This book is respectfully dedicated to my teachers, particularly Ellen Berscheid, Saul Kassin, Peter Murphy, Stephen Fix, Elizabeth Estill, and Ron Norton. Your wisdom, intellect, humor, and love of learning have illuminated my life. Thank you.

The Mating GAME

A Primer on Love, Sex, and Marriage

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10

Attraction and Courtship

Chapter Outline

Most animal species perform courtship rituals designed to attract and secure the attention of a reproductive partner. For example, the male African widowbird performs an elaborate hopping display in which he fans his magnificent 18-inch tail and skims over the ground using exaggeratedly slow wingbeats. The male sage grouse puffs his chest, raises his white neck feathers, spreads his tail, lifts his wings, and makes a loud popping noise by expelling air from a specialized sac in his throat. The male bowerbird builds a structure to attract his mate, decorating it with flowers and bits of glass and painting the walls with a mixture of saliva and chewed-up fruits and grass. We humans also perform various behaviors in the process of courting a potential mate (although perhaps not as colorful as those exhibited by our animal counterparts).

INITIAL ENCOUNTERS: COMMUNICATING ROMANTIC INTEREST

Researchers have identified a repertoire of facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal behaviors that serve as signals designed to communicate attraction and romantic interest to a potential partner. For example, in one study, psychologists Naomi McCormick and Andrew Jones (1989) examined the nonverbal flirting behavior of heterosexual couples. Trained confederates, working for the researchers, observed 70 pairs of unmarried men and women interacting in bars, taverns, and cocktail lounges. Each couple was watched for a period of 15 minutes, and their nonverbal behaviors were coded. The results revealed that men and women engaged in a number of flirting behaviors designed to communicate romantic interest. One of the most common behaviors displayed by both sexes was that of moving closer to the potential partner and gazing into his or her eyes. Other acts included smiling, laughing, and displaying other positive facial expressions along with such grooming activities as self-touching, smoothing one's hair, tightening one's abdomen, arching one's back, and stretching.

Similar results were reported by anthropologist David Givens (1978), who observed male-female pairs of college students in initial encounters ranging from having coffee together for the first time after class to conversing for the first time at a cafeteria table. Typical nonverbal behaviors displayed by both men and women included facing the partner, gazing directly at the partner as well as in a downward direction, abundant smiling, and such "automanipulation" behaviors as clasping the hands, covering the mouth, and touching the cheek or neck. Givens posited that these nonverbal actions contain a mix of friendliness and submissiveness that conveys "an interest in the partner that is coupled with covert denials of aggressiveness and threat" (p. 355). Such behaviors serve as a potent signal that romantic overtures will be well received.

Research also reveals that interpersonal touch is another powerful communicator of attraction. Men and women in one investigation were asked to provide a detailed description of their most recent flirtation episode (Abrahams, 1994). A second group of participants then rated these accounts in terms of how flirtatious they appeared to be. Accounts rated as highly flirtatious tended to contain references to interpersonal touch, including specific actions such as "I began to rub my fingers up her arm," "I then lightly hit her with a pillow, which led to a pillow fight that ended in us holding each other," "I lightly touched him on the shoulder," and "I moved my head closer to his [and] we put our arms around each other." Other researchers have similarly found that interpersonal touch communicates attraction, interest, liking, and intimacy (Burgoon, Buller, Hale, & deTurck, 1984).

Smiling, touch, and other nonverbal actions are not the only means by which men and women convey romantic interest to potential mates. Social scientists Jerrold Downey and Katharina Damhave (1991) set out to explore people's perceptions of what constitutes flirting. Participants in their study were asked to read a number of hypothetical scenarios involving an interaction between themselves and a stranger. These scenarios differed along three dimensions: location (school hallway or restaurant bar), amount of effort expended by the stranger (makes inadvertent eye contact vs. goes out of his or her way to approach), and type of comment made by the stranger (pays a compliment vs. asks for the time). For each scenario, participants indicated whether they believed that the stranger was flirting with them or not. The results revealed significantly higher percentages of "yes" (i.e., flirting) responses when the stranger was in the restaurant bar as opposed to the school hallway (61% vs. 49%), when the stranger made an effort to go out of his or her way as opposed to making inadvertent and noneffortful eye contact (68% vs. 41%), and when the stranger paid a compliment as opposed to asking for the time (83% vs. 26%). Not surprisingly, given this pattern of results, the scenario that produced the highest percentage of "yes" responses (74%) was that involving a stranger who went out of his or her way to compliment the target while in the "flirt-friendly" setting of a restaurant bar.

In sum, researchers have identified a wide array of nonverbal and verbal actions that are used by men and women to convey romantic interest.

Does Flirting Work?

The real question, of course, is whether or not these flirting behaviors actually "work." Do smiles, touches, effortful approaches, and sincere compliments do what they are designed to do—that is, prompt romantic interest and overtures from potential mates? To answer this question, psychologist Monica Moore (1985) unobtrusively observed 40 women (ranging in estimated age from 18 to 35 years) in four different social settings: a local singles bar, a university snack bar, a

university library, and a meeting at a university women's center. Women were selected for observation only if they were surrounded by at least 25 other people and if they were not accompanied by a man. During each hour-long observational period, both the type (e.g., smiling, sustained gazing, hair flipping, head tossing) and the number of flirting behaviors demonstrated by each woman were recorded.

There were a number of interesting results. First, Moore (1985) found that women's flirting behavior was context specific. That is, women in the singles bar (the most likely setting in which to meet a mate) flirted significantly more frequently than did women in the other three settings. In addition, women in the snack bar flirted more than did women in the library, who in turn flirted more than did women in the women's center (the least likely setting to meet a mate, assuming a heterosexual sample). Second, Moore found that women in the singles bar *increased* their rate of flirtatious display over the observational period; they flirted more as the hour passed. However, flirting behavior was constant (i.e., did not change over time) in the other three contexts. Third, and perhaps most important, the results revealed that women's flirting behaviors actually were quite effective at eliciting interest from potential mates. Specifically, regardless of the setting, the women who engaged in the most flirting behavior were also those who were approached most often by men. Thus, flirting does appear to work!

THE FIRST DATE

After an initial encounter, and assuming the successful communication of romantic interest, two people may further their relationship by embarking on an "official" romantic interaction—the first date. Given the existence of the traditional (heterosexual) sexual script (see Chapter 6), it is not surprising that both men and women believe that it is more socially appropriate for a man to initiate a date than for a woman to do so (Green & Sandos, 1983). Compared with women, men also report a greater willingness to initiate dates and a higher frequency of actual relationship initiations (Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999; Green & Sandos, 1983; McNamara & Grossman, 1991; Spreadbury, 1982).

These results notwithstanding, there is some evidence that many heterosexual men would like women to take a more active role in relationship initiation than the traditional script would seem to allow. In one survey (Muehlenhard & Miller, 1988), for example, more than 200

undergraduate men indicated their preferences with regard to three different approaches a woman might make to initiate a date: *asking directly* for a date, *hinting* for a date, and simply *waiting* for the man to ask her out. The majority preferred the more direct approaches. Specifically, 44% said that they preferred a woman to ask for a date, and 53% indicated that they preferred a woman to hint for a date. Only 3% of the men surveyed stated that they preferred a woman to adopt the passive and indirect approach of simply waiting to be asked out. In addition, provided that they liked the woman, nearly all of the men believed that the strategies of directly asking (99%) and hinting (93%) would result in a date. Few men (4%) believed that waiting would result in a date, even if they themselves liked the woman and wanted to go out with her. The initiation of a dating relationship clearly requires active efforts on the part of both individuals.

So, what prevents men—and women, for that matter—from pursuing dates with individuals to whom they are attracted? One of the primary reasons why people fail to initiate dating relationships concerns their fear of being rebuffed by the objects of their affection. Jacquie Vorauer and Rebecca Ratner (1996) asked a sample of 291 men and women whether a fear of rejection had ever been a "significant obstacle" to their pursuing a romantic relationship with another individual. The majority (76%) responded affirmatively, suggesting that the experience of fearful inhibition is quite common. The researchers then asked a second set of participants to imagine themselves in the following situation:

> You are at a party; currently, you are not seriously romantically involved with anyone. Early in the evening, you are introduced to a single person who could be a potential romantic partner. You learn from a brief conversation that you have a lot in common. In your opinion, the two of you are equally physically attractive. Toward the end of the evening, you find yourself alone in the kitchen with the person. You talk with each other for a while. Neither of you explicitly expresses a romantic interest in the other, or an interest in seeing the other again. You head back to join the group in the living room. (pp. 491-492)

After reading the scenario, men and women indicated which of two possible alternatives explained their own and the other person's inaction: lack of romantic interest or fear of being rejected. Interestingly, the

results provided strong evidence for *pluralistic ignorance*, a phenomenon in which people observe others behaving similarly to themselves but attribute their own behavior and that of the others to very different underlying causes. In this case, participants attributed their own failure to make a romantic overture to fear of rejection (74%); however, they assumed that the other person's inactivity was caused by a lack of interest (71%). This attributional bias may create a dynamic that impedes a potentially rewarding romantic relationship from even starting. The researchers summarized the process as follows:

> Individuals who are romantically interested in one another hesitate to make their feelings explicit because they fear that they will be rejected. However, even though both people are engaging in the same "waiting" behavior, they apply different explanations to their own and the other person's conduct. They see their own failure to make initiatives as stemming from a fear of rejection, but attribute the other person's inaction to a lack of interest. These unwarranted negative inferences about the other person's feelings subsequently exacerbate individuals' hesitation to take the risk of conveying their affection, leading them to give up on the relationship prematurely. (p. 484)

Thus, it is no wonder that women want men to make the first move when it comes to initiating a first date and that men wish that women would make the first move more often!

What Happens During a First Date?

What occurs during a "typical" first date between a man and a woman? In an effort to answer this question, psychologists John Pryor and Thomas Merluzzi (1985) asked a sample of undergraduate students to list the "typical things that occur when a male and a female decide to go on a first date" (p. 365). Participants were instructed to generate events that happen in the "getting a date" stage as well as events that happen during the date itself. The following event sequence was viewed as typical during a first date initiation:

Step 1: Notice each other (with the man noticing the woman first).

Step 2: Get caught staring at each other.

Step 3: Smile.

Step 4: Find out about the other person from friends.

Step 5: Create ways in which to "accidentally" run into each other.

Step 6: Get introduced by a friend.

Step 7: The woman says "hello" and the man begins the conversation.

Step 8: Make an attempt during conversation to find common interests.

Step 9: The man asks the woman for her phone number.

Step 10: The man phones the woman later to ask her out, beginning the conversation with "small talk" and then making arrangements for the date.

Both men and women generated this same type of sequence. Their scripts for the actual first date were similarly identical:

Step 1: The man arrives to pick up the woman for the date.

Step 2: The woman greets the man at the door.

Step 3: They make conversation.

Step 4: The woman introduces her date to her parents/roommates, and the two leave the house/apartment/dormitory.

Step 5: They discuss where they will go on their date.

Step 6: They talk about common interests (i.e., make "small talk").

Step 7: They go to a movie.

Step 8: The man buys refreshments at the movie.

Step 9: They then go get something to eat/drink and continue their conversation.

Step 10: The man takes the woman home.

Step 11: The man walks the woman to her door.

Step 12: They exchange complimentary views of the evening.

Step 13: If interested, the man asks to call again/the woman hopes the man asks to call again.

Step 14: They kiss.

Step 15: They say "good night" and thank each other for the evening.

Step 16: The man returns home.

In this study (Pryor & Merluzzi, 1985), both men and women agreed on the sequencing of events. However, more recent research suggests that men and women may possess slightly different first date scripts. For example, although the "good night kiss" remains a fixed feature of this particular social interaction, heterosexual men often expect greater sexual involvement than do heterosexual women on a first date (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995). Indeed, there is evidence that men and women may pursue different goals when initiating a romantic relationship. Catherine Clark, Phillip Shaver, and Matthew Abrahams (1999) asked a large sample of undergraduates to describe what goals they had pursued in the initiation of their two most recent successful romantic relationships. The primary goal identified by the researchers concerned love; most men (84%) and women (81%) said that they sought to obtain a loving, caring, serious relationship. Other relatively common goals mentioned by equal numbers of both sexes included fun (cited by 18% of the men and 16% of the women) and learning (e.g., to experience dating, learn more about the other person [cited by 16% of the men and 18% of the women]). Only one sex difference was found. Far more men (30%) than women (8%) identified sexual intimacy—including kissing, intercourse, and just "following hormones"—as the reason why they sought to initiate a dating relationship.

The different expectations that men and women may bring to their initial romantic interactions may result in misunderstanding and miscommunication. For example, a woman who wishes to communicate her feelings of affection and liking for a new dating partner may smile at him and engage in other nonverbal displays. The woman's partner, whose goal may be one of sexual intimacy, may misinterpret her behavior as indicating sexual attraction. Indeed, researchers have found that men are much more likely than women to perceive a number of interpersonal cues as signaling an interest in sex (e.g., Abbey, 1982; Abbey & Melby, 1986; Zellman & Goodchilds, 1983). For example, a study conducted by Robin Kowalski (1993) revealed that men imputed a higher desire for sexual intercourse than did women to a woman who was described as engaging in common dating behaviors

such as accepting a man's invitation for a date, having dinner with him, maintaining eye contact with him, smiling at him, allowing him to pay for dinner, and complimenting him. Perhaps not surprisingly, other researchers have found that women are more likely than men to report having had their friendliness toward someone of the opposite sex mistakenly perceived as a sign of sexual interest (Abbey, 1987). Clearly, knowledge of the different ways in which men and women perceive interpersonal cues, along with direct and open communication of dating goals and desires, is essential between partners during the early stages of a romantic relationship.

BEYOND THE FIRST DATE: INITIATING A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

Only a very small portion of the first dates and other initial encounters that we have with potential partners actually will evolve into stable romantic relationships. What strategies do men and women use when trying to move relationships beyond those beginning stages? To explore this question, communication scholar James Tolhuizen (1989) asked men and women who had been or who were involved in a serious dating relationship to describe the things they said or did to intensify their relationship and change it from "one of casual dating to one of serious and exclusive dating" (p. 418). Analysis of participants' free responses revealed that the most common strategy was to *increase contact;* more than 39% of the participants reported increasing the frequency and duration of their contact and interaction with the partner. Another commonly used method was *relationship negotiation* or direct discussion of the relationship, feelings between the partners, and the future of the relationship (29%). Participants also sought *social support and assistance* from individuals in their social networks, usually by asking for advice on how to proceed in intensifying the relationship (26%). Other strategies included *increasing the partner's rewards* (18% [e.g., paying compliments, doing favors]), *making a direct bid* for a more serious relationship (17% [e.g., directly requesting a more exclusive or serious relationship]), giving the partner *tokens of affection* (16% [e.g., giving gifts, cards, or other items that symbolize feelings of affection for the partner]), providing *verbal expressions of affection* (14% [e.g., declaring feelings of love, caring, or affection for the partner]), and *accepting a direct bid* for a more serious relationship (10% [e.g., agreeing to a direct

request for a more exclusive relationship]). Not surprisingly, men and women differed slightly in the types of strategies they reported. Men were significantly more likely to report using verbal expressions of affection and making a direct relationship bid, whereas women were more likely to report using relationship negotiation and accepting a direct relationship bid.

Similar results were reported by Clark and colleagues (1999), who asked a large group of undergraduates to describe the strategies they used when initiating a romantic relationship. Participants reported engaging in a variety of behaviors to propel a relationship through its beginning stages. One of the most common categories of strategy involved *emotional disclosure*. For example, the majority of participants said that they talked in person (94%), talked on the phone (54%), and spent time (85%) with the partner. *Direct and forward action* was also mentioned frequently. Specifically, participants reported asking the other person directly to be their girlfriend or boyfriend (63%) and touching (64% [e.g., kissing, hand holding]). As in Tolhuizen's study, participants also clearly used their social networks to promote the relationship. Approximately 86% reported that third parties helped to initiate and intensify the relationship by engaging in such activities as discovering whether a potential partner was available and/or interested, by introducing the two people, and by going out with them as the relationship began to develop.

In sum, men and women enact a number of behaviors as they attempt to shape their initial encounters with a potential date or mate into a more enduring relationship.

PATHWAYS TO COMMITMENT

As noted earlier, many relationships do not stand the test of time despite the best efforts of the couples to promote or intensify their development. Some relationships, however, will survive beyond the initial exchanges and continue along a path toward commitment. A number of different courtship patterns or trajectories to commitment have been identified. In one early study, social scientist Catherine Surra (1985) asked a sample of young newlywed couples to retrospectively report on how the partners' commitment to each other had changed from the time they first met to the day of their wedding. Specifically, husbands and wives were instructed to estimate the chance of marriage (on a scale ranging from 0% to 100%) that they felt characterized their

relationship from the date it began, during the subsequent months of courtship, and up until the wedding day (which naturally received a "chance-of-marriage" rating of 100%). These estimated chance-of-marriage values were placed on a graph that provided a pictorial view of each couple's pathway to commitment.

Surra (1985) then coded monthly chance-of-marriage values for each participant and derived a number of additional variables from the graphs, including length of courtship (number of months from the beginning of the relationship to the wedding day), degree of acceleration (number of months it took for the couple to move from a low [25%] to a high [75%] chance of marriage), number of turning points (upturns and downturns in the graph), and length of stage of involvement (number of months the couple spent in the casually dating, seriously dating, and engaged stages of involvement).

Analysis of the monthly chance-of-marriage values and the derived variables revealed four different courtship paths or trajectories to marital commitment. Couples on an *accelerated* courtship trajectory moved rapidly and smoothly to marriage, spent relatively little time dating prior to engagement, and experienced a higher index of upturns (turning points characterized by increased commitment) than did other couple types. *Accelerated-arrested* couples also experienced a high number of upturns, which Surra (1985) hypothesized may provide momentum to the courtship process. The courtship of these couples was characterized by an even more rapid trajectory to marriage. Specifically, accelerated-arrested couples devoted very little time to dating, preferring to become engaged very quickly and then spending most (nearly 60%) of their courtship in this stage. Couples on a *prolonged* trajectory to marital commitment demonstrated the reverse pattern; that is, they spent 65% of their courtship seriously dating and only 22% of it engaged. The *intermediate* courtship type fell somewhere in between the two accelerated types and the prolonged type in the smoothness and rapidity of its progression toward commitment.

Essentially, Surra's (1985) research demonstrated that there is no one path toward permanence; couples may achieve commitment in a variety of ways.

SUMMARY

During initial romantic encounters, men and women engage in a number of behaviors designed to attract a potential mate. Eye contact,

smiling, interpersonal touch, and other flirtatious behaviors all serve to convey romantic interest. Following these initial interactions, many individuals may further the relationship by embarking on a first date. Research indicates that a first date often involves a series of scripted behaviors and action sequences, in some instances including the communication of sexual attraction and the willingness to engage in some form of sexual contact (e.g., good night kiss). After a first date or series of initial encounters, one or both partners may attempt to intensify the relationship or propel it to a state of greater permanence through engaging in various affectional and communicative behaviors. Assuming that the relationship does, in fact, endure beyond these beginning stages, a couple may progress along one of several different pathways to commitment. In Chapter 11, we consider the actual processes that serve to move couples along their courtship trajectory.

KEY CONCEPTS

Flirting behavior (p. 122)
First date (p. 124)
Heterosexual sexual script (p. 124)
Pluralistic ignorance (p. 126)
First date script (pp. 127-128)
Accelerated courtship pattern (p. 131)
Accelerated-arrested courtship pattern (p. 131)
Prolonged courtship pattern (p. 131)
Intermediate courtship pattern (p. 131)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the nonverbal behaviors that people use to signal their romantic interest. Does flirting "work"?
2. In what ways might pluralistic ignorance contribute to missed dating opportunities?
3. Create your own "first date" script. How does the typical first date script identified by researchers differ from—or resemble—your own? What do you think explains the difference between men's and women's first date scripts? How would the theories we reviewed in Chapter 8 explain this sex difference?

4. In what ways might perceptions about sexual interest and intent contribute to interpersonal conflict and miscommunication?

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Pryor, J. B., & Merluzzi, T. V. (1985). The role of expertise in processing social interaction scripts. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 21*, 362-379.

Rose, S., & Frieze, I. H. (1989). Young singles' scripts for a first date. *Gender & Society, 3*, 258-268.

Rose, S., & Frieze, I. H. (1993). Young singles' contemporary dating scripts. *Sex Roles, 28*, 499-509.

These three articles examine men's and women's expectations about the events that occur during a first date.

Cate, R. M., & Lloyd, S. A. (1992). *Courtship*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

This book explores the topic of courtship, including the events that take place during courtship, the relation between courtship and later relational outcomes (e.g., marriage), and problematic aspects of courtship (e.g., violence).

11

Relationship Development

Chapter Outline

developed that seem to capture more accurately the how and why of relationship progression.

THE PROCESS OF RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The majority of theorists now agree that romantic relationships develop gradually over time rather than by passing through a series of discrete stages. *Process models* suggest that relationship development is fueled by sometimes imperceptible changes in intimacy, self-disclosure, and other interpersonal processes that occur between partners.

Self-Disclosure and Intimacy

Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973) proposed one of the first process models of relationship progression. *Social Penetration Theory* targets self-disclosure as the fuel that propels couples along their developmental trajectory. Specifically, romantic partners are believed to become progressively more committed to each other as they increase both the *depth* (degree of intimacy) and *breadth* (number of areas) of their self-disclosure. At first, relationships are characterized by superficial shallow exchanges in which the partners reveal relatively impersonal information (low depth) along very few dimensions (low breadth). Meeting for the first time at a college party, for example, Jen and Paul might exchange information about their majors, their musical preferences, and the food being served by the host of the party. If these initial disclosures are rewarding and if each believes that future interactions will also be rewarding, then presumably they will progress to more intimate exchanges in which they reveal increasingly intimate, emotional, and detailed personal information about themselves along a greater number of dimensions. Following their enjoyable conversation at the party, Jen and Paul might begin to meet a few times a week for coffee. During these interactions, Paul might disclose his ambivalent feelings about his parents and their expectations about his future career. Jen, in turn, might reveal the problems she is experiencing with her roommate and her secret desire to spend a year hiking in the Himalayas.

Other theorists have subsequently expanded this theory by proposing that it is not only the depth and breadth of self-disclosure that propel a couple's relationship along its courtship path but also how responsive each partner is to the other's disclosures. According to

Intimacy Theory (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), responses that leave the partner feeling validated, understood, cared for, accepted, and nurtured promote the growth of intimacy and the subsequent development of the relationship. In the preceding example, Jen's acknowledgment of Paul's statements about his parents, her expressions of sympathy, her responsiveness and willingness to continue the conversation, and her reciprocal disclosures all serve to communicate that she understands the situation and that she respects Paul's point of view. This, in turn, will increase Paul's sense of trust and security and will promote intimacy and the development of the relationship. To the extent that Jen fails to reciprocate ("Let's talk about something else"), challenges ("I've never had those feelings about my own parents"), or dismisses ("Hey, I didn't come here to listen to you whine about your personal problems") Paul's revelations, intimacy will decrease and the relationship may stall or be compromised. Thus, it is not simply the act of disclosing information or making personal revelations that contributes to relationship development. Rather, *reciprocal* disclosures that contribute to *feelings of intimacy*—in other words, disclosures that reflect mutual perceptions of understanding, caring, and validation—are what encourage and sustain the growth of romantic relationships.

Many of these theoretical statements have received empirical support. For example, self-disclosure and intimacy appear to be integrally connected with both relationship satisfaction and stability. Research conducted with dating and married couples generally reveals that people who self-disclose, who perceive their partners as self-disclosing, and who believe that their disclosures and confidences are understood by their partners experience greater need fulfillment, satisfaction, and love than people whose relationships contain lower levels of intimacy and disclosure (e.g., Morrow & O'Sullivan, 1998; Prager & Buhrmester, 1998; Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991). In one study, for example, Brenda Meeks and her colleagues (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998) asked 140 couples to complete a variety of measures, including a relationship satisfaction scale, a self-perceived self-disclosure index that assessed participants' tendency to disclose to the partner, a partner-perceived self-disclosure scale that reflected participants' evaluations about their partners' level of self-disclosure, a self-reported perspective-taking scale designed to assess participants' general awareness of and ability to understand the partner, and a partner-perceived perspective-taking scale that assessed participants' perceptions of the partner's perspective-taking abilities.

The correlational analyses revealed strong positive associations between relationship satisfaction and the other measures for both men and women. Specifically, participants who believed that they themselves self-disclosed and that their partners also self-disclosed tended to be very satisfied with the relationship. Similarly, participants who believed that they were able to take the partner's perspective and that the partner was able to take their perspective were very satisfied. In sum, mutuality—of disclosure and perspective taking—was strongly correlated with overall relationship satisfaction.

In fact, men and women often consciously use self-disclosure and expressions of intimacy as strategies for intensifying and maintaining their romantic relationships. For example, communication researchers Stephen Haas and Laura Stafford (1998) asked a convenience sample of men and women involved in committed (homosexual) romantic relationships to report on the behaviors that they used to maintain their relationships. Although participants generated a number of maintenance strategies, one of the most commonly cited was self-disclosure. Specifically, 57% of the sample specified open and honest communication about thoughts and feelings, including disclosures about the relationship, as an effective way in which to maintain the romantic relationship. Less "deep" communication, akin to "small talk," was mentioned by close to 25% as a means by which the relationship is maintained. Research conducted with heterosexual samples corroborates these findings (for a review, see Dindia, 2000).

The process of revealing oneself to another, particularly when accompanied by reciprocity and validation, appears to play an essential role in the progression of romantic relationships.

Social Exchange

Many theories of relationship development are grounded in principles of *social exchange* (e.g., Adams, 1965; Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979; Homans, 1961; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). These theories focus on the exchange of rewards and costs that occurs between partners in ongoing mating relationships. Although a number of social exchange theories exist, each with its own particular terminology and "take" on the process of relationship development, all share a few basic assumptions (some of which we reviewed in Chapter 8).

Principle 1: Maximize rewards, minimize costs. The first assumption is that individuals seek to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs in any given relationship. *Rewards* are anything that the individual considers valuable; they can range from the concrete and tangible to the abstract and intangible. For example, Robert's marriage with Vicki may provide him with a number of concrete benefits that he values, including financial security, sex, children, and the social profit that comes from having an attractive and intelligent partner. This relationship also may provide Robert with a variety of less tangible rewards, including love, emotional support, and the fulfillment of life goals involving marriage and fatherhood. *Costs* are those things that the individual considers to be unrewarding or that involve time, effort, compromise, or lost opportunity. To maintain his relationship with Vicki, for instance, Robert contributes to the housework, shares parenting tasks, listens supportively to Vicki's complaints about her new coworker, and spends vacations with his (greatly detested) in-laws.

Of course, what is rewarding or costly for one person might not be rewarding for another. Fresh-baked cookies are rewarding to a child but distinctly costly to an adult trying to stay on a diet; an invitation to the opera might fill some with glee, while it fills others with dismay; and a foot massage might be pleasing when offered by a loved one but creepy if offered by a casual business associate. In addition, two individuals in a relationship might not agree on the value of a particular reward or cost. For example, Robert may place greater worth on the housework he does than Vicki places on Robert's housework.

Principle 2: Relationships are dynamic. The second assumption shared by social exchange theories is that relationships themselves are dynamic; they change over time. Relational partners are assumed to engage in a continual process of evaluation whereby they assess each other's gains and losses, profits and expenditures, and rewards and costs. This means that a relationship that is seen as equitable and satisfying at one point in time may come to be viewed as less equitable and satisfying (and even as inequitable and dissatisfying) as the gains and losses of each partner change over time. This happens, in part, because of the shifting nature of rewards and costs. A particular event, behavior, or occurrence may become less rewarding and/or more costly as it occurs repeatedly or as the relationship progresses. Two people caught up in the thrill of a new love might find sexual activity to be highly rewarding and

not at all costly. Over time, as they become used to each other and the novelty of their passion decreases, they may come to view sexual activity as less rewarding.

Principle 3: Evaluations influence relationship development. Third, social exchange theories assume that the result of each partner's cost-benefit evaluation determines the course of the relationship. For example, two strangers might meet at a party. Following their initial contact, each person evaluates the immediate outcomes of that interaction and makes a prediction about the outcomes of future interactions. If these evaluations and predictions are positive ("What a fun conversation; she seemed to really like me, and we have so much in common"), then the individuals are likely to continue down the path to romantic involvement. If the evaluations and predictions are negative ("He didn't listen to a thing I said; we have nothing in common, and what's with those clothes?"), then the two are unlikely to maintain anything other than a superficial relationship; they may even cease to interact altogether.

Principle 4: Evaluations influence relationship satisfaction. A fourth (and related) assumption is that the partners' perceptions of the outcomes they obtain from the relationship are strongly linked with their level of satisfaction. Exchange frameworks posit that people will be most satisfied with a relationship when the ratio between the benefits derived from the relationship and the contributions made to the relationship is similar for both partners, that is, when they perceive the relationship to be characterized by *equity*:

$$\frac{\text{Vicki's benefits}}{\text{Vicki's contributions}} = \frac{\text{Robert's benefits}}{\text{Robert's contributions}}$$

It is the ratio of benefits to contributions that determines equity rather than the exact number that each partner receives or makes. Thus, a relationship in which one partner receives more benefits than the other may still be equitable so long as he or she makes a correspondingly higher number of contributions.

Principle 5: Inequity causes distress. A final assumption of this theoretical framework is that people who find themselves in an inequitable relationship—who are underbenefited or overbenefited relative to the partner—will experience distress and seek to restore equity. Equity can be restored to a relationship in a number of ways. For example, a woman who believes that her steady dating partner contributes much more to the relationship than she herself does may attempt to restore *actual equity*. She may increase her own contributions (e.g., by making an effort to return his phone calls more promptly, by paying him more compliments) and/or decrease her own benefits (e.g., by asking him to fix fewer things around her apartment). Alternatively, she may try to restore *psychological equity*. She may, for instance, convince herself that equity actually does exist ("It's not like I'm taking advantage of our relationship; he likes fixing things, and he already owns all the tools"). And finally, if the distress caused by the inequity should prove too great, then she can simply *end the relationship*.

Empirical Evidence. Some of the principles set forth by social exchange theories have received empirical support. For example, there is evidence that the nature of rewards and costs shifts over time and within relationships. Sociologist Diane Felmlee (e.g., 1995) has conducted research on what she labels "fatal attractions." Her work demonstrates that a partner's attributes that are seen as particularly attractive, rewarding, and valuable at the beginning of a relationship can later come to be viewed as unpleasant, costly, and detrimental to the relationship. For example, a woman who values her lover's "spontaneous and carefree" nature may later perceive that same attribute as an annoying "flightiness." A man who is attracted to his dating partner's "refreshing innocence" may later find that it has become an irritating "lack of maturity."

We also know that people differ in terms of what they consider costly and/or rewarding; in particular, there appear to be several sex differences. In one study, Constantine Sedikides, Mary Beth Oliver, and Keith Campbell (1994) investigated the perceived benefits and costs of romantic relationships in a sample of heterosexual college students. Participants were reminded that romantic relationships are likely to result in both benefits and costs and then were asked to list the five most important benefits they had enjoyed, and the five most serious costs they had incurred, as a result of all the romantic relationships they had personally experienced. Analysis of these lists revealed a variety of *benefits*, including the following:

- Companionship or affiliation (cited by 60% of the total sample)
- Sexual gratification (46%)
- Feeling loved or loving another (43%)
- Intimacy (42%)
- Relationship expertise or knowledge (40%)
- Self-growth and self-understanding (37%)
- Enhanced self-esteem (32%)
- Exclusivity (32%)
- Feeling secure (28%)
- Social support from the partner's friends or relatives (22%)
- Feelings of happiness or elation (16%)
- Learning about the other sex (12%)

Although men and women reported experiencing similar kinds of benefits from their romantic relationships, significantly more men (65%) than women (26%) cited sexual gratification as a particularly important benefit. Conversely, significantly more women (49%) than men (14%) specified enhanced self-esteem (including higher self-respect and self-confidence) as a romantic relationship benefit.

Participants also generated a number of different *costs*, including the following:

- Loss of freedom to socialize (cited by 69% of the total sample)
- Loss of freedom to date (68%)
- Time and effort investment (27%)
- Nonsocial sacrifices, such as falling grades (24%)
- Loss of identity (22%)
- Feeling worse about oneself (22%)
- Stress and worry about the relationship (20%)
- Fights (16%)
- Increased dependence on the partner (13%)
- Monetary losses (12%)
- Loss of privacy (10%)
- Loss of innocence about relationships and love (9%)

As before, there were sex differences. More men than women cited loss of freedom to socialize (77% vs. 61%) and to date (83% vs. 56%) as particularly heavy costs associated with their romantic relationships, and more men than women specified monetary losses (18% vs. 6%) as a dating burden. More women than men mentioned loss of identity (29% vs. 14%), feeling worse about themselves (29% vs. 14%), and increased dependence on the partner (23% vs. 3%) as important costs they had experienced in their relationships.

In a second study, the authors asked another sample of men and women to rank order the list of benefits and costs generated by the first group of participants in terms of their perceived importance; these results confirmed and extended those of the first study. Specifically, women in the second study viewed intimacy, self-growth and self-understanding, and enhanced self-esteem as more important benefits than did men, whereas men in the second study perceived sexual gratification and learning about the other sex as more important benefits than did women. Also in the second study, women regarded loss of identity, increased dependence on the partner, feeling worse about oneself, and loss of innocence about relationships and love as greater costs to romantic involvement than did men, who considered monetary losses and time and effort investment to be more serious costs than did women.

Other researchers, rather than exploring perceptions of costs and benefits, have tested the theoretical prediction about the association between equity and relationship satisfaction. People clearly *believe* that equity is an important determinant of relationship quality, *expect* to experience distress if confronted by inequity in close relationships, and *believe* that equity should be restored to inequitable relationships (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Haas & Stafford, 1998). For example, sociologist Susan Sprecher (1992) asked a large sample of men and women college students to imagine that they were in a long-term romantic relationship that had recently become inequitable. Participants first imagined that the inequity benefited their partner, that is, that the relationship was one of *underbenefit* for themselves: "You feel that you are contributing more (in love, effort, time, emotions, tasks) than your partner is. In other words, you feel that you are currently getting a worse deal than your partner is" (p. 60). They then were asked to imagine the opposite situation—a relationship that was inequitable due to *overbenefit* for themselves. For each scenario, participants indicated how they would respond emotionally to the inequity. The results revealed that men and women expected to become distressed—to experience increased anger and depression and decreased happiness, contentment, satisfaction, and love—in response to underbenefiting inequity. In addition, although participants did not expect to experience a great deal of distress in response to overbenefiting

inequity, they did expect their feelings of guilt to increase. Clearly, inequity is believed to be associated with some form of emotional distress and dissatisfaction.

However, there is mixed evidence about whether equity and satisfaction actually are correlated in ongoing romantic relationships. Some studies find that equity is associated with a higher degree of satisfaction than is inequity (for a review, see Sprecher & Schwartz, 1994). Others find that inequity—specifically, overbenefit—is related to higher levels of satisfaction than is equity (as we might expect from Sprecher's [1992] belief study). Yoshinori Kamo (1993), for example, examined the relationship between perceived fairness in the allocation of household chores and self-reported marital satisfaction in a sample of American and Japanese couples. Among American couples, being overbenefited (believing that the spouse does more than his or her fair share of tasks around the house) was positively associated with marital satisfaction—for both husbands and wives. The same result was found for Japanese wives; that is, the more Japanese wives believed that they benefited from the relationship in terms of household task allocation, the more satisfied they were with their marriages.

Although the evidence in support of the social exchange framework is mixed, these theories nonetheless provide insight into how the exchange of rewards and costs between romantic partners can promote relationship development and continuity.

Interdependence

We have seen that the exchanges between partners—their disclosures and revelations, their contributions and benefits—can propel a relationship toward increasing closeness (or, alternatively, toward dissolution). *Interdependence frameworks* also focus on partners' exchanges, their perceptions of rewards and costs, and the process by which they evaluate and regulate the relationship (see Holmes, 2000). In addition, these models add to our understanding of relationship development in two important ways. First, interdependence models distinguish between relationship satisfaction and relationship stability. They recognize that a highly satisfying relationship may ultimately prove unstable and that a deeply unsatisfying one can endure for a lifetime. Second, these frameworks propose that relationship outcomes are affected not only by what happens between the partners but also by external forces that can serve to cement or weaken the partners' bond.

For example, sociocultural taboos against divorce may prevent an unhappily married couple from terminating their relationship; legalization of same-sex marriage may enable another couple to publicly acknowledge the commitment the partners have to each other; and parental interference may heighten (or extinguish) the passion between two young lovers.

Interdependence Theory. John Thibaut and Harold Kelley's (1959) *Interdependence Theory* proposes that two people involved in a relationship are interdependent with respect to the outcomes of their behavior; that is, the thoughts, feelings, and actions of one partner influence his or her own outcomes as well as those of the other partner. Because each partner generally cannot achieve his or her best possible outcome at the same time, some degree of compromise is necessary for both partners to obtain at least minimally satisfactory outcomes. Thus, as their relationship develops, the partners are likely to coordinate their behaviors to achieve mutually rewarding outcomes ("We'll spend this vacation doing what you want, and next year we'll do what I want"). This process of coordination is called *transformation of motivation* and is assumed to produce satisfaction and to enhance commitment to the relationship.

The fact that partners experience a transformation of motivation and achieve beneficial outcomes is not enough, however, to guarantee that their union will be satisfying or that it will endure. Interdependence Theory proposes that relationship partners rely on two standards when evaluating the outcomes they are receiving from a relationship. The first, called *comparison level* (CL), is the standard against which a partner evaluates the attractiveness of a relationship or how satisfactory it is. The comparison level is determined by the individual's expectations about the level of outcomes (rewards and costs) that the relationship ought to provide, and it is influenced by personal experience as well as general knowledge of outcomes commonly experienced in that type of relationship. To the extent that the outcomes the person actually experiences in the current relationship meet or exceed what is expected (outcomes > CL), he or she is likely to view the relationship as attractive and to be satisfied; to the extent that the outcomes fall short of expectations (outcomes < CL), dissatisfaction is likely to result. Thus, it is possible for someone who benefits immensely from a relationship to nonetheless be unhappy—if he or she expects more. Conversely, it is possible for someone who appears to be in a highly

unrewarding relationship to be relatively satisfied—if he or she believes things could be worse.

The second standard on which partners rely when evaluating their interpersonal outcomes is called the *comparison level for alternatives* (CLalt). CLalt is the standard the partners use in determining whether or not to remain in the relationship, and it reflects the outcomes the partners believe they could obtain from available alternatives to the current relationship. If a person's current outcomes meet or exceed his or her expected outcomes in alternative relationships (outcomes > CLalt), then the relationship is likely to endure. If current outcomes fall below perceived alternative outcomes (outcomes < CLalt), however, then the relationship will be unstable and may dissolve. Thus, an unhappy relationship may persist if there are no acceptable alternatives, and a blissful union may dissolve in the face of a particularly appealing alternative (see Figure 11.1).

In sum, this theory predicts that the most stable relationships will be those in which partners do not expect a great deal (have a low CL) but actually get quite a lot (receive many positive outcomes) from the relationship (and consequently experience high levels of satisfaction) and have very few attractive alternatives to the relationship (have a low CLalt). These factors work together to produce a high level of *dependence* on the relationship; the partners need the relationship to obtain the outcomes they desire, and they have no other viable options for attaining those desired outcomes. Their dependence, in turn, promotes the stability and endurance of their union.

Interdependence Theory reminds us that satisfaction and stability are not necessarily one and the same and that relationships develop as a function of changes in the partners' needs, motives, and expectations as well as shifts in the surrounding social context.

Extensions of Interdependence Theory: Cohesiveness and Commitment. Other theorists have elaborated on the basic principles of Interdependence Theory. For example, George Levinger's (e.g., 1965, 1976) *Marital Cohesiveness Model* posits that the strength of the bond between partners is a function of two basic factors: the various inducements to remain in the relationship and the inducements to leave it (see Figure 11.2). *Inducements to remain* include all of the sources of *attractions* to the marriage and the spouse, which range from affectional rewards (e.g., love, companionship, sexual enjoyment), to socioeconomic rewards (e.g., income, material possessions, social prestige), to

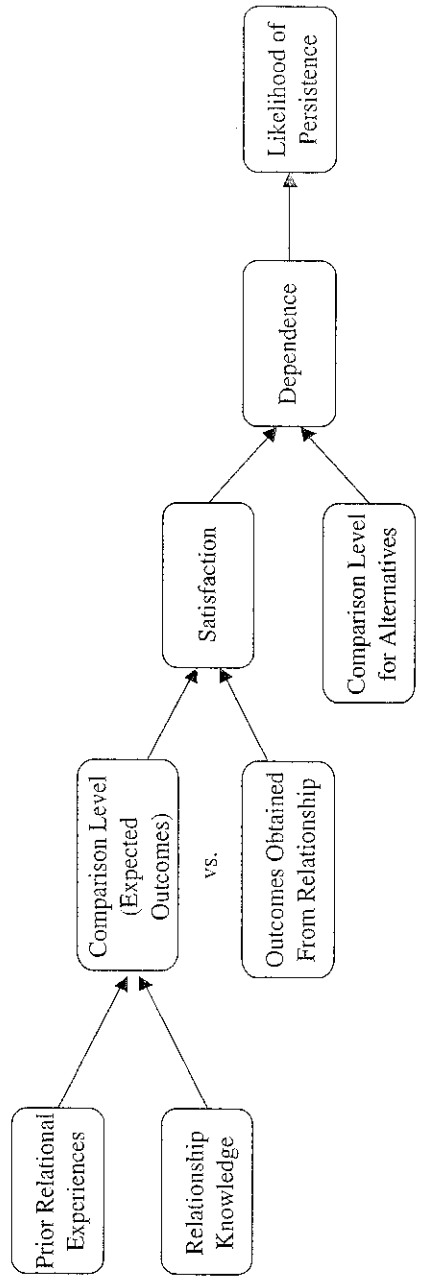


Figure 11.1 Thibaut and Kelley's Interdependence Theory. Interdependence Theory predicts that relationships will endure to the extent that the partners are highly dependent upon each other and the relationship for desirable outcomes. Dependence is a function of satisfaction with the relationship (which is highest when people's actual outcomes meet or exceed the outcomes they expect to obtain or their comparison level) and the comparison level for alternatives (or what is believed to be available from other relationships or partners). Thus, both internal (satisfaction) and external (quality and quantity of alternatives) forces determine whether a relationship will continue.

Figure 11.2 Levinger's Marital Cohesiveness Model. Like Interdependence Theory, the Marital Cohesiveness Model proposes that both internal and external factors determine whether a relationship will endure over time. Highly cohesive relationships are the most likely to last. Cohesiveness (the strength of the relational bond between partners) is determined by the level of rewards and costs experienced in the relationship, which produces attraction; by the number of costs associated with terminating the relationship, or barriers; and by the presence or absence of acceptable alternatives to the relationship.

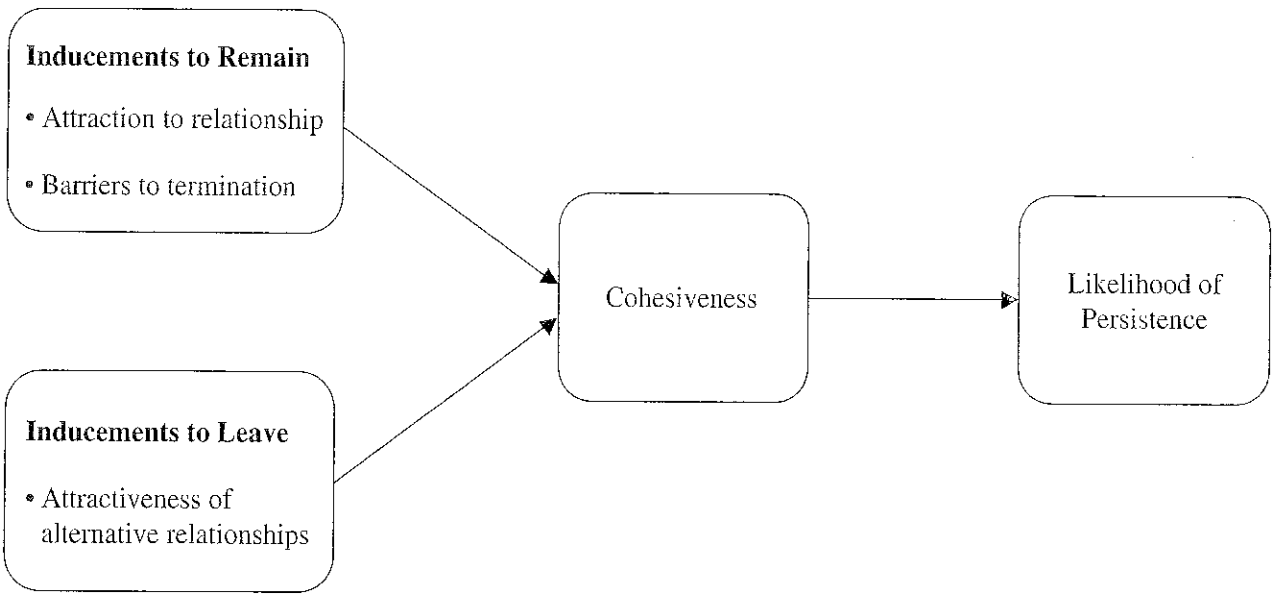
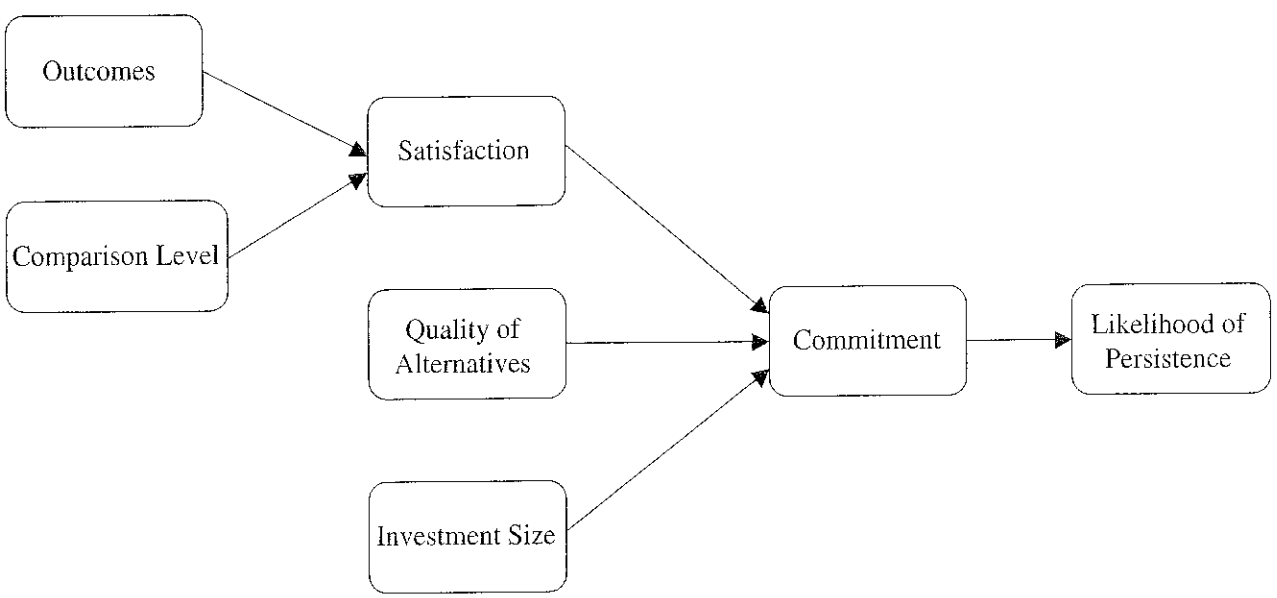


Figure 11.3 Rusbult's Investment Model. Like Interdependence Theory and the Marital Cohesiveness Model, the Investment Model recognizes that the outcomes an individual obtains in his or her relationship, as well as the perceived quality of alternatives to that relationship, are important contributors to relationship stability. Specifically, this model proposes that people will feel committed to their relationships to the extent that they feel satisfied, believe that they have few good alternatives to the relationship, and have invested important resources in the relationship. This feeling of commitment, in turn, influences whether or not a relationship will last.



similarity between the spouses on important demographic dimensions. Other inducements to remain in a relationship include the restraints or *barriers* against its dissolution. Barriers derive from the social structure in which people live and from the social contracts into which they enter. For example, feelings of obligation to the partner, the marriage, and existing children; moral proscriptions stemming from religious values; and external pressures from kin, community, and social institutions all may serve as potent barriers to termination. *Inducements to leave* the relationship include the various attractions or rewards that can be obtained from alternative relationships (including no relationship at all). Essentially, this model proposes that "marital strength is a function of bars as well as bonds" (Levinger, 1965, p. 20). Thus, the bond between two people is likely to be cohesive (strong and stable) to the extent that they experience high attraction to the relationship, many barriers to terminating the relationship, and low attraction to alternative relationships.

Another extension of Interdependence Theory was proposed by Caryl Rusbult (1983; see also Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Her *Investment Model* proposes that commitment, defined as the individual's feelings of attachment to the partner and his or her intention and desire to remain in the relationship, is a function of three factors: (a) the person's level of *satisfaction* with the relationship, which is a function of rewards and costs (outcomes actually experienced) and comparison level (the level of outcomes people believe they deserve); (b) the perceived *quality of alternatives* to the relationship or the degree to which the individual believes that important needs could be met outside the relationship (e.g., by specific others, by friendships, by hobbies and other activities, by no relationship at all); and (c) the size of the person's *investment* in the relationship, which refers to the ways in which he or she is connected to the partner and bound to the relationship (these can be of a direct [e.g., time, emotional energy, personal sacrifice] or indirect [e.g., mutual friends, shared memories, shared possessions] nature) (see Figure 11.3). Thus, this model proposes that partners will feel committed to their relationship to the extent that they feel satisfied (i.e., their relationship provides abundant rewards, does not involve heavy costs, and closely matches their beliefs and assumptions about an ideal partnership), they believe they have few and/or poor-quality alternatives to the relationship, and they have invested important resources in the relationship that serve as powerful inducements for its continuation. Commitment, in turn, influences whether or not the relationship will endure.

Empirical Evidence. There is strong support for many of the basic propositions just outlined. Both Interdependence Theory and the Investment Model propose that relationship satisfaction will be greater to the extent that partners' actual outcomes exceed their expectations (outcomes > CL). Research supports this contention. For example, Marianne Dainton (2000) gave people currently involved in romantic relationships a list of everyday behavioral strategies that can be used to maintain or promote a relationship. These maintenance activities encompassed five general dimensions: *positivity* (e.g., behaving in a cheerful and optimistic manner), *openness* (e.g., engaging in self-disclosure or direct discussion of the relationship), *assurances* (e.g., providing messages stressing commitment to the partner and the relationship), *social networks* (e.g., relying on common friends and affiliations), and *sharing tasks* (e.g., being equally responsible for accomplishing tasks that the couple faces). For each activity, participants were asked to consider their partners' behavior and to indicate the extent to which their current relationships compared, either favorably or unfavorably, with their expectation levels. They also completed a measure of relationship satisfaction. The results revealed a strong and positive correlation between expectation fulfillment and satisfaction; the more an individual perceived his or her partner as using the various maintenance behaviors relative to his or her expectations, the more satisfied the individual was with the relationship.

Other aspects of these theories also have received support. In particular, research reveals that both the internal characteristics of a relationship (e.g., satisfaction, perceptions of rewards and costs, investment level) and the external forces surrounding the partners (e.g., availability and quality of alternatives, presence or absence of societal barriers to divorce) influence whether the relationship continues and the well-being of the partners (e.g., Attridge & Berscheid, 1994; Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Kurdek, 2000; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Clearly, interdependence models provide a compelling view of relationship development.

SUMMARY

Recognizing that only a very few relationships survive beyond initial interactions and first dates, social and behavioral scientists have devoted a great deal of time and effort to understanding the how and

why of relationship development. In their quest, they have proposed a number of theoretical frameworks. Those who adopt a stage approach have charted the phases or stages of relational progression. Others have focused on the processes—self-disclosure and intimacy, exchange of rewards and costs, interdependence—that occur between partners and that fuel relationship development. Regardless of the framework used, researchers and theorists acknowledge that relationships are dynamic entities that fluctuate over time as a result not only of changes in the partners but also of alterations in the social environment and in the properties of the relationship itself.

KEY CONCEPTS

Stage models of relationship development (p. 135)
Filter Theory (pp. 135-136)
Social attributes (p. 135)
Value consensus (p. 135)
Need complementarity (p. 135)
Wheel Theory (pp. 136-137)
Rapport (p. 136)
Self-revelation (p. 136)
Mutual dependency (p. 136)
Intimacy need fulfillment (p. 136-137)
Stimulus-Value-Role Theory (p. 137)
Stimulus stage (p. 137)
Value stage (p. 137)
Role stage (p. 137)
Process models of relationship development (p. 138)
Social Penetration Theory (p. 138)
Depth of disclosure (p. 138)
Breadth of disclosure (p. 138)
Intimacy Theory (p. 139)
Social exchange theories (pp. 140-143)
Rewards (p. 141)
Costs (p. 141)
Equity (p. 142)
Actual equity (p. 143)
Psychological equity (p. 143)

Interdependence frameworks (p. 146)
Interdependence Theory (pp. 147-148)
Transformation of motivation (p. 147)
Comparison level (p. 147)
Comparison level for alternatives (p. 148)
Dependence (p. 148)
Marital Cohesiveness Model (p. 148)
Attractions (p. 148)
Barriers (p. 152)
Investment Model (p. 152)
Satisfaction (p. 152)
Quality of alternatives (p. 152)
Investment (p. 152)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the basic premises of stage models of relationship development? Why have these models fallen out of favor?
2. Think about your current (or a previous) romantic relationship. Explain how your relationship developed using Social Penetration Theory and Intimacy Theory.
3. Identify and describe the five basic assumptions of social exchange models of relationship development.
4. Discuss the concept of inequity and identify the ways in which theorists say that people can restore equity. Have you ever been in an inequitable relationship? How did you respond to the inequity? Does your response support theoretical assumptions or not?
5. Evaluate the following three statements from the perspective of Interdependence Theory:

Statement 1: "A rewarding marriage is a happy marriage."

Statement 2: "If [illegible]"

[illegible]