the morning, so come four thirty, I bolt.
Norm: What’s the score?
Cliff: Cubs up by two, bottom of the eighth.
Norm: Any home runs?
Cliff: No, but Hendricks’ got a two-hitter going.
Norm: Hey, I’ve been thinking about buying a truck.
Cliff: Hmm. A guy at work just got one of those SUVs. Says he loves it but the thing guzzles gas like there’s no tomorrow.
Norm: Have you looked at gas prices lately? If this keeps up I’m gonna have to take out a second mortgage just so I can drive to work.
Cliff: C’mon, how can that be a strike? That pitch wasn’t even in the same zip code as the plate!
Norm: You know, I remember when a gallon of gas was like fifty cents.
Cliff: Yeah, back when Fergie Jenkins still played for the Cubs.
Norm: Fergie Jenkins. Those were the days.
Cliff: And Ditka. They just don’t make them like that anymore.
Meanwhile, in a quiet corner of the same bar, Oni and Susan find a small table at which to sit. They pull up the chairs so they can face each other as they catch up on what’s been happening in their lives.
Oni: How have you been? It’s been almost a week since I last saw you.
Susan: I’ve been trying to shake this awful cold.
Oni: You do look like you’re a little under the weather.
Susan: Under the weather? I’ve been sniffling and sneezing almost the entire winter. Everybody at work’s been doing the same thing, so I’m sure that doesn’t help.
Oni: I’ve been lucky so far. Do you take vitamins or any kind of supplements? I’ve been doing that and I think it’s been helping me this year.
Susan: Well, I take a multiple vitamin and some extra Vitamin C on occasion. But I don’t know about that other stuff, like Echinacea and stuff. I sometimes wonder if they do more harm than good.
Oni: I see your point. It’s probably a good idea to stay away from stuff that’s not FDA approved. How are things at work?
Susan: All right, I guess. There’s this new guy in accounting who’s been acting kind of weird. I mean he is nice and real easy on the eyes, but he keeps dropping sexual innuendos all the time. That really makes me feel kind of yucky.
Oni: We had a guy like that, too, a few years ago. He probably thought he was funny, but some people didn’t and filed a sexual harassment complaint against him. I don’t exactly know what came out of it, but one day I came to work and he was gone.
Susan: I wish my company had a policy against sexual harassment. I mean, I don’t like what’s going on, but I don’t think I want to file a lawsuit and stuff.
Oni: Well, who would? It costs an arm and a leg and it’s probably hell to prove. So what are you going to do?
Susan: I don’t know, I just wonder why guys have to be like that.
Oni: Weird creatures, I’m telling you. Just look at those two over at the bar [pointing to Norm and Cliff]. I wonder what they’re hatching.
Susan: Whatever it is, I’m not sure I want to know.

Admittedly, some aspects of these fictitious conversations reflect popular stereotypes more than anything else. But are men more likely to talk about sports and trucks? Do
women really talk more than men, as some have suggested (James & Drakich, 1993)? There is evidence that the sexes approach the job of talking to one another in different ways. By looking at the conversational styles evident when men talked to each other and when women talked to each other, Tannen (1994a) found several differences. By and large, men prefer side-by-side interactions, whereas women prefer their bodily alignment to be oriented toward each other. Consequently, Norm and Cliff prefer to sit at the bar, whereas Susan and Oni sit at a table. But even though the preference for a side-by-side alignment prevents men from gazing at each other, their conversations are not necessarily less engaged than those of women. Rather, their engagement proceeds as if on parallel tracks. Not surprisingly, there is evidence that the different alignment preferences may be related to differences in the kind of activities men and women enjoy (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). Specifically, it appears that men prefer activities that can be done in parallel (e.g., going fishing), whereas women prefer activities that promote talking (e.g., having lunch together).

Compared to men, women establish topics for their conversations quickly and talk in depth about a small number of them for an extended period of time. Men, on the other hand, show less topical cohesion, preferring instead to cover a lot of topics for a shorter period of time. Interestingly, these differences in alignment and topical cohesion appear to manifest themselves at an early age. In Tannen’s (1994b) study, differences were equally present among 6-year-olds as well as 25-year-olds. Before we look at possible explanations for these differences, let us look at another feature of mixed-sex conversations: interruptions.

**Interruptions: Let Me Finish, Please!**

It is easy to see that the different conversational styles might clash once men and women talk to each other rather than among themselves. Men might become impatient with women’s proclivities to talk about one topic at length. Women might take men’s tendency to jump from one topic to the next with trailblazing speed to indicate a lack of attention and caring. Moreover, one might speculate that men would be tempted to interrupt women more during a conversation. Preferring to jump from one subject to the next quickly, men might cut women off as they are talking in depth about a single topic. In addition, interruptions can be interpreted as a means for reasserting dominance and control in an interaction (e.g., Mishler & Waxler, 1968; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Zimmerman & West, 1975). Researchers who work within this framework look at interruptions as violating normal conversational rules, as being negative or undesirable behavior, and as constituting an attempt to exercise power and to dominate and control the interaction through control of the floor and of the topic of conversation.

So, are interruptions more common in mixed-sex conversations? In other words, are men more likely to interrupt women than they would other men? Are women less likely to interrupt a speaker of either sex? An early study that recorded naturally occurring conversations in public places (Zimmerman & West, 1975) seems to suggest the answer is a resounding yes. In this study, 31 conversations were recorded in such places as coffee shops and drugstores. A total of 10 conversations took place between men, another 10 between women, and the remaining 11 between mixed-sex pairs. Interruptions were operationally defined as simultaneous speech that penetrated into the structure of the speaker’s utterances more than two syllables from completion. The results indicated that when men talk to men and when women talk to women, interruptions are about equally
divided between the two speakers. However, in mixed-sex dyads, a whopping 96 percent of interruptions were initiated by men.

Many took these findings as proof for the asymmetrical pattern of interruptions predicted by both the topical cohesion perspective as well as the reasserting dominance perspective. However, as Aries (1996) has pointed out, such a conclusion may be more in line with wishful thinking than the actual data. The main problem is that the number of interruptions observed by Zimmerman and West (1975) was very low to begin with. A mere 7 interruptions took place in the 20 same-sex conversations, and they occurred in only 3 of the 20 conversations (leaving 17 conversations that took place without any interruptions whatsoever). This is an awfully small database on which to base the somewhat sweeping conclusion that interruptions in same-sex conversations are about even. In the mixed-sex conversations, a full quarter of all interruptions came from a single man who repeatedly interrupted a female teaching assistant as she was trying to explain something to him. Once again, given the small sample size, the behavior of this single outlier may have skewed the data to the point that the conclusions might be at least somewhat erroneous. The reason this particular man interrupted so frequently may have been less rooted in his desire to dominate the female than in his wish to fully understand the concepts she was explaining.

Of course, based on a close look at just one study, one should be reluctant to reject the popular notion that men interrupt women more. However, a comprehensive review of all relevant studies between 1965 and 1991 suggests that reports of sex differences in interruptions may have been greatly exaggerated (James & Clarke, 1993). Only 6 of 20 studies on interruptions in mixed-sex dyads find a higher frequency of interruptions by men. More than twice as many studies (13) report no differences in the frequency of interruptions by men and women, and 2 even find that women are the interrupting sex!

It also appears that researchers have historically defined interruptions too narrowly. Rather than being evil devices employed in the service of dominance and control, some interruptions may be made for the purpose of clarification or simply to express agreement. Interruptions of this nature have been termed confirmation interruptions (Kennedy & Camden, 1983). They are very different from rejection interruptions, such as the expression of disagreement. They are further different from disconfirmation interruptions, including those that show awareness of the speaker’s statement but make light of them (tangentialization) and those that are made with the ultimate goal of changing the subject.

When one looks at interruptions from this perspective, a very different picture emerges with regard to sex differences. One study looking at interruptions in naturally occurring mixed-sex graduate seminars (Kennedy & Camden, 1983) found that in this context, women actually interrupted more than men. Interestingly, almost half of the interruptions were confirmation interruptions (indicating agreement and asking for clarification). Of course, one might argue that the nature of the setting (graduate seminars) did not easily lend itself to interruptions based on power and dominance. On the other hand, a study that looked at interruptions during conversations between pairs of unacquainted men and women (Dindia, 1987) found that the majority of interruptions by both males and females expressed agreement.

The bottom line on interruptions in mixed-sex conversations seems to be that the popular belief regarding men interrupting women more than vice versa has very little support. This is not to say that men never interrupt women in the service of asserting or maintaining dominance. Rather, the conclusion should be that interruptions serve many functions (Aries, 1996) that may be invoked by men and women alike.
Communication

At times conversations can be interrupted by a delay in one person’s response to another’s utterance, regardless of the conversants’ gender. Because this happens with some frequency in conversations mediated by technology, it is worth considering how they may affect relationships among two or more people. Several studies of previously unacquainted individuals whose conversations were disrupted by a longer-than-expected pause found that these silences threatened their sense of belonging and undermined their sense of “we-ness” (Koudenburg, Postmes, & Gordijn, 2011, 2013). These detrimental effects occurred independently of the content of the conversation and in the absence of participants’ conscious awareness of the disrupting silence. It appears that conversations that flow smoothly can go a long way toward creating a sense of belonging and positive affect.

The picture changes dramatically, however, when it comes to flow disruptions in the conversations of close partners. They don’t perceive them as a threat but instead fall back on their relationship beliefs to conclude that silence implies mutual agreement. Not surprisingly, then, this is particularly prevalent in relationships in which partners feel secure (Koudenburg, Gordijn, & Postmes, 2014).

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- It seems that gender differences in communication have less to do with content and more with style. How much of an influence do you think this type of difference has on a relationship?
- One explanation for the gender differences in communication is that they are acquired through socialization. Two such differences have to do with alignment (parallel vs. face-to-face) and with topical cohesion (many topics discussed cursorily vs. fewer topics discussed in depth). What might be the reasons behind these different socialization outcomes? Why do you think they developed?
- Keeping in mind that different types of interruptions are employed for different purposes, what influence do you suppose the context, or the situation, might have on interruption frequency and type? Think for example of a seminar-style class, a workplace, and a romantic dinner.

Language Use and Conversation Management

Interruptions to express agreement or to ask for clarification can serve as important tools for managing conversations. Even though it appears there is little difference in the ways men and women use interruptions, the literature on gender and communication is replete with claims about scores of sex differences.

Politeness

One popular claim holds that women’s speech is marked by politeness. For example, compared to men, women are said to be more likely to use the words please, might, may, and could when making a request (Lakoff, 1973, 1975, 1977; Holmes, 1984). Women are also said to be more likely to avoid directives and imperatives (Brown & Levinson,
In other words, a man working on his car’s engine is likely to request a tool by uttering, “Get me a half-inch wrench!” whereas a woman would request the same tool by politely asking, “Would you please get me a half-inch wrench?” Again, this claim appears to have some face validity. Furthermore, questionnaire studies in which men and women were asked to respond to hypothetical scenarios revealed such differences quite clearly (e.g., Baxter, 1984). Finally, a recent study analyzing over 14,000 samples of men’s and women’s writings found a reliable but small tendency for women to use more polite phrases (e.g., “Would you mind if we had sex?” “Should we buy a flat screen TV?”) than men (Newman, Groom, Handelman, & Pennebaker, 2008).

However, a number of variables modify the extent to which men and women use more or less polite forms in making requests. Specifically, it has been suggested that the balance of power may play an important role (Sagrestano, 1992). As such, focusing on informant (i.e., speaker) characteristics alone may not be enough to fully inform our understanding of communication. Research analyzing the utterances of men and women purchasing train tickets found no significant differences between men’s and women’s use of speech devices such as repetitions, hesitations, self-corrections, and the asking of questions (Brouwer, Gerritsen, & De Haan, 1979). Instead, the most significant factor in determining differences in speech type was the gender of the ticket taker! In other words, a man might be more likely than a woman to use a directive when requesting the wrench from his adolescent son than his neighbor, who happens to be an expert in car repair as well as the owner of the wrench. And, of course, when the need for a wrench arises while motor oil is gushing from the engine, it may matter little whether the person making the repair is male or female.

Tag Questions

Another communication difference, first proposed by Lakoff (1973, 1975, 1977), has to do with the use of tag questions by men and women. The claim is that women often add a short question to the end of a sentence to express hesitancy and uncertainty (“We’re eating out tonight, aren’t we?”). However, there is conflicting empirical evidence regarding this claim. Some studies find support, others find the exact opposite (i.e., men asking more tag questions), and still others find no difference (Aries, 1996; Newman et al., 2008). One way to resolve the conflicting findings is to look at the functions that tag questions serve. As was the case with interruptions, not all tag questions are the same (Holmes, 1984). Some may be uttered to convey uncertainty, whereas others can serve to express solidarity and ask the person to join a conversation (“Still bummed out about your divorce, are you?”). Yet other tag questions may be used to soften a directive or a negatively toned speech act, thus adding a measure of politeness (“You’re not going to play golf again, are you?”).

One study that examined tags (Holmes, 1984) found a number of interesting sex differences in terms of sheer frequency as well as in how they are used. By and large, women use tags slightly more often than men. More importantly, the majority of women’s tags were used in the service of expressing solidarity, and women used these types of tags far more frequently than men. Somewhat surprisingly, in light of Lakoff’s claims, men used almost twice as many tags to express uncertainty than did women. Thus, it appears that women use tags primarily to promote conversation, whereas men use tags primarily to express uncertainty (as in, “We are having sex tonight, aren’t we?”).

Another way to examine the use and function of tag questions is to analyze their impact based on the speaker’s credibility rather than his or her gender. In the context of
persuasion, Blankenship and Craig (2007) found that the use of tag questions reduced the persuasiveness of messages from communicators low in credibility. Conversely, tag questions used by credible sources increased the extent to which messages were elaborated and processed (Blankenship & Craig, 2007). The implications of this study raise the question as to whether studies on gender differences in the use of tag questions might also have captured some of the stereotyped differences in terms of source credibility.

Qualifiers and Hedges

Lakoff (1973, 1975, 1977) claimed that women expressed uncertainty and hesitancy by virtue of using more qualifiers and hedges, such as I guess, I think, Sort of, I mean, and You know. Among all of Lakoff’s claims, this has been one of the most difficult to study empirically. Part of the problem is that many different meanings are attached to what Lakoff considered qualifiers. Take, for example, the use of “you know.” Its precise meaning depends on both its position in a sentence as well as the speaker’s intonation (Aries, 1996; Holmes, 1984). At the beginning of a sentence, it may simply be a call for attention and indicate certainty (“You know, we really need to clean up the kitchen”). At the end of a sentence, preceded or followed by a pause, it may serve as an invitation to provide feedback to the speaker and indicate a level of uncertainty. For example, “It’s nice out, you know” may prompt the other to ask, “Do you want to play tennis?” It is not clear if the same thing would happen if the phrase you know had been omitted.

Mulac and colleagues (Mulac & Lundell, 1994; Mulac, 2006) as well as Newman et al. (2008) coded and analyzed written text and found empirical support that women were more likely than men to hedge. However, when Holmes (1984) analyzed men’s and women’s formal and informal speech, he found no overall sex differences in the use of the phrase you know. As one might expect, it seems to occur primarily in informal conversations. As was the case with tag questions, men use you know primarily to express uncertainty, whereas women use it to express certainty. Moreover, women use it more often than men to boost the strength of a statement (“You just bought a new car last year, you know”) and to express certainty about the validity of a proposition (“They thought I was stupid, you know”). To boost the strength of a statement by means of the phrase you know generally entails falling intonation, whereas the expression of certainty entails rising intonation. In any event, there is little research to suggest that phrases such as you know are expressions of uncertainty by women. Nor does it seem to be the case that women use the phrase more frequently than men. In studies that find such a difference, you know is primarily used as a device to secure a conversation topic (e.g., Fishman, 1980).

Back-Channeling

Our laundry list of alleged and real sex differences in communication concludes with some considerations of Duncan’s (1974) observations about back-channeling. It includes a variety of verbal and nonverbal responses to another’s utterances, such as sentence completions, brief restatements, head nodding and head shaking, and minimal responses of the Hmm, Yeah, and Right variety. Many studies indicate that women use back-channeling to a higher degree than do men, although it appears that an equal number of studies show the opposite or find no difference (cf. Aries, 1996). Back-channeling serves a variety of
purposes; for example, minimal responses inserted during another’s speech may indicate agreement and encouragement, whereas the same responses after a delay may be attempts to discourage further conversation about the topic. Interestingly, Fishman (1980) found that women use back-channeling more to express agreement, whereas men tend to use it primarily to signal lack of interest.

The mixed bag of evidence regarding Lakoff’s claims about differences in men’s and women’s language use triggers at least two questions. First, why is there such a discrepancy between Lakoff’s claims and the evidence? One problem is methodological in nature. In arriving at her conclusions, Lakoff relied primarily on inspections of her own speech and that of acquaintances, using introspection and intuition. If nothing else, it may be that this relatively severe sampling bias was ultimately responsible for her conclusions. Had she included a more representative sample of women, Lakoff may well have found what others did in the process of debunking her claims. The second question is more difficult to answer: Why, as a society, have we rushed to embrace Lakoff’s findings so willingly and with little hesitation? The answer may lie in our deep-seated desire to find differences between the sexes. We all know perfectly well that men and women are different, but we are much less certain on exactly how they differ. In addition, Lakoff’s observations about differences in politeness, use of tag questions, and qualifiers resonate well with our stereotypes about men and women in conversation.

**Emotionality and Support**

Our discussion of sex differences in communication has so far focused primarily on differences in the conversational style preferred by women and men. However, there is another area to investigate. Much literature seems to support the notion that women are more emotionally sensitive and expressive than men. Put a slightly different way, women approach talk with an affective orientation, whereas men approach it with an instrumental orientation (e.g., Ballswick, 1988; Gilligan, 1982; Vaux, 1985; Mulac, 2006; Newman et al., 2008). Support for this idea comes from research on sex differences in self-disclosure, discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, much of its thrust comes from research that looks at sex differences in emotional support. Research consistently finds women to be more likely than men to do the following:

- Inquire about an upsetting situation (Mickelson, Helgeson, & Weiner, 1995)
- Provide emotional support (Trost, Collins, & Embree, 1994)
- Seek emotional support from others (Ashton & Fuehrer, 1993)
- Feel confident about their ability to provide support (Clark, 1994)
- Place a high value on skills related to giving support (Burleson, Kunkel, Samter, & Werking, 1996)
- Employ supportive strategies directed at emotions (Derlega, Barbee, & Winstead, 1994)

A study of gender differences in instant messaging (IM) found gender similarities on all variables except in expressiveness. Not surprisingly, women sent more expressive messages than men (Fox, Bukatko, Hallahan, & Crawford, 2007). Women’s use of emotional language and men’s use of instrumental language were also supported in Newman et al.’s (2008) analysis of over 14,000 written texts, mentioned earlier. Women used words that referenced emotional and psychological states as well as social situations more than men. Women wrote more about their thoughts, emotions (including doubts), and other people,
and they were more likely to use verbs. Men, on the other hand, used a preponderance of words referring to objects, processes, and labeling of external events. They were more likely to write about occupation, money, and sports; refer to numbers; and use more articles, prepositions, and long words. And yes, men also used more swear words than women. Although many of these differences were statistically small to moderate, the size and scope of the sample, coupled with the computer analysis and coding of text, make these results notable.

Thus, although some of the reported sex differences are relatively small, as is the case in differences regarding self-disclosure, the cumulative evidence suggests that sex differences in emotionality and emotional support are fairly pervasive. It is therefore difficult to argue that these findings may be artifacts due to methodological shortcomings, as was the case with some of the purported sex differences in communication style. Accounting for these differences theoretically is an entirely different matter. We examine the prevailing view next.

**Men and Women: Different Cultures, Different Planets?**

Even though numerous explanations have been offered to account for a variety of sex differences in communication, by far the most prevailing and popular view is that women and men form different cultures (Wood, 1994). The different cultures hypothesis holds that the sexes are socialized into different cultures, with each sex developing vastly different but equally valid and effective ways of communicating, including expressions of emotional intimacy and support. This idea is not without appeal. For one thing, it seems to be a step up from biological accounts (e.g., Fausto-Sterling, 1985) that essentially proclaim biology to be destiny. For another, it seems to make intuitive sense. After all, everybody knows that girls and boys are raised differently. Little girls are encouraged to express their emotions and to be concerned about the feelings of others. Little boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to keep their feelings under wraps, especially when it comes to expressing emotions such as sadness and distress. Is it any wonder, then, that men and women will come to inhabit different speech communities (Wood, 1997), emotional cultures (Wood, 1994), or planets (Gray, 1992)? Is it any wonder that the different cultures view has become so widely accepted that it is taught like the gospel?

Unfortunately, the different cultures view has some rather profound implications for theory, research, and teaching (Kunkel & Burleson, 1998) that justify a more critical examination. For example, if women and men constitute different cultures, it may be necessary to develop separate theories of close relationships to account for the different things men and women seek in a relationship as well as the different ways in which they develop and maintain them. Further, if women and men are from different cultures, it may be necessary to develop culturally sensitive methods for our research. Finally, if men and women are from different cultures, it may be necessary to develop educational programs designed to respect and appreciate the differences in each other's culture. In other words, in order to get along with each other, men and women need diversity training (Kunkel & Burleson, 1998)!

So what's wrong with this picture? It is not entirely clear who belongs to the different cultures (Burleson, 1997). Many researchers assign membership according to biological sex (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Noller, 1993; Tannen, 1990); others, most notably Wood (1997), base assignment on psychological gender. This approach, then, suggests that the different cultures thesis does not necessarily apply to males and females per se, but instead
to masculine and feminine speech communities. But how does one find out to which culture or community any given person belongs? Seemingly, the answer is that one examines the person’s speech style: Those who use the feminine style are members of the feminine community, and those who use the masculine style are members of the masculine community (Wood, 1997).

There is something deeply troubling about assigning people to speech communities or even cultures based on their style of speech. For one thing, it is inherently circular. For another, it makes it unclear how the different cultures thesis could be tested empirically. In order to ascertain if we are dealing with different cultures, we need to provide data that go beyond simply showing that there are sex differences in communication. In light of this consideration, Burleson (1997) suggested that tests of the different cultures hypothesis should take into account differences that one would generally expect for different cultures, such as meanings, values, and preferences. In other words, if men and women form different cultures beyond communication styles, one would expect them to differ also in terms of the meaning they associate with important relationship concepts (e.g., intimacy, sex), the values they place on such things as emotional support, and general preferences regarding the way things ought to be done.

Interestingly, when one throws meanings, values, and preferences into the mix, there is surprisingly little support for the different cultures hypothesis. With respect to meanings, Monsour (1992) looked at sex differences in the meaning assigned to intimacy in friendships and found them to be very small. Men and women alike listed self-disclosure as the most common meaning of intimacy. Even though women did so more often than men (87 percent vs. 56 percent), the important thing is that the majority of both sexes appeared to feel the same way. Moreover, roughly even numbers of men and women listed emotional expressiveness as the second most common meaning of intimacy. Sharing activities was mentioned relatively infrequently by most sexes (0 percent of women and 9 percent of men). Many other studies show very similar results (Helgeson, Shaver, & Dyer, 1987; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Reis, 1990).

Research on the values men and women place on different communication skills is equally unsupportive of the different cultures thesis. In one study, male and female research participants rated the importance of various communication skills in friendships and romantic relationships (Burleson et al., 1996). The list included affectively oriented skills such as comforting (e.g., “Can really cheer me up when I’m feeling down”) and ego support (e.g., “Makes me feel like I’m a good person”) as well as instrumental skills such as persuasion (e.g., “Is able to get me to go along with what he/she wants to do”) and narration (e.g., “Often comes up with witty remarks in conversation”).

Women considered the affective skills of their partner as slightly more important than men regardless of relationship type. Men, on the other hand, viewed the instrumental skills of their partner as important. However, contrary to the different cultures thesis, both men and women placed a much higher value on the affectively oriented skills of their partner. Of course, in light of such findings, one might ask why women often report more problems in their long-term romantic relationships than do men. It appears that it is not a matter of differences in the standards or values that men and women deem important. Rather, it is that the perception of problems stems from discrepancies in the extent that the standards are fulfilled (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997) in the relationship.

Finally, the idea that men and women would prefer to interact with a member of their own culture has little support. It really does not make too much sense to begin with. Heterosexual men and women generally prefer to have sexual interactions with members of
the opposite sex (a.k.a. the different culture). But even when it comes to seeking emotional support, men and women do not gravitate toward members of their own sex. Instead, both sexes prefer to look for emotional support from women (Clark, 1994; Kunkel, 1995). Even the more general hypothesis that men and women find cross-sex interactions less rewarding than interactions with members of their own sex because of the “clash of conversational styles” (Tannen, 1990) has virtually no support (e.g., Goldsmith, McDermott, & Hawkins, 1996). If anything, evidence shows that members of both sexes find interactions with females to be more intimate and meaningful than interactions with men (Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985; Wheeler et al., 1983).

**Different Cultures, Different Skills, or Different “Degrees”?**

The differences in the communication styles of men and women, as profound as they may be, do not appear to justify claims of representing different cultures. Instead, it may be that the differences in men’s and women’s socialization lead to predictable communication deficits. In other words, men and women are part of one culture in which differences in socialization foster the development of emotional support skills among girls but discourage them among boys. The result is a skill specialization among women and a skill deficit among men with respect to support and comforting (Kunkel & Burleson, 1999). It is this difference in comforting skills that leads both men and women to turn to women for comfort and support during times of stress and emotional upheaval (Clark, 1994; Kunkel, 1995). The skill specialization account proposes a number of additional hypotheses that contrast maximally with the different cultures account, as shown in Table 10.1.

Several things are appealing about the skill specialization account of the sex differences in emotional support. First, unlike the different cultures view, skill specialization takes into account similarities between the sexes along with differences. Second, this viewpoint represents a much more parsimonious explanation than the different cultures account. Third, it is more soundly supported by the data (Kunkel & Burleson, 1999; MacGeorge, Graves, Feng, Gillihan, & Burleson, 2004). Fourth, and perhaps most important, skill specialization suggests a unique and perhaps simple solution to communication problems between men and women. That is, rather than needing diversity training, men and women may be able to learn each other’s communication skills by way of the three P’s involved in acquiring any skill: Practice, practice, practice.

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<th><strong>Table 10.1</strong> Some Differences in Comforting Preferences Predicted by Two Theoretical Accounts</th>
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<td><strong>Different Cultures Account</strong></td>
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<td>Men and women live in different emotional cultures.</td>
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<td>Men and women have different but equally effective ways of dealing with emotional experience.</td>
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<td>Men and women will turn to their own sex for support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and women will feel more supported by members of their own sex.</td>
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</table>

Source: Adapted from Kunkel and Burleson (1999).
Skill deficits aside, research on gender differences in men’s and women’s linguistic styles overwhelmingly supports the contention that there are more similarities than differences between the sexes (MacGeorge et al., 2004; Dindia, 2006; Mulac, 2006). And though men and women may have different ways of executing the same communication task, these differences are subtle at best (Mulac, 2006). Thus, it is probably more accurate to say that men and women differ in degree, not in kind (Dindia, 2006). In fact, research comparing men’s and women’s responsiveness to different “emotional” situations further puts to rest the mythical nature of gender cultures.

In a study on gender differences in emotional responsiveness, male and female participants were presented with situations in which a friend had experienced one of the following: impending divorce, poor performance appraisal at work, death of a friend, or giving a speech (MacGeorge et al., 2004). Although women were somewhat more responsive to a friend facing divorce and men were slightly more responsive to a friend giving a speech and to one whose own friend had died, overall, both men and women were equally responsive across all situations. Consistent with past research, the researchers also found that women were more likely to respond by offering help and affirmations while men responded with advice. However, all gender differences were so slight that they did not warrant an explanation based on different cultures. Yet, despite the dominance of research demonstrating only subtle gender differences in communication, gender stereotypes and expectations persist. It almost begs the question of why.

In terms of perpetuating gender differences in scholarly research, Dindia (2006) points out that one potential culprit may lie in researchers’ failure to make clear the statistical effect sizes—usually small—when reporting research results. Knowing that there are “significant gender differences” in, say, the use of personal pronouns is not the same as finding “small” or “slight” differences with small effect sizes. Thus, differences between men’s and women’s communication styles may be exaggerated, in part, by the way we report our findings.

This does not explain why Americans have shelled out over 40 million dollars to read about the galactic difference between Martian men and Venetian women. Part of the willingness to buy into the myth of the gender divide may lie in the pervasiveness of cultural stereotypes regarding speech. Part may also be based on our perception of male and female speakers. For example, significant differences in linguistic style have been confirmed across multiple studies: Men are more directive, concise, and instrumental, while women are more indirect, detailed, and affective (Mulac, 2006). Clearly, these different linguistic styles also correspond to more general gender stereotypes. Not surprisingly, then, “blind” transcribers in one study were unable to detect, at a rate better than chance, the gender of the text’s author (Mulac, 2006). This suggests that gender differences in speech are so subtle that they are relatively undetectable!

Linguistic differences may be undetectable to someone who is “blind to condition”; however, men and women speakers are perceived very differently (Mulac, 2006). Female speakers are evaluated as being higher in social status, more literate, and also as more agreeable and beautiful. Male speakers, on the other hand, are perceived to be stronger and more aggressive. Thus, while linguistic differences are slight, these subtle differences make a big difference in terms of how communicators are evaluated. And the fact that we perceive male and female speakers so differently leads to a misattribution of sorts. We falsely interpret our perception of speaker differences as stemming from variances in speaking style.
In sum, the issue over whether men and women hail from different planets (e.g., Mars or Venus) or from different cultures (Tibetan or Columbian) might be supplanted with a different one. Perhaps the more apt analogy might be that men and women are from the same culture and country, but from neighboring states. As Dindia (2006) suggests, it might be more fruitful to conceptualize gender differences as, “Men are from North Dakota and Women are from South Dakota.”

### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Research found that in general women tend to be more polite than men and that politeness seems to be a function of the power differential in a situation. How does politeness affect this power differential?
- Mulac and colleagues found gender differences in the frequency with which men and women use hedging in written communication. However, other researchers failed to find any such differences in oral communication. How would you explain this discrepancy?
- Our culture fosters the development of emotional support skills among girls but discourages them among boys. In what specific ways do you think this differential socialization is achieved? What might its utility be?
- In keeping with the findings that gender differences are a matter of degree rather than kind, Dindia (2006) suggested that a more appropriate way to conceptualize these differences would be “Men are from North Dakota and Women are from South Dakota.” Imagine this as a book title and compare it with *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. Which book do you think will sell more copies? Why?

### Managing Relationships

One important aspect of close relationships is often overlooked when viewed through the different cultures lens. On a daily basis, most couples actually manage the mundane aspects of their relationships quite well. Communication is frequently not a problem when it comes to such tasks as paying the bills, taking out the garbage, getting dinner, and taking the kids to baseball practice. How do couples manage to get these and other chores done?

### Transactive Memory in Close Relationships

If one took an exhaustive look at the sheer number of tasks that couples need to complete, living together may seem like a gargantuan task. Moreover, remembering who does what appears to be an equally tall order. However, most couples have little trouble assigning chores to one another and getting them done.

One of the reasons for the apparent ease with which couples manage the numerous chores imposed by everyday life is that they develop a transactive memory structure, a shared system for encoding, storing, and retrieving information (Wegner, 1986; Wegner, Giuliano, & Hertel, 1985). Transactive memory not only informs partners about what
they themselves need to remember but also what the other person will remember. These assignments can be based on a number of principles. Gender and, more generally, sex roles can provide simple cues to what the other might know and can thus serve as default options. For example, men may be more likely to remember who got the final out in game 7 of the 2016 World Series, and women might have an easier time recalling all the movies in which Leonardo DiCaprio starred. Thus, when questions about baseball or movies come up, the members of a couple can turn to each other for answers without first ascertaining whether or not they might know them. From this perspective, memory assignments frequently follow the general division of labor among couples (Atkinson & Huston, 1984). Alternatively, memory assignments can be negotiated based on suspected expertise or on who has accepted responsibility for a task in the past.

The operation and importance of transactive memory among couples was demonstrated in a study in which couples who had been together for at least 3 months completed a memory task (Wegner et al., 1991). The memory task consisted of remembering items belonging to seven distinct categories. For example, the sentence *Midori is a Japanese melon liqueur* represented the category “Alcohol.” The sentence *Yeasts reproduce by budding* represented the category “Science.” Research participants could complete the memory task in one of two ways: by assigning categories to each other based on their relative expertise or through an arbitrary assignment provided by the experimenter. As expected, couples who used their relative expertise in assigning the memory tasks remembered more items than couples who had to complete the task according to the experimenter’s scheme, which supposedly interfered with the way couples ordinarily remember things. How long the couples had been together did not influence their performance. Couples who had been dating for 3 months did just as well as those who had been together for years, as long as they could rely on their transactive memory. It is important to note that transactive memory does not operate by some sort of magic. Rather, intimate couples often use a variety of nonverbal cues, like eye contact, to ascertain who might know what, especially when they are confronted with novel memory tasks (Hollingshead, 1998).

These findings are important for a number of reasons. They suggest that couples develop a way of assigning memory tasks to each other, including knowing what the other knows (as opposed to knowing and remembering everything themselves). It seems that couples develop such a transactive memory early in their relationship, as evidenced by the absence of any effect due to the length of a relationship. Further, transactive memory retrieval works best when members of couples interact face-to-face. Finally, breaking up may be hard to do in part because it entails the loss of one’s transactive memory. When a relationship ends, reassignment of expertise frequently occurs at great expense. The individual needs to become an expert in a number of topics that used to be a part of the other’s domain. New information relating to the previous partner’s areas of expertise may be handled poorly at first and perhaps for some time. The resulting confusion may lead items in one’s own domains to be mishandled, as well. Even if a new partner is eventually found, it will likely take time and effort for the new couple to know what the old couple took for granted.

**Creating and Maintaining Satisfying Relationships**

The observation that women are less adversely affected by a breakup should not be taken as an indication that they might be relieved when a relationship ends. Nor does it mean that women are necessarily more unhappy in intimate relationships than men. Instead, several interpersonal processes contribute to the level of satisfaction in intimate relationships.
Idealization can create and maintain a high level of satisfaction with their relationship as long as they look at their partners in an idealistic rather than realistic way (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b). This may strike some as counterintuitive. After all, idealization is characteristic of the early stages of relationship development, when the novelty of one’s partner seems to short-circuit any type of rational thought. However, ample evidence shows that maintaining positive illusions, especially after experiencing adversity, has beneficial effects on one’s mental and physical health (Taylor & Brown, 1988). There are three different ways that idealization can develop in intimate relationships (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Cognitive idealization includes developing positive illusions and viewing one’s partner in a “better” light (Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b; Miller, Caughlin, & Huston, 2003). Couples, especially those who do not interact with each other frequently, are also able to develop positive illusions of their relationship, although they are apt to do so via behavioral idealizations. These couples maintain the initial idealized perceptions of their partners because they have not been exposed to the full repertoire of their partner’s daily behaviors (e.g., leaving socks on the floor, chewing with their mouths open). Both cognitive and behavioral idealizations may also be the result of massive impression management efforts on the part of one or both partners (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). Self-presentation can be used—at least in the short run—to create a perfect “reality.”

At least two studies suggest that maintaining positive illusions about one’s partner is beneficial for intimate relationships. One study (Murray et al., 1996a) asked members of married and dating couples to rate themselves and their partner on a number of interpersonal attributes reflecting virtues (e.g., patience, understanding), faults (e.g., complaining, moodiness), and social commodities (e.g., self-assured, witty). The complete list of items is depicted in Table 10.2. You may want to take a moment to rate yourself and your partner, keeping in mind that the scientific way to assess levels of idealization is somewhat more complicated.

A number of interesting findings resulted from this study. First, intimates saw their partners in a more positive light than their partners saw themselves, suggesting somewhat idealized constructions of the other. Moreover, idealization was correlated with relationship satisfaction. Those who most idealized their partner were happiest with their relationship. Not surprisingly, in light of these findings, idealization also appears to have a number of self-fulfilling mechanisms that add to the stability of relationships. Specifically, relationships are most likely to persist, even in the face of conflicts and doubts, when intimates idealize each other the most (Murray et al., 1996b). However, once a conflict arises, idealization by itself is not likely to prevent escalation. Instead, it may be one among many variables that contributes to the extent to which a partner inhibits the temptation to respond destructively to a partner’s transgression and instead chooses constructive ways to deal with the resulting conflict (e.g., Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Rusbult et al., 1991). We will discuss these and other issues in Chapter 13.

Attributions

The extent to which we idealize our partners may ultimately be related to how we explain their behavior, especially when the behavior in question is detrimental for the relationship. In general, satisfied partners generate attributions that attenuate the impact of negative relationship events. Dissatisfied partners, on the other hand, tend to generate attributions
that accentuate the impact of negative events and diminish the impact of positive events (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1989). For example, Happy Harold may attribute his partner’s disinterest in going dancing to his or her preoccupation with final exams. Sad Sally, on the other hand, may interpret the same behavior to indicate a lack of love and consideration. Of course, the extent to which a person chooses negative attributions has consequences for subsequent behavior. Negative attributions for a partner’s behavior tend to trigger negative behavior. If the partner responds to this situation in the same fashion (i.e., with negative attributions and negative behaviors), and if this pattern persists over a period of time, the couple will likely be enveloped by massive unhappiness. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 13, this cyclical pattern of behavior and attributions is common in distressed couples (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). It may be that idealizing one’s partner acts as an important buffer in this cycle of events. If we have exaggerated views of our partner’s personality, we may simply be less likely to attribute his or her behavior to a negative disposition.

Table 10.2 Interpersonal Qualities Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtues</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Partner</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kind and affectionate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open and disclosing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive to my needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant and accepting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Faults</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical and judgmental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling and dominant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaining</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childish</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Commodities</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Murray et al. (1996a).

Note: Assign a number from 1 (“Not at all characteristic”) to 9 (“Extremely characteristic”) for yourself and your partner. You are idealizing whenever the number for your partner is higher, except for attributes that are negatively worded. In these cases, negative discrepancies indicate idealization.
Finally, it is reasonable to suspect that partners’ expectations regarding their relationship would be related to satisfaction. If two people expect their relationship to be marked by open self-disclosure and interaction resulting in identity affirmation, they will be happy if that occurs and unhappy if it does not (e.g., Hackel & Ruble, 1992). One situation in which expectations have been shown to be of paramount importance is the transition to parenthood. The birth of the first child represents an important transition and is frequently marked by a decrease in relationship satisfaction, especially for mothers (Belsky, Rovine, & Fish, 1989; Cowan & Cowan, 1988). This is not entirely surprising for a society that leaves providing and securing childcare primarily in the hands of mothers. However, there is also evidence that the decline in relationship satisfaction after the first baby is born is neither universal nor inevitable. Some (e.g., Ruble et al., 1988) have found that the overall level of relationship satisfaction among parents remains at higher than average levels or does not differ very much at all from nonparents. How can one account for such conflicting results? It appears that whether relationship satisfaction takes a turn for the worse as a result of the transition from couplehood to parenthood depends in important ways on the extent to which the experience of childrearing confirms or disconfirms prepartum expectations. Consistent with the idea that expectations are important, Hackel and Ruble (1992) found that mothers are not necessarily dissatisfied when they find out that they are left with the majority of chores related to childrearing. They are only dissatisfied if they previously had strong expectations regarding an equal and fair division of labor. Interestingly, women with traditional attitudes about the roles of women and men in society showed the opposite effect. They were actually happier with their relationship after they found out that their partners were going to contribute less than an equal amount of work. On the surface, this finding looks as though it is somewhat inconsistent with the idea that expectancy disconfirmation leads to negative affect. However, although having to do the bulk of the chores may have violated the mothers’ expectations for the relationship, it confirmed their expectations regarding their role. Consequently, being primarily in charge of caring for the baby increased their happiness with their relationship. Of course, the larger implication here is that the number of diapers one changes does not, by itself, determine happiness. Rather, it is one’s expectations regarding how many diapers one will change.

To conclude, effective and rewarding communication is clearly important for the success of intimate relationships; however, it does not guarantee it. The extent to which intimate partners are happy with their relationship further depends on their ability and willingness to idealize the other and to generate benevolent attributions for negative relationship events, as well as their more general expectations regarding the nature of their relationship. How do these factors operate when couples are forced to live apart? What role does communication and idealization play in long-distance relationships?

The Special Case of Long-Distance Relationships

By some estimates more than 3 million Americans live apart from their spouses for reasons other than conflict or separation (Bergen, Kirby, & McBride, 2007). A whopping 75 percent of college students are or have been in a long-distance relationship at some point (Stafford, 2005). Although some long-distance couples fare better than others—most notably those with securely attached partners (Pistole et al., 2010) and those who manage to savor their experiences (Borelli, Rasmussen, Burkhart, & Sbarra, 2015)—there is little reason to
believe that the trials and tribulations of conducting an intimate relationship over a long
distance are particularly traumatic. One study that examined how couples in long-distance
and proximal relationships fare in terms of satisfaction, trust, and relationship progress
found that proximal relationships were in no way superior to long-distance relationships
(Guldner & Swenson, 1995). Not surprisingly, compared to couples in proximal relations-
ships, those in long-distance relationships report a decrease in descriptive self-disclosure
and companionship. However, they were comparable to proximal couples in their evalu-
ative self-disclosure and level of affection for their partner (Van Horn et al., 1998).

Although distance certainly increases the difficulties in meeting each other’s needs (Le
& Agnew, 2001), there is a reason for the seeming lack of profound decrements in long-
distance relationships. Couples who are apart often find ways to cope with their physical
separation. It appears that how frequently they visit each other and how often they com-
municate otherwise, via the phone or the Internet, contribute to their level of satisfaction
(Holt & Stone, 1997). But what contributes most to long-distance dating couples’ rela-
tionship stability might be how they perceive their partner and their relationship. Long-
distance couples have been found to have higher levels of idealization and romantic love,
greater perceived agreement, and more relational reminiscence than geographically prox-
imal dating couples (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Ironically, idealization was negatively cor-
related with face-to-face interactions: the fewer the visits, the greater the positive illusions.
Coping in such ways may further explain why long-distance couples are no more likely to
break up than proximal couples, at least in the short run (Van Horn et al., 1998). What
happens in the “longer” run?

That roughly half of long-distance dating relationships terminate while partners are apart
(Stafford, Merolla, & Castle, 2006) is not surprising, given the situational stressors and the
fact that almost as many proximate dating relationships terminate as well. What is surprising
is that of the relationships that survive the distance and time apart, not all end in a “happily
ever after.” One study found that one-third of the “reunited” relationships ended within 3
months of relocation and reunion (Stafford et al., 2006). This statistic may be surprising
because it violates many of our expectations. The fact that a couple’s relationship has success-
fully weathered a stint apart suggests they have an especially durable relationship. For each
person in the long-distance relationship to endure the privations and resist the temptations of
separation also suggests an especially mighty type of love and an even mightier commitment.

What then leads to the rather swift termination of the reunited couples? Responses
from 180 college students who had been reunited revealed that several factors contrib-
uted to post-reunion relationship stability. They included the loss of autonomy, increased
knowledge—both positive and negative—of each other, difficulty inserting another per-
son into their daily routines, and increased conflict and jealousy (Stafford et al., 2006).
Taken together, these findings suggest that how long-distance couples think of their
relationship—i.e., the extent to which they idealize each other—may play an important
role in determining dissolution as well as relationship stability.

For instance, low levels of idealization were found to predict instability and the dis-
solution of long-distance relationships, whereas moderate to very high levels of idealiza-
tion contributed to stability and endurance of long-distance relationships (Stafford &
Merolla, 2007). However, high levels of idealization (which, as you may recall, occurred
in the absence of frequent face-to-face visits) were most likely to precipitate dissolution
upon reunion. It seems that moderate levels of idealization yielded the most stable and
successful couples both pre- and post-reunion (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Finally, as
found previously, face-to-face contact during separation predicted stable reunions, while
Communication

Table 10.3 Researchers’ Advice on Navigating Your Long-Distance Relationship

- Visit each other as frequently as possible. Instant messaging, e-mail, letters, and Internet chats cannot replace real time together. How are you ever going to find out how your boyfriend or girlfriend gets along with your friends . . . or how responsive he or she is to your mundane needs . . . or how compatible you are on issues outside your immediate relationship?
- Realize that your knowledge of each other while apart may not be the complete picture. No one and no relationship are perfect.
- Be ready to renegotiation your relationship when you are reunited: Don’t be surprised to discover flaws in your partner . . . or that you partner has changed since you first separated.
- Being more realistic about your relationship and each other will help—like Mary Poppins said, just take a “spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down . . .” You do not need the entire sugar bowl.

computer-mediated and mail communications did not! One conclusion from this research is that nothing takes the place of face-to-face contact in helping couples develop the deepest, most realistic (though optimistic) understanding of each other. Of note is the fact that phone calls, computer-mediated communications, and letters do not facilitate the exchange of unpleasant information and may even inhibit these important exchanges. Thus, though they enable couples to cope with separation, overly positive illusions that obscure real partner qualities do not provide a good foundation for relationship stability after reunion.

Finally, it is also reasonable to speculate about sex differences in adjusting to physical separation. Recall that both men and women alike gravitate toward women when it comes to seeking emotional support (Clark, 1994; Kunkel, 1995) and that both sexes find interactions with women more meaningful and rewarding (Reis et al., 1985; Wheeler et al., 1983). Based on these findings, one might expect that any negative ramifications of physical separation should be more pronounced for the male partner in a long-distance relationship. Some have even argued that women might be better off as a result of physical separation because it eases the burden of giving emotional support without receiving similar levels from their partners (Helgeson, 1994). How can you survive your long-distance relationship? See Table 10.3 for research-based advice.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Self-disclosure is key to achieving intimacy, which is in turn linked to relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, there is research that shows that self-presentation is one way to foster positive illusions, which also have been shown to promote satisfaction. How might you integrate the two sets of findings?
- Some research found that new mothers who are left with most of the chores related to childrearing are unhappy with the relationship only if they had expected a fair division of the labor. Does this mean that fairness is neither always expected in a relationship nor essential to relationship satisfaction?
- One interesting finding about long-distance relationships is that both low and high levels of idealization predict instability and dissolution, whereas moderate and very high levels of idealization predict stability. How would you explain this pattern?
Summary

Issues

- Are there sex and gender differences in communication?
  - Men prefer side-by-side communication
  - Women prefer face-to-face communication
- Are there gender differences in linguistic styles?
  - Differences in politeness, use of tag questions, qualifiers, and back-channeling
  - Differences in emotional expressiveness and use of instrumental language
- Couples manage their relationships in a variety of ways, including using transactive memory and idealization
- How can couples navigate long-distance dating relationships?

Theory

- Theoretical perspective that gender differences arise because men and women grow up in different communication cultures
- Theoretical perspective that gender differences stem from having different, gender-based skill sets
- Perspective that gender similarities in linguistic style outweigh differences

Research

- Sex differences in linguistic styles are small but reliable
  - Sex differences in interruptions, use of tag questions, qualifiers, and back-channeling depend more on speech goals rather than on sex differences alone
  - Women use more supportive speech and express more emotion than men
- Men and women are from the same language culture because they share values and preferences for interactions partners and also because of shared meanings
  - Skills specialization is a better way to conceptualize sex differences in linguistic styles
- Research on transactive memory shows how establishing a memory system helps couples navigate the many chores of daily life (Wegner, 1986)
- Idealization is not related to relationship satisfaction, but it is important in relationship maintenance
- Relationship satisfaction is influenced by the types of attributions individuals make for partner transgressions and the extent to which relationship expectations are confirmed (Bradbury & Fincham, 1989)
- Idealization plays an interesting role in long-distance relationships (Stafford & Merolla, 2007)
  - High levels of idealization sustain relationships during separation
  - Moderate levels of idealization are associated with successful reunion

Key Terms

Topical cohesion: the extent to which topics introduced to a conversation are related; low cohesion is characterized by covering a lot of topics for a short time.

Reasserting dominance: establishing and maintaining dominance in a conversation by way of interruptions.
Confirmation interruptions: made for the purpose of clarification or to express agreement.
Rejection interruptions: express disagreement.
Disconfirmation interruptions: include those that seek to minimize the importance of the speaker’s statements and those made with the goal of changing the subject.
Qualifiers: phrases such as I guess, Sort of, I mean, and You know to express uncertainty.
Back-Channeling: a variety of verbal and nonverbal responses to another’s utterances, such as sentence completion and nodding.
Different cultures hypothesis: the idea that men’s and women’s communication patterns are so different that they resemble distinct cultures.
Transactive memory: a shared system for encoding, storing, and retrieving information.
Positive illusions: beliefs that are more positive than the reality warrants.
Self-presentation: the processes through which people try to control the impression other people form about them.
Self-disclosure: the processes through which people reveal more of themselves to others.
It is a brutal story of jealousy and obsession which ended in the horrific murder of a businesswoman.

Sadie Hartley was found with more than 40 stab wounds lying in a pool of blood in the hallway of her home in Helmshore, Lancashire, on January 14.

Today, Sarah Williams, 35, and her friend Kitt Walsh, 56, were both found guilty of murdering the 60-year-old.

Williams had become “jealous and obsessive” over Ms Hartley’s partner Ian Johnston, 57, after having sex with him a number of times when he was previously single.

— Mirror, August 17, 2016

When asked, most people would vehemently disagree with the statement, “If you really love me, you’d be jealous.” Some quite forcefully argue that jealousy is a selfish reaction to perceived threat and loss and is indicative of poor self-esteem, possessiveness, and a lack of trust rather than a sign of true love. Yet, despite this widespread belief, who among us can honestly say we have never experienced the bitter sting of jealousy? And if the earlier statement is reversed, can it be possible (or desirable) to truly love someone and not experience any jealousy at all? Why does it seem difficult, even impossible, to eliminate jealous feelings? On the other hand, would we really want to? Perhaps a better question would be: Why do we even question the validity of our jealousy in the first place?

Infidelity and Jealousy Across Time and Cultures

Fidelity and Infidelity

To the extent that fidelity is an important feature of romantic relationships, infidelity should lead to a plethora of negative emotions, including feelings of jealousy. However, if we equate fidelity with monogamy, there are some interesting news to report. According to a 2016 survey by YouGov.com, monogamy (and with it fidelity) is still valued among people over 30; 70 percent of people over 65 indicated that their ideal relationship would be completely monogamous. This percentage declines with (younger) age. Among Millennials—those under 30—only 51 percent indicated a desire for a completely monogamous relationship (Zane, 2016).

Cultures and subcultures also differ in the degree to which fidelity is valued and practiced. The same YouGov survey suggested that the desire for monogamy was influenced
by race, with White Americans placing a higher premium on complete monogamy than African-Americans and Hispanics (Zane, 2016). In “honor cultures” such as in the American South and West, a woman’s fidelity is especially important to her husband’s reputation. In such cultures men are *expected* to react to perceived threats with jealousy, thus protecting the fidelity of their mates along with their honor (Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

In cultures that place little value on fidelity and sexual exclusivity, jealousy is a less common experience (Hupka, 1991; DeSteno & Salovey, 1996a), and people who enjoy open marriages and sexual adventure may actually attempt to weaken the link between love and sex in order to reduce jealousy (Buunk, 1991). For example, “swingers” in England attempted to manage jealousy through communication and negotiation and by insisting on emotional fidelity (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). Swinging couples actually welcomed the experience of sexual jealousy because they perceived it as arousing rather than threatening. Thus, one way that culture influences the incidence or the expression of jealousy is through the value it places on fidelity. That is, the greater the value placed on fidelity, the greater the vigilance to guard monogamy and, consequently, the greater the emotional and behavioral reactions (e.g., jealousy) to perceived threats to the relationship.

Although one can find cultural variations in the value of fidelity, there is one form of infidelity that appears to be universal. Think about your current or most recent romantic relationship. How did you meet your partner? Was your partner single and uncommitted when you first met? Or was your partner in a relationship already and decided to jump ship? If the latter applies, you have successfully “poached” another’s mate. Mate poaching refers to attempts by individuals to romantically attract others already involved in a relationship (Davies, Shackelford, & Hass, 2007; Foster et al., 2014). Worldwide it is fairly common throughout much of Europe and South America. It is less common in Africa and much of Asia. In North America, roughly 75 percent of men and women report to have been a target of a poaching attempt; about half of them report to have successfully poached from a romantic partner. Although some of these poaching attempts result in relationships that are short-lived, the majority of poached men (63 percent) and women (54 percent) form long-term relationships with their poachers (Schmitt & International Sexuality Description Project, 2004). Longevity does not translate into bliss, however. Individuals who were poached by their current partners tend to be less committed, less invested, and less satisfied. Not surprisingly, they also tend to pay more attention to romantic alternatives, perceive them to be more attractive, and engage in infidelity at a higher rate than non-poached individuals (Foster et al., 2014).

It may be that evolution predisposes us to infidelity, but cultural expectations of fidelity may dictate the degree to which we will suffer the pangs of romantic betrayal. Yet there is still more to the story of fidelity and jealousy than culture and evolution can explain. An examination of infidelity at the relationship level clarifies its elements and reveals its complexity. A 17-year longitudinal study reports that infidelity is both the *cause* and *result* of relationship discord and conflict (Previti & Amato, 2004). Let us explore the factors—historical, evolved, situational, and dispositional—that contribute to the occurrence and experience of jealousy.

**A Brief History of Jealousy**

From a personal, emotional perspective, jealousy has often been viewed as a potentially destructive and embarrassing emotion (a view currently embraced by lovers and researchers
The 18th-century Chinese, for example, considered jealousy an unmanly and dangerous female sentiment, while 17th-century philosophers and writers believed that two forces guide action: passion and reason. Actions motivated by reason were considered superior, and behaviors stemming from passion were viewed as uncontrollable, irregular, and erratic. Jealousy and other extreme emotions that stem from passion were therefore deemed unreasonable. This view continues to be reflected in much of our current thinking about jealousy and other “darker” emotions.

Not all thinkers view emotions in such a grim light. In fact, 14th-century philosophers saw in jealousy the eagerness, devotion, and zealousness of love (Mullen, 1991). Here, jealousy found a place where its expression was justified—not as a base manifestation of possession, but as an expression of ardor in defense of romantic threats. Similarly, 18th-century British philosopher David Hume thought that human passion—not reason—was the correct guide for our actions and morality. Jealousy, therefore, was considered a legitimate guide for moral conduct. The evocation of jealousy would dictate the correct moral action: for example, defending one’s honor, reacting to the loss of an exclusive relationship, responding to a romantic rival.

Current perspectives on jealousy have evolved along with the concurrent shift away from a pragmatic, economic basis for marriage to a romantic one. Cultural changes in the role of women in the workplace have also had a ripple effect on the way we view fidelity and jealousy. One of the outcomes of these cultural revolutions has been a subtle but inexorable change in our view of jealousy as a justified, (even) moral reaction governed by social norms to one of jealousy as a purely individual-level reaction occurring outside of acceptable romantic expectations and standards. Currently, jealousy has been stripped of its positive attributes (i.e., enthusiastic, devoted, ardent love) and functions (i.e., protection of the relationship, defense of honor). In 21st-century Western culture, jealousy is no longer considered a valid, socially acceptable way to express one’s love, defend one’s honor, or protect and protest a partner’s infidelity. It has become a uniquely individual expression of rage, a sign of irrationality, immaturity, and even pathology (Mullen, 1991).

Defining Jealousy

Although the English language includes more than 2,000 words describing emotions, theorists suggest that only six (plus or minus four) emotions are universal and universally recognizable (cf Tomkins, 1991; Izard, 1991; Plutchik, 1983; Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1982). This means that a bushman from the Kalahari, a college student in America, and a child in Japan will all recognize an angry face when they see one. The idea, of course, is that we are born with the equipment to detect and interpret these primary, universal expressions. Although the exact number of these universal emotions is subject to debate, at least six are commonly recognized across theories: fear, anger, enjoyment, disgust, interest, and surprise. A seventh emotion, sadness, is also common to many models. Where do jealousy and the remaining 1,990 or so other emotions fit into the emotional landscape?

The vast majority of our emotional responses fall outside the universal or primary emotions category. The experience and expression of emotions such as relief, panic, fondness, and jealousy are generally thought to be shaped by upbringing and culture to a much larger extent than are primary emotions. They are considered either subtypes of a primary emotion (e.g., Shaver et al., 1987), secondary emotions (e.g., Plutchik, 1983), or blends of the primaries (e.g., Izard, 1991; Sharpsteen, 1991). From an emotional blending
perspective, loneliness is a blend of sadness and fear while ecstasy results from the combination of joy and love, for example. Similarly, jealousy can be a subtype of anger (Shaver et al., 1987) or a blend of anger, sadness, and fear (Sharpsteen, 1991). (See Figure 11.1 for a prototype model of emotions.)

Others have suggested that jealousy is a universal human experience (Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Salovey & Rodin, 1985; Sabini & Silver, 2005) rather than being a subtype or blend of more primary emotions. How else could one explain that infants as young as 6 months of age (Hart & Carrington, 2002) are capable of experiencing jealousy? Marriage counselors estimate that over one-third of their clients seek help for problems related to romantic jealousy (Mullen, 1991). And a survey of over 25,000 Psychology Today readers verified the prevalence of jealousy across class, gender, and race (Salovey & Rodin, 1985). Jealousy, like love, appears to be central to our interpersonal lives and thus may be best viewed as an emotion in its own right (Sabini & Silver, 2005) that can manifest itself as either suspicious jealousy or fait accompli jealousy (Parrott, 1991). We will return to this distinction in a moment.

On the face of it, to suggest that jealousy is both universal and variable across cultures may seem a bit contradictory. However, what may vary across groups is not the actual

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**Figure 11.1** Primary Emotions and Their Subtypes
emotional experience of jealousy, but the degree to which jealousy is tolerated, how and when it can be expressed, and whether its expression is sanctioned at all. Thus, whether you live with a bunch of swingers, with a polygamous band of nomads, or are in a relationship “till death do us part,” you will experience jealousy when you feel your romantic relationship(s) threatened. Of course, what you do with those feelings of anxiety, insecurity, anger, or sadness has everything to do with the context in which you find yourself.

In sum, few if any of us are spared jealousy’s grip. While feelings of jealousy transcend time and place, its expression and value are determined by its context—the time, place, situation, and culture. A full understanding of jealousy should also include what it is not: envy.

**Envy: I Want What I Cannot Have**

Some researchers have suggested that envy and jealousy are the same emotion, differing only in intensity (Salovey & Rodin, 1986). Granted, both envy and jealousy are negative responses that arise when we cannot have what we want, yet there are subtle differences between them. In particular, envy occurs when we covet someone else’s possessions (e.g., your friend’s car, your classmate’s iPod, your sibling’s popularity). Jealousy, on the other hand, occurs when we perceive a threat (real or imagined) to a desired relationship. Thus, envy can be construed as the triadic relationship among the actor (A), who wishes to possess a material or immaterial possession (B) that belongs to someone else (C). Jealousy can be represented by the triadic relationship in which the actor (A) is threatened by the intentions of a rival (B) for the attention of the desired (C).

The subtleties that separate envy from jealousy are meaningful, and their semantic closeness is reflected in our language usage. American English speakers are prone to using the terms interchangeably (Parrott & Smith, 1993; Stepanova & Coley, 2002). Interestingly, part of this confusion may arise largely from local linguistic norms rather than real conceptual overlap (Stepanova & Coley, 2002). However, despite linguistic distinctiveness, careful analyses reveal qualitatively different emotional experiences for envy and jealousy. While envy includes feelings of inferiority, longing, and disapproval, jealousy includes feelings of anger, distrust, anxiety, and fear of loss and rejection (Parrott & Smith, 1993). In essence, though, what truly separates the two emotional experiences is the presence of a rival. We will look more closely at this defining characteristic of jealousy when we consider the different sources of jealousy.

**Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research**

- In view of what we know about love and sex from Chapter 9, how successful might attempts to weaken the link between them in order to reduce jealousy be?
- People in all cultures experience jealousy, even in cultures that denigrate it. But across time and geographic space it has been viewed either as justified, normative, and desirable or as dangerous and embarrassing. How would you argue for either position?
- Jealousy occurs when one perceives a threat (real or imagined) to a desired relationship. Do you think it makes a difference whether the threat is real or imagined? How would you support your answer?
Sources of Jealousy: The Jealous Person, the Partner, and the Rival

The Jealous Person

Dear Abby: Some people may think my problem silly, but they don’t realize how serious it is to me—it’s making my life miserable . . . My problem is jealousy. I am jealous of all other females, and it has made my life pure hell. I am 37 years old and the mother of two children. I have a good husband, if he can manage to live with me. My family and friends, my husband, even my children think I am way overboard with my feelings of jealousy . . . Please help me. This is not a joke. Jealousy is ruining my life. (Signed) Jealous Julia in Ohio
—“Dear Abby,” Chicago Tribune, July 7, 1998

Witnessing your romantic partner in a loving embrace with someone else is clear grounds for jealousy. It is a powerful situation that will evoke jealous feelings no matter how possessive, insecure, confident, shy, or intelligent we may be. However, to what degree can jealousy be attributed to characteristics or traits of the individual—the jealous person? Are some of us, like Jealous Julia, more prone than others to experience jealousy? Research grounded in evolutionary principles suggests that height plays a role. Shorter men are more likely to be chronically jealous than taller men. Both shorter and taller women are more likely to be chronically jealous than women of average height (Buunk, Park, Zurriaga, Klavina, & Massar, 2008). But what are the psychological characteristics of a jealous person? (See Figure 11.2 for an example of a jealousy measurement instrument.)

Research using the Self-Report Jealousy Scale suggests that highly jealous individuals have lower self-esteem, experience lower life satisfaction, feel more negativity toward the world, and have an external locus of control compared to individuals less prone to experience jealousy. High chronic jealousy is also correlated with higher levels of dogmatism and greater reactivity to threatening events (Bringle, 1991). This corresponds to a commonly held idea that individuals with low self-esteem are most likely to experience and exhibit jealousy. Let’s explore this possibility.

By its very nature, self-esteem is a dispositional quality. As such, we cannot randomly assign participants to high and low self-esteem conditions in an experiment. Because of this complication, much research on jealousy and self-esteem is correlational. But as we know, correlation does not imply causation. Specifically, does low self-esteem cause jealousy, or does jealousy lead to low self-esteem, or is there yet a third possibility? Research on jealousy and self-esteem has suggested all of the above. Some (e.g., Mullen & Martin, 1994; Salovey & Rodin, 1991; White, 1981) find that low self-esteem precedes jealousy, while others find that low self-esteem is the result of jealous experiences (e.g., Bringle, 1991; Mathes, Adams, & Davies, 1985; Peretti & Pudowski, 1997). Still other researchers have found only a weak or no link between self-esteem and jealousy. For example, Buunk (1982) found only a weak correlation between self-esteem and jealousy in women and no relationship between self-esteem and jealousy for men!

The Partner

Our romantic partners play an essential role in the experience of jealousy, the importance of which is often unstated and assumed by us all. Love is a prerequisite: We must in some
Infidelity and Jealousy

Figure 11.2 Multidimensional Jealousy Scale


Cognitive component: How frequently do you have the following thoughts?

1. I suspect that X is secretly seeing someone of the opposite sex.
2. I am worried that some member of the opposite sex may be chasing after X.
3. I suspect that X may be attracted to someone else.
4. I suspect that X may be physically intimate with another member of the opposite sex behind my back.
5. I think that some members of the opposite sex may be romantically interested in X.
6. I am worried that someone of the opposite sex is trying to seduce X.
7. I think that X is secretly developing an intimate relationship with someone of the opposite sex.
8. I suspect that X is crazy about members of the opposite sex.

Emotional component: How would you react emotionally to the following?

1. X comments to you on how great looking a particular member of the opposite sex is.
2. X shows a great deal of interest or excitement in talking to someone of the opposite sex.
3. X smiles in a very friendly manner to someone of the opposite sex.
4. A member of the opposite sex is trying to get close to X all the time.
5. X is flirting with someone of the opposite sex.
6. Someone of the opposite sex is dating X.
7. X hugs and kisses someone of the opposite sex.
8. X works very closely with a member of the opposite sex (in school or office).

Behavioral component: How often do you do the following?

1. I look through X’s drawers, handbag, or pockets.
2. I call X unexpectedly, just to see if he or she is there.
3. I question X about previous or present romantic relationships.
4. I say something nasty about someone of the opposite sex if X shows an interest in that person.
5. I question X about his or her telephone calls.
6. I question X about his or her whereabouts.
7. I join in whenever I see X talking to a member of the opposite sex.
8. I pay X a surprise visit just to see who is with him or her.

way love a person in order to experience jealousy. Perhaps it is exactly this element that led early Christian philosopher St. Augustine to suggest, “Qui non zealat non amat” (“He who is not jealous does not love”).

If we are madly in love with our partner, we can find at least two sources from which jealousy may arise. For example, we may believe our love is not reciprocated. In this
case, feelings of insecurity may then give rise to heightened sensitivity to real or imagined threats from potential rivals. Or our partner may love us deeply but flirt mercilessly with others. In this case, feelings of jealousy may be inevitable. In fact, some people actually use jealousy strategically to gain attention from their partner (Fleishmann, Spitzberg, Andersen, & Roesch, 2005).

Some romantic partners, though, are simply more likely than others to stray. Some have located the source of infidelity not in individual genotypes, but in the genetic match between couples (Garver-Apgar et al., 2006). Genetic similarity as measured at the level of the immune system (i.e., the major histocompatibility complex, or MHC) revealed that the greater the degree of genetic or MHC similarity, the lower the level of sexual responsiveness in females. Further, high MHC similarity also corresponded to a higher likelihood of infidelity. Thus, high degrees of genetic similarity spell trouble for men who will be frustrated by their partners’ lack of sexual responsiveness. In fact, these MHC-matched men may be threatened by both the lack of sexual interest and the likely prospect of infidelity. Of course our love for our partner and how our partner responds to it explains only a small fraction of jealousy. Our analysis can gain considerably by adding the romantic rival.

The Rival

The presence of a rival sets jealousy apart from envy. Rivals, whether a romantic opponent, your partner’s best friend, or simply time your partner spends at work, can be threatening because they signify a possible loss in attention (Parrott, 1991), especially the kind of formative attention (Tov-Ruach, 1980) that is central to how we think of ourselves and to our feelings of intimacy.

The presence of a rival may also lead to jealousy by way of self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) processes (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996b). According to Tesser and colleagues (e.g., Tesser, 1988; Erber & Tesser, 1994; Beach et al., 1998), self-evaluation is a temporary manifestation of self-esteem that is subject to fluctuations. Self-evaluation suffers whenever we realize we have been outperformed by a close other on a dimension that is important to us. In romantic relationships, jealousy comes about when a person makes a relevant comparison to a rival. Comparisons may include qualities that are important to the jealous person (i.e., self-relevant qualities such as those that makes him or her special, loveable) or those that are relevant to the relationship (i.e., qualities the partner finds attractive and admirable).

In support of SEM processes in jealousy, male and female research participants who imagined their romantic partner flirting with someone other than themselves at a university party felt threatened by some but not all interlopers (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996b). When asked about how they felt about rivals who excelled in different domains (i.e., intelligence, athleticism, and popularity), participants felt the most intense jealousy when rivals outshone them on self-relevant dimensions. For example, participants who felt that intelligence was important to their self-concept were most threatened by an intelligent rival but experienced little threat when the rival was athletic and popular. Interestingly, participants rated similar rivals more favorably than dissimilar ones, suggesting that the threat was due not to competition but to SEM processes.

What other characteristics contribute to how threatening a rival is perceived? In their study of infidelity in 53 cultures, Buss and colleagues found individuals likely to engage in mate poaching were high in extraversion, low in agreeableness, and low in conscientiousness. And they admitted to loving sex! Similar results were reported in a study that
specifically looked at individuals who admitted to being unfaithful (Barta & Kiene, 2005) and in a representative sample of over 3,000 U.S. respondents, aged 18 to 59 (Treas & Giesen, 2000).

**Social-Cognitive Approaches to Jealousy**

Understanding the characteristics of the jealous person, the partner, and the rival in isolation falls short of providing a comprehensive account for why jealousy comes about. A complete understanding also needs to take into account how these characteristics interact to produce jealousy. This is considered by social-cognitive approaches to jealousy that add to our discussion in important ways.

The **transactional model of jealousy** (Bringle, 1991; Rydell & Bringle, 2007) examines how three variables—arousability, commitment, and insecurity—moderate jealousy. First, individual differences in jealousy are determined by individual differences in levels of physiological arousability. Individuals who are easily aroused have more intense jealous reactions than those lower in physiological arousal. **Commitment** refers to the degree of involvement a person has in the relationship. The more committed we are in a relationship, the greater the threat of loss and ensuing feelings of jealousy. **Insecurity** refers to the perceived level of commitment on the part of the beloved. If we perceive our partner to be uninvolved or disinterested in the relationship, we will feel a greater sense of insecurity. These three elements combine at three levels to determine the intensity of jealousy: the individual, the relationship, and the situation. Yet despite taking the situation and relationship into account, this particular model focuses primarily on the individual's chronic tendencies toward jealousy (i.e., the arousability component). Dispositions carry a relatively greater weight than situational factors (Bringle, Renner, Terry, & Davis, 1983).

Dispositional jealousy is much less prominently featured in theories that emphasize how we, as actors, see and understand our romantic worlds. For example, cognitive motivational theorists (e.g., White, 1991) emphasize the importance of the cognitive processes by which the jealous person perceives and interprets jealousy-provoking situations. Proponents of this approach suggest that our expectations and beliefs about the behaviors of others play an important role in determining how we will react. The same situation, depending upon the expectations of the perceivers, can be interpreted and responded to in a variety of ways: Brittney may interpret a smile as a benign greeting, whereas Jacob may interpret it as sign of sexual interest. Thus, in order to fully understand and predict jealous behaviors, we must understand both the individual's disposition and his or her interpretation of the partner's behavior. The interplay between disposition and interpretation predicts jealous reactions (White, 1991).

Our experience of jealousy may also be shaped by specific relationship goals (Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997; Sharpsteen, 1995). For example, a person whose goal is to maintain a long-term relationship will react to a jealousy-provoking situation very differently from someone whose primary goal is to have a sexual fling. Once motivation has been established, jealousy results from perceived threat to either the person's self-esteem or to the relationship. The higher the threat to both self-esteem and to the relationship, the greater the jealousy (Sharpsteen, 1995).

It seems, then, that a complete explanation of jealousy needs to include at least three if not more critical elements (e.g., the jealous person, the rival, the desired relationship, commitment, motivations, perceptions) in order to accurately account for the entire range of experiences. Cognitive approaches take many of these elements into account. Of course,
considering multiple explanatory influences is often more difficult than relying on a single source. However, models focusing on interactions provide a greater degree of completeness to our understanding of the wellspring of jealousy. Let us now examine how we react to jealousy.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- How could you explain the relationship between one’s height and proneness to jealousy?
- From Chapter 9 we know that we are attracted to and form close relationships with others who are similar to us. Yet some research shows that genetic similarity within a couple is linked with a lower level of sexual responsiveness of the woman. How would you resolve this contradiction?
- The self-evaluation maintenance model predicts that we are likely to experience jealousy when the rival excels in a domain that is important to us, but not if he or she excels in something we find irrelevant. Getting personal, imagine that your significant other paid undue attention to a person who excelled in domain that is not important to you. Would you feel jealous? Why or why not?

Reactions to Jealousy

We’ve all experienced jealousy at one time or another. What causes some of us to demand that our boyfriends commit murder to prove their love for us while others go into a deep depression or become bar hoppers? It appears that gender plays a big role in how we perceive threat and react to infidelity and jealousy.

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Threat

Researchers have found that gender differences in our reactions to jealousy may start with the differences in what men and women find threatening about a potential rival (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996b; Nadler & Dotan, 1992). For instance, men’s jealousy is largely driven by a concern to protect their egos whereas women’s jealousy is primarily focused on protecting their relationships (Nadler & Dotan, 1992). Consistent with this idea, DeSteno and Salovey (1996b) found that men were most imperiled by rivals who were exceptional on dimensions that were relevant to their own self-definitions (e.g., a jock would be more threatened by the rivalry of another jock rather than by that of the campus chess master). Women, on the other hand, were most threatened by rivals who seem to possess characteristics important to their partners (e.g., for a woman dating a jock, a rival who loves sports would be more threatening than a rival who loves opera). In other words, men were competitive with their rivals while women were focused on their ability to meet their partner’s needs and desires.

Clearly, men and women alike are concerned with infidelity. Although early approaches suggested that men are more threatened by sexual infidelity whereas women are more threatened by emotional infidelity because of the disparity in their parental investment
Infidelity and Jealousy (Trivers, 1972), it now appears that men and women are similarly concerned with sexual infidelity (Carpenter, 2012; Sagarin et al., 2012). What sets them apart is how they deal with infidelity-related threats.

According to the rivalry sensitivity hypothesis (Ein-Dor et al., 2015) women tend to pay attention to potential rivals (other women) in their mate's vicinity, whereas men tend to focus on their partner. Moreover, Ein-Dor et al. (2015) found that women were more alert to cues of potential partner unfaithfulness than men. And they were faster and more accurate in detecting signs of infidelity photographs depicting infidelity scenarios!

Further, researchers are developing a compendium of links between jealousy and other evolved characteristics (see Table 11.1). Individually, these findings are intriguing and together suggest multiple sources of evidence that jealousy may be linked to an evolved mechanism. However, whether jealousy is triggered by an evolved mechanism or is due to an interaction of cognitive and situational forces, being jilted still feels bad. How do we react to jealousy?

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<th>Table 11.1 Links Between Jealousy and Other Evolved Characteristics</th>
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Gender and Reactions to Jealousy: “Every Breath You Take . . . I’ll Be Watching You”

The stereotype is that women suffer the pangs of jealousy more than men, but research also suggests that women and men suffer differently. Shettel-Neuber, Bryson, and Young (1978) showed men and women videotaped episodes of a jealousy-provoking situation. Men viewed a video in which a male interloper attempted to steal another man’s girlfriend. Women saw a video with a similar scenario, except with a female interloper attempting to take a woman’s boyfriend from her. Participants put themselves in the place of the person whose relationship was threatened by the rival and then responded to the scenarios.

The videotaped scenarios produced several sex differences. Men were more likely to express anger, including self-directed anger. Further, they claimed they would get drunk or high and verbally threaten the intruder (not necessarily in this order). Yet at the same time, men indicated they would feel flattered by the interloper’s attention to their partner as well as experience arousal by their girlfriend. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to say they would be depressed, engage in self-blame, and try to make themselves more attractive to their partners. And they would first cry alone, but then put on their best face in public.

Sex differences aside, our reactions differ depending on the type of jealousy we experience. As we alluded to earlier, Parrott (1991) proposed two different types of jealousy: suspicious and fait accompli. Each type of jealousy is associated with specific feelings and reactions. For instance, suspicious jealousy arises when we suspect that the self-verifying, self-defining feedback we crave from our loved one is being given instead to a rival. This type of jealousy creates feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Fait accompli jealousy occurs when our suspicions of betrayal have turned to certainty; we’ve lost to our rival. This type of jealousy leads to three different types of reactions. Focusing on the loss of the relationship will make us sad. Focusing on being alone will make us anxious, and focusing on the betrayal aspect of our loss will make us angry. According to this perspective, sex differences arise not because men and women have different responses to jealousy, but because they might focus on different aspects of the situation. Perhaps women are more likely than men to focus on relationship loss and being alone, while men are more likely to focus on the betrayal.

Sabini and Green (2004) have developed a comprehensive model to predict the nature of the emotional experience that comprises jealousy. Consistent with Parrott (1991), their first premise is that jealousy, the emotion, is comprised of subcomponents, two of which are anger and hurt feelings. Whether we experience anger or hurt feelings depends on several factors. First, we must consider degree to which we blame our partner for the betrayal. Blame is more likely to be trigged by sexual infidelity (than by emotional unfaithfulness) because engaging in sex with someone is a behavior that can presumably be controlled. Emotions, on the other hand, are believed to be less under our direct influence, and thus we may not find our partners as blameworthy for their wandering affections. Greater blameworthiness for sexual infidelity, in turn, results in anger. Lower levels of blame, such as in cases of emotional infidelity, result in sadness and hurt feelings.

Sex differences in jealousy may be the result of men’s and women’s unique reactions to relationship distress. In support of this idea, Sabini and Green (2004) found that men and women interpret and react to distress differently. Men interpret distress as anger whereas women interpret it as feeling hurt. To the extent that sexual infidelity results in feelings of anger and emotional infidelity results in hurt feelings, men are more likely to experience greater distress (anger) over sexual infidelity. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to be distressed (feel hurt) by emotional infidelity.
Finally, reactions to jealousy include behavioral responses in addition to emotional reactions. In this regard, evolutionary psychologists have found that men respond to threats to their relationships by engaging in **mate guarding** behaviors (Goetz et al., 2005; Shackelford, Goetz, Guta, & Schmitt, 2006) intended to safeguard a partner from a rival’s unwelcome overtures. According to Buss (1988; Buss & Shackelford, 1997), mate guarding can be accomplished in several ways. Mate concealment includes strategies such as staying at home rather than going out to a party. Vigilance includes checking in and checking up on one’s partner such as questioning one’s partner about time spent apart. Monopolization of time involves keeping your partner to yourself in public or at a party. Another reaction to perceived threats to the relationship is to increase the frequency and amount of sexual intercourse, or **in-pair copulation (IPC)**. The possibility, in monogamous pairs, of being cuckolded (i.e., raising the offspring of another male) leads to behaviors intended to displace the sperm of rivals (or poachers). Consistent with this speculation, men who engage in higher rates of IPC generally have partners who are highly attractive, who seem more likely to have had sex with other men, or who are near ovulation (Shackelford et al., 2006). Mate guarding assumes some degree of success in warding off rivals. However, should those efforts prove fruitless, the subsequent feelings of anger, sadness, and betrayal are difficult to diffuse. The next section talks about research on how we cope with jealousy.

**Coping With the Green-Eyed Monster**

Dear Jealous Julia: Jealousy is no laughing matter—it can make you and those around you miserable . . . Until you learn to feel more secure about yourself, you will probably continue to have these feelings. Short-term therapy, focused specifically on this issue, will help you recognize that your feelings are not based in reality, and will give you useful tools to manage them. You may have to work hard to conquer this, as any counselor will tell you, but it can be done. (Signed) Abigail Van Buren


Individuals like “Jealous Julia” who suffer from chronic jealousy would probably benefit from taking Abby’s advice aimed at self-esteem repair and increased self-reliance (Salovey & Rodin, 1988). Chronically jealous individuals might curb their jealousy by increasing their self-confidence and independence. In the process they may realize that they can survive and perhaps even flourish without being in a relationship. Of course, such a simple “self-esteem patch” or “psychic band aid” may be of little utility to individuals who, for one reason or another, find themselves trapped in relationships marked by infidelity and betrayal. If, for instance, your partner is cheating on you, isn’t jealousy an appropriate reaction to this betrayal? And wouldn’t the absence of jealousy in this case be more “abnormal” than its manifestation? To discover a loved one’s infidelity and to experience no threat or fear of loss returns us back to St. Augustine’s proclamation that “He who is not jealous does not love.” Sometimes jealousy, as Hume suggested, may be an indication that we have an unworthy partner or are stuck in a doomed relationship. Just as pain signals the presence of an injury, perhaps jealousy can be a sign that a deeper ailment may be afflicting the relationship. Thus, disentangling ourselves from relationships torn apart by jealousy and infidelity will sometimes require more than self-affirmations or other self-esteem boosts.

Clinicians, recognizing the volatile and multifarious nature of jealousy, have suggested that couples and rivals involved in jealous triads are more highly intertwined than we might suspect (Pam & Pearson, 1994). Helping a jealous person cope with his or her
jealous feelings needs to include considerations of the psychological state, needs, and motivations of the primary client, as well as the cheating partner and interloper. Furthermore, the dynamic between the couple and the rival can be extremely complex and quite resistant to change. Improving self-value may help us feel better about ourselves but does not guarantee that we can extricate ourselves from these situations.

Pam and Pearson (1994) offer clinical examples of couples who were unable to completely rid themselves of their former partners or their ties to the severed relationship even after they had terminated it. Although the psychological presence of the ex-partner and rival are necessary to achieve closure and provide eventual healing, the third wheel is not so easily discarded. In one case, a man left his wife for his mistress. After several years, the former mistress pleaded with the man’s ex-wife to take him back. She refused. Incredibly, the man believed the women were still fighting over him without realizing they were now fighting to get rid of him!

Finally, using denial as a way to cope with our jealous feelings may not work at all and may actually backfire. According to work by Wegner and colleagues (e.g., Wegner & Erber, 1992), suppressed thoughts often return unbidden to us. Additionally, efforts to control or suppress thoughts can actually lead to a magnification of the unwanted thoughts. In other words, trying not to think about how jealous we are or trying not to think about our rival may increase our feelings of jealousy or our insecurity about our rival. Instead of suppressing our feelings and thoughts, we may actually benefit from expressing them openly. Specifically, sharing our thoughts and feelings with others makes us feel better even if the “other” is a diary (Pennebaker, 1990). We should therefore strive to acknowledge our feelings of jealousy, find a counselor or a helpful friend who cares to listen to our problems, and take positive strides to address the source of the jealousy.

An Attachment Approach to Jealousy

Our discussion of the reactions to jealousy suggests that we react in many different ways to perceived threat: anger, blame, hurt feelings, depression, self-blame, mate guarding, in-pair copulation, self-medication, and so on. Being able to predict who will react in what manner might further our ability to assist individuals cope successfully with jealousy. The attachment model, as applied to adult relationships (also discussed in Chapter 8), offers a way of integrating what we know about jealousy, reactions to jealousy, and coping with its effects.

Like attachment processes, jealousy can be viewed as a mechanism that functions in the service of relationship maintenance (Sharpsteen and Kirkpatrick, 1997). Similar to the attachment system that is activated by separation from a primary caregiver, jealousy is triggered by the threat of losing a romantic partner. Thus, romantic partners, or attachment figures, should activate attachment systems and also trigger their related emotional and jealous reactions. Needless to say, the types of jealous experiences should co-vary predictably with attachment style. Recent research supports this and reveals how attachment style predicts the intensity and frequency of jealous episodes.

In one study, Sharpsteen and Kirkpatrick (1997) measured participants’ attachment style and dispositional jealousy and also asked them to describe their usual reactions to jealousy situations in general as well as to recall and evaluate two specific jealousy incidents. It turned out that anxiously attached individuals, who view themselves as inadequate and unworthy lovers, reacted to jealousy with feelings of fear and sadness. In other words, they felt inferior and, although angry, were careful not to express it. Their poor self-image led to intense fears of abandonment and rejection, which also resulted in heightened perceptions of threat and subsequent jealous reactions. However, instead of
blaming the betrayal on their lover or the interloper, anxious individuals focused their anger inward and blamed themselves for their lover’s infidelity—even to the neglect and detriment of their own self-esteem.

In a similar vein, because avoidantly attached people expect rejection, they generally approach relationships with hesitation and maintain psychological and physical distance from their romantic partners. In essence, they expect their relationships to fail and attempt to shield themselves from what they perceive as the inevitable. When it comes to jealousy and betrayal, it is not surprising that this strategy almost guarantees failure. Jealousy episodes of the avoidantly attached were dominated by self-doubt and sadness. These individuals directed their anger and blame at their rival and were not likely to make attempts at “rescuing” their relationship. Instead, their energies were channeled into repairing and maintaining their own self-esteem.

Finally, securely attached lovers, who have confidence in their relationships and expect them to endure, did not experience feelings of inferiority or self-doubt when confronted with jealousy situations. They reported the least amount of sadness but instead displayed high levels of anger and betrayal directed toward their partner. Yet despite feeling angry, securely attached individuals, consistent with their confidence in the relationship, worked hard to maintain and improve it.

The transactional model of jealousy (Rydell & Bringle, 2007) makes similar predictions. Lovers who experience reactive (i.e., the emotional component of) jealousy experience lower levels of chronic jealousy and exhibit higher levels of dependency and trust in their partners. These reactions are suggestive of a secure attachment style. Conversely, lovers who are prone to suspicious (i.e., the cognitive and behavioral manifestations of) jealousy are more likely to have lowered levels of self-esteem and higher levels of chronic jealousy. Suspicious jealousy is more typical of anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals.

In sum, Sharpsteen and Kirkpatrick’s (1997) attachment approach to jealousy provides a way of predicting the intensity and frequency of jealous reactions. Attachment style is consistent with different patterns of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions to jealousy. Although based largely on correlational data, these findings are theoretically exciting and may also provide a powerful clinical tool.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

• Social psychological models emphasize the role of self-esteem, while evolutionary theory proposes the threat to inclusive fitness posed by infidelity as the likely underlying causes for jealousy. Can you think of a way to reconcile the two approaches?
• Both infidelity and the demand for fidelity (with its resultant jealousy) are thought to be evolved mechanisms. Why do you think evolution would create this demand?
• Suspicious jealousy and fait accompli jealousy occur when one focuses either on the betrayal, or on the loss, respectively. Research shows that men are more prone to the first kind, and women to the second kind of jealousy. What do you think makes one focus on one aspect or the other?
• Research shows that often, thoughts and feelings we try to suppress tend to become even stronger. What does this imply for our current cultural trend to regard jealousy as negative, embarrassing, and undesirable?
Summary

Issues

• How are jealousy and fidelity linked?
• Do our experiences of them change over time and across cultures?
• How do we define jealousy—types of jealousy, jealousy versus envy?
• Are there sex differences in jealousy and infidelity?
• How can we cope with jealousy?

Theories

• Prototype model defines jealousy as a subtype of anger
• Cognitive appraisal approaches contend that jealousy is a bona fide emotion
• Bringle’s (1991) transactional theory of jealousy proposes that it arises from the interplay between the individual and the situation
• Cognitive motivational approaches emphasize attributions and how we think about jealousy-provoking situations
• The SEM approach focuses on the interaction between rival characteristics and the jealous person’s self-evaluation
• Attachment model of jealousy predicts the intensity and frequency of jealous reactions based on attachment type

Research

• Salovey and Rodin (1985) surveyed 25,000 readers of a national magazine to canvas the prevalence of jealousy
• Sharpsteen (1995) asked participants to imagine different jealousy-provoking scenarios and found that jealousy stemmed from threats to self-esteem and to the relationship
• DeSteno and Salovey (1996b) found that rival characteristics evoked jealousy when those characteristics were on self-relevant dimensions
• Schmitt and colleagues found sex differences for jealousy based on evolutionary predictions
• Women have different jealous reactions than do men
• Sharpsteen and Kirkpatrick (1997) showed how different attachment styles lead to differences in how we react to jealousy

Key Terms

Suspicious jealousy: a form of jealousy that occurs when one suspects a betrayal. It is characterized by feelings of anxiety and insecurity.
Fait accompli jealousy: a form of jealousy that occurs when betrayal is a certainty. It is characterized by feelings of sadness, anxiety, or anger.
Formative attention: attention from others that sustains part of our self-concept.
Transactional model of jealousy: a theoretical model that examines how commitment, insecurity, and arousability interact to predict the occurrence and intensity of jealousy at three levels: the individual, the relationship, and the situation.
Commitment: the degree of involvement a person has in a relationship.
Insecurity: the perceived level of commitment of one’s partner.
Mate guarding: a set of responses to relationship threats that can take the form of mate concealment, vigilance, and monopolization of time.
In-pair copulation (IPC): sexual intercourse with the primary partner.
12 Relationship Violence and Abuse

The World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, Austria, in 1993, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the same year, concluded that civil society and governments have acknowledged that domestic violence is a public health policy and human rights concern. In the United States, according to the National Intimate Partner Sexual Violence Survey of 2010, 1 in 6 women suffered some kind of sexual violence induced by their intimate partner during the course of their lives.

—https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_Against_Women_Act

When we think of violence and victimization, many of us believe it is something that happens among strangers or acquaintances in faraway places. In fact, The mugging in a dark alley, the high school massacre, terrorist attacks, and the gang-related drive-by shooting have become the prototypes of violence in our culture. However, there is mounting evidence that, for women at least, the most dangerous place is the home, and her most likely assailant is her domestic partner. In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a summary of a 10-country study of domestic violence. Interviews with over 24,000 women revealed that between 15 to 71 percent of the respondents had experienced either sexual or physical abuse by their intimate partners. Moreover, 24 percent of the women surveyed in rural Peru, 30 percent of women in Bangladesh, and 40 percent of women in South Africa said their first sexual experience was nonconsensual. Annually, about 5,000 women in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand, and Tanzania are murdered by their families in the name of honor. Closer to home, a National Violence Against Women Survey (2000) conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice found that 17.6 percent of the women reported they had been sexually assaulted. In addition, 22.1 percent of women (compared to 7.4 percent of men) reported that they had been abused or assaulted by an intimate partner. Estimates put the number of women assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the U.S. at 1.3 million as compared to 835,000 men. Sexual violence has been an especially vexing problem on college campuses where, by some estimates, 1 in 5 women are the victims of sexual assault. College presidents and politicians alike are grappling with how to solve this problem.

These prevalence numbers are startling, and, if anything, they may underestimate the scope of the problem. Although many studies conducted in the United States derive their estimates from probability samples, others rely on convenience samples in which women of color, the very poor, the homeless, and those who do not speak English are underrepresented. But even true probability samples ultimately gather their data from those who are home when the interviewers call, who are willing to talk to them, and, perhaps
most importantly, who are willing to report having been assaulted. Regardless of what the actual numbers may be, physical assault against women perpetrated by their partners represents the most dramatic and perhaps most dangerous form of relationship violence. It is one type of abuse that also includes neglect, verbal put-downs, intense criticism, intimidation, restraint of normal activities and freedoms, and denial of access to resources (e.g., Pagelow, 1984; Walker, 1979). And although it can be directed at anyone in the relationship, including children and the elderly, domestic partners are its most common victims. Of course, any discussion of domestic violence should necessarily include sexual aggression, as well, including sexual harassment, along with date rape and marital rape.

**Relationship Violence: Its Definition and Measurement**

At first glance, to define relationship violence seems like a silly endeavor. After all, physical acts like punching, shoving, kicking, and so on seem like obvious signs of violence and abuse. However, if we chose a number of women or children at random and asked them if they had been subjected to violent behavior from their partners or parents, few would probably say yes, even though several of them may have been subjected to some form of physical abuse.

The problem is that violent behavior can be interpreted in many ways. Those on the giving end may believe that a slap in the face is a form of disciplining, and those on the receiving end may interpret a shove as an expression of nothing more than temporary frustration. The presence or absence of physical injury is fraught with a set of different problems. Some victims may be subjected to consistent and prolonged violence at levels that never result in bruises or visits to emergency rooms. Others may be subjected to occasional yet extremely violent behavior resulting in severe physical injury. The bottom line is that we cannot define domestic violence through intent to harm, frequency, or severity of injury. Instead, whether or not it occurs in a relationship is a matter of what actual physical acts are or have been committed.

Regardless of the specific physical acts that are committed, it is possible to distinguish relationship violence by looking at how both partners use it as a means of control over the other (Johnson, 2006). In **intimate terrorism**, the individual is violent and controlling while the partner is neither. In **violent resistance**, the individual is violent but not controlling while the partner is both violent and controlling. In **situational couple violence**, the individual is violent, but neither the individual nor the partner are controlling. Finally, in **mutual violent control** both partners are violent and controlling.

Analyzing data from a survey of 330 married couples in which wives had reported violence, Johnson (2006) found that situational couple violence was the most common form of violence while mutual violent control was the least. Moreover, while both husbands and wives were equally guilty of committing situational couple violence and mutual violent control, a very different picture emerged for intimate terrorism and violent resistance.

As one might expect, men overwhelmingly commit acts of intimate terrorism in the service of controlling their wives. As one might also expect, violent resistance is almost entirely a woman’s type of violence. This is not surprising because in these kinds of relationships almost all the intimate terrorism is perpetrated by men. Violent resistance represents cases in which women do respond with violence in order to defend themselves rather than gaining control.

The most frequently used measures to assess relationship violence are primarily designed to tap into situational couple violence. The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus,
Hamby, McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) includes a subscale for physical violence. Several items (throwing something, pushing or shoving, grabbing, slapping, and twisting a partner’s arm) are considered indications of minor violence. Other items (kicking, biting or hitting with a fist, hitting with an object, beating up, threatening with a weapon, using a weapon, choking, slamming a partner against the wall, and burning or scalding) figure prominently in the severe violence subscale.

In general, the CTS2 does a good job of determining whether violence has occurred in a relationship; however, it also has a number of shortcomings. Because it was initially designed to be a measure of how people respond to conflict, it asks respondents to indicate the extent to which the behaviors occurred as a result of a conflictual situation. Consequently, it may do a less-than-adequate job measuring violence that is not a result of conflict, such as patriarchal terrorism. Conflict is a sufficient cause for violence, but it is by no means a necessary one. In other words, violence can come about for many reasons. Thus, by tying the measure to conflict, instances of violence caused by something other than conflict may go unreported. Furthermore, the CTS2 gives little consideration to the seemingly obvious fact that violent acts committed by men against women often have different implications than acts of violence committed by women against men. On average, men tend to be larger and stronger than women, and consequently the same violent act may be more or less severe. In other words, a man’s shove may be just as severe as a woman’s kick.

Regardless of how one measures relationship violence and abuse, their prevalence gives rise to at least three important questions: What are the consequences of relationship violence on its victims, perpetrators, and the relationship itself? What causes violence in relationships? What, if anything, can be done to reduce the level of relationship violence?

**Consequences of Relationship Violence**

Violent victimization has numerous and often grave physical and psychological consequences. Obviously, being subjected to even mild forms of violence can result in direct physical injury. Typical injuries range from bruises, cuts, black eyes, concussions, and broken bones, to permanent injuries such as damage to joints, scars, and loss of hearing or vision. In some cases, the injuries sustained may not be limited to the victimized woman. The 1985 National Family Violence Survey revealed that one-third of victimized women had been physically assaulted while they were pregnant (Gelles, 1988). In addition, there are indications that violent victimization may also have indirect physical consequences. Extrapolating from rape victims, those subjected to violence report more symptoms of illness and visit their physicians twice as often as women who were not victimized (Browne & Williams, 1989). Furthermore, victims of relationship violence are likely to engage in a number of negative health behaviors, such as smoking, alcohol use, and failure to use seat belts (Koss, 1993).

Not surprisingly, physical violence causes a great deal of psychological harm to its victims. Growing evidence shows that victims of violence suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a clinical diagnosis initially reserved for survivors of military combat and natural disasters (Browne, 1993; Koss, 1993). Like combat veterans, survivors of relationship violence often suffer from any or all of the following: fear and terror, flashbacks of the traumatic event, denial and avoidance, loss of memory for the traumatic episode, constricted affect, chronic anxiety and hypervigilance, insomnia, and nightmares (Browne, 1993; Dutton, 1992). Despite these similarities, there is one important difference between combat veterans and battered women. In the case of combat veterans, the
traumatic event leading up to PTSD is generally known, thus facilitating the appropriate diagnosis. However, battered women do not receive a Purple Heart, and mental health professionals rarely screen for relationship violence. As a result, symptoms are often treated without considering the underlying cause. And although prescribing tranquilizers for a woman who complains about sleeplessness may take care of the immediate symptoms of insomnia, tranquilizers do little in terms of alleviating the conditions that brought on the sleeplessness in the first place (Browne, 1993; Herman, 1992).

Causes of Relationship Violence

The extraordinarily high prevalence of relationship violence and the realization of the grave consequences for its victims have resulted in several important initiatives. In the early 1990s, the American Psychological Association established a task force to conduct research on possible intervention strategies aimed at decreasing relationship violence of any kind. In 1993, the U.S. Senate passed legislation that treats violence against women as civil rights violations, thus rendering it equivalent to a hate crime based on gender. Of course, any attempts to resolve the problem of relationship violence ultimately hinge on finding its underlying cause. In other words, if we are to find ways to get men to abstain from subjecting women to violence, we have to understand what compels them to do this in the first place.

Common Beliefs and Realities

Speculations about the underlying causes of violence against women have been around for some time. They can be found in the psychological literature as well as in advice columns, daytime talk shows, and made-for-TV movies. Depictions of relationship violence in these media revolve around a number of more or less interrelated themes. Many people believe that violence is something that happens to other people, mostly those with a lower socioeconomic standing. Very little evidence supports such a claim, however. In fact, one study that looked at relationship violence in families of varying incomes (Makepeace, 1987) found that violence occurred just as frequently in high-income families as it did in low-income families. According to Marshall and Vitanza (1994), one reason for our perception that relationship violence is more likely to occur in low-income families has to do with differences in the living conditions between those with and without wealth. A neighbor is more likely to respond to violence when it occurs on the other side of an apartment wall than when it occurs in a home that is several hundred feet away. Thus, rather than reflecting true population differences, any variations in relationship violence among families of diverse income levels is likely the result of a reporting bias.

A related belief about relationship violence holds that its victims enable their abusers by not telling anyone about the violence. However, several studies of dating relationships among undergraduate students (e.g., Olday & Wesley, 1988; Pirog-Good & Stets, 1989) indicate that they tell others about dating violence quite openly. Nationally, the picture looks a little bleaker. One study indicates that women, not surprisingly, tell others (friend, family member, police) about being victimized at a higher rate than men, but the percentages were only 13.4 and 9.4, respectively.

Conventional wisdom holds that relationship violence is something committed primarily by men. But the results of several studies corroborate the suspicion that both men and
women inflict and sustain violence (e.g., Johnson, 2006; Kimmel, 2002; Stuart, Meehan, Moore, Morean, Hellmuth, & Follansbee, 2005). In a national sample of married couples (Straus and Gelles, 1986), 11 percent of respondents reported at least one act of husband-to-wife violence, whereas 12 percent reported at least one act of wife-to-husband violence. Similar results were obtained in studies looking at violence in dating relationships (Marshall & Rose, 1987; Pipes & LeBov-Keeler, 1997). Even though the frequency estimates vary widely depending on the question that is asked (e.g., threatened violence versus actual violence), men and women generally inflict violence at a similar rate. Of course, in light of such data, one might ask why there are few, if any, shelters for battered men. One of the reasons has to do with the different ways in which men and women express violence. With the exception of lethal violence, men generally cause more harm to their victims than women. As a result, female victims of relationship violence are generally in more need for places that allow them to avoid violence from their partner.

Much has been made of the role of violence in the family of origin to account for why people would become both physically abusive and endure abuse. Social learning theory (e.g., Bandura, 1965) teaches us that we learn our own behavior from observing relevant models. When it comes to modeling close relationship behavior, our own parents can play an important role. Assuming they stay together, they are the most prevalent and enduring relationship models available to us. Accordingly, watching Dad physically abusing Mom might give little boys the idea that the infliction of violence is part of the male relationship role. By the same token, little girls might come to believe that enduring violence from one's partner is part of their role.

There is some evidence for the intergenerational transmission of violence. Children with violent parents have difficulty relating to peers. They struggle with cooperative play and with managing their emotions (Katz & Low, 2004). They are also more blaming and have more pessimistic expectations for conflict resolution. As such, they are prone to perpetuate the conflict escalation patterns modeled by their parents and are more likely to commit partner violence in adulthood (Duggan, O'Brien, & Kennedy, 2001; O'Hearn & Margolin, 2000). Sadly, these effects are not limited to watching Dad hit Mom and getting away with it. Instead, being subjected to corporal punishment similarly models violence and results in adult domestic violence (Smith & Mosby, 2003).

Another popular conception related to violence in relationships is that the occurrence of violence is somewhat cyclical. Walker (1984) described this cycle as consisting of several components. During a period of rising tension, the woman withdraws to avoid any behavior that could anger her partner. This generally does not lead to the desired outcome, but instead to an acute incident of battery in which the batterer unleashes a barrage of physical and verbal violence. Then, after the dust settles, the batterer engages in loving contrition, complete with profuse apologies, affirmations of remorse, acts of kindness, and gifts and compliments. Even though the idea of a cycle of violence seems to have some face validity, it may not be a good description of what actually happens. One problem is that Walker’s (1984) hypothesis is based on a small sample of women in therapy. Another problem has to do with the interpretation of the seeming cyclical events. Even in the most abusive relationship, violence does not occur on a constant basis. Instead, abusive episodes may be interspersed with periods marked by relative normalcy and even signs of kindness and affection. Consequently, the perceived cycle of violence may simply be a result of such fluctuations in the interactions between the abuser and the abused. See Table 12.1 for a summary about the myths and facts of violence in relationships.
Table 12.1 Myths and Facts about Intimate Partner Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth or Fact?</th>
<th>Research Shows . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence is tied to poverty.</td>
<td>Violence occurs across income levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims enable abusers through silence.</td>
<td>Not all are silent: 13.4% of women tell others about the abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are the primary abusers.</td>
<td>Surveys reveal a comparable rate of wife-to-husband violence, but men are more likely to use lethal violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children learn by observing parental abuse.</td>
<td>Some evidence supports the intergenerational transmission of violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence is cyclical: Tension leads to violence, which yields to apologies and reaffirmations, which lead to tension . . .</td>
<td>Perceived circular nature of violence might be due to the misinterpretation of the fact that violence cannot occur constantly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alcohol and Relationship Violence

The use of alcohol is often implicated as a contributor to relationship violence, partly because there is overwhelming evidence that alcohol can increase all forms of human aggression (Bushman & Cooper, 1990; Ito, Miller, & Pollock, 1996). Alcohol has disinhibiting effects, and thus its consumption by an already hostile partner may loosen any existing constraints on exerting violence. Additionally, alcohol has been shown to lead to myopia (Critchlow, 1983; 1985), a condition in which the range of behaviors deemed appropriate in a given situation is narrowed. During periods marked by tension, resentment, and anger, alcohol myopia may restrict the perception of means of resolution other than inflicting violence. Interestingly, little evidence exists for such a straightforward link between alcohol use and relationship violence. Several studies of batterers (Eberle, 1982; Fagan, Barnett, & Patton, 1988) report that alcohol is involved in only about one-third of battering incidents. Although alcohol does not account for all instances of battering, its impact on relationships occurs on many levels. See Table 12.2 for a list of alcohol’s physical and cognitive effects.

Just how is alcohol related to relationship violence? There is growing empirical evidence that high levels of alcohol often precede intimate partner violence (Murphy, Winters, O’Farrell, Fals-Stewart, & Murphy, 2005). Relative to men who don’t drink, partner assault is three times higher in those who are frequent binge drinkers (Kantor & Straus, 1987). Looking at chronic alcohol use contributes an added layer of complexity to the relationship between alcohol and violence. Specifically, it appears that alcoholics prone to relationship violence differ from their nonviolent counterparts in several important respects.

First, violent alcoholics tend to become alcoholics at an earlier age than nonviolent alcoholics. They also tend to have a history of antisocial behavior, are more likely to have been arrested, and generally experience a variety of problems associated with drinking. Second, it appears that this type of alcoholism, known as Type II Alcoholism Syndrome, is inherited primarily by males (Gondolf & Foster, 1991). Thus, relationship violence is most common among male alcoholics who fit this particular profile (Murphy & O’Farrell, 1994, 1996). Furthermore, unstable drinking patterns rather than drinking per se are causally related to relationship violence. Specifically, binge-drinking alcoholics have higher rates of relationship violence than steady-drinking alcoholics, even though steady drinkers may consume more alcohol in the long run (Murphy & O’Farrell, 1994).
Table 12.2 The Problem With Alcohol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Problem for Men</th>
<th>Problem for Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol reduces inhibitions, but it also reduces physiological performance.</td>
<td>• Decreased penile engorgement.</td>
<td>• Reduced vaginal blood flow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Higher incidence of erectile dysfunction.</td>
<td>• Decreased intensity of orgasm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of sexual desire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol damages liver and heart tissue, leads to weight gain around midsection, and hurts sexual performance.</td>
<td>• Chronic heavy drinking causes imbalances in hormone levels.</td>
<td>• Can result in fetal alcohol syndrome for a woman’s developing fetus if she is pregnant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leads to feminization: breasts enlarge, testicles shrink, body hair thins.</td>
<td>• Toxic effects on the ovaries and pituitary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol impairs judgment.</td>
<td>• Increases likelihood to assault by reducing sexual inhibitions, social concerns, and responsibility.</td>
<td>• Increases the risk for sexual assault by reducing alertness, judgment about high-risk partners, and ability to resist attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol is a psychoactive depressant and can alter mood and perceptions. It can make a person feel more relaxed and also lead to impaired judgment.</td>
<td>• Both men and women who drink have heightened beliefs that sex will occur.</td>
<td>• Both men and women who drink have heightened beliefs that sex will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Less likely to engage in safe-sex practices such as having protected sex.</td>
<td>• Less likely to engage in safe-sex practices such as having protected sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More likely to engage in risky behaviors such as sex with multiple partners.</td>
<td>• More likely to engage in risky behaviors such as sex with multiple partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Makes it difficult to achieve truly satisfying relationships by clouding true feelings.</td>
<td>• Makes it difficult to achieve truly satisfying relationships by clouding true feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Binge drinking is associated with high mortality rates and poor performance at school and work.</td>
<td>• Binge drinking is associated with high mortality rates and poor performance at school and work.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


In addition to differences in the nature of the alcohol problem and the pattern of alcohol consumption, violent and nonviolent alcoholics also differ in their beliefs about the effects of alcohol. Violent alcoholics and their partners tend to believe that alcohol causes marital problems. At the same time, violent alcoholics believe they cannot weather interpersonal conflict without drinking (Murphy & O’Farrell, 1994). Interestingly, when alcoholics who are prone to relationship violence are asked to discuss problems under sober conditions with their spouses, they tend to display higher levels of hostility and defensiveness than their nonviolent counterparts.

The bottom line about alcohol and relationship violence is that alcoholics who abuse their partners differ in important ways from alcoholics who are not violent. See Table 12.3 for a list of characteristics of violent alcoholics. The pattern of risk for relationship violence appears to hinge on the nature of the alcohol problem, consumption patterns, beliefs about alcohol’s ability to cause harm to a relationship, and relationship-specific communication patterns. Furthermore, the findings discussed thus far suggest that relationship violence is multicausal. No single set of factors can explain why violence occurs in relationships, and consequently it is difficult to come up with a magic wand that would make the problem go away.
Relationship Violence and Abuse

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Relationship abuse includes physical assault, as well as less physical behaviors, such as neglect, verbal put-downs, and severe criticism. Do you think these behaviors can be legitimately put together in the same category? Why or why not?
- Being a victim of relationship violence is correlated with negative health behaviors, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and not using seat belts. As you know, correlation does not imply causation. Make a case for different causal directions between relationship violence and negative health behaviors. Which one seems more likely to you?
- Various intervention programs aim to reduce the incidence of relationship violence. In the case of alcohol-related violence, its occurrence seems to be at least partially due to genetically inherited causes. Do you think this limits the effectiveness of intervention programs?

The Macrocontext of Relationship Violence

In 1999, a judge in Fort Worth, Texas, sentenced Jimmy Dean Watkins to 4 months in prison for murdering his wife. Not to give the impression that Watkins’ jury was soft on crime, he was also sentenced to 15 years in prison for wounding his deceased wife’s boyfriend, Keith Fontenot, in the same attack. Watkins’ case illustrates a legal double standard for violence among strangers and violence among intimates. Instead of treating them the same, intimate partner violence is often considered a “domestic” issue to be dealt with
by the parties involved. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the United States has far more shelters for animals than shelters for abused women (Biden, 1993).

This view of domestic violence is further exacerbated in cultures that preserve traditional gender roles and place a premium on the maintenance of male honor (Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008; Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Honor cultures include Mediterranean societies (e.g., Greece, Italy, Spain), Arab cultures, Latin and South American cultures, and the American South and West (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). In such cultures, a man’s honor and status are linked to a wife’s fidelity. And, in the case of a wife’s infidelity, members of honor cultures condone and even encourage the use of violence to restore honor. Wives, on the other hand, are expected to remain loyal (and silent) in the face of their husbands’ infidelity (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). In addition to internalizing these values, men in honor cultures are more likely to believe that others in their culture endorse their views and use of aggression (Vandello et al., 2008). Although non-honor cultures may not endorse aggression as a way to restore honor, there is reason to believe that many take a “hands off” approach to domestic violence.

Law enforcement has traditionally been reluctant to make arrests for domestic violence unless the victim demands it or the suspect insults or assaults the officer (Sherman, 1980). To be sure, this reluctance is not borne out of callousness. Rather, it represents the response of police officers to the different options demanded by different groups. For instance, women’s advocacy groups might recommend that the officer protect the victim, whereas colleagues and trainers might recommend forced separation or mediation as a short-term solution to the problem at hand.

Considering that relationship violence continues to be a problem, one might ask what would happen if violent offenders were to be arrested rather than talked to or forcibly separated from their victims. This question was first addressed in a field study conducted with the help of the Minneapolis Police Department (Sherman & Berk, 1984). Some 33 police officers stationed in the two precincts with the highest rate of domestic violence agreed to respond to calls of misdemeanor domestic assault by (1) arresting the offender, (2) separating the offender and victim for at least 8 hours, or (3) dispensing advice, including mediation. In order for the experiment to have the highest possible internal validity, how officers responded to calls was not left within their control. Rather, their responses were designated by a prearranged random assignment plan. Over a 17-month period, this plan of action produced 98 cases in which an offender was arrested, 114 cases in which officers separated the offender and the victim, and 108 cases in which officers responded by dispensing advice. To check for the effectiveness of the different responses (i.e., the likelihood that the offender refrained from violence), additional data were collected in the form of police reports as well as interviews of the victims within 6 months of the initial incident.

The results strongly suggested that arrest, compared to separation and advice, acted as a deterrent to further relationship violence, at least over a period of 6 months. Of all three experimental groups, offenders who had been arrested were least likely to commit another domestic assault. Those who had been separated were most likely to assault their partners again, and those who had received advice or mediation fell somewhere in between. Based on these findings, 15 states passed laws that made arrest mandatory for all cases of domestic violence. However, the results of several subsequent replications of the original Minneapolis experiment suggest that such legislation may have been premature and further call into question the generalizability of the Minneapolis findings (Sherman et al., 1992). Although replications in Colorado Springs and Dade
County found a deterrent effect of arrest in line with what the Minneapolis study had found, replications in Omaha, Charlotte, and Milwaukee not only failed to find a deterrent effect, but they found an escalating effect of arrest. In other words, rather than reducing future domestic violence, getting arrested made an offender more likely to become violent again.

If nothing else, this example should teach us not to devise public policy on the basis of the outcome of one single study. An important question remains, however: Why did what seemed to have worked in Minneapolis fail so miserably in other places? The answer seems not to have anything to do with geography at all. Rather, it appears that punishment, such as being arrested for domestic assault, affects different people in different ways. Specifically, arrest works best as a deterrent for those who have a lot to lose. For people who have a job or are married, the stakes are particularly high, as repeated arrests could adversely affect their occupational and marital status. Together, these stakes constitute important forms of informal control to work in conjunction with the formal control of the law. From this perspective, it is not surprising to learn that those individuals with jobs and marriages were deterred from future violence by being arrested, compared to their counterparts who received advice or were separated from their victims.

Quite a different picture emerges for those people for whom the stakes are relatively low. Offenders who were unemployed or unmarried and who were arrested for domestic assault became more likely to become violent again in the future. Several reasons are possible for why this may have happened. The initial arrest may instill in the offenders the belief that they are deviant, and thus they change their identities accordingly. Repeated punishment may have further led to the discovery that the legal threat is overstated and relatively tolerable. In support of this point, in the Milwaukee experiment, only 1 percent of arrested offenders were eventually convicted. Finally, repeated punishment may have led to anger and resentment against the victim, the law, or society, resulting in future aggression and violence.

Thus, to some extent, the prevalence of relationship violence may be due to the vestiges of a system that has traditionally considered women to be possessions of their male partners. Changes in laws governing relationship conduct can contribute to a decrease in the prevalence of relationship violence, but only within limits. For one thing, as we have seen, laws and their enforcement affect different people in different ways. Consider further the draconian laws against drugs enacted during the 1980s and 1990s. They did little, if anything, to decrease drug-related violence. To make laws against domestic violence work, it will ultimately take a collective reorientation in terms of how society looks at the nature of domestic relationships.

Finally, the macrocontext of our relationships provides us with myriad stressors that can lead to acute and chronic stress. Acute stress results from distressing events that have a clear-cut beginning and end. This might be something like failing a class or trying to complete your income tax returns on April 14. Chronic stress, such as living in poverty, is long-term and has no clear onset or termination.

How do acute and chronic stress impact relationship violence? Looking at self-reports from 82 newlyweds, Frye and Karney (2006) found that levels of stress fluctuated over time, perhaps contributing to the perception of the cyclical nature of relational violence. However, physical aggression did not result from acute stress alone, but instead resulted from an interaction between acute and chronic stress. Only husbands for whom acute stress occurred against the backdrop of high levels of chronic stress responded with
physical aggression (Frye & Karney, 2006). Thus, the effects of stress are not straightforward. We will see that stress interacts with other individual characteristics as well to produce interpersonal aggression.

The Microcontext of Relationship Violence: Individual Dispositions

Any union between two people ultimately involves two individuals who bring a multitude of characteristics, traits, and dispositions that uniquely affect the nature and quality of their relationship. For example, we have already seen how love styles and attachment styles of individuals can affect their relationships with others. What individual disposition could lead people to become violent and abusive? Many lay theories hold that violence and abuse are somehow related to power. Power has been defined by some as the ability to elicit compliance from others (Weber, 1976). Others have defined it as a general concern for (1) having an impact on others, (2) arousing strong emotions in others, and (3) maintaining a reputation and sense of prestige (Winter, 1988). However one looks at power, force can be a means of establishing, maintaining, or restoring the balance of power in a relationship.

The Need for Power

The balance of power in a relationship can be based on many things, including differences in socioeconomic resources. An alternative way of understanding power is to look at it as a social motive. In other words, just as people have needs for affiliation, belonging, achievement, and so forth, they also have needs for power. And, as is the case with all social motives, there is considerable variation among people in their need for power.

In the majority of cases, relationship violence in heterosexual couples is initiated by the male partner; therefore, one might suspect to find the root cause of the problem in men's higher need for power. However, as intuitive as this idea may be, research has shown it to be wrong, at least in this simple form.

In a now classic study, Winter (1988) measured the need for power (referred to as n(pow)) in a sample of college women and men by having them create stories to describe what was happening in drawings of ambiguous situations. This projective test, known as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), is predicated on the assumption that people's needs will manifest themselves in their fantasies. A research participant who responds to a series of pictures with power-related themes ("He is telling her what to do," "He is demanding an explanation") would be considered to be high in n(pow), compared to someone who responds to the same pictures without reference to power-related themes ("He's telling her about a movie he just saw," "He's asking how her kids are doing").

Not surprisingly, the study found that people varied greatly in terms of their need for power. However, men and women did not differ in the nature and level of n(pow). In other words, n(pow) is equally present (or absent) in both sexes. What differed between the sexes were the actions associated with a high need for power. On the extreme end, men high in n(pow) had proclivities for alcohol and drug use, physical and verbal aggression, gambling, and precocious and exploitative sex (including a liking for magazines such as Hustler). In addition, or perhaps because of these proclivities, men high in n(pow) were found to have difficult and less stable intimate relationships, and they tended to oppress women in general, both economically and psychologically. Such
psychological oppression can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as cutting a woman off during a conversation or touching her in nonsexual yet nonetheless inappropriate ways.

This pattern of profligate impulsivity was not obtained for the women who were high in need for power. Instead, it appeared that they expressed their need for power primarily in socially responsible ways. Women high in n(pow) tended to hold office in student government or attained high visibility by other means, such as writing letters to the editor of the student newspaper. In addition, they had a proclivity to acquire possessions associated with high prestige, such as televisions, stereos, and framed pictures (remember, this is a study of college students). Finally, women high in n(pow) indicated that they were planning to have careers, especially power-related careers, in such fields as teaching, therapy, journalism, business management, and the clergy. For those readers who are wondering how owning framed pictures and wanting to be a teacher or a minister is related to a need for power, remember that the definition of power emphasizes concerns with having an impact on others as well as maintaining a sense of prestige. Because teachers, journalists, therapists, and clergy have the ability to affect the lives of others in substantial ways (for better and worse), aspiring to these types of careers is considered related to a need for power. Similarly, posters of Monet’s water lilies or Michael Jordan dunking a basketball are just that; however, in a frame, they become pieces of art.

It is one thing to demonstrate meaningful and reliable gender differences; explaining their origins is an altogether different matter. One might argue that gender differences, including those in the expression of need for power, are innate. But such an attempt would still fall short of pinpointing the origins of such differences, unless one could find something akin to a genetic marker. However, the observation that gender differences related to power are not so much a matter of differences in the need for power, but instead in the ways in which this need is expressed, suggests their origins may be social in nature.

In several studies, Winter (1988) managed to trace the differences in how men and women express their need for power in socially responsible ways because throughout their upbringing they receive more responsibility training than their male counterparts. Specifically, women are socialized to express their need for power in socially responsible ways because throughout their upbringing they receive more responsibility training than their male counterparts. For example, girls are more likely to be asked to help in the care of younger siblings than are boys. Consistent with this speculation, the highest level of responsible nurturance was observed among women who had grown up with younger siblings. Moreover, more profligate impulsivity was found among women who did not have younger siblings and thus had been deprived of relevant opportunities toward social responsibility training. Put a slightly different way, women express a high need for power in socially responsible ways to the extent that they had opportunities for social responsibility training during childhood and adolescence. In the absence of such opportunities, they are very much like their male counterparts who are high in need for power.

Does this mean that men high in n(pow), especially those without younger siblings, are condemned to a life of substance use and gambling? Not necessarily. When all our rowdy friends are settling down, it is often because they have children of their own. It appears that being a parent can provide the social responsibility training that may have been missing from one’s earlier years. Although parenthood may do little to change one’s need for power, it can substantially alter the way it is expressed.
Power and Abuse

How is need for power tied to relationship violence and abuse? One might suspect that profligate impulsivity could be at the core of the problem. From this perspective, both men and women who are high in need for power and who lacked opportunities for social responsibility training might be predisposed toward violence. However, not every person who fits this pattern will become violent. Thus, we need to look at other variables that might play a role in the connection of power and abuse.

One such attempt was made in a study that looked at a number of personality characteristics to predict the occurrence of relationship violence (Mason & Blankenship, 1987). Along with the need for power, the researchers measured the need for affiliation, activity inhibition, and stress, through appropriate tests. In addition, the researchers kept track of the length of relationships. The general idea was that the occurrence of relationship violence could be predicted by unique combinations of these variables. For example, it might be the case that violence will be inflicted primarily by those high in need for power, low in need for affiliation, and low in their ability to resist their violent impulses. Moreover, it might be that different combinations predict whether men and women will become violent.

The results suggest that relationship violence does in fact have multiple causes and that the nature of the causes is somewhat different for men and women. High need for power was significantly correlated with the infliction of abuse among men but not women, suggesting that profligate impulsivity stemming from a high need for power is the major reason men become violent. For women, the story is considerably more complex. Need for power did not predict the infliction of violence, as one might suspect. Instead, need for affiliation and level of activity inhibition moderated the effects that stress had on the infliction of abuse. In other words, women who were under a lot of stress, high in need for affiliation, and low in activity inhibition were most likely to inflict abuse. Of course, given the correlational nature of the study, the opposite is also true. Women who were under a lot of stress but were low in need for affiliation or high in activity inhibition were not particularly likely to inflict abuse.

Individual Differences and Interaction Variables

An individual’s attachment orientation can also mediate domestic aggression (Rogers, Bidwell, & Wilson, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 8, adult attachment has implications for how we initiate, approach, and manage our intimate relationships. Current research suggests it can also predict who is likely to engage in relational abuse and when it will occur (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008). Specifically, women in abusive relationships had higher levels of preoccupation and were high in attachment anxiety (Allison et al., 2008). Men in abusive relationships, while also high in preoccupation, were more dismissing. Moreover, attachment orientation can also predict responses to abuse. Preoccupation, for instance, is associated with approach and pursuit, such as clingingness, nagging, and even abuse. A dismissing style is associated with distancing behaviors such as compliance, avoidance, and even physical abuse (Allison et al., 2008).

Another study on the link between attachment and aggression compared violent to non-violent couples (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000) and found that 74 percent of violent husbands were marked by insecure attachment orientations. Although secure husbands in this sample were more defensive in conflicts, dismissing men were more
controlling and distancing. Moreover, their violence was triggered by their wife’s defensiveness, and their aggression was used to reassert their control. On the other hand, preoccupied batterers were more violent in response to their wife’s withdrawal or avoidance, and their aggression stemmed from their fears of abandonment (Babcock et al., 2000). Attachment orientation also interacted with need for power to predict abuse. Rogers, Bidwell, and Wilson (2005) found that individuals with an avoidant-fearful orientation resorted to physical aggression when their relationship power was threatened. Conversely, individuals with a preoccupied orientation resorted to physical abuse only when they felt themselves in positions of relational power.

Negative emotionality, that is, being prone to experiencing sadness, anxiety, and anger, also contributes to relationship violence and abuse. Although there appears to be no direct link, a study of 169 newlyweds (Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008) found that individuals high in negative emotionality aggresed against their partners only when they lacked good problem solving skills and experienced high levels of stress (Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008).

Other individual differences in intimate partner violence cleave to sex and gender differences (Fitzpatrick, Salgado, Suvak, King, & King, 2004). For example, women who had been abused are more likely to prefer domineering, possessive men. Male abusers are more likely to prefer and seek out highly anxious women—i.e., women they could abuse (Zayas & Shoda, 2007). Further, male aggression has been reliably linked to relationship dissolution, but not female aggression (DeMaris, 2000). In terms of severe violent aggression, male batterers often have a history of violent aggression or criminal histories that could serve as warning signs of partner abuse (Busch & Rosenberg, 2004; Henning & Feder, 2004). Conversely, female batterers generally react in self-defense (Busch & Rosenberg, 2004), exemplifying Johnson’s (2006) violent resistance.

Clearly, inflicting violence on one’s partner has different consequences for the sexes. Men, by and large, get away with it; women who strike their partners get struck back. Interestingly, relationship violence most often occurs in mature, committed relationships. This finding is of some interest, as it begs two questions: Why do committed members of a couple resort to violence and abuse? Why do the victims of such violence remain in the abusive relationship? Psychologists have traditionally tried to address the second question yet have paid scant attention to the first. Cynics might argue that this is due to a bias that puts the onus on women for a pattern of behavior for which men are behavioraly and morally responsible. A more benevolent interpretation would suggest that any bias may be the result of a primary concern with the victims of relationship violence rather than the perpetrators.

If we look at the issue from a couple perspective we can identify several reasons why committed people, in particular, might be mired in abusive and violent relationships. As a relationship matures over time, the investment individuals have in it increases, as well. Thus, abused partners may find themselves engaged in some calculus that balances the costs of staying against the costs of leaving. Furthermore, over time, the number of alternatives may decrease, as well. This may ultimately lead to a lowered comparison level for alternatives (CLAlt) (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), thus increasing one’s dependency on the relationship. Finally, as relationships mature, the number of material and psychological barriers in general increases to the point where leaving even an abusive relationship may be difficult (see Table 12.4 for a list of signs you might be in an abusive relationship). We will address these and other issues in the next chapter. For now, let us turn our attention to sexual violence and its relationship to power.
Table 12.4 Signs You Are in an Abusive Relationship

You are in an abusive relationship if your partner . . .

- Withholds affection or approval as punishment.
- Criticizes you, shouts at you, or calls you names.
- Ignores your feelings or insults your beliefs, ideas, or values.
- Lies to you or manipulates you.
- Insists you look a certain way to please him or her.
- Humiliates you in public.
- Keeps you from seeing friends or family.
- Takes away resources such as money or the car.
- Puts you in a dangerous situation (e.g., reckless or drunk driving, abandoning you).
- Locks you out of the house.
- Threatens to commit suicide if you leave or to kill you if you leave.


Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- The need for affiliation represents our desire to establish ties with others and to have positive, pleasant interactions with them. In view of this, the positive correlation between women’s need for affiliation and inflicting abuse is rather counterintuitive. How would you explain the relationship between the two?
- It is easy to see how preoccupation can lead to abuse. But how would you account for the link between the dismissing orientation (involving distancing behaviors such as compliance and avoidance) and physical abuse?
- It would seem reasonable to expect that women who had been abused would avoid domineering, possessive men. However, research shows the exact opposite tendency. How could you explain this finding?

Sexual Violence

We can think of sexual violence as manifested in two ways. Sexual harassment refers to unwanted sexual advances between strangers or acquaintances, often in such settings as the workplace and school. Although sexual harassment does not generally occur between intimates, the harasser often desires some sort of intimacy with the victim, and thus it is included in this discussion. Coercive sex refers to sexual encounters without the consent of one partner. It can occur between strangers, acquaintances (date rape), or intimates. Sexual harassment and coercive sex have profound implications for their victims. The psychological and physical scars they leave are often just as severe as the scars resulting from the type of abuse we have discussed.
Sexual Harassment

Although the earliest published accounts of sexual harassment go as far back as the 1730s (Foner, 1947), it was not illegal until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And a legal definition of what constitutes sexual harassment was not issued until 1980, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission outlined two broad categories of prohibited behavior. Quid pro quo harassment refers to attempts to extort sexual cooperation by means of subtle or explicit threats of job-related consequences. Hostile environment harassment refers to pervasive sex-related verbal or physical conduct that is unwelcome or offensive, even when not accompanied by threats of job-related consequences. In light of these guidelines, sexual harassment is now generally understood as “any deliberate or repeated sexual behavior that is unwelcome to its recipients, as well as other behaviors that are hostile, offensive, or degrading” (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 1070).

That sexual harassment can be quite severe and even hostile has been documented in a number of high-profile court cases. For example, in Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson (1986), Michele Vinson, an employee at Meritor Savings Bank, testified that her boss had repeatedly raped and fondled her and followed her into the restroom at her place of employment. In Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards (1991), Lois Robinson went to court after company officials repeatedly ignored her complaints regarding the widespread display of pornographic pictures and sexually degrading graffiti in her workplace. However, the vast majority of sexual harassment is not quite so dramatic but instead consists of intrusive and unwanted sexual attention from superiors and coworkers. In one study of several thousand female government employees (U.S. Merit System Protection Board, 1981), 33 percent of the respondents reported having been subjected to repeated sexual remarks, 26 percent had been subjected to physical touching, and 15 percent had been pressured for dates.

Although many workplaces have strict prohibitions against sexual harassment, it is nonetheless important to find out why it occurs. Because most cases involve the sexual harassment of women by men, several accounts are plausible. According to one hypothesis, sexual harassment of women at work is the result of sex-role spillover, which is defined as the carryover of gender-based expectations for behavior into the workplace (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). Sexual harassment due to sex-role spillover is most likely to occur when the sex ratio at work is skewed toward males. In these settings, women take on the status of “role deviates” and are treated differently from male workers. In other words, in male-dominated settings, men tend to treat women based on gender-based expectations that are largely irrelevant to the work setting but might be appropriate in other settings. From this perspective, whether a behavior is considered sexually harassing depends in large part on the context. For example, a request for a date may be perfectly reasonable when it is issued at a party, but it becomes an issue of harassment when it is issued in the workplace.

The sex-role spillover hypothesis is not without empirical support (Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Sheffey & Tindale, 1992), and it helps explain why it often occurs in work settings that are dominated by males, such as the military (Pryor, 1995), medical training (Kramer, Bindman, Haber, & Sand, 1993), and firefighting (Rosell, Miller, & Barber, 1995). On the other hand, although some forms of sexual harassment, such as asking for a date or complimenting a woman about her appearance, might be the result of applying behaviors based on gender expectations in the wrong setting, the sexual spillover hypothesis has a harder time accounting for a number of phenomena related to sexual harassment.

For one thing, not all men are equally likely to sexually harass women in the workplace. Instead, it appears that men vary in their proclivity to sexually harass. But even those
with a high proclivity may not display harassing behaviors. Whether sexual harassment occurs depends additionally on cues in the situation that either permit or prohibit harassing behavior. To test this idea, Pryor, Giedd, and Williams (1995) recruited males, who had previously completed a measure indicating their likelihood to sexually harass, to participate in a study on employee training. The participants’ job ostensibly was to instruct female participants in some basic office skills. Prior to conducting the training session, participants saw one of two short videos in which a model demonstrated how this was to be done. In one video, the male model complimented the female model on her appearance and touched her frequently while describing the task. In the other video, any sexually harassing behaviors were omitted.

Consistent with the hypothesis, male participants who scored high in the likelihood to sexually harass and who had seen a model get away with sexually harassing behaviors were most likely to sexually harass the woman they were supposed to train. Interestingly, men with a high likelihood to sexually harass who were exposed to a nonharassing model were just as likely (or unlikely) to harass their “trainee” as men who were low in the likelihood to sexually harass.

From a practical point of view, Pryor et al.’s (1995) study suggests that the incidence of sexual harassment, even from the most determined harassers, might be lowered by workplace policies that do not permit or even punish sexual harassment. From a theoretical point of view, the study prompts a more complete account of the kinds of things that make some men more likely to sexually harass than others. At this point, it appears that the behavior of men who sexually harass is strongly motivated by a need for power and dominance, particularly when it comes to interacting with women (Bargh & Raymond, 1995). Moreover, men who are likely to sexually harass appear to have a mental association that links power with sex. Thus, when the power end of this association is activated (e.g., by virtue of someone’s position in the workplace), the sex end will be automatically activated, as well (Pryor & Stoller, 1994). As a consequence of the activation of this power-sex association, female coworkers are often perceived as more attractive, which can then bring about sexually harassing behaviors (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). Of course, whether sexually harassing behavior will ultimately ensue may in part depend on additional signals indicating that the setting will either permit or prohibit it, as indicated by the Pryor and colleagues (1995) study.

Sexual harassment necessarily involves a perpetrator and a victim. So far, we have concentrated on illuminating the reasons why some men sexually harass women at work. But how does sexual harassment affect its victims? Obviously, severe and violent sexual harassment (e.g., *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, *Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards*) is likely to have devastating consequences for its victims. But even harassment that does not include an overt form of sexual coercion affects women profoundly. One study of 10,000 working military women found that those who had been subjected to sexual harassment (59 percent) displayed lower productivity, negative attitudes about their workplace, and negative emotional reactions and problems with relationships in the family (Pryor, 1995). Yet only a small minority of women who experience sexual harassment report it (Komanomy et al., 1993).

The underreporting of sexual harassment may occur for several reasons. Quid pro quo sexual harassment is likely to increase the possibility of losing one’s job; thus, women subjected to this form of harassment may fail to take action primarily out of fear. But this is not the whole story. Sexual harassment is often surrounded by a great deal of ambiguity due to differences in men’s and women’s lay definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment.
in the first place. In general, men’s definitions tend to be narrower and less inclusive than those of women (Fitzgerald, 1993). In other words, whereas a woman may think of a touch or a verbal comment as a form of sexual harassment, men often interpret such actions as an expression of mere friendliness. In light of these divergent perceptions, the legal system has supplemented the burden of proof on the part of the victim with a “reasonable woman standard,” which holds the victim responsible for responding appropriately (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fisher, 1995; Gutek & O’Connor, 1995). Although these legal hurdles protect the accused (as intended by the legal system), they make many women wonder if they would find justice as a result of filing a complaint (Rudman, Borgida, & Robertson, 1995). Consequently, women are often compelled to suffer in silence, especially when the harassment is not severe, when it does not come from a supervisor, and when the workplace lacks adequate policies on sexual harassment (Gruber & Smith, 1995).

**Stranger Harassment**

Although policies can help women from being sexually harassed at school and in the workplace, they do little to prevent women from being harassed by strangers. Sexual harassment of this kind includes verbal behaviors such as catcalls and sexual remarks as well as nonverbal behavior such as leering and fondling. In the U.S., 31 percent of college women and 29 percent of non-college women report experiencing some form of stranger harassment every few days (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Fairchild, 2010). This has a host of adverse consequences. There is evidence that victims perceive being harassed by a stranger as more severe and emotionally devastating than being harassed by a coworker or fellow student (McCarty, Iannone, & Kelly, 2014). Moreover, women often internalize the objectification inherent in stranger harassment, which can lead them to increasingly objectify both other women and men (Davidson, Gervais, & Sherd, 2015). Women lower in self-esteem are more likely to make benign attributions for stranger harassment and engage in self-blame (Saunders et al., 2016).

What about men who think harassing strangers is appropriate? Results from a sample of college men suggest that they score high in the Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH) scale, as one might expect. In addition, they are most likely to engage in stranger harassment when they are in a group because it affords them anonymity along with opportunities for group bonding (Wesselmann & Kelly, 2010).

**Coercive Sex**

**Rape** has been legally defined as the nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration, obtained by force, by threat of bodily harm, or when the victim is incapable of giving consent (Searles & Berger, 1987). Researchers have looked at characteristics of rapists in order to try to gain a better understanding of how to prevent such violent acts. In terms of who rapes, researchers have found that rapists lack empathy for their victim (Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003) and have poor empathic accuracy for their victims (Clements, Holtzworth-Munroe, Schweinle, & Ickes, 2007). Men’s attitudes toward women also influence their proclivity to commit rape and shape their views of rape victims. For example, men were more likely to commit rape if they had first made insulting, derogating comments to their partners (Starratt, Goetz, Shackelford, & McKibbin, 2008). Moreover, men who were “benevolent sexists” (i.e., men with sexist views but positive feelings toward women) were more likely to blame the
victim in an acquaintance-rape scenario. Hostile sexists (i.e., men with sexist views and negative, antagonistic feelings toward women), though, indicated that they had a greater inclination to perpetrate acquaintance, but not stranger, rape (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003). Rape, it seems, is more widespread than this personality profile might suggest. Situational and context factors may also influence with who and when sexual coercion occurs.

Contrary to popular belief, rape is not something that happens between strangers in a dark alley. Instead, as WHO and U.S. Justice Department statistics confirm, most incidences of rape occur between people who know each other. Quite simply, a woman is far more likely to be raped by her husband than by a stranger (Greeley, 1991; Russell, 1982). Coercive sex may be most common among acquaintances and dating couples. In one study of over 3,000 female college students, 54 percent reported that they had been subjected to some form of coerced sexual contact, and roughly half of those cases occurred on dates (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987).

In some ways, it is not surprising that a woman would be more likely to be raped by a close acquaintance other than a stranger. After all, husbands, cohabitors, and dating partners have frequent contact with their partners, and the rape can be committed in relative privacy (Browne, 1993). At the same time, sexual coercion among intimates appears to be incompatible with the characteristics of a close relationship and thus requires explanations for its occurrence. One way to account for this phenomenon is to attribute rape to sexual communication gone awry. In line with data from Abbey and Melby (1986), a man may be compelled to rape because he interprets a woman’s flirtatious behavior as indicating sexual intent. However, rape frequently occurs and continues even after a woman has clearly indicated she does not wish to have sex. Thus, overperception of sexual intent tells only part of the story. Additionally, men who commit rape approach women with the general notion that women’s communications about sex and romance cannot be trusted, and these men fail to recognize negative reactions from others appropriately (Malamuth & Brown, 1994). These characteristics themselves appear to be part of a larger problem. Sexually aggressive men tend to subscribe to the myth that deep down women like to be handled roughly (Burt, 1980). Furthermore, these men tend to endorse interpersonal violence and generally hold adversarial sexual beliefs, often thinking of sex as a conquest or a battle (Malamuth & Brown, 1994).

A more controversial account for the occurrence of coercive sex proposes that men’s proclivity to rape is an outcome of an evolutionary adaptation to procreation (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000). In other words, men are biologically predisposed toward rape because it has been adaptive to the different mating strategies employed by men and women. As we discussed at length in Chapter 3, in most mammalian species, a male’s primary reproductive goal is to mate early and often so as to ensure the survival of his genes in future generations. Females, on the other hand, are primarily interested in ascertaining this genetic survival once conception has occurred, and thus they restrict sexual interactions to males whom they perceive to be maximally capable of providing resources necessary for childrearing. From this perspective, rape is adaptive to males across many species (Crawford & Galdikas, 1986) because it helps subvert females’ gate-keeping tendencies, thus increasing the chances of meeting their reproductive goals.

In partial support of this general hypothesis, Goetz, Shackelford, and Camilleri (2008) identified five different contexts of rape that produce different motivations for rape. Disadvantaged men are low in attractiveness and rape because they have no other access to women. Specialized rapists commit rape because they are aroused by violent sex.
Oppportunistic rapists commit rape when women reject their advances and the costs are low. An example of this is rape that occurs during wartime. High-mating-effort rapists are sexually experienced, aggressive, domineering, and psychopathic. They are not particularly sensitive to contextual and situational cues and therefore are likely to commit rape regardless of the context. Finally, partner rapists commit rape in long-term, committed relationships. They are motivated by concerns with sperm competition and displacement. If they believe their partner has had extra-relational copulation, they will rape in an attempt to displace the interloper’s sperm (Goetz & Shackelford, 2006; Goetz et al., 2008). However, not all men who suspect infidelity are sexually coercive (Starratt, Popp, & Shackelford, 2008). Only men who perceive themselves as more desirable a mate than their wives are prone to meet doubts about fidelity with sexual coercion.

The evolutionary approach to rape is controversial for several reasons. With regard to its implications, many object that explaining rape in terms of its adaptive value merely justifies the status quo and absolves men from any responsibility (e.g., Travis, 2003). But even if a case could be made that these implications were unintended or even false, it is not clear how rape is an adaptive mechanism on the level of the species as a whole. Rape may have reproductive benefits for men, but it has substantial costs for women. Specifically, women who are in the prime of their childbearing years are most traumatized by rape and therefore are most likely to develop strategies to reduce the likelihood of being raped. During the fertile period of their menstrual cycle, women have been found to behave more cautiously and to take fewer risks. They also become more vigilant in detecting sexual coerciveness in strange (but not familiar) males. Perhaps the most helpful adaptation is one that compels women to seek out the protection of strong and domineering male relatives or to seek the company of a band of female friends (Starratt, Popp, & Shackelford, 2008).

Why men feel compelled to rape is likely to be subject to continued theoretical debate among behavioral scientists. This debate is important because in order to generate prescriptions aimed at the prevention of rape, we need to have a clear theoretical understanding of why it occurs in the first place. Approaches that treat rape as an adaptation to evolutionary pressures provide insights into its ultimate causes and, in combination with considerations of its proximate (or immediate) causes, may help us better understand why rape occurs (Goetz et al., 2008).

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Sexual harassment has been linked to the need for power that is expressed differently by men and women. Does this necessarily mean that female-to-male sexual harassment will never occur?
- Everyday communication is possible only under the assumption that people mean what they say. It is an implicit expectation we have for all our social interactions. What do you think gave rise to the idea that when it comes to sex, women’s communication cannot be trusted?
- In addition to its ultimate causes, what proximate causes may need to be considered for a comprehensive account of why rape occurs?
Summary

Issues
• How can intimate partners—whose relationship is based on love, trust, and caring—inflict harm on each other?
• What is the frequency of intimate partner violence worldwide?
• How can defining and measuring domestic violence complicate our understanding of it?
• What are the origins of intimate relationship violence? How do we separate the “myth” from the reality?
• How can a multicausal approach help us understand relationship violence?
• What role do dispositions, context—the macrocontext—play in relationship violence?
• What is the role of stress in relationship violence?
• What effects do sexual harassment and other forms of sexual coercion have on their victims?

Theory
• Popular theories about the causes of relationship violence erroneously suggest that violence is:
  • Found mainly in low-income families
  • Hidden by the abuser and his or her victim
  • Committed mostly by men
  • Related to familial patterns of abuse
  • Cyclical in nature
  • Alcohol abuse contributes to relationship violence
  • Macrolevel theories: Relationship violence is promoted by a culture of honor and the lack of social and legal consequences for its perpetrators
  • Individual difference theories focus on the need for power, lack of empathy, and sexism as sources of domestic violence
  • Sexual harassment is explained in terms of sex-role spillover and the mental association between power and sex for the harasser
  • Evolutionary explanations suggest that rape is an adaptive mechanism and define different contexts for rape

Research
• Descriptive research suggests relationship violence is universal
• Relationship violence takes four forms (Johnson, 2006)
  • Intimate terrorism: The individual is violent and controlling while his or her partner is not
  • Violent resistance: One partner is violent and not controlling, while their partner is both violent and controlling
  • Situational couple violence: The individual is violent, but neither the individual nor the partner are controlling
  • Mutual violence: Both are violent and controlling
• Little support for popular theories of relationship violence
• Community-based interventions—e.g., increasing penalties—work primarily for perpetrators who have a lot to lose (Sherman et al., 1992)
• Acute stress interacts with chronic stress to predict violence in men but not in women (Frye & Karney, 2006)
• Need for power is a fairly straightforward predictor of relationship violence in men
• Violence in women, however, depends on a complex interaction among needs for affiliation, impulse control, and stress
• Spillover theory in sexual harassment supported by research that looks at sexually harassing behaviors in settings with varied gender ratios (Gutek & Morasch, 1982)
• Studies that surreptitiously prime power in men who then rate the attractiveness of female coworkers support the association between power and sex (Bargh et al., 1995)
• Evolutionary explanations are supported in part by the pervasive nature of coercive sex among all mammalian species (Goetz et al., 2008)
• Rape is likely to be committed by men who subscribe to the rape myth, endorse interpersonal violence, and hold adversarial sexual beliefs

Key Terms

Intimate terrorism: a situation in which an individual is violent and controlling, while the partner is neither.
Violent resistance: a situation in which the individual is violent but not controlling, while the partner is both violent and controlling.
Situational couple violence: a situation in which the individual is violent, but neither the individual nor the partner is controlling.
Mutual violent control: situation in which both partners are violent and controlling.
Myopia: a condition in which the range of behaviors deemed appropriate in a given situation is narrowed.
Acute stress: results from distressing events that have a clear-cut beginning and end.
Chronic stress: long-term and has no clear onset or termination.
Need for power: a general concern for (1) having an impact on others, (2) arousing strong emotions in others, and (3) maintaining a reputation and a sense of prestige.
Quid pro quo harassment: attempts to extort sexual cooperation by means of threats of job-related consequences.
Hostile environment harassment: pervasive sex-related verbal conduct that is unwelcome or offensive.
Sex-role spillover: theoretical position that proposes that sexual harassment of women at work is the result of a spillover of gender-based expectations for behavior into the workplace.
Rape: nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration, obtained by force, by threat of bodily harm, or when the victim is incapable of giving consent.
Conflict

Causes and Consequences

All conflict can be traced back to someone’s feelings getting hurt, don’t you think?
—Liane Moriarty, *Big Little Lies*

Conflict is part and parcel of all close relationships. Even the most loving couple is not immune to the occasional spat and the resulting hurt feelings. And in some cases it can lead to the end of a relationship. Whether it does depends on how you and your partner handle it.

The question of why we disagree even though we are in love is just one of the many exquisite mysteries of intimate relationships. And not surprisingly, it is just one of the challenging questions that relationship research has attempted to address. Although it is fairly easy to spot an argument and identify conflicts, it is less clear how conflicts arise, what their sources are, how we solve them, and why we engage in them in the first place.

Conflicts between Lovers and Strangers

What are the differences among conflicts between romantic couples, coworkers, and strangers? At the purely physical level, it is much easier to retreat from conflicts with strangers than it is to escape conflict in close relationships. Further, our reaction to conflict with close others feels different from conflict with strangers or peers (e.g., Dunn, Slomkowski, Donelan, & Herrera, 1995; Maccoby, 1996). Even children exert more affective and behavioral control and temper the tone of the confrontations when they argue with peers than when they engage in a conflict with family members.

Affective and verbal restraint in a confrontation is important because nothing hurts quite like a barbed comment that exposes our most private vulnerabilities for public ridicule. Unfortunately, close relationships can lend themselves to a lack of restraint as communication patterns change in predictable ways both as intimacy increases as well as when it deteriorates (Altman & Taylor, 1973). As relationships wither, the breadth of conversation topics becomes constricted while the depth of intimacy deepens. Discussions about politics, philosophy, and movies dwindle while hurtful exchanges about each other’s supposed weaknesses, shortcomings, and wrongdoings increase. Conversations become centered on issues of contention—real, imagined, or exaggerated. Altman and Taylor (1973) aptly characterized this communication pattern as a social dagger. In essence, the intimacy developed throughout the course of a close interpersonal relationship turns conflict into a deeper, more hurtful affair than would, say, an argument between coworkers or strangers.
Thus, there are some obvious reasons (e.g., negative feelings, partner violence, relationship dissolution) why we should strive to understand the nature of discord in romantic relationships and some less obvious but even more compelling reasons to do so (e.g., building a stronger relationship, avoiding legal action). Let us begin our examination of conflict by looking at some theoretical perspectives on the very nature of conflict itself.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Conflict in Intimate Relationships

The courtship and inexorable path toward Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie’s divorce played out before a national audience. In addition to bearing witness to their courtship, we watched from the sidelines as their marriage became increasingly marked by conflict amid accusations of child abuse and finally ended in divorce.

The demise of the “Brangelina” union fits well with early approaches that viewed conflicts as predominantly negative, destructive events (Coser, 1956). News accounts of abusive relationships, deadly stalking incidents, and murder-for-hire horror stories fit this view equally well. Thus, according to the conflicts-as-destructive perspective, conflicts are signs of problems or weaknesses in the relationship. Consequently, people should strive as much as possible to avoid conflicts at all cost.

More recently, however, researchers have begun to view conflicts as more than bothersome negative events and have instead taken a transformational view that looks at conflict as essential for relationship growth (e.g., Gottman, 1993; Peterson, 1983; Rausch, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). According to this view, conflict can be characterized as either constructive or destructive (e.g., Coser, 1967; Deutsch, 1969; Simmel, 1955).

Constructive conflict is a main force for change and growth in a relationship. It is through conflict that we achieve group and dyadic unity. Moreover, constructive conflict may be the creative impetus underlying all social change (e.g., Gottman, 1993) and growth (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). Gottman and Krokoff (1989) have even found that expressions of disagreement and anger predict long-term satisfaction and improvement in marital relationships. Destructive conflict, on the other hand, leads to the termination of relationships. It is painful, harmful, and damaging and can include hurtful communications and escalation.

The notion that conflict can be transformational is encouraging news, especially for those of us who have thought about conflict mainly in terms of how to avoid it. Currently, researchers view it as one of the mechanisms key to achieving balance among partners’ occasionally divergent needs. In other words, conflict reveals the “seams” in relationships that come about because of the competing needs of being both an individual and a part of a couple. Successful resolution of such competing needs provides growth opportunities and adds to relationship satisfaction and happiness (Gottman, 1993).

Recent research (Gordon & Chen, 2016) suggests that these outcomes are more likely obtained when individuals feel that their partners “get them.” When they feel that their thoughts and feelings are not understood, conflict often results in lowered relationship satisfaction. Perceived understanding, on the other hand, is positively associated with conflict resolution, suggesting that it acts as a buffer against negative conflict outcomes.

In sum, each of the theories regarding the nature of conflicts includes its own unique set of assumptions, predictions, and implications. According to the conflict-as-undesirable view, discord is a sign of a serious rift in the system or relationship. On the other hand,
transformational theorists acknowledge the pervasiveness of conflict. They suggest that rather than circumventing it, we should embrace constructive conflict and openly express both positive and negative thoughts. Finally, recent research suggests that perceptions of being understood by one's partner may be key to continued relationship satisfaction in the face of conflicts.

**Defining Conflict**

Although we may agree that conflict has both positive and negative effects on our relationships, we may have a more difficult time agreeing on what it is and how to measure it. Peterson (1983) defines conflict as the “interpersonal process that occurs whenever the actions of one person interfere with the action of another” (p. 365). This definition provides a good starting point for characterizing conflicts between any two individuals or groups. Other typologies attempt to identify the different kinds of conflicts that have been observed—conflicts that range from orderly debates between strangers to impassioned and chaotic quarrels between lovers. Let us explore how conflicts can differ in scope and orderliness.

**From Order to Disorder: Types of Conflict**

One way to distinguish between different types of conflict is by the degree to which they are predictable and adhere to “rules of engagement” (Brickman, 1974). Accordingly, there are four different types of conflicts: fully structured (e.g., debates), partially structured (e.g., games, intense competitions, and bargaining), unstructured (e.g., fights), and revolutionary (e.g., metaconflicts that include conflicts over the very rules of engagement).

Sillars and Weisberg (1987) suggested that minor conflicts follow a predictable pattern of communication, whereas severe conflicts are more likely to occur outside of rational, rule-bound communications. Hence, instead of being orderly and predictable, these exchanges often defy any sense of logic. Self-interest motives take precedence over the common good. Disputants disregard established rules of communication such as norms to be relevant, clear, complete, and truthful. Not surprisingly, severe conflicts tend to be intense, chaotic, less controllable, and highly confusing (Sillars & Weisberg, 1987).

These conflict typologies clearly depict the progression of the structure of conflict from orderly disagreements all the way to the ambiguity, confusion, disorder, and even chaos of fights and severe conflicts (Brickman, 1974; Sillars & Weisberg, 1987). However, in addition to an “orderliness continuum,” these typologies also provide a way to capture the differences in disputes between strangers and lovers. Because of the emotional investment in romantic relationships, disagreements between lovers can quickly feel more intense and can become less rule-bound and more disorderly.

In addition to self-interest motives and an inattention to the rules of normal communication, another source of ambiguity in serious conflicts stems from both the breadth of topics over which a couple can disagree and the fact that problems can exist at various levels of abstraction (Sillars & Weisberg, 1987). The number and variety of disputable issues can lead to confusion because each person can focus on a different issue. For her, it’s his displeasure with her posture, but for him, it’s her indifference to his concern for their joint health and physical fitness.

Similar to Freud’s notion of manifest or overt content (e.g., a cigar is a source of smoking pleasure) and latent or unconscious content (e.g., cigar as a representation of a phallus),
conflicts may involve straightforward sources visible at the surface as well as those that go deeper to the core of the relationship. The difficulty, however, is in identifying which argument stems from which source. For example, seemingly superficial spats surrounding things like, “She doesn’t wear enough makeup” or “His raincoat looks like an undertaker’s overcoat” may reflect deeper misgivings and may have their origins in more profound, basic issues of compatibility. Other disagreements over seemingly minor events might also be a veiled attempt on the part of one partner to disengage from the relationship! Thus, arguments over what appear to be trivial matters may actually reflect deeper and more fundamental problems.

Conflicts range from the predictable to the catastrophic, and a majority of serious conflicts in romantic relationships are comprised of the latter. This is not surprising since conflicts, especially intense ones, are “hot” and imbued with chaos, ambiguity, and disorder. But how do conflicts start?

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Gottman and Krokoff’s (1989) research produced the counterintuitive conclusion that expression of anger and disagreement predicts long-term satisfaction in marital relationships. How do you think the two variables are linked?
- In your opinion, what distinguishes a major conflict from a minor one? Is it the magnitude of the divergence in needs or the way conflict plays out (i.e. orderly vs. chaotic)?
- Arguments can stem from relatively unimportant issues. However, sometimes these seemingly trivial matters can indicate more serious issues of compatibility. In view of this, evaluate both the conflict-as-destructive and the conflict-as-transformative positions.


We all know that anything can potentially start a fight—from the little, “It’s the way you said it” and “Why don’t you put the seat down on the toilet?” to the more serious, “Your family/friends/football games come before our relationship” and “You don’t love me anymore.” So far, we have discussed some of the more general sources of conflict; however, let us look more closely at its specific origins and antecedents. At the broadest level, we see that conflict can arise from within the relationship (i.e., individual qualities or qualities of the pair) and from sources external to it (i.e., children, family, friends, jobs, economics, war, etc.).

One important internal source of conflict is the allocation and sharing of resources (Brickman, 1974). That is, the seemingly simple act of sharing and distributing resources can increase the likelihood of producing interference with individual and mutual goals and can thus lead to conflict. Other internal sources of conflict and threats to relationship stability are the amount of time spent together, racial dissimilarity, quality of communication, and length of the relationship. Additionally, Rausch and colleagues (1974) proposed that internal sources of conflict might also include issues stemming from
friction between the needs of the one and those of the couple. That is, conflicts arise from the divergence and conflict between the most basic needs of the individual and the needs of the couple: isolation versus intimacy, individuality versus unity, separateness versus connectedness, and privacy versus openness. Finally, some external source of conflict might be the availability of social support and alternative relationships as well as low income and employment (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Levinger, 1976; Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990).

In a similar vein, Fincham and Bradbury (1987, 1988) suggest that an absolute understanding of relationships—conflict included—is difficult to achieve because relationships are necessarily complex (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990, 1992). They achieve their complexity, in part, because they take place at several levels: the individual level, the dyadic level, and within a larger social context. Correspondingly, each level gives rise to its own source of conflict: the self, the partner, the relationship, the external environment, and fate. Dimensions of the “self,” for example, include gender, whereas “age” might be considered both a component of the self as well as of the relationship (i.e., life stage and the length of the relationship). Although much of this is self-explanatory, let us take a closer look at several individual level sources of conflict including gender and age.

**Gender and Conflict: “He Said . . . She Said . . .”**

By and large, research has found that women approach conflicts more constructively than men (Levenson & Gottman, 1985; Rusbult et al., 1991; Tannen, 1990). At first blush, this seems to fly in the face of the stereotype of women as more emotional (and less rational) than men. However, this finding is consistent with women’s greater preference to engage in activities that strengthen and maintain relationships (Surra & Longstreth, 1990) and men’s relative difficulty in discussing their feelings (Levenson & Gottman, 1985).

Perhaps this same preference contributes to the sex differences observed in the demand/withdraw pattern of conflict (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). This pattern of conflict pits one partner’s willingness to be emotionally and verbally expressive against the other’s reluctance to engage and their simultaneous preference for avoidance. The fact that men are generally less expressive and more withdrawn than women explains why the most commonly observed communication pattern is one in which a demanding wife tackles a problem by complaining, criticizing, and pleading to a husband who withdraws in self-defense. In addition to being the most common communication pattern, it was also the one most likely to escalate into conflict when the “problem” had to do with change favored by the wife. The opposite pattern of a demanding husband and a withdrawing wife was observed far less frequently and was less likely to lead to conflict or escalation.

Thus, conflict erupting from biological gender might sometimes be difficult to avoid. Rusbult and colleagues (1991; Rusbult, Zembrod, & Iwaniszek, 1986) suggest that what might be even more important than biological sex is the person’s psychological orientation. Rusbult’s team found that psychological femininity was related to attempts toward improving or eliminating relationship problems or waiting for improvement. Psychological masculinity was related to passively allowing the problem to worsen. These effects were independent of biological gender.

These findings may have important implications for conflict in gay and lesbian couples. On the surface, it seems that couples of the same gender should avoid conflicts that arise from the friction caused by gender differences in priorities and communication styles.
However, Rusbult et al.’s (1991) research suggests that although such problems might be reduced, gay and lesbian couples generally experience similar difficulties in conflict resolution. Further, because psychological orientation is only loosely correlated with biological gender, gay and lesbian couples are likely to encounter the same differences in constructive versus avoidance reactions to conflict.

Age and Conflict

Cursory consideration might lead one to expect conflict to increase as our relationships lengthen. Indeed, stereotypes of the elderly contribute to this notion of disinterested, distant, or bickering couples. Empirically, some researchers have suggested that as couples age, the good fit that brought them together decreases, opening the door to greater conflict.

Time mediates the occurrence of conflict in several ways. The aging of a relationship naturally leads to an evolution of “hot” issues. “Older” couples have had ample opportunity to deal with and resolve many of the issues that were once central to their relationship. Research on long-term marriages supports this (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993, 1994). Thus, while conflicts still occur, mature couples, relative to their young counterparts, have fewer disagreements.

Another effect of time is the result of developmental changes that occur with the progression of age. Different issues are important to us at different stages of our lives, regardless of the intimacy or tenure of our relationship. For example, achieving satisfying levels of intimacy in our relationship might be replaced by concerns over career accomplishments. Selecting the hippest restaurant or movie is replaced with finding a good school for the children.

Further, as we age, we experience fewer emotional extremes in all aspects of our lives (Costa et al., 1987). Attenuation of all emotions means less negative affect and lower levels of distress and anger. In fact, research on conflict supports the idea that we “cool down” with age: Older couples experience lower levels of physiological arousal during marital interactions than do middle-aged couples (Levenson et al., 1994). Thus, although the goodness of the fit between romantic partners may deteriorate over time, perhaps the concurrent decrease in emotional extremes may take the edge off the increasing number of differences.

This attenuation of affect also has direct implications for how we experience conflict. For example, as affective reactions to problems become more modulated, interactions similarly become less negative and more patterned. However, not only are older couples less likely to experience volatile and destructive conflicts and more likely to resolve them with less negativity, they are also more likely to demonstrate greater affection toward one another while resolving their grievances (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995). It seems that, with age, we do learn something about ourselves and gain conflict resolution skills!

In addition to achieving greater success at resolving conflicts, long-term couples, relative to those in middle-aged relationships, actually find greater common sources of enjoyment. The reduction of gender differences with age may be one of the contributing factors to the greater correspondence in pleasurable activities (Levenson et al., 1993). It is noteworthy, however, that another effect of time may be that the sample of older couples is somewhat biased. Unhappy couples with poor conflict resolution strategies are unlikely to be included in this group because they may have separated or divorced long ago. All in all,
although not intensely investigated, research on older marriages supports a positive picture of love in the twilight years. The causes of conflict change with age and the affective reactions to them diminish—for the good of the couple.

**Attribution and Conflict: Partner-Level Sources of Conflict**

Soap operas succeed on the communication skills (or the lack thereof) of their characters. Angst, intrigue, and torment are perpetuated because of a lack of key facts, misinformation, and misattribution of causes. Conflicts rest not so much in what our partners have or haven’t done, but on our perceptions of why they did what they did. Because we continually strive to determine the motives and reasons for others’ behaviors, attribution is common in close relationships and increases during conflicts and disagreements (Harvey, 1987).

Exactly what types of attributions do we make? Generally, attributions can be internal or external, stable or unstable. When we make internal attributions for behaviors, we attempt to explain the behavior by referring to internal, personal attributes, such as abilities, skills, and traits inherent in the individual (e.g., “Scott got upset when I got home late because he’s jealous, controlling, and unreasonable”). External attributions, on the other hand, locate the cause of behavior in elements in the person’s environment, such as the weather, other people, fate, luck, and so on (e.g., “Scott got upset when I got home late because he’s under a lot of pressure at work and has had to put in a lot of overtime”). Further, these attributions can be stable or unstable. Stable attributions are fixed and constant (e.g., IQ, traits, ability, some aspects of the environment), whereas unstable attributions are more variable and changeable (e.g., mood, fate, luck).

In close relationships, the types of attributions we make are influenced in large part by how happy we are with our relationship. These attributions can have profound effects. For example, spouses who make negative attributions for problems in their marriage have been found to react more destructively to conflict than those making positive, more benevolent attributions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). Moreover, the relationship between attributions and behaviors is more strongly correlated in unhappy than in happy marriages. For example, reciprocity of negative interactions was more easily and reliably predicted in the cases of distressed wives than in nondistressed wives. It seems that negative, malevolent attributions foster reciprocity of negativity. We will talk about this more in the following section.

Precisely how do we get from attributions to conflict? The entailment model (Fincham & Jaspers, 1980; Davey, Fincham, Beach, & Brody, 2001) suggests that conflicts are preceded by a chain reaction of events starting at causal judgments that cascade to responsibility judgments and finally to the assignment of blame or conflict (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987, 1988; Bradbury & Fincham, 1990, 1992). That is, both source attributions (i.e., internal, external, stable, unstable) and responsibility decisions are key in determining conflict outcomes. We discussed source attributions in the section prior. According to Fincham and Bradbury (1987, 1988), responsibility judgments are based on whether we believe that an action was freely chosen and our assessment of the actor’s motivation and intent. Once responsibility is determined, blame is assessed, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Suppose, for example, that Ray forgets to pick Ellis up from work. Ellis attributes Ray’s forgetfulness to the combined effects of stress and fatigue stemming from work and family problems (positive and external attribution). She knows things are tough for Ray (action
not freely chosen), and so it is easy for her to quickly forgive him once she has conveyed her hurt feelings (conflict avoided). Now, take the case of Nino, who also fails to fetch Teresa from work. Teresa, though, attributes her abandonment to Nino’s lack of caring and general thoughtlessness (negative and internal attribution). Teresa believes that Nino should do more to demonstrate his love for her (negative motivation and intent), and she blames him for forgetting her. They go to bed angry. This, in effect, is what studies of married couples found: Conflict was preceded by both causal attributions and determinations of responsibility (Lussier, Sabourin, & Wright, 1993; Davey et al., 2001).

Thus, although just about anything can lead to a disagreement or fight, researchers have identified different classes of causal factors. However, current thinking suggests that it is not so much the topic of discord that matters, but our attributions for our partner’s acts and judgments of blame that lie at the heart of most conflicts.

Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- One interesting finding about conflict is that low income can be an external source of conflict. Does this predict more frequent/severe conflict among the poor? How do you think income is related to conflict?
- Gender differences in conflict patterns can either be the result of gender stereotypes or psychological orientation. Which theory do you think does a better job explaining the demand/withdrawal pattern of marital conflict?
- Some research found that with age the good fit between partners decreases, bringing the potential for more conflict. Yet other research shows a decrease in frequency and severity of argument in older couples. One explanation that would reconcile the two findings is based on the decreased general arousal characteristic of older age. Can you think of other ways to reconcile them?

Reactions to Conflict

Sheila, her husband, Alexi, and their two young sons are in Chicago for President Obama’s farewell address and decide to do some sightseeing. They visit Millennium Park, and, after waiting for the crowds to subside, Sheila attempts to capture the Cloud-gate sculpture on camera. “Stand over there!” directs Alexi. “Now, Sheila, zoom in on our faces . . . you don’t want us to look like pinheads! OK, now don’t shoot the picture into the sun . . . OK . . .” Sheila, tired from the cold and frustrated by the crowds, finally snaps, “Don’t tell me what to do!” Her rebuke echoes loudly and adds a sour note to their relationship. How should Sheila and Alexi react to their newfound unhappiness? Should they express themselves openly, freely, and loudly? Or should they bite their tongues, grind their teeth, and hope things will somehow “right” themselves? Should they get angry at each other or head straight for divorce court instead? As it happens, whether partners engage in or avoid conflicts, how they respond to them emotionally, and what attributions they make for their disputes all impact how conflicts unfold and how they are solved.
Expression Versus Avoidance

Peterson’s (1983) model includes, in its beginning stage, the issues of engagement and avoidance. The uses of expression (as a specific form of engagement) and avoidance have been widely investigated as two general reactions to conflict (Deutsch, 1969). An underlying assumption of this research area is that conflict, unless dispelled, will lead to the end of a relationship. Similar to a hydraulic model, the analogy is that the steam in the engine (the conflict) must be released at regular intervals in order to prevent a dangerous buildup or backlog of negativity (emotion). If release of these negative forces is not accomplished, an explosion or breakdown will occur. Thus, expression is viewed as positive and constructive while avoidance is considered dysfunctional.

In addition to releasing steam, expression may also serve to increase intimacy. That is, expression leads to openness and sharing, which in turn are important to the development of intimacy. Furthermore, transformational perspectives (i.e., conflict is positive) also view conflict as a social skill that can be learned and an event that can be managed successfully (cf. Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994; Sillars & Weisberg, 1987). Most Americans and Westerners in general are comfortable with these assumptions. Many of us tend to agree that keeping our feelings to ourselves, guarding secrets, and hiding our emotions are generally counterproductive to the development of intimacy and closeness.

That said, the simple dichotomy of expression/engagement versus avoidance/escape may be an oversimplification. Expression might be good for our soul, but depending on what we’re saying, it may not be as good for our partner’s. (Recall the precarious couples in which the man was more inhibited that we discussed in Chapter 4.) Thus, Rusbult and colleagues suggest that in addition to expression and avoidance (or activity/passivity in their model), we should include the motives of the partners (Drigotas, Whitney, & Rusbult, 1995; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). That is, conflicts can be pursued with either positive or negative intentions. This is depicted in the constructiveness-destructiveness dimension of Rusbult’s model. Finally, these two dimensions, active/passive and constructive/destructive, can be combined to yield four distinct responses to conflict: Exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (see Table 13.1).

In addition to identifying these four types of reactions, Rusbult et al. (1982) also predict when each will be used. Not surprisingly, satisfied couples are more likely to use constructive strategies, whereas dissatisfied couples are more likely to enact destructive ones. Consistent with these findings, Ptacek and Dodge (1995) find that couples who use similar types of constructive coping strategies experience greater relationship satisfaction. Thus, our motives, as guided by how satisfied we are in our relationships, factor into how we choose to resolve our conflicts. Together, these elements dictate whether we pursue the improvement or dissolution of the relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13.1 Reactions to Conflict</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
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<td>Active</td>
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Conflict is stressful (Powers et al., 2006; Swann, McClarty, & Rentfrow, 2007). Yet it's not just the fighting that makes us upset. Our reactions depend on the strength and state of our relationship. Levenson and Gottman (1983) found that our response to conflict depends more on how satisfied we are with our relationship and less on the specific topic of disagreement or the way in which we argue. In their study distressed couples experienced more physiological arousal and negative affect and were also more likely to reciprocate negative affect.

Moreover, results revealed sex difference in negative affect reciprocity: Relationship satisfaction decreased most when husbands reciprocated their wives’ negative affect and wives did not reciprocate their husbands’ negativity (Levenson & Gottman, 1985).

Indeed, negative affect reciprocity is one of the main warning signs that a relationship is headed for the rocks. Dissatisfied couples, more than satisfied couples, experience higher levels of negative affect and physiological arousal (Levenson & Gottman, 1983, 1985). Predictably, they are also more likely to reciprocate negative affect. That is, couples who use “expression” to return hurtful, angry accusations with even more harmful words are taking a dangerous path toward relationship dissolution. Additionally, a longitudinal study involving 73 married couples found that dissatisfied couples evaluated their problems as being more negative and severe, had poorer health, experienced more negative and fewer positive emotional exchanges, had greater defensiveness, and demonstrated more stubbornness and withdrawal from the relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

In light of what we know about negative affect reciprocity and relationship satisfaction, asking whether expression is necessarily superior to avoidance may be the wrong question. Instead, we should be asking what we think of our relationship and what and how are we saying it. That is, relationship satisfaction, attributions, and what we say all combine to determine how we settle disagreements. Angry, bitter, hostile, and hurtful expressions can surely be worse than silence and avoidance. In fact, researchers have found links between adult attachment styles and reactions to conflict (e.g., Powers et al., 2006; Shi, 2003; Simpson, Winterheld et al., 2007).

Attachment Style and Conflict Resolution

How we respond to conflict may be influenced by our attachment style. Physiological measures of stress, such as salivary cortisol levels, indicate that insecurely attached individuals experience greater physiological reactivity to conflict and higher levels of physical stress reactions than securely attached individuals (Powers et al., 2006). Further, this reaction is not limited to the insecurely attached person. Partners of insecurely attached individuals also experience greater stress in conflicts. Avoidant women show a different stress reaction pattern than anxious men. Specifically, avoidantly attached women are anxious upon entering a conflict or strange situation but experience relief quickly upon leaving or escaping from the uncomfortable situation. Anxious men, however, are both faster to become stressed and take much longer to recover from it.

In terms of conflict resolution preferences, securely attached individuals are constructive and take a problem solving approach. Insecure individuals, on the other hand, generally follow avoidance strategies as they attempt to protect themselves and
Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- There are at least two positions about expression and avoidance in conflicts. One is based on an analogy with a hydraulic system and predicts that avoidance is dangerous for a relationship and therefore expression is not only good but also necessary. The other position claims that expression is not always the best approach. Taking into consideration such factors as manner, content, and timing, which of the two approaches do you think is more productive?

- Satisfaction with a relationship influences attributions, which in turn determine the type of conflict and the strategy adopted to resolve it. What do you think determines satisfaction in the first place? Is the relationship between satisfaction and conflict necessarily unidirectional? How would you support your position?

- Attachment styles are related to the way we resolve conflict. On the other hand, there is research showing that conflict management is an acquired skill. How would you integrate the two perspectives?

Transforming Relationships—From Conflict to Growth

Conflicts can terminate in one of several ways, ranging from constructive to adequate to downright destructive (Peterson, 1983). The destructive consequences of conflict engagement include stress, poor health, loneliness, anger, property damage, physical and emotional abuse, psychological harm, and even murder. We will deal with outcomes associated with dissolution later in this chapter. Let’s first examine some paths toward constructive resolution and relationship transformation.
The Social Skill of Conflict Resolution

A fair number of researchers and a large part of commonsense advice portray reactions to conflict in terms such as conflict management, making strategic choices, or having proper communication skills. Can we learn how to manage conflicts with proper know-how and skill? Is achieving constructive outcomes to conflict largely the result of being skilled at conflict resolution? Several approaches address these questions.

Deutsch (1969) found that the type of conflict strategy used in a dispute determines whether the conflict is constructive or destructive. Couples involved in constructive conflict processes concentrate on the issue at hand and use mutual problem solving approaches, such as persuasion, openness to each other’s views, mutual enhancement, and minimization of both threat and deception. These arguments tend to be orderly and predictable. Rusbult and colleagues, as you may recall, found similar patterns in their research.

Couples involved in destructive conflicts, on the other hand, use escalating conflict processes such as threat, coercion, and deception. Further, participants in these interactions, as we discussed earlier, were found to reciprocate negative with negative, deploying destructive strategies in response to receiving them. Not surprisingly, these disputes can best be described as disorderly and unpredictable, often expanding beyond the bounds and scope of the original problem.

As we saw in our previous discussion of expression versus avoidance of conflict, a “let’s talk it out” approach should not be the default approach to conflict resolution. Simply talking is not always enough to solve problems: What you say, how you say it, and when you express disagreement all matter. For example, being critical and complaining, while definitely encompassing expression, lead to withdrawal (e.g., Carrére & Gottman, 1999), stress (Swann et al., 2007), and even divorce (Carrére & Gottman, 1999)! The demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict (Christensen & Heavey, 1990) suggests as much. Complaining and criticizing are likely to lead to withdrawal and defensiveness. Gottman and colleagues call this withdrawal “stonewalling,” where (usually) men protect themselves from being flooded with negativity by withdrawing emotionally and shutting out their partners’ complaining criticisms. Knowing all this, we should be able to see the warning signs and constructively combat negative conflict styles.

Cross-cultural research also supports the notion that expression should not be advanced as the default panacea to conflict. For example, differences in communication styles have been found between Israeli and U.S. couples. Israeli couples are more emotional, more verbally aggressive, and less calm; U.S. couples, on the other hand, are more likely to use rational approaches to problem solving (Winkler & Doherty, 1983). These cultural differences in conflict styles translate directly into what types of coping strategies should be effective for each group. In fact, improving communication skills was more positively related to increases in relationship satisfaction in the U.S. couples but not in the Israeli couples.

Likewise, Sillars and Weisberg (1987) proposed that other cultural or group values are as important as the ideology of intimacy and expression: Values such as harmony maintenance (versus confrontation), the need for privacy and mystery, and the notion that we should “leave well enough alone” also need to be considered in our investigations of conflict in intimate relationships. Certainly, many conflicts eventually “go away,” even when we do not take active steps to solve them. In other cases, we may not use expression and
Table 13.2 Guidelines for Fighting Fairly

- Pick the right time and place. Make sure you have ample time to talk through problems. Pick an occasion when you both have adequate time to discuss the issues at hand.
- State your feelings honestly without being sarcastic or insulting to the other person. You need to edit your thoughts and remove anything that might hurt the other person before you speak.
- Stick to the issues. Don’t bring up things that happened long ago or things that happened with prior partners. Only discuss what the current problem is.
- Don’t try to figure out who is at fault. It is more important to talk about what you both need to do to solve the problem than who’s to blame.
- Stick to “I” statements and try to stay away from “you” statements.
- Avoid using words like “always” and “never.” This will help you stay away from criticizing your partner’s entire personality.
- Don’t mind-read. If you don’t know how your partner feels or what they think, then ask them. Don’t put words into their mouths or assume you know their motives.
- Incorporate positive statements and compliments along with your complaints.
- This will soften the blow of any complaints and make your partner less defensive.

Source: University of California, Santa Barbara, www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/?article=1L88.

rational problem solving to deal with conflict, but may instead employ subtler methods, such as joking or gentle hints (Sillars & Weisberg, 1987).

Take a look at Table 13.2 for a list of suggestions to help you build constructive conflict resolution skills. This list is posted on the University of California, Santa Barbara’s relationship website and clearly reflects the research reviewed in this chapter. While these guidelines can be supremely helpful, perhaps the real challenge in resolving conflicts successfully is knowing what to say and how and when to say it. Managing the inevitable negative affect is equally important. One way to reduce it may be by changing the way we think and feel about our partner.

Conflict in Context

The consequences of conflicts extend beyond the couple and their relationship and touch parents, children, and friends. Researchers find that the harmful effects of destructive conflict can be seen in children living in these households long before the ink is dry on the divorce papers (Gottman & Katz, 1989). Not all disagreements are harmful, and in fact the specific type of conflict engagement strategy used by parents in their disputes affects children’s ability to regulate their own emotional reactions to conflict. Children who witness their parents engage in chaotic, destructive conflicts develop problems with their ability to regulate their own emotions (Gottman & Katz, 1989). They tend to either engage in excessive internalization or externalization of behaviors. For example, these children’s experience of positive emotions tends to be in excess of the event, and they are unable to “rein in” their emotions. We probably think it charming when, upon receiving a small gift, this type of child is inordinately happy and remains so for a longer period of time than seems usual. In addition to being a grateful child, the excessive response indicates difficulty with emotional or affective self-regulation and an inability to “pull out” of the emotion of the moment.
Researchers suggest that we examine conflict in context (Fincham, 2003). One way to broaden our look at conflict is to examine not just a single event, but to include a comprehensive examination of the whole array of conflict and happiness across time.

The Gospel According to John Gottman

Gottman (1993) did just this in a longitudinal study using both observational and self-report data. This comprehensive analysis enabled him to distinguish between conflicts that lead to dissolution and those that are part of a healthy relationship. Accordingly, the best predictor of relationship stability is the ratio of positive to negative affective experiences. Specifically, stable couples demonstrated a five-to-one ratio of positive to negative affective experiences. In other words, what matters is not necessarily what is said or done, but the number of positive and negative exchanges that take place. As long as positive relationship elements outweigh the negative by a factor of five, the relationship remains intact. This model is satisfying for many reasons. Intuitively, it encompasses our personal experiences of different types of couples and relationships. Many couples are happy and happy to argue with each other, retaining romance and passionate attraction in spite of their interaction styles.

Another notable element of Gottman’s (1993) research was his identification of five different types of couples based on their communication patterns and their conflict engagement styles. From this, Gottman developed a “balance theory” of relationship. In his couple typology, Gottman identifies couples first as being stable—i.e., those whose relationships remained intact—and those who are unstable, or whose relationships ended in termination.

Gottman (1993) labeled the three types of stable couples validators, volatiles, and avoiders. He found that validators reacted to problems with a “let’s talk it out” approach and were generally positive and constructive. They were supportive listeners and considerate speakers. Emotional expression, not surprisingly, was moderate. These couples were calm and comfortable in their discussions.

Volatiles, while also stable, had communication patterns that might be called loud, heated, and sometimes combative. Like Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler of Gone With the Wind fame, volatiles expressed a high degree of both positive and negative affect. They actually embraced disagreements and conflict; however, in addition to vocalizing negative affect, there was an abundance of humor and affection as well.

Avoiders used the passage of time as a conflict resolution strategy. Seldom did these couples delve into their problems; rather, each person might state his or her position and then let the conversation come to an end. Moreover, avoiders seemed to feel that no matter the problem or differences they experienced, what they had in common was greater than what they did not. This attitude allowed them to let issues and problems simply unfold on their own.

The two types of unstable couples, hostile and hostile/detached, were extremely combative in their interactions. Hostile couples engaged in a great deal of direct conflict, were highly defensive, and concerned themselves with mind reading tinged with a judgmental or blaming overtone. Hostile/detached couples had similar communication patterns but were generally more emotionally detached and uninvolved. See Table 13.3 for a summary.

In sum, the balance theory and research on conflict in families suggest that conflict takes place in a broader temporal, dyadic, and social context. In this regard, support
Table 13.3 Categories of Couples Based on Their Communication Patterns and Conflict Engagement Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple Type</th>
<th>Stable</th>
<th>Unstable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Validators:</strong></td>
<td>Use expression and constructive conflict resolution strategies.</td>
<td><strong>Hostile:</strong> High levels of conflict engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volatiles:</strong></td>
<td>Expressive and emotional. Express both positive and negative affect.</td>
<td>Tend to be defensive, judgmental, blaming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoiders:</strong></td>
<td>Avoid discussing problems, use passage of time to reduce conflict.</td>
<td><strong>Hostile/Detached:</strong> High levels of conflict but emotionally detached.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Gottman (1993).

Dissolution of Intimate Relationships: The End of Romance

Destructive conflict is a frequent precursor to the dissolution of an intimate relationship, as we have seen. But intimate relationships can come to an untimely end for a host of other reasons as well and can tear away at our unshakeable belief that we will all find that “happily ever after” relationship. And we often find ourselves endlessly disappointed, dismayed, and perhaps even surprised by the dissolution of those same romantic relationships. Must all relationships end? Let us look more closely at some theories on the breakdown of relationships.

Causes of Dissolution

Breakups rarely occur out of the blue. Instead, they frequently result from three conditions: preexisting doom, mechanical failure, and sudden death (Duck, 1982).

In preexisting doom, the partners are so ill-matched that breakup is inevitable. We can think of certain celebrity couples—such as Rapper Drake and Jennifer Lopez or Chris Brown and Rhianna—as cases of doomed couples. In these cases, the shock generated by the fact that the couple had formed a liaison in the first place far outstrips any reaction created by the relationship’s demise. In other words, the seeds of dissolution or longevity are planted when Romeo first proposes to Juliet. The odds for success or failure lie in the unique characteristics of the romantic duo and the chemistry that results from the combination of their dispositions, expectations, and interactions.

Not all couples who break up are ill-matched. For example, in 2016, after 12 seemingly glorious years and six children, “Brangelina” unceremoniously began divorce procedures. In many cases, boredom or a sense that the relationship has grown stale and is lacking in excitement precedes its dissolution. Such mechanical failure describes couples who just do not seem able to work things out. Like couples in soap operas, their relationships are undermined by miscommunication, suspicion, and power struggles. These types of breakups are caused by poor social skills, an inability to experience intimacy, and perhaps
difficulties arising from problems adjusting to changes in the relationship (e.g., moving, employment changes, changes in family composition, etc.).

**Sudden death** is Duck’s (1982) graphic description of the third condition leading to relationship termination. Here, one partner betrays the other by breaking the cardinal rules of the relationship, such as engaging in behaviors that culminate in the betrayal of trust, committing adultery, or abusing the partner. As anyone who has experienced sexual infidelity can attest to, deception and rule breaking can destroy trust and thus render a relationship beyond repair.

**Barriers to Dissolution**

Whereas Duck (1982) pinpoints internal relationship dynamics as sources of dissolution, barrier models of dissolution consider both internal and external factors, including attraction to the relationship, alternative attractions, and barriers. Social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) offers a good example of a barrier explanation of dissolution. As we discussed in Chapter 6, our comparison level for alternatives helps us predict how dependent we are on our current relationship. In the absence of attractive alternatives, we are more likely to stay in the relationship even if we are unhappy. Although we become more likely to leave a relationship when attractive alternatives are present, if the material and psychological costs of leaving are high, we may be compelled to stay put (Levinger, 1976). Jointly owning property and having children are prime examples of material and psychological barriers.

Of all barriers, commitment may be one of the strongest. Ironically, it is both a force that pulls us closer as well as one that prevents departure. Like other barriers, it holds us secure in great relationships and prevents us from leaving unhappy ones. In two longitudinal studies of dating couples, Arriaga and Agnew (2001) looked at how three specific commitment components—psychological attachment, long-term orientation, and intention to persist in the relationship—related to relationship stability and duration. Couples in successful relationships had higher levels of all three components. Further, long-term orientation was an especially potent predictor of staying power. But individuals who left the dating relationship had markedly lower levels of “persistence” relative to the other two components (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001).

Finally, even mere perceptions of commitment are important. Doubt about a romantic partner’s commitment can spell trouble! For example, another set of studies found that fluctuations in levels of perceived commitment were correlated with termination, while perceived stability in partner commitment was tied to relationship duration (Arriaga et al., 2006). Thus as folk wisdom suggests, love alone is not enough to keep us together. The level of commitment to our partners and our perceptions of their commitment to us are clearly important!

**Alternatives to Dissolution**

Barriers may keep us from leaving a relationship, but that doesn’t mean we have stay together unhappily ever after. In fact, couples have a number of tools at their disposal to get their relationships back on track. They can try to sort things out themselves or seek outside help via therapy when they feel they lack the efficacy to accomplish it on their own. And in some cases, they may simply decide to forgive each other when transgressions have occurred.
Some (Dindia & Baxter, 1987) have argued that couples in long-term relationships devote a great deal of time on their maintenance and repair. Dindia and Baxter (1987) asked 50 married couples to list 10 strategies they used to maintain their relationships and 10 they used to repair it when necessary. Results indicated that the couples used more maintenance strategies than repair strategies. They were equally likely to use talking, sharing their feelings, being nice to each other, and expressing affection for each other in the service of both relationship maintenance and repair. Not unexpectedly, they used talking about a problem more frequently when the goal was repairing the relationship than when it was maintaining it. At the same time, they reported spending time together and engaging in shared activities more frequently when the goal was maintaining the relationship than when it was repairing it.

Clearly, intimate partners can “fix” many problems that may arise in their relationships on their own and with the tools in their toolbox. And many of those same tools can also help them avoid the onset of problems in the first place. At times, however, couples may feel they lack the skills to use these tools effectively and may seek help from outside the relationship. There are a number of therapeutic interventions designed to support couples whose relationships are in distress.

**Therapy Approaches: How Well Do They Work?**

Although assisting a couple to terminate a relationship that is beyond repair might seem an appropriate intervention, most therapeutic approaches aim to help couples become more satisfied with their relationship. To that end, *Behavioral Marital Therapy* (BMT) aims to teach couples ways to communicate better and solve problems more effectively. It is focused on altering behavior. In contrast, *Cognitive Marital Therapy* (CMT) aims to teach couples to consider alternative explanations for why their partners might behave in a negative manner and to reevaluate any unrealistic expectations about relationships in general. It is focused on altering how people think. Because much relationship distress likely results from a combination of sub-optimal behavior and faulty thinking, *Cognitive-Behavioral Marital Therapy* combines behavioral and cognitive interventions.

Note that all three approaches focus on teaching couples specific skills to aid them in improving relationship satisfaction. As such, they contrast with *Emotion-Focused Therapy* (EFT) and *Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy* (IOMT), which ask partners to explore the thoughts, feelings, and needs they believe to underlie their current distress. They are insight-oriented interventions.

The answer to the question of how well these interventions work comes down to comparing couples’ relationship outcomes following any of these therapies to the relationship outcomes of couples who experienced distress but were on a waiting list to receive therapy. When Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, and Daiuto (1998) did just that, they found that all of the therapeutic interventions were superior to not getting treatment. When they compared the different approaches with one another, BMT and EFT appeared as winners, suggesting that when it comes to couples therapy no one size fits all. Improving distressed relationships may be a matter of sharpening skills and gaining insight into what makes us feel the way we do.
The therapies compared by Baucom et al. (1998) represent interventions for couples already in distress. Other therapeutic approaches aim to prevent the onset of distress by teaching couples skills and strategies to deal with conflict more optimally early in their marriage. Worthington et al. (2015) compared the outcomes of two enrichment programs—(1) HOPE (Handling Our Problems Effectively), which emphasizes communication and conflict resolution, and (2) FREE (Forgiveness and Reconciliation through Experiencing Empathy). Although quite different in their focus, both enrichment programs produced positive outcomes for the couples, compared to non-treated controls.

Couples therapy is not for everyone as it requires a hefty commitment in time and money. But couples not willing or able to make these commitments are by no means doomed. In fact, they can prevent a decline in their (marital) happiness by investing just a few minutes a year. Finkel, Slotter, Luchies, Walton, and Gross (2013) recruited 120 married couples for a 2-year intensive study. All participants responded to a number of questions at different points in time, including questions about the quality of their marriage. At the end of the first year, half the participants were randomly assigned to engage in a conflict reappraisal task. It asked them to take the perspective of a neutral third party about a disagreement they had with their partner and write about it for 7 minutes. Participants repeated the exercise at 16 and 20 months into the study. By the end of Year 2, investing 21 minutes into reappraising disagreements paid big dividends! Whereas couples in the control condition perceived a decline in the quality of their marriage, couples who had engaged in the conflict reappraisal were as happy as ever.

Forgiveness—Love Means You Should Say You’re Sorry

Although couples can resolve many conflicts borne through communication or with the help of therapeutic interventions, conflicts borne out of transgressions and betrayals are often best solved through forgiveness.

The healing power of forgiveness has long been known to clinicians and religious followers but only recently has been studied by social scientists (Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006). Researchers define forgiveness as the willingness to forgive wrongdoings over time (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Connor, & Wade, 2001). And they suggest that forgiveness is comprised of three factors: benevolence, retaliation, and avoidance (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004). Resisting the urge to retaliate against a transgressor is key (Burnette et al., 2014; Finkel & Campbell, 2001). Moreover, forgiveness involves a transformation of motivation that replaces the destructive conflict strategies with constructive feelings, thoughts, and behavior (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). In forgiving the perpetrator, the victim cancels the interpersonal debt created by the perpetrator’s act of betrayal (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002).

How, though, can we forgive a betrayal of our trust and love? One way to initiate forgiveness is for the transgressor to start with a profound apology that includes an admission of guilt (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991). Apologies are important because they help transform relationship-destructive motivation by eliciting empathy for the transgressor. Empathy—taking another’s perspective—lies at the heart of altruistic behavior. Putting one’s own bad feelings and destructive inclinations aside for the greater good of the relationship requires altruism. Thus, apologies
prompt forgiveness by eliciting empathy for the perpetrator. Forgiveness, in turn, brings opportunities for conciliatory behavior, allowing the relationship to get back on track (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997):

Apology → Empathy → Forgiveness → Conciliatory Behavior

Although apologies are important, forgiving can occur for other reasons, as well. For example, people are generally willing to forgive when the transgression was low in severity or when they feel capable of committing the same transgression themselves (Exline, Baumeister, Zell, Kraft, & Witvliet, 2008). Moreover, your level of commitment influences your willingness to forgive someone in the absence of an apology. Commitment is related to forgiveness and positive relationship behaviors in a couple of ways. First, commitment is linked to interdependence. Because highly committed couples depend on one another for many different outcomes, their interdependence may compel them to take a broader view of each other’s transgressions. Second, commitment inspires behavior that is directed toward the other’s welfare, which is antithetical to holding a grudge. Finkel and his colleagues (2002) have shown that commitment is indeed predictive of participants’ willingness to forgive acts of betrayal. Finkel et al.’s study also provides evidence that commitment may influence willingness to forgive outside of conscious awareness. Rather than measuring how committed participants were to their relationships, these researchers primed different levels of commitment. Participants in whom high commitment had been primed were more likely than others to indicate that they would respond to acts of betrayal by discussing them with their partners. Those in whom low commitment had been primed were more likely than others to indicate that they would terminate the relationship. Moreover, the psychological well-being associated with forgiveness was strongest in committed couples (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2000).

Forgiveness has also been associated with better conflict resolution, repairing damage to relationships, and restoring interpersonal harmony (Fincham et al., 2004; Rusbult et al., 2005). For victims, forgiving has tangible benefits in the form of lessened negative feelings (Worthington & Scherer, 2004), as well as improved physical health (Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson, 2001) and psychological functioning (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). However, victims are most likely to derive the benefits of their forgiveness when the perpetrator acts in a way that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship (Luchies, Finkel, McNulty, & Kumashiro, 2010).

But who is more likely to forgive? Individuals high in the Big Five personality dimension of Agreeableness (McCullough, 2000), those high in religiosity (McCullough & Worthington, 1999), and those with positive models of self and others find it easier to forgive (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004). Their positive views of self and others probably contribute to attributions that facilitate forgiveness.

Those less likely to spontaneously forgive their partners are narcissists (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998) and couples in which men high in retaliation and avoidance motivation are paired with women low in benevolence (Fincham et al., 2004). Moreover, forgiveness is especially difficult for those with attachment anxiety (Finkel, Burnette, & Scissors, 2007) and those whose anger fuels prolonged rumination (McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007).
Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theory, and Research

• The balance theory of marriage and conflict focuses on the ratio of positive to negative encounters as the predictor of conflict outcome. How would you integrate this theory with research that shows that conflict type and resolution are determined by such factors as attributions, motivations, and attachment style?
• Forgiveness is considered a positive resolution to certain types of conflicts. Under what circumstances is it more or less appropriate and effective?
• Commitment plays a role in conflict strategy and resolution. What do you think about the other two elements in Sternberg’s love typology, passion and intimacy? Do they have an influence on conflict? What might their influence be?

Summary

Issues
• What is conflict?
• What are the outcomes of conflict?
  • When do relations end (termination)?
  • When are they transformed?
• What is the role of attributions in determining the sources of conflict?
• When is expression beneficial?
  • How important are context and location?
  • How is avoidance related to dissatisfaction and withdrawal?
• How do attachment styles mediate conflict reactions?
• What can couples do to prevent breaking up?
• Role of forgiveness in relationship repair

Theories
• Entailment model of relationships
• Balance model

Research
• Research on dating couples found that gender differences in preference for activities were a source of many conflicts
• Longitudinal study of married couples identified five different types of couples and found links among relationship satisfaction and conflict engagement styles (Gottman, 1993)
• Improving communication, cognitive reappraisal, and various forms of couples therapy help with conflict resolution

Key Terms

Transformational view of conflicts: theoretical position according to which conflict is essential for relationship growth.
Constructive conflict: results in positive change and growth in a relationship.
Destructive conflict: results in termination of relationship.
Conflict: the interpersonal process that occurs whenever the actions of one person interfere with the action of another.

Demand/withdrawal pattern of conflict: a conflict situation where one partner is willing to engage emotionally and verbally while the other prefers to avoid engagement.

Entailment model: suggests that conflicts are preceded by a chain of events starting with causal attributions, continue with responsibility judgments, and result in assignment of blame.

Preexisting doom: a condition that leads to relationship dissolution because the partners were ill matched from the beginning.

Mechanical failure: a condition that leads to dissolution because the partners seem unable to work things out.

Sudden death: a condition that leads to dissolution because one partner betrays the other by breaking the cardinal rules of the relationship.

Forgiveness: the forgiving of transgressions over time; it requires the transformation of relationship-destructive motivation into strategies that promote the relationship.

Note

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How One Woman Gamed Online Dating—and Found Her Future Husband

“Smart. Funny. Must not smoke. Must insist that I stop smoking. Must weigh at least 20 pounds more than me at all times! Must be willing to listen to George Michael. Attend concerts. Be totally devoted to me.”

Just like the Mary Poppins children advertising for a wart-free nanny who plays “games, all sorts,” journalist Amy Webb drafted her own “husband list”—72 traits for an ideal partner. She used her list—and other tricks—to narrow the field on JDate, an online dating site for Jewish users. Only one man, Brian, scored above her minimum threshold of 700 points: He was her first and last date on the site. Webb describes her success in the new book, *Data, A Love Story: How I Gamed Online Dating to Meet My Match*, a shamelessly nerdy, algorithm-loaded tome in which she argues that anyone can stack the romantic odds in their favour using the Internet.


Dating and Mating in the Internet Age

We suspect that for most of our readers the Internet has always been around. In fact, it was “born” on August 30, 1969, as the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), was funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, and was based on an interface message processor (IMP) built from a Honeywell computer that sported a whopping 12k of memory!

The Internet has certainly come a long way since these humble beginnings, having morphed into a tool for person-to-person communication (e.g., e-mail, text messaging), a mass medium (e.g., YouTube), and a giant global library (e.g., Google). Early research on the Internet was specifically concerned with the effects of computer-mediated communication (CMC) on individuals and their relationships. For example, Sproull and Kiesler (1986) contended that CMC limits the “bandwidth” of social communication relative to face-to-face communication because it does not unfold in real time and lacks essential nonverbal features of speech, including tone of voice and facial expression. The lack of such social cues promotes a greater sense of anonymity, which in turn has deindividuating effects that promote more self-centered and less socially regulated behavior. For example, e-mail and text messaging may tempt us to say things to others that we might not tell them face-to-face.

However, there is very little evidence to support the idea that CMC leads to more hostile and aggressive communications (Straus, 1997; Walther, Anderson, & Park, 1994). In fact,
rather than producing deindividuation, CMC produces **depersonalization** that reduces personal accountability and increases compliance with local norms. From this perspective, whether CMC has positive or negative effects depends on the specific goals pursued by the people who are interacting and the context in which their interaction takes place (Bargh & McKenna, 2004).

How does the Internet affect our relationships with friends and family? Do we disconnect from them when we are connected? In reviewing the available literature at the time, Bargh and McKenna (2004) concluded that there was no support for the idea that heavy Internet use resulted in less time spent face-to-face with friends and family. Instead, it came at the expense of watching television and reading the newspaper. One survey (Kraut et al., 2002) indicated that the more hours the average respondent spent on the Internet, the more time they also spent face-to-face with family and friends. And rather than being a substitute for face-to-face contact, e-mail, for example, helps increase communication with friends and family. It is reasonable to suspect that more recent Internet tools, like Facebook, Instagram, and SnapChat, similarly extend rather than curb social contact.

The beneficial effects of the Internet on relationships are not limited to providing novel ways to maintain them. It can also be a powerful tool to bring people together. When McKenna, Green, and Gleason (2002) surveyed close to 600 Internet users who had subscribed to various newsgroups, they found that a substantial proportion of their respondents reported having formed a close relationship with someone they initially met on the Internet. Moreover, more than half had moved their virtual relationship into an actual, real-life relationship. Nearly a quarter reported to have married, had become engaged to, or were living with the person they originally met on the Internet.

Why and how the Internet facilitated these relationships became clear when McKenna et al. (2002) followed up the survey with a laboratory experiment in which previously unacquainted participants met each other for the first time either in an Internet chat room or face-to-face. Participants who met first on the Internet liked each other more than participants who initially met face-to-face. Digging a little deeper, Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons (2002) found that participants felt the Internet helped them overcome any discomfort associated with expressing their “true” selves (i.e., those aspects of the self that might be difficult to share publicly). Internet partners who liked each other also tended to project qualities of their ideal friends onto each other more than the face-to-face group. It seems that the relative anonymity of the Internet contributes to the formation of close relationships by reducing the perceived risks that come with self-disclosure.

**Online Dating**

Computer-mediated communication is also an essential component of **online dating**—an increasingly popular and accepted way for singles to meet others for the ultimate purpose of coupling. People interested in starting the search for a date from their laptop or smartphone can do so with the help of an increasing number of online dating sites and apps that vary in terms of the services they offer. General self-selection sites like Match, OkCupid, and Plenty of Fish let users browse profiles of a wide range of potential partners. Niche self-selection sites like JDate, Grindr, Darwin Dating, and SugarDaddie allow users to browse potential partners from a specific population. Matching sites like eHarmony, PerfectMatch, and Chemistry use algorithms to create matches based on information supplied by the users.
Although online dating was at one point considered for the desperate and creepy, public attitudes have become more positive. An increasing number of Internet users date online, and the percentage of Americans who met their partner online has been on the rise as well (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012): Online dating has become a pervasive strategy for meeting potential romantic partners!

How has online dating changed the way we become acquainted with our romantic partners? The models of self-disclosure discussed in Chapter 5 suggest that we learn about each other in a gradual, give-and-take fashion when we interact with one another face-to-face. When we do this online, we can glean a lot of information about many potential partners from their online profiles ahead of time. This can help narrow down the number of potential dates for subsequent mutual computer-mediated communication. What we learn as a result of browsing profiles and engaging in CMC can make finding suitable partners more efficient and less time-consuming than what we could accomplish through more traditional offline dating. There is one important caveat, however. When it comes to CMC, less may be more. Prolonged periods of CMC with potential dates may be detrimental to one’s romantic prospects. Specifically, people tend to overinterpret the social cues available from CMC, and because CMC falls short of the experiential richness of a face-to-face meeting, some information about potential dates is difficult to ascertain in this way. Thus, it is important to meet potential partners in person sooner rather than later for a reality check and “to integrate their CMC and face-to-face impressions into a coherent whole” (Finkel et al., 2012, p. 3).

How well do online dating sites that promise to use science or math to optimally match potential partners fare? Do the matching algorithms really produce more well-matched couples, or at least narrow the number of choices to the very few who would make a great relationship partner, as advertised by eHarmony?

On the face of it, it seems difficult to argue against “scientific principles” and math. They have allowed us to send humans into space, and it is not clear why they wouldn’t apply to the seemingly simpler job of creating romantic human matches. Moreover, online matching sites collect prodigious amounts of information from their clients. eHarmony’s survey has about 300 items designed to measure the 29 dimensions claimed to predict long-term relationship success. Specific items are designed to assess members’ personality, interests, and emotions to reveal “core traits” (i.e., aspects of the self not likely to change) and “vital attributes” (i.e., aspects of the self that are more mutable as a result of experience). eHarmony’s algorithm aims to establish compatibility based on how similar two people are.

PerfectMatch’s survey contains more than 100 items that focus on measuring eight personality characteristics considered to be important for successful relationships: romantic impulsivity, personal energy, predictability, flexibility, outlook, decision-making style, emotionality, and self-nurturing. To establish compatibility, PerfectMatch takes into account both similarity and complementarity.

We discussed the importance of similarity and complementarity on attraction at length in Chapter 4. As you may recall, the similarity-attraction hypothesis has received ample empirical support since it was first advanced more than 50 years ago. To the extent that the two matching sites seem to apply this principle with the help of data collected from its members that are then crunched with an algorithm, one would suspect they do very well at what they claim to do, namely at creating lasting, compatible romantic relationships.

But do they? Finkel et al. (2012) are skeptical for several reasons. First, and as we saw in Chapter 4, similarity matters for attraction primarily when it comes to attitudes. The
role of similarity in personality is far more complicated. Moreover, it is people’s perceptions of similarity that attract them to each other. For obvious reasons, this does not exist between two people who have not met yet. As we also saw in Chapter 4, the evidence for complementarity leading to attraction is equivocal. If nothing else, online matchmaking needs to take into account the specific dimensions of complementarity that might produce compatible matches. That, too, is no small task.

Complicating matters further, the algorithms that drive the matchmaking are proprietary. Although that makes sense from a business point of view, it makes it difficult to ascertain just how they crunch the numbers and to what effect. Finally, although eHarmony proudly advertises that it has created thousands of matches, it is not quite as forthcoming about the number of failed matches it creates. The proportion of unsuccessful to successful matches would be an important indication of eHarmony’s ability to serve as a matchmaker. And as Finkel et al. (2012) also point out, so would the results of a controlled experiment that compared the romantic outcomes of people randomly assigned to an online matchmaking service to those dating in other ways both online and off.

In conclusion, access to potential partners for people who might otherwise lack it along with the ability to engage in brief computer-mediated communication with potential dates before meeting face-to-face are the clearest benefits of online dating. Whether algorithms using members’ self-reports produce better matches than Hater, an app that takes into account people’s mutual dislikes to create matches, is less clear.

The Evolution of Marriage

Regardless of whether they were the result of dating online, offline, or some combination of the two, many long-term relationships result in marriage. Although it has been around for thousands of years, marriage did not always serve the primary purpose of benefiting the needs and desires of its members (Coontz, 2004). Until the late 18th century, marriage had everything to do with transferring property, status, money, tools, and livestock across generations for those who owned property. A wife’s dowry provided an infusion of cash, goods, or real estate; finding a husband was the most important investment a woman could make (Coontz, 2004; Hunt, 1996).

Marriage was also an economic and political transaction among the lower classes, albeit on a different scale. Regardless of one’s socioeconomic status, marriage marked entry into adulthood and respectability. Love was considered a poor reason to get married, although it was desirable for it to develop after marriage (Coontz, 2004).

This characterization overlaps with the institutional era of marriage in the U.S. that lasted from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s. Marriage was considered a formal institution, strictly regulated by law and religion and designed around practicality. Stable and strong marriages were considered essential to the welfare of the family, and survival more generally, giving society standing in regulating the behavior of spouses (Amato, 2012). As the influence of the Protestant church began to wane, a worldview that emphasized natural passions—including love and romantic desire—reduced practicality concerns and provided individuals with more freedom in selecting a spouse (D’Emilio & Freedman, 2012).

These trends accelerated rapidly around the middle of the 19th century and ushered in the companionate era of marriage. The home ceased to serve as the primary place of (agricultural) production. Instead, industrialization created urban settings in which husbands became wage earners and breadwinners while wives focused on childrearing and
homemaking. In this environment, ties of affection and companionship became a more important foundation for marriage than obligations to religion and society had been in the institutional era (Amato, 2012).

In the mid-1960s, the companionate era was replaced by the self-expressive era of marriage, which continues to characterize marriages in the 21st century. It was the result of a number of forces. The civil rights and feminist movements along with the embrace of humanistic psychology converged to create a climate that emphasized self-discovery and self-expression and put marriage in charge of fulfilling needs related to self-esteem and personal growth (Finkel et al., 2014).

Although some (e.g., DePaulo & Morris, 2005) have argued that Americans are expecting more from their marriage than in the past, others (Finkel et al., 2014, 2015) have taken the view that it is the nature of our expectations that has changed. Whereas marriages in the institutional and companionate era focused on meeting more basic survival needs, contemporary marriages are more about helping meet each other’s self-esteem and self-actualization needs.

Finkel et al. (2015) have argued that building a marriage focused on helping spouses meet these higher-order needs can be difficult. It requires insight into a spouse’s idiosyncratic needs along with the ability to provide tailor-made support. All this, in turn, requires an investment in both time and energy, or “bandwidth,” that is often in short supply because the average American spends more time at work than in the past. Similarly, parenting has become more time intensive, further reducing bandwidth (see Finkel et al., 2015). To the extent that spouses find ways to reallocate time and energy, their marriage is likely to flourish. For example, scheduling regular date nights can make a marriage more fulfilling (Wilcox & Dew, 2012) because it provides spouses with means to focus on meeting intimacy and other emotional needs. And maintaining ties with family and friends can relieve pressure on spouses to the extent that they allow us to share our emotional experiences. Marriages in which spouses fail to deploy the resources necessary to meet each other’s self-esteem and self-actualization needs are likely to decline. In the worst case, they may be headed for divorce court.

The Problem With Divorce

For marriages that are beyond repair for whatever reason, divorce is certainly an option. However, the relief one may experience as a result of escaping an unpleasant and untenable situation comes at a price. Because “Equal pay for equal work” is still not a reality in the U.S., women are, by and large, worse off financially as a result of getting divorced even when they are employed or pursuing a career.

Divorce has a ripple effect that extends to children, extended family members, friends, coworkers, and even neighbors. However, children are probably the most vulnerable to its effects. For example, although marital partners can look forward to new lives and new beginnings, children’s prospects are generally much bleaker. From their perspective, all they see is the destruction of their family. What happens to the children of divorce?

Some of the unintended effects of divorce are manifested in the behavior and relationships of the children of divorce. Many studies find that children of divorce engage in more high-risk behaviors and are themselves much more likely to get divorced as adults (White, 1990; Amato, 2007). Other researchers have found that, in regions and cultures where divorce stigma is still high (e.g., traditional cultures), the effects of divorce on children are proportionately worse. For example, in traditional and highly
religious cultures (e.g., Iran), studies find that children of divorce exhibit higher rates of emotional problems and delinquency (Aghajanian & Moghadas, 1998). And even more dramatic, researchers in Canada found that along with economic factors, divorce and other family disruptions were the best predictors of youth suicide (Leenaars & Lester, 1995).

Perhaps some of the more distressing revelations of the ill effects of divorce on children come from a recent set of longitudinal studies. Children of divorce are more likely than their peers to experience a higher mortality risk: i.e., they die younger (Stattin & Romelsjoe, 1995; Tucker et al., 1997). This may, in part, be due to another finding, and that is that the adult children of divorce have great difficulty maintaining long-term relationships. Both male and female children of divorce were more likely to get divorced themselves. And divorce, as research has found, puts one at risk for premature mortality (Friedman et al., 1995; Schwartz et al., 1995).

Additionally, sons had difficulty with social relationships, having higher levels of impulsivity, antisocial, and reckless behaviors. These factors, in turn, resulted in lower levels of education—also a correlate of divorce. Stressors for female children of divorce included getting divorced themselves and engaging in high-risk behaviors such as smoking. Tucker and colleagues (1997) have suggested that the antecedents of these problems may be that children of divorce not only engage in high-risk behaviors but also generally have poorer social skills, which leads to a greater likelihood that they will experience more failures in their intimate relationships. Without the protective benefits of marriage, these children can flounder as adults. Finally, the deleterious effects of divorce have been tracked across three generations (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

Divorce in the first generation resulted in lower education and poorer relationship adjustment (including divorce) in the second generation. In addition to higher levels of divorce, the children of first generation divorce also manifested poorer parent-child relationships (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). In fact, Amato and Booth (2001) found that adult children's recollection of their parents' turbulent marriage mediated about half of the second generation's accounts of their own marital problems. Finally, divorce in the first generation was statistically linked to lower education in the third generation, more marital problems, and weaker bonds between third generation children and their own parents (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

Thus, current research entreats us to examine more closely our motives for divorce, especially when children are involved. Couples and counselors alike should carefully consider our commonsense ideas of the benefits of divorce. The optimistic hopes that our children will benefit from exiting a conflict-ridden family should be balanced against the potentially harmful effects to parents’ health and the health and well-being of their children.

In sum, although the data suggest that children of divorce are simply going to have a difficult time, we can learn several important things from them (Amato, 2007). First, we might consider developing better interventions for children of divorce. For example, research suggests that higher levels of inter-parental conflict surrounding the divorce can worsen children's adjustment and well-being. Interventions should therefore include an assessment of the custodial parent’s psychological adjustment and parenting skills. Additionally, maintaining contact with the noncustodial parent is equally important to buffering the negative impact of divorce. More generally, parents need to more carefully weigh their responsibilities to themselves, their spouses, and their children when they make decisions about separating.
Fortunately, as we discussed in Chapter 1, divorce rates in the U.S. have been declining steadily since they hit their highest levels around 1980. Assuming a continued decline, the number of those who experience the ripple effects of divorce should go down further as we move through the 21st century.

**Diversity of Marriage**

Recall that during the institutional era, marriage was highly regulated by law, religion, and social norms. It allowed people very limited choice over whom they could marry. Although subsequent marriage eras eased these regulations, some limitations persisted throughout much of the past century. In the U.S., anti-miscegenation laws created to enforce racial segregation at the level of marriage and intimate relationships criminalized interracial marriages and, in some cases, sex between members of different races. Enacted in the late 1700s, they were widely adopted by many states and territories and remained in effect in many places until 1967 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional (*Loving v. Virginia*).

According to a 2015 report by the Pew Research Center, a record-high 12 percent of newlyweds married someone of a different race. Across all marriages, the percentage of interracial marriages has increased from a paltry 1 percent in 1970 to 6.3 percent in 2013. These percentages do not include marriages between Hispanic and non-Hispanic spouses as they are considered “interethnic” for census purposes.

Some races are more likely to intermarry than others. Of the 3.6 million adults who married in 2013, 58 percent of American Indians, 28 percent of Asians, 19 percent of African-Americans, and 7 percent of Whites had a spouse from a different race. The data also show that race interacted with gender in interesting ways. African-American men are twice as likely to marry someone from a different race than African-American women. The pattern goes in the opposite direction for Asians. Women are 2.5 times more likely to marry someone who is not Asian than their male counterparts.

These numbers appear to reflect changing social norms. In 2014, 37 percent of Americans felt that more people of different races marrying each other was “a good thing for society,” up from 24 percent in 2010. Only 9 percent thought it was a bad thing. However, although acceptance is on the rise, many Americans continue to disapprove of cross-race relationships (Herman & Campbell, 2012). And it’s not just a “White thing.” Rejection of interracial dating has been found to be higher among African-Americans than Whites (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). Further, the continuing stigma attached to interracial relationships puts pressure on those who enter them. For example, although individuals in interracial unions have been found, objectively, to be more physically attractive than their monoracial counterparts (Wu, Chen, & Greenberger, 2015), interracial couples continue to experience the damaging effects of parental disapproval (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013) and social exclusion. Not surprisingly, the divorce rate among interracial couples is consistently higher (average of 33.7 percent) than it is for monoracial couples (average of 28.2 percent) (Bratter & King, 2008).

**Marriage Equality**

It took quite a bit longer for another prohibition that limited who could marry whom to disappear. In 1996—29 years after the *Loving v. Virginia* decision—President Bill Clinton signed into law the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that made marriage the exclusive
domain of a man and a woman. It followed decades of legal wrangling over the issue of whether states had the right to ban same-sex marriage. Under one key provision of DOMA, states in which same-sex marriage was illegal could refuse to recognize a same-sex marriage from a state in which it was legal. This provision was finally overturned in 2015 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that same-sex married couples were to be constitutionally accorded the same recognition as opposite-sex couples at the state as well as federal level. Same-sex marriage bans were struck down, and with it marriage equality was born!

At the time of the Supreme Court’s decision, public sentiment was already in favor of same-sex marriage. Polls conducted by various media outlets put it consistently at 60 percent or higher. And President Obama declared his support for marriage equality in 2012.

In Billy Wilder’s classic comedy *Some Like It Hot*, one of the protagonists asks: “Why would a man marry a man?” The answer is: “Financial security.” It is not that far off. The federal government confers more than 1,110 rights and protections on couples who are legally married, including Social Security and veterans’ benefits. Gay or straight, married couples can file joint tax returns and make medical decisions for each other. Importantly, marriage equality gives same-sex couples the right to adopt children, providing an important path to raising families in which both partners are parents in the eyes of the law.

Considering the relative novelty of same-sex marriage, it is perhaps not surprising that research on how families with two dads or two moms fare is lagging. But studies reviewed by Biblarz and Savci (2010) suggest that, by and large, lesbian couples are highly satisfied with their relationship, with each other, and with their parenting. They have comparatively high levels of shared labor and parental investment, spending more time with their children than their straight counterparts. White, middle-class lesbian couples in particular seem to adhere to egalitarian standards with regard to childrearing. By and large, the children of lesbian couples are indistinguishable from children of straight couples on most measures of adjustment and achievement. A cross-national study comparing Dutch and American children from lesbian families (Bos, Gartrell, Balen, Peyser, & Sandfort, 2008) indicated that American children were significantly more likely to be treated unkindly because of their parents than the children in the Dutch sample. What may account for the difference between the two countries? The Netherlands was the first country to establish marriage equality and has a 15-year head start on the U.S. By Biblarz and Savci’s (2010) account, research on gay families is lagging a little behind the academic work conducted on lesbians. It seems primarily concerned with gay men’s pathways to parenthood and how they negotiate issues of masculinity. We can look to the future for more exciting research on the outcomes of marriage equality for its spouses and their children.

**Being and Remaining Single**

In Chapter 1, we talked about the rising tide of singles having increased to the point where singles now surpass the percentage of married people in the U.S. Millennials seem to disproportionately contribute to this surge. According to data from the Gallup Institute, the percentage of Millennials between the ages of 18 and 29 who are single is 64 percent compared to 50.2 percent for the general population. To be sure, many of them are single because they put off marriage for a number of (good) reasons. Their wages are often low, and many of them are unemployed or underemployed. Millennials are also more interested in pursuing college degrees than past generations. Yet it seems clear that being single isn’t always a matter of necessity. Although in years past it may have been considered a
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temporary, not entirely desired, and occasionally unpleasant state, more and more Americans now eschew the trappings of serious coupling altogether (marriage included) and chose the single life instead (DePaulo, 2006).

Staying single by choice has several drawbacks, however. Singles can be targets of stereotyping, interpersonal rejection, economic disadvantage, and outright discrimination. This singlism (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) manifests itself in several ways. First, although the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission are charged with assuring legal protection under the law, civil (marital) status is not included among the protected categories. Among other things, this deprives single people of the many federal rights and protections afforded to people who are married. For example, although single and married people contribute to Social Security at the same rate, their contributions are treated differently when they die. A surviving spouse is generally eligible to receive a portion of the deceased spouse's benefits, but a single person's contributions go back into the system when he or she dies. Second, there is evidence that, compared to married men, single men earn lower salaries and are less likely to receive promotions in a broad range of professions (Bellas, 1992; Budig & England, 2001). Third, participants in a laboratory experiment who were asked to act as landlords (Morris, Sinclair, & DePaulo, 2007) overwhelmingly chose to rent their property to married rather than unmarried couples. This observation prompted DePaulo and Morris (2006a) to conclude that singlism was rooted in a pervasive ideology of marriage and the family that served as justification for discriminatory behavior.

Admittedly, the picture of singles as a disadvantaged and oppressed group in society is a bit overdrawn. As DePaulo (2006) pointed out, most singles are quite happy with their civic status and their lives. Improved relationships with one’s parents are among the many tangible benefits of singlehood, especially for those between the ages of 25 and 34 (DePaulo, 2015). There is also growing evidence that being married does not confer any health advantages over being single, as was once thought (DePaulo, 2014).

At any rate, whenever new forms of relating materialize or when previously prohibited relationships achieve increased acceptance, it is always tempting to declare that “the traditional family” is becoming a thing of the past (e.g. Coontz, 2004). However, it may be more productive to think about them as dotting the 21st-century landscape of relationship with more diversity. With that come new challenges and new opportunities for how we live our lives.

Summary

Issues

- Impact of CMC on face-to-face relationships
- Online dating sites and apps are gaining in popularity and use, but their success rates are not known
- Shift of marriage from a contract based on practicality to relationship based on romance and love
- Same-sex marriage becomes the law of the land
- Increase in interracial relationships occurs in spite of continuing societal disapproval
- Singlism and choosing singlehood
- Same-sex relationships
Research

• McKenna et al. (2002) find that the Internet is increasingly a place where people initiate what become face-to-face relationships and that people who meet online like each other more
• Anonymity of the Internet helps people express their “true” selves
• Time spent getting acquainted via CMC is negatively related to relationship success
• Marriage as a means to meeting self-esteem and personal growth generates added stress for modern couples
• Research suggests that, in cultures where divorce is stigmatized, the impact of divorce on children is deleterious
• Research reveals that a percentage of both African-Americans and Whites disapprove of interracial relationships
• Lesbian couples are satisfied, and their children well-adjusted
• Favoritism toward married couples results in bias against house-hunting singles

Key Terms

Depersonalization: a state that reduces personal accountability and increases compliance with local norms.

Online dating: an increasingly popular and accepted way for singles to meet others.

Institutional era of marriage: a period that lasted from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s during which marriage was a formal institution, strictly regulated by law and religion, and designed around practicality.

Companionate era of marriage: a period that began in the mid-19th century during which ties of affection and companionship became an increasingly more important foundation for marriage.


Anti-miscegenation laws: a set of laws first enacted in the 1700s that made it illegal for members of different races to intermarry. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled them to be unconstitutional in 1967.

Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA): a 1996 federal law that made marriage the inclusive domain of men and women and left recognition of same-sex marriage up to individual states. The U.S. Supreme Court declared key provisions of the law unconstitutional in 2015.

Singlism: Prejudice and discrimination against people who are single.


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