As humans, we are fundamentally social beings whose connections to others are vital to our health and happiness. As we have noted in many places throughout this book, the evidence connecting well-being to relationships is overwhelming (see Chapters 3 and 5). David Myers referred to the contribution of relationships to health and happiness as a “deep truth” (1992, p. 154). The “truth” of the well-being/relationship connection appears to be universal. Of the many factors that contribute to well-being, only social relationships...
consistently predict happiness across widely differing cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995).

Relationships are responsible for our greatest joys and our most painful sorrows. Our physical and emotional well-being is enhanced as much by supporting and caring connections with others as it is jeopardized by social isolation and bad relationships. For physical health and longevity, the magnitude of these effects rival those of well-established health risks such as smoking, obesity, diet, and lack of exercise (see Chapter 3). The quality of our relationships has equally powerful effects on mental health and happiness. Healthy people have strong, supportive connections to others and happy people have rich social lives, satisfying friendships, and happy marriages (see Chapters 3 and 5).

The importance of positive relationships is widely recognized by psychologists and non-psychologists alike. People typically list close relationships as one of their most important life goals and a primary source of meaning in life (Emmons, 1999b). In one study, 73% of college students said they would sacrifice another important life goal (e.g., good education, career) before they would give up a satisfying romantic relationship (Hammersla & Frease-McMahan, 1990). In answer to the “deathbed test” most people point to relationships as a major factor that contributes to a satisfying and meaningful life (Reis & Gable, 2003; Sears, 1977). A full appreciation of the value of close relationships is one of life’s more important lessons, often learned in the face of life-threatening events (see Chapter 4 on Posttraumatic Growth).

We have also discussed the multiple ways that relationships contribute to well-being. Relationships provide an important coping resource through social support, fulfill needs for intimacy and sharing of life’s burdens through self-disclosure, and represent an ongoing source of enjoyment and positive emotions through interactions with others. Many psychologists believe these positive effects are built on a biological foundation reflecting our evolutionary heritage. Humans are not particularly imposing figures compared to the other animals they confronted in pre-historic times, and human infants remain relatively defenseless for many years. Evolution may have selected for a genetically-organized bonding process. Going it alone likely meant the end of a person’s genetic lineage. In short, humans probably would not have survived if they did not have a built-in biological motive to form cooperative bonds with others and nurturing connections with their own offspring. As we noted in Chapter 5, the evolutionary basis of human connections, together with the extensive literature showing the importance of human bonds, led Baumeister and Leary (1995) to conclude that belongingness is a fundamental human need which they described as, “a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). Food and water are essential supplies for a healthy life. Similarly, caring relationships with others also appear to be essential to well-being.

Recent studies have begun to explore some of the biological underpinnings of our need for belonging. For example, oxytocin is a pituitary hormone that has physiological effects that counter the flight-or-fight stress response. That is, this hormone reduces fearfulness and the physiological arousal associated with stress by producing relaxation and calmness (Carter, 1998; Taylor, Klein, Lewis, et al., 2000; Uvnas-Moberg, 1998). Oxytocin is sometimes referred to as the “cuddle hormone” because close physical contacts such as touching, hugging, and kissing stimulate its release (Hazan, Campa, & Gur-Yaish, 2006). Oxytocin is responsible for the release of milk in nursing mothers. The calm emotional state and feelings of safety produced by the hormone are thought to contribute to infant–maternal bonds. For both men and women, oxytocin levels are at their highest during sexual orgasm (Uvnas-Moberg, 1997). These findings suggest that our desire for intimate connections with others and the comfort these connections provide are at least partially mediated by biological responses. Obviously, there’s more to a hug than just biology, but that hug might not feel quite as good if it weren’t for biology.

The connection of satisfying relationships to well-being is clear. What is not so clear is how people develop and maintain good relationships. In this chapter, we will explore what psychologists have learned about close, intimate relationships that addresses the following sorts of questions: What is the difference between close relationships and more casual acquaintances? How does an intimate connection develop between two people? What does it mean to be someone’s friend? To be in love? What characterizes good and bad relationships? Given the widely shared belief in the importance of close relationships, why do half of all marriages end in divorce? Why is it so difficult to sustain a satisfying
long-term marriage? Can “happy” couples tell us something about the ingredients of a successful marriage?

DEFINING CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Characteristics

We encounter many people each day as we shop, talk on the phone, keep appointments, visit, work, go to school, go to church, and relax with family members, friends, or spouses at the end of the day. While all the relationships involved in these encounters are potentially significant, researchers have spent most of their time studying our closest relationships—specifically friendship, romantic love, and marriage. Our best friends, lovers, and spouses are the most important people in our lives and have the most impact on our overall well-being across the life span.

Close relationships can be distinguished from more casual acquaintances in a number of ways, but the degree of intimacy seems most central to the distinction. In everyday language, intimacy often implies a sexual and romantic relationship. We may be more likely to describe a good friend as a best friend or a close friend, rather than an intimate friend. However, relationship researchers use the term “intimacy” to capture mutual understanding, depth of connection, and degree of involvement, whether or not the relationship is sexual. The term “intimacy” can apply both to friends and to lovers. It is in this sense that our closest relationships, sexual or not, are the most intimate ones.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, Miller, Perlman, and Brehm (2007) suggest that both lay-persons and psychologists seem to agree on six core characteristics that set intimate relationships apart from more casual relationships: knowledge, trust, caring, interdependence, mutuality, and commitment (see also Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Harvey & Weber, 2002).

Brief descriptions of these six characteristics are given in Table 11.1.

**KNOWLEDGE** Our closest friends and intimate partners know more about us than anyone else. They have extensive knowledge of our personal history, deepest feelings, strengths, and faults. Intimate knowledge in close relations develops through the mutual self-disclosure of personal information and feelings. **Self-disclosure** means revealing intimate details of the self to others (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). These details have to do with our “true self” and the actual state of affairs in our lives, which is likely different than the public self presented to less intimate others in everyday interactions. That is, we share things with intimate others that we typically keep private when we are in the company of strangers or casual acquaintances. Sharing of personal information, in turn, provides the basis for developing a deeper connection than is typical in casual associations. To have someone accept, like or love you, when they know you as you know yourself, is powerful affirmation of the essence and totality of self. This is one reason why rejection by a good friend or romantic partner may be so painful. The relatively complete self-knowledge shared with another may make rejection by that person feel profound. In contrast, the rejection of someone who has minimal and partial knowledge of us is likely to be less upsetting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 11.1 Characteristics of intimate relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong>—mutual understanding based on reciprocal self-disclosure.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong>—assumption of no harm will be done by the other. Keeping confidences.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Caring</strong>—genuine concern for the other and ongoing monitoring and maintenance of relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interdependence</strong>—intertwining of lives and mutual influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mutuality</strong>—sense of “we-ness” and overlapping of lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong>—intention to stay in the relationship through its ups and downs.</td>
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because only the more superficial aspects of the self are invested.

Research suggests that self-disclosure both signifies and enhances mutual liking and affectation. A major review by Collins and Miller (1994) found strong empirical support for three disclosure-liking effects. (1) We disclose to people we like. (2) We like people who disclose intimate self-information more than those whose disclosures are less intimate. (3) We like people to whom we have disclosed. Research has also identified a strong tendency for disclosure to beget disclosure, an effect called disclosure reciprocity (Derlega et al., 1993; Miller, 1990; Reis & Shaver, 1988). People tend to both reciprocate a disclosure and match its level of intimacy. The process often begins with non-intimate information and then moves on to more intimate factual and emotional disclosures over time. If initial conversations are rewarding, then over time both the breadth (diversity of topics) and the depth (personal significance and sensitivity) of topics that are discussed increases (Altman & Taylor, 1973). This movement of communication from small talk to the exchange of more sensitive personal information is considered central to the development of relationships. Reciprocal self-disclosure captures the process of how we get to know someone. The knowledge that results from disclosure describes what it means to know and be known by someone.

The power of self-disclosure to produce feelings of closeness is dramatically shown by a study that manipulated the intimacy of two conversation partners (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997). Participants began their exchange as complete strangers. They were first instructed to talk for 15 minutes about personal topics that were relatively low in intimacy such as, “When did you last sing to yourself?” During the second 15-minute interval, topic intimacy increased to include things like, “What is your most treasured memory?” During the final 15 minutes, conversation partners were instructed to talk about very personal topics invoked by questions such as, “When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?” “Complete this sentence: ‘I wish I had someone with whom I could share...’” Compared to a group of non-disclosing participants who engaged in 45 minutes of small talk (e.g., “What’s is your favorite holiday?”), participants in the disclosure condition reported feeling very close to their conversational partners by the conclusion of the experience. The researchers compared closeness ratings for the group that engaged in self-disclosure and the group that made small-talk. Surprisingly, the experimental subjects reported feeling closer to their experimental partners, than one-third of the small-talk subjects reported feeling to the person with whom they shared the closest real-life relationship! This is strong evidence for the importance of self-disclosure to the development of intimacy.

Reciprocal disclosure is most evident at the beginning of relationships and less so once relationships are well established (Altman, 1973; Derlega, Wilson, & Chaikin, 1976). In a new friendship, we are likely to feel an obligation to reciprocate when a person opens up to us with personal information. In a budding romance, the disclosure may be quite rapid and emotionally arousing, which may add to the passion we feel. Telling a romantic partner your deepest secrets and your innermost feelings is exciting, especially when it is reciprocated. One of the ironies of romance is that the better we know our partners, the less we may experience the excitement of disclosure. Baumeister and Bratslavsky (1999) argue that passion and deepening intimacy are strongly linked. They believe one reason passion fades in long-term marriages is that spouses already know most everything about each other.

In well-established relationships, intimacy is sustained more by responsiveness than by reciprocity (Reis & Patrick, 1996). That is, in our interactions with best friends, family members, and marital partners, it is less important to reciprocate and more important to respond in a supporting, caring, and affectionate manner (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). If you tell your spouse all your angry feelings about your boss after a bad day at work, you aren’t looking for reciprocation. You don’t really want to hear about her or his bad day at that moment. What you want is a sounding board, a sympathetic ear, and expressions of care and empathy for your feelings.

**TRUST** Mutual trust is another vital ingredient of intimate and close relationships. To trust someone means that you expect they will do you no harm. Chief among the harms we are concerned about is the breaking of confidences. When we open up to other people we make ourselves vulnerable. It is a bit like taking your clothes off and feeling self-conscious about the less than perfect shape of your body. In a network of friends or co-workers,
sensitive information can have damaging consequences if someone tells others how you “really” feel about someone—your boss, for example. Violation of trust is damaging to relationships and will likely lead the betrayed person to be less open and more guarded in revealing personally sensitive information in the future (Jones, Crouch, & Scott, 1997). Trust is an essential ingredient in close relationships, partly because it is a necessary precondition for self-disclosure. We don’t disclose to people we don’t trust.

CAREING Caring means concern for and attention to the feelings of others. We feel more affection and appreciation for our close partners than for most people. When we ask a casual acquaintance, “how are you doing?” we most often expect and receive an obligatory and cliché response: “Fine,” “Hanging in there,” “Not bad,” and so forth. Neither person expects a deep revelation about personal feelings. At one level, in those passing greetings, we aren’t actually asking for information about how the person is really doing. We’re just following polite social rules for greeting and acknowledging people as we encounter them. In our intimate relationships, the same question carries different expectations. We expect and want a more detailed and genuine response, especially if things are not going well. And the other person is expected to be more honest in describing how they really feel, and not to pass off the question with a stock answer used in low-intimacy exchanges. Caring also involves all the little things we do to express our appreciation and valuing of a relationship: providing support in times of need; recognizing special occasions like birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries; inviting people for dinner and other shared activities; and keeping in touch with a phone call or an invitation to get together over coffee or lunch. All these things reflect the simple fact that more intimate relationships take high priority in our lives. We have more invested, so we take care to maintain the quality of our close relationships.

INTERDEPENDENCE The lives of people in intimate relationships are deeply intertwined. The mutual influence of each person on the actions, feelings, and thinking of the other is, for some researchers, a defining characteristic of close relationships (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). We typically care more and give greater weight to the advice and judgments our family members, friends, and spouses than we do to people we know less well. This is particularly true regarding self-relevant personal issues and actions. We may consult an expert when our computer malfunctions, but we are likely to seek the support and advice of spouses and friends in times of personal challenge, such as interpersonal conflicts at work or caring for aging parents. Our feelings and actions are also intertwined. The emotional ups and downs of our intimate partners affect our own emotional states and actions. Intimate partners share in each other’s emotional experiences. Compared to casual relationships, the mutual influences characterizing close relationships are more frequent and involve more areas of our lives. And they are long-term. For example, most parents find that they never stop being parents, in terms of showing concern, giving advice, and offering help and support to their children. Children would likely agree that the influence of parents does not end when they leave their parents’ home and begin their own lives.

MUTUALITY Mutuality is another distinctive feature of our closest relationships. Mutuality refers to feelings of overlap between two lives—that is, the extent to which people feel like separate individuals or more like a couple. These feelings are revealed in the language we use to describe our connection to others. Plural pronouns (we and us) have been found to both express and contribute to close relationships (e.g., Fitzsimons & Kay, 2004). People use “we” to signify closeness. In a developing relationship, shifting from singular pronouns (e.g., “she and I”) to plural (“we” or “us”) contributes to feelings of closeness and mutuality.

Another way of capturing mutuality and feelings of closeness is to ask people to pick among pairs of circles that overlap to varying degrees (see Figure 11.1). Called the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale, this measure has been found effective in assessing interpersonal closeness (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Sample items from this scale are shown in Figure 11.1. People simply pick the circle pair that best describes a relationship partner specified by the researcher (e.g., closest relationship, best friend, spouse, etc.). The pictorial representation of mutuality seems to be a direct and meaningful way for people to express their feelings of closeness for another person.
Commitment is a final component of intimate relationships. Commitment is a desire or intention to continue a relationship into the future. Research suggests that people associate commitment with loyalty, faithfulness, living up to your word, hard work, and giving your best effort (Fehr, 1988, 1996). In short, commitment means persevering “through thick and thin.” This can be contrasted with the lack of commitment shown by a “fair weather friend,” who is there when things are going well, but not when a supportive friend is needed most. Successful friendships and marriages require some amount of work. This means spending time and energy maintaining closeness and working through the inevitable conflicts and problems that arise in long-term relationships. Close relationships also require some degree of personal sacrifice and compromise of individual self-interests for the good of the relationship. Mutual commitment helps ensure that relationship partners will do the work and make the sacrifices and compromises necessary to sustain an intimate connection.

Our most satisfying relationships will likely involve all six characteristics: knowledge, trust, caring, interdependence, mutuality, and commitment (Miller et al., 2007). Both research and everyday personal experience suggest that these characteristics do, indeed, capture the essential elements of what it means to be a close friend or intimate partner. If we view these six features as ideal standards, then degree of intimacy and closeness might be evaluated according to the relative prominence of each characteristic. Fehr (1996) argues that the difference between a friend, a good friend, and a best friend is largely a matter of degree. With our best friends, we know more, trust more, care more, are more deeply committed, and so forth.

It is important to recognize the diversity of relationships. That is, close relationships are a bit too complex to be captured by six ideal characteristics. Deep affection and caring can exist without passing the six-feature test. For example, the movie Grumpy Old Men portrayed two elderly men (played by Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon) who competed for a woman’s affection, constantly criticized and insulted each other, and spent considerable time planning and carrying out acts of revenge that stopped just short of mayhem. Yet their relationship was utterly endearing, caring, affectionate and, despite its peculiar nature, loving. Fitting this long-term friendship to the six characteristics would be a challenge! In a similar vein, marriages come in all shapes and sizes, reflecting the unique needs and personalities of spouses. A marriage may “work” despite a lack of fit to the ideal. Both of your textbook authors, for instance, know of a successful marriage based on high independence rather than interdependence. That is, a couple that takes pride in not exerting much influence on each other in terms of careers, vacation travel, mutual friends, or even shared activities at home. This may not seem to many of us like a recipe for a satisfying relationship, but they are both very happy with their marriage and wouldn’t have it any other way.

It is worth keeping in mind that none of these characteristics, in and of itself, guarantees an intimate relationship. Self-disclosure, for instance, does not guarantee intimacy or deep affection. Sometimes when you really get to know a person, you find that you really dislike them! Perhaps this has happened with a relative or a co-worker with whom you’ve had frequent and long-term contact. In a similar vein, commitment might not signify a desire to work on or enhance a relationship. A married couple in
an unhappy marriage might make a mutual commitment to stay together because they believe it is best for their kids. In short, relationships are complex. The six features of intimate relationships should be considered general guidelines rather than hard-and-fast criteria.

Exchange and Communal Relationships

In addition to the six characteristics that define intimate relationships, such relationships also differ in how we think about and evaluate them. According to Clark and Mills, relationships come in two basic forms, exchange relationships and communal relationships (Clark, 1984; Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993). The two forms are related to different patterns of thinking, evaluating and behaving in a relationship, and to different levels of intimacy and closeness. Clark and Mills provide evidence showing that, as intimacy increases, people's relationships shift from an exchange form to a communal form.

Exchange relationships are typically more formal, less personal, and in the beginning stages of development. They are built on fairness and mutual reciprocity. That is, in an exchange relationship each party is expected to return favors in a mutual fashion. I do something nice for you and you return the favor. Exchange relationships are evaluated by keeping mental track of what we have done for others in comparison to what they have done for us. We may feel satisfied if our exchange ratio is fairly equal; conversely, resentment may build if we feel we are putting ourselves out, but getting nothing back. A sense of indebtedness might result from believing we are “falling behind” in doing nice things for another person.

Communal relationships are more typical with our closer friends, romantic partners, and family members. In these relationships, the tit-for-tat reciprocation of exchange relationships would probably feel a bit funny and might even be damaging. What would you think if your best friend reciprocated every one of your favors, like an accountant who keeps track of assets and liabilities on a ledger sheet? Clark and Mills (1979, 1993) found that while tit-for-tat reciprocation of favors increased liking among low-intimacy and formal relationships, the same favor reciprocation decreased liking among friends and in more intimate relationships. With our long-term friends, family members, and spouses we are in it for the long haul. We tend to pay more attention to keeping track of others’ needs, rather than logging all the specific things we have done for them and they have done for us. We are highly responsive to others’ emotional states and respond appropriately. In communal relationships, we share an ongoing mutual concern focused on the overall quality of a relationship and the needs and welfare of the other. We do not expect to be repaid for each positive act.

The distinction between exchange and communal relationships is not hard-and-fast. All relationships probably involve some kind of exchange and a close relationship does not necessarily mean that each person takes a communal view (Clark & Mills, 1993; Mills & Clark, 2001). Some married couples undoubtedly do focus on what they put in versus what they get out of their marriage, although this probably signifies a less healthy and less mature relationship. And, thinking about costs and benefits seems entirely appropriate when close relationships become hurtful, conflicted, or dominated by one person’s self-centered needs.

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

Love and friendship are built on the same foundation. Knowledge, trust, caring, interdependence, mutuality, and commitment are the basic building blocks of all close relationships. As these basic ingredients develop, our thinking shifts from an exchange perspective to a more communal perspective. One reason relationships are so strongly connected to health and happiness is that they represent a sort of safety net to catch us when life knocks us off balance. The depth of knowledge, care, concern, and trust that characterize close relationships provide confidence that we don’t have to go it alone. Support from friends, family members, and intimate partners in times of trouble has been consistently documented as one of our strongest coping resources (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 2000; Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, & Steward, 2000; Salovey, Rothman, & Rodin, 1998; Taylor et al., 2000). However, relationships also enhance our well-being when things are going well. Most of the “good times” we have in life involve shared activities and fun with our families and friends. These good times translate into more frequent positive emotional experiences that, in turn, allow us to reap the benefits of positive emotions shown in research and described by
Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Chapter 3).

Teasing and Humor

Aside from sex, which is arguably more intense, but far less frequent (at least when you’re older), laughter is one of our most commonly experienced sources of positive emotion. From childhood to old age, laughter is a universal experience and it’s almost always social (Lefcourt, 2002). We may, on occasion, laugh when we’re alone, but we have the most fun with others. We both enjoy and seek out people who make us laugh. Large-scale surveys find that a sense of humor is one of the most valued qualities that people seek in choosing opposite- and same-sex friends, dating partners, and marriage partners (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Certainly, humor can be used for negative purposes, such as the humiliating teasing of a schoolyard bully. However, in satisfying relationships, humor is typically prosocial and serves positive functions (Keltner, Young, Heerey, & Oemig, 1998). Teasing, playful banter, exchanging jokes, and contagious laughter are typical features of close relationships and one of the primary reasons we enjoy them. Even serious occasions are often marked by humor. For example, it is not uncommon for people to tell humorous stories about the deceased at a funeral reception, especially if the person was elderly and lived a long, full life. Humor is a positive coping strategy in the face of loss (Bonanno & Keltner, 1997). Humor helps lighten up serious situations by replacing negative emotions with more positive ones. Humor is widely regarded as an effective way to release stress-related tension, deal with sensitive issues, and help confront and resolve interpersonal conflicts (Argyle, 2001; Lefcourt, 2002; Martin, 2007). Laughter helps put both the mind and body at ease.

Humor is important in forming and maintaining social bonds. We like and feel closer to people who make us laugh (e.g., Fraley & Aron, 2004), including teachers and professors. Studies show that students believe a sense of humor is one of the most desirable teacher characteristics that contributes to more classroom enjoyment, engagement, and learning (see Chapter 11 in Martin, 2007). Research also consistently finds that humor contributes to satisfying long-term relationships (see Martin, 2007, for a review). The more married individuals value their partner’s sense of humor, the more satisfied they tend to be with their marriages. In short, high levels of reciprocated humor are one mark of a happy marriage. In fact, humor may well be a key ingredient for a successful long-term marriage, in part because it outlasts the pleasures of sex. When couples who had been married for over 50 years were asked why their marriage had lasted so long, “laughing together frequently” was one of the top reasons (Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr, 1990). They didn’t say, “fantastic sex!” As the frequency and importance of sexual pleasure decline with age, humor may become a more significant source of enjoyment. In our later years of life, we may not want, or be able, to have sex on a regular basis, but there is no indication that we lose our ability to enjoy laughter, or our affection for people with whom we laugh.

One of the more prominent humor-related features of close and developing relationships is playful prosocial teasing. Flirtatious teasing is common in dating couples (Keltner et al., 1998) and playful teasing is regarded by people across different cultures as a basic “rule of friendship” (Argyle & Henderson, 1984, 1985). In a large-scale survey of four different cultures, Argyle and Henderson found that teasing and joking were expected features of friendships. This is true despite the fact that teasing is something of a paradox. As Keltner and his colleagues have noted, “Teasing criticizes, yet it compliments, attacks yet makes people closer, humiliates yet expresses affection” (Keltner et al., 1998, p. 1231). Despite its surface negativity, teasing says, “I like you well enough to tease you” and “I enjoy our good-natured fun together.” It signifies closeness, trust, caring, and mutual understanding. In contrast, teasing a casual acquaintance risks misinterpretation, because a good tease and a stinging put-down are just a step apart. Interestingly, the absence of teasing and taking teasing literally are probably signs that a relationship is in trouble. If our best friend stopped teasing us, or took offense at our own well-intentioned teasing, we would clearly take notice and wonder what was wrong. And it goes without saying that if teasing turns aggressive or hurtful, this is also damaging to relationships (Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001).

Focus on Research: Sharing What Goes Right in Life

Because caring relations increase our experience of positive emotions, they enhance our well-being on an ongoing basis. Consistent with the direct effects
**hypothesis** of social support, close relationships contribute to health and happiness even when we are not facing stressful life events (see Chapter 3). The basic idea here is that positive emotions have beneficial effects that are both independent of, and beyond those of negative emotions. That is, in addition to offsetting the ill-effects of negative affect, positive emotions independently enhance the quality of our lives. In line with the direct effects hypothesis, Shelly Gable and her colleagues have recently shown that it is just as important to receive supportive responses to our positive life experiences, as it is to receive support when we’re having trouble (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). When people share or celebrate a positive life event with others, they derive additional benefits beyond the effect of the event itself. Drawing from earlier work, Gable and colleagues refer to this process as **capitalization** (i.e., capitalizing on a positive event to receive additional benefits). The benefits of capitalization may occur because sharing a positive event with others causes us to relive its emotional effects. A partner’s enthusiastic response, indicating genuine pleasure at our good fortune, also enhances our positive feelings. In four separate studies, Gable and her colleagues examined the individual and interpersonal well-being benefits of sharing positive events.

In the first study, participants kept a daily diary in which they recorded their positive and negative emotions and their life satisfaction over an average period of 5 days. For each day, participants also recorded their most important positive event and whether they had shared that event with someone else. Results showed that on 70% of the days, people **bad** shared their most positive event. Analysis of daily positive affect and daily life satisfaction ratings revealed that well-being was enhanced on “sharing” compared to “non-sharing” days.

In the second and third studies, dating and married couples were recruited to examine whether a partner’s perceived responsiveness to positive sharing enhanced the quality of relationships. Various measures of relationship quality were completed independently by each partner (e.g., commitment, satisfaction, trust, and intimacy). An important feature of these studies was the development and use of a newly developed Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts scale. This scale measured the degree and nature of a partner’s responsiveness to a positive event by asking people to answer the following question: “Please take a moment to consider how your partner responds when you tell him or her about something **good** that has happened to you” (Gable et al., 2004, p. 233, emphasis in original). Examples of positive events were given, such as a promotion at work, a positive conversation with a family member, winning a prize or doing well at school. Each participant rated his or her partner’s response using rating items describing four types of reactions to sharing a positive event: (1) **active-constructive** (e.g., “I sometimes get the sense that my partner is even more happy and excited than I am”); (2) **passive-constructive** (e.g., “He/she points out the potential downside of the good event”); (3) **active-destructive** (e.g., “My partner tries to make a big deal out of it, but is happy for me”); and (4) **passive-destructive** (e.g., “My partner doesn’t pay much attention to me”) (Gable et al., 2004, p. 233). Both studies found that only active-constructive responses to the sharing of positive life events were related to enhanced relationship quality. The three other response types were associated with decreased relationship quality, making it clear that capitalization is dependent on an active, enthusiastic, and supporting reaction from one’s partner. In a final 10-day diary study, Gable and her colleagues examined the individual benefits of capitalization. Would sharing a positive event and receiving an active-constructive response also increase the subjective well-being (SWB) of the person who shared? Answer: yes. On days when people told others about a positive event, both life satisfaction and positive affect increased. The more people they told, the more their well-being increased, especially if the responses received were supportive and enthusiastic. Altogether, these four studies provide strong support for the value of capitalizing on the good things that happen to us by sharing them with others. They also suggest another basis for the connection between relationships and well-being. The well-being enhancing effects of positive emotions can be relived and extended through our connections with caring others.

**FRIENDSHIP AND ROMANTIC LOVE**

Liking and loving, friendship and romance overlap considerably (Rubin, 1973). We love our good friends and like our romantic partners. When people were asked to write about their romantic relationships, the dominant theme was friendship—nearly
half the participants said their romantic partner was also their closest friend (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1993). Though we use “love” to describe many of our closest relations, “in love” seems to have a more specific meaning related to sexual desire and attraction. Meyers and Berscheid (1997) had people sort their relationships into categories of love, in love, and sexual attraction/desire by naming people who fit into each. The love category was the largest, followed by sexual attraction/desire. The in love classification contained the fewest names and showed overlap with names in the sexual attraction category. In short, being in love means romantic love, involving strong sexual desire and attraction. This is where friendship and love part company. Telling a romantic partner “let’s just be friends” or “I love you, but I’m not in love with you” usually signals the end of a romance because sexual attraction and desire are weak or absent. Romantic love includes fascination, passion, infatuation, sexual desire, and a more total absorption in the relationship. We seldom use the language of romance to describe our good friends, which are most often of the same sex (opposite sex for homosexual individuals). Our friendships are less emotionally intense partly because they do not typically involve sexual intimacy.

In addition to emotional intensity, friendship and romantic love are also distinguished by differences in the clarity of rules governing the relationship, the complexity of feelings, and the expectations concerning the emotional consequences of the relationship.

### Clarity of Rules

A seminal study by Argyle and Henderson (1984) suggests some universality in people’s understanding of what it means to be someone’s friend. These researchers presented participants from different cultures (England, Italy, Hong Kong, and Japan) with a large set of rules for friendship and asked them which ones they endorsed. Interestingly, a number of these rules, described in Table 11.2, were widely endorsed across cultures.

You can think of these rules as a kind of test, apparently widely shared, that people use to evaluate their friendships. Friendship involves a set of obligations and rules defining what friends are supposed to do. If you fulfill these obligations and live by the rules, you pass the test for friendship, and if you don’t, you fail. Argyle and Henderson found that people did, in fact, think of past failed friendships in terms of their friends or themselves failing to follow one or more of these rules.

Do these rules also apply to romantic involvements? Is there a set of rules governing love? Certainly, between Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Phil and the self-help section of your local bookstore, there is no shortage of advice for developing and maintaining marriage and romance. And relationship researchers have described general guidelines for maintaining healthy relationships (e.g., Gottman & Silver, 1999; Harvey & Omarzu, 1997, 1999). However, we are unaware of empirical studies describing reasonably clear and shared rules that people possess for romantic love like those for friendship (although see Baxter, 1986). Consistent with the idea that “all’s fair in love and war,” the complexity and emotionally volatile nature of romance and passion would seem to preclude clear rules. In fact, given the importance of spontaneity, passion, and exclusivity, some might argue that if you are following rules, you probably aren’t in love. Compared to friendship, love seems more varied in its particular form of expression and

### TABLE 11.2 Rules of friendship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being supportive</th>
<th>Volunteer help in time of need</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show emotional support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stand up for the other person in their absence</td>
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<td>Being a trustworthy confidant</td>
<td>Respect the friend’s privacy</td>
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<td>Trust and confide in the other</td>
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<td>Keep confidences</td>
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<td>Don’t criticize each other in public</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Disclose personal feelings or problems to a friend</td>
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<td>Being a source of enjoyment and humor</td>
<td>Strive to make him/her happy while in each other’s company</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engage in joking or teasing with a friend</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Share news of success with the other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being tolerant and accepting</td>
<td>Don’t be jealous or critical of each other’s relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be tolerant of each other’s friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask for personal advice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t nag</td>
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individual meaning, as we shall see in our discussion of the varieties of love.

**Complexity of Feelings**

Romantic love involves more complex feelings, more stringent demands, and higher expectations than friendship. The complexity of love is reflected in researchers’ inability to define it and in the dominance of love-related themes in music, movies, and popular culture. Harvey and Weber (2002) note that prominent relationship researcher Ellen Berscheid probably had it right when she commented (in Sternberg & Barnes, 1988, p. 362) that “... love is a huge and motley collection of many different behavioral events whose only commonalities are that they take place in a relationship with another person ...” As for music, movies, and pop culture, no aspect of love’s many-faceted mystery and no detail of celebrities’ love-life intrigues are left unexplored. Love for hire, love for money, love for power, love for life, fatal attractions, tragedies of love, love conquering all, losing all for love, hate turned to love, love turned to hate, etc... — all “in the name of love.” Our fascination with love does not have a counterpart in friendship. How many songs and movies explore the “mysteries” of friendship?

Further, we do not demand the same level of loyalty, faithfulness, and exclusivity of our friends that we do of our romantic partners (Miller et al., 2007). Being someone’s good friend does not preclude you or your friend from being good friends with someone else. Hearing that a good friend went out for dinner and a movie is not a cause for alarm. Among romantic and marital partners it is obviously a different story. Finding out that your spouse went out on a dinner-movie “date” would probably be upsetting or at least require explanation. Suspicions of infidelity are raised if one party in a romantically-involved couple pursues an opposite-sex friendship without his or her partner present. In a similar vein, showing strong interest in, or talking and joking with another person is not typically an affront to a good friend. But, if the same behaviors are interpreted as flirtation, they may well get you in trouble with your romantic partner.

**Expectations**

A final difference between friendship and love concerns emotional expectations. A number of social observers have noted that we demand a good deal more emotional fulfillment from marriages and romantic relationships today than in the past, and certainly more than we expect from our friendships (e.g., Myers, 2000b; Phillips, 1988). Historically, marriages were built more on practical matters having to do with finances, family connections, and raising children. Romantic love was important, but it was not the exclusive or most significant foundation for marriage. Today, large-scale surveys indicate that being in love is the primary basis for getting married and that maintaining love is an important requirement for staying married (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986). More so today than in the past, we expect marriage to fulfill our deepest emotional needs, to be exciting, and to make us happy. Marriage is expected to be personally fulfilling, lifelong, and romantically and sexually satisfying. As many researchers have noted, this is a tall order, perhaps destined for disappointment. The point here is that we do not hold our friends responsible for our personal fulfillment and happiness. Certainly our friends contribute to our enjoyment of life, but personal fulfillment and life satisfaction are our responsibility—not theirs. Friends give us room to maneuver through life on our own terms, pursuing our own unique talents and interests. In contrast, a strong mutual expectation of emotional fulfillment in a marriage intertwines each person’s happiness with the other’s. Given the many contributors to happiness, from genetics to life choices, expecting a marriage to make you happy may be expecting too much, and assuming responsibility for another’s happiness may be too great a burden.

**VARIETIES OF LOVE**

**Passionate versus Companionate Love**

Love comes in many shapes and sizes. One of the most basic distinctions is between passionate or romantic love and companionate love (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Hatfield, 1988; Walster & Walster, 1978). This distinction parallels our discussion of the overlapping, yet different meanings of love and friendship. **Passionate or romantic love** typically involves strong sexual attraction, infatuation, total absorption, exclusivity (nobody but you), and emotions that run the full gamut from ecstasy to anguish. Specific components of passionate love include, preoccupation with our lover, idealization of his or her personal attributes, physiological arousal when
in the person’s company, desire for physical close-
ness, and a strong need for reciprocity (to be loved in return) (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). As you might
guess, passionate love describes romance in its early stages. Your first author has been married for 40 years, and guarantees that his wife does not ide-
alize him, is not particularly aroused in his presence (other than humor or irritation), and is certainly not
preoccupied or infatuated with their relationship.

Companionate love, on the other hand, built
on a special kind of loving friendship, would
describe your first author’s marriage. Some years
ago, my wife and I gave each other identical
Hallmark cards for our anniversary. The cards cele-
brated deep and abiding friendship and not roman-
tic or passionate love. We had both started feeling a
bit awkward about the passionate, “can’t wait to get
in bed,” “you make my life complete,” and “without
you I’m nothing” sayings, in what we came to
regard as “syrupy” anniversary cards. We love each
other dearly, but it is not the hot fire of passion, but
the warm glow of affection and appreciation that
come from having spent four decades in the
trenches of life together that make our marriage sat-
isfying. This slower-developing companionate
love is less emotional, calmer, and more serene than
passionate love. It reflects the fact that your spouse
has become your best friend and soul mate in your
journey through life. After decades of marriage, who
else knows you as well? Who else have you shared
so much of your life with? If nothing else, the sheer
amount of years together is not replaceable. For me,
at 60 years old, I will never have another 40-year
marriage. I know I’m not living to 100! It should be
noted that, despite the similarities between compan-
ionate love and close friendships, there is a differ-
ence. A warm hug from your wife is different than a
heartfelt hug from a good same-sexed friend. Both
feel good, but you can’t get sex out of the equation.
Even older couples still “do it,” even if not as fre-
quently as when they were first married!

Triangular Theory of Love

The varieties of love are captured in Sternberg’s
three-part theory of love’s essential ingredients
(Sternberg, 1986, 1987). In Sternberg’s model, inti-
macy, passion, and commitment each represent one
side of a triangle describing the love shared by two
people. Intimacy refers to mutual understanding,
warm affection, and mutual concern for the other’s
welfare. Passion means strong emotion, excite-
ment, and physiological arousal, often tied to sexual
desire and attraction. Commitment is the con-
scious decision to stay in a relationship for the long
haul. It includes a sense of devotion to the relation-
ship and a willingness to work on maintaining it. By
putting together different combinations of the three
ingredients, Sternberg’s model describes several
varieties of love and the specific components of
romantic and companionate love discussed above.

ROMANTIC LOVE (INTIMACY + PASSION) High inti-
macy and passion describe romantic love in
Sternberg’s model. It may seem strange not to
include commitment, but Sternberg argues that com-
mitment is not a defining feature of romantic love. A
summer romance, for example, may involve inti-
mate mutual disclosure and strong passion, but no
commitment to continue the relationship at sum-
mer’s end.

COMPANIONATE LOVE (INTIMACY + COMMITMENT)
As we have noted, companionate love is a slow-
developing love built on high intimacy and strong
commitment. When youthful passions fade in a mar-
riage, companionate love, based on deep, affection-
ate friendship provides a solid foundation for a
lasting and successful relationship.

FATUOUS LOVE (PASSION + COMMITMENT) AND
INFATUATED LOVE (PASSION ONLY) Both of these
types might be regarded as forms of immature, blind
or unreasonable love built on passion. Fatuous love
combines high passion and commitment with an
absence of intimacy. This would describe people
who hardly know each other, but are caught up in a
whirlwind passionate romance. Their commitment is
based on passion and sustained solely by passion.
Because passion is likely to fade with time, fatuous
love relationships are unlikely to last. The same can
be said for infatuated love, based only on passion,
without intimacy or commitment. This might
describe a teen romance in which sexual passion is
taken for love, or a one-night sexual affair between
people who barely know each other, and have no
intentions of developing a relationship. Infatuated
love may also describe the sense of awe, adoration,
and sex-related feelings that some people have for
their favorite Hollywood movie or music celebrity.
**EMPTY LOVE (COMMITMENT ONLY)** No passion, no intimacy, just a commitment to stay together. Appropriately called empty love, this would describe an emotionally “dead” relationship that both members find some reason to continue. Reasons might include things such as convenience, financial benefits, keeping up appearances, or a sense of obligation or duty.

**CONSUMMATE LOVE (INTIMACY + PASSION + COMMITMENT)** Consummate or complete love is marked by high intimacy, passion, and commitment. It is a form of love that many people desire, but Sternberg is doubtful that it can be sustained. As in romantic love, the passionate component typically decreases over time. Yet as Hacker (1979) points out, most of us know a couple that seems to epitomize this type of love: “We all know couples who have been married twenty or thirty years and still seem passionately attached to each other. A few look as if they just came away from bed, or can’t wait to get back there. We see them at restaurant tables for two, chattering together—and not about the children. Or they prefer to stay home by themselves, perhaps each engrossed in a book, so long as they are across from each other” (p. 27).

Sternberg’s three-component model of love has received good empirical support. People’s understanding of love’s primary features and the differences among various types of relationships appear to fit well with the intimacy/passion/commitment conception (Aron & Westbay, 1996; Sternberg, 1998b). For example, an ideal lover was rated high on all three components; friendship was rated high on intimacy and commitment, but low on passion; and a sibling relationship scored high on commitment, but low on intimacy and passion. Other taxonomies have also been developed and found empirically useful in capturing the richness of love and love styles (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1993, 2003; Lee, 1988). Of love’s many varieties, romantic and companionate love, involving varying degrees and combinations of romance/passion and friendship, seem the most basic and widely applicable way to think about differences in our closest relationships.

**Cultural Context of Love, Marriage, and Divorce**

In the remainder of this chapter, we will concentrate on one of our most important intimate relationships, namely marriage. Marriage and well-being are strongly connected. A successful marriage is one of the more powerful contributors to enhanced individual health and happiness (see Chapter 5). Unhappy marriages have an equally strong connection to unhappiness and diminished health. As David Myers remarked, “...a bad marriage is worse than no marriage at all” (1992, p. 158). Since most people marry, the level of well-being within society as a whole would also seem to be influenced by the overall quality and state of individual marriages. U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that about 90% of us will eventually marry at some time during our lives (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Noller & Feeney, 2006). U.S. census data for 2002 showed that 60% of men and 57% of women were currently married at the time they completed the survey. Statistics also tell us something about the state of marriage today compared to the past. Most of the news is not good. Despite its potential for contributing to lasting happiness, the ratio of successful to failed marriages is not high. Major reviews of census data, national attitude surveys, and longitudinal studies of married couples paint a rather dismal picture of the current state of marriage compared to the past (e.g., Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Bryant, Bolland, Burton, Hurt, & Bryant, 2006; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Miller et al., 2007; Myers, 2000b; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004).

Starting in the mid-1960s through the 1970s, dramatic changes occurred in marriage and these have been sustained to the present. Most of us are familiar with the most significant change: marriages no longer last. The divorce rate can be computed in several ways, but the basic conclusion remains the same. In today’s America, some 50% of all new marriages will end in divorce or separation (Myers, 2000b; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004). Other Western societies, such as Netherlands, Sweden, Canada, and England, have also seen increases in divorce, but U.S. divorce rates are nearly double those of other developed countries. Divorce rates have always been higher within the first 5 to 7 years of marriage, consistent with the conventional wisdom about the “7-year itch.” However, today many longer-term marriages also fail (i.e., 10 years and up). There appears to be no “safe” point beyond which all marriages last, although after 15 years, the divorce rate does drop substantially. And while most people will eventually remarry after divorce, second and third marriages fail at higher rates than first-time marriages.
Other statistics seem to signal a retreat from marriage (data from reviews by Bryant et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2007; Myers, 2000b; Noller, 2006). Compared to the 1950s and 1960s, people are marrying later (in their early 20s then, versus later 20s now), with more than 33% of people now remaining single into their middle 30s. A retreat from marriage is also suggested by the facts that more people are choosing to remain single; the remarriage rate after divorce has declined, particularly among women; and the cohabitation rate has increased. The percentage of people who live together before marriage has increased dramatically. Nearly a third of American households are made up of unmarried men and women living together. An estimated 50% of college students live with a romantic partner without being married. Does cohabitation increase the success of a future marriage? The idea that a “trial” marriage may help couples know if they are “right” for each other is undercut by the fact that couples who cohabit before marriage have higher divorce rates than non-cohabitating couples, unless they cohabit after getting engaged to be married. It appears that cohabitation before marriage attracts people with less commitment to marriage and less willingness to work at dealing with the inevitable conflicts that long-term relationships entail. Cohabitation may also make marriage seem less desirable and easier to dissolve if it is considered dissatisfying. Is cohabitation an alternative form of a stable marriage? Apparently not. Noller (2006) cites evidence that cohabiting couples part ways at rates of 50% within 2 years and 90% by five.

**Why Don’t Marriages Last?**

Cultural changes are clearly implicated in our country’s high divorce rate. If the divorce rate were 1% instead of 50%, then a failed marriage would suggest individualized causes of divorce. We could ask the few divorced couples, “Why didn’t your marriage make it when almost everyone else’s does?” And we could study what is unique and different about divorcing couples. However, a 50% divorce rate suggests two things. First, there must be commonalities in the reasons for divorce. There are about 1 million divorces per year in this country. Can there be 1 million different reasons for failed marriages? Second, the high prevalence of divorce suggests it is successful marriages, not failed ones that are becoming unique. That is, it seems increasingly appropriate to ask happy, long-term married couples, “How has your marriage made it when so many others don’t?”

**INCREASED FREEDOM AND DECREASED CONSTRAINTS** A number of researchers have noted the interplay between internal and external factors in people’s decisions to stay or leave a relationship (e.g., Kelley, 1979; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Levinger, 1976; Levinger & Levinger, 2003; Myers, 2000b). Both Levinger (1976) and Rusbult (1983), for example, have developed models focusing on how commitment to marriage is affected by a couple’s level of satisfaction, by the costs and barriers related to leaving the relationship, available alternatives, and the extent of accumulated personal investment in the marriage. If you consider the cultural/historical changes relevant to these factors over the last 40 years or so, one explanation for the rise in divorce seems clear. It is simply easier today than in the past to get out of an unhappy marriage and with fewer costs. In short, more freedom and fewer constraints means more divorce.

In the past, unhappy married couples considering a divorce faced a number of barriers to dissolving their relationship (see Bryant et al., 2006; Harvey & Weber, 2002; Miller et al., 2007; Myers, 2000b, for reviews). First, before the women’s movement and two-career families, many stay-at-home women were dependent on their husbands for their financial livelihood. Divorce often meant a dramatic drop in income, a relatively bleak future in providing for their children, and the prospect of entering the workforce with few job skills and little or no experience. Second, divorce at one time carried a significant cultural stigma for both men and women. Prominent politicians, for example, needed to keep their marital difficulties private so as to preserve a good family image because divorce could be very damaging to a political career. Third, the importance of staying together “for the sake of the kids” was a common belief. Sacrificing one’s own happiness for the well-being of one’s children was a stronger expectation in the past. Fourth, beliefs about the sanctity of marriage—that it should be preserved at all cost—were reflected in social norms and in the laws governing divorce. For example, a woman seeking advice about marriage difficulties from a friend, parent, counselor, or minister was more likely told to “kiss and make-up” (that is, to find ways to make the marriage work), rather than consider a divorce. The legal system also upheld the
importance of marriage by permitting a divorce only when relatively serious offenses or prolonged conflict could be shown. In the past, even if they weren’t particularly happy, married couples could find a number of reasons for maintaining a commitment to their marriage. This may have led some couples to work out their difficulties and develop satisfying marriages. For others, it may have meant being trapped in an emotionally empty or conflict-ridden relationship.

The direction of cultural change since the 1960s has been toward a reduction in the barriers to, and costs of, divorce. Marriages between two people with professional careers are now quite common. Each spouse can make it on her or his own if the marriage ends. Within the United States, women’s increasing participation in the workforce is strongly correlated with the rise in divorce rates. And, a woman who brings in significantly more money than her husband has a higher risk of future divorce than a woman whose income is equal to, or less than, her husband’s (Miller et al., 2007). Increased financial independence allows greater freedom to leave an unhappy marriage. Spouses who do divorce are less likely to face social disapproval. Divorce, in large measure because it is so common, is not stigmatized as strongly as in the past. Politicians, corporate executives, and other prominent people no longer cover up their failed marriages and seem to suffer few, if any, consequences. Surveys show that staying together for the sake of the kids is also less of a barrier to divorce today. Thornton (1989) found that by 1985 only 20% of women in his survey believed that unhappily married couples should stay together because they had children. A common belief today seems to be that a stable and conflict-free single-parent family is a better environment for kids than a two-parent family with emotional problems.

Finally, the courts and conventional wisdom have also accommodated the changing cultural context of marriage. Many states now have no-fault divorce laws that grant divorces because of “irreconcilable differences,” which would seem to include everything from boredom and unhappiness to, “I think I can do better with someone else.” Because divorce is commonly accepted, the advice and help couples in troubled marriages receive from others is likely to be more accepting of divorce as well. In summary, compared to the past, more people today seem to believe that divorce is a reasonable and viable solution to marital problems. The increased freedom to dissolve a marriage, like the constraints that held marriages together in the past, may be a dual-edged sword that cuts both ways. On one hand, freedom means the possibility of a better life, rather than being trapped in an unhappy marriage. On the other hand, increased freedom may make ending a marriage too easy an option. That is, rather than making a commitment to do the hard work that might resolve marital difficulties, people may view divorce as the simplest and easiest solution.

GETTING MARRIED AND STAYING MARRIED: IS LOVE THE ANSWER? More so today than in the past, marriage is not a prerequisite for having sex, for having children, or for a woman’s financial well-being. Sex outside marriage is widely accepted (Myers, 2000b); a third of children are born out of wedlock (Miller et al., 2007); and many women enjoy financial independence. A man’s ability to provide for his family is less important to women when they can provide for themselves. In addition, people used to believe that a pre-marital pregnancy meant the couple “had to get married.” If they didn’t, we had the image of the “shotgun” wedding, in which the bride’s father compelled the groom to take responsibility for the child and to maintain the social respectability of his daughter. Today, marriage is more of a choice—freer of the constraints, social norms, and practical necessities of the past. Survey research suggests marriage is a choice that is increasingly and more exclusively based on love.

Think about the following question: If a person had all the other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you were not in love? When American college students were surveyed in 1967, 35% of men and 76% of women said yes to this question (Simpson et al., 1986). Men evidently had more romantic notions for the basis for marriage, whereas women were more practical-minded. For women, desirable qualities trumped love. However, nearly three decades later, “no” was the overwhelming answer to the same question by both men and women (86% of men and 91% of women said no) (Allgeier & Wiederman, 1991, cited in Hatfield & Rapson, 2006). In current American culture, being in love appears to be the major reason to get married. The ability of love to prevail over differences in people’s social status, religion, backgrounds, and life circumstances is a prominent theme in romantic movies. Think of the classic love story in the movie...
Passion and romance have much do with why people marry. Why do they have to do with why people divorce? If you recall our discussion of the difference between friendship and romantic love, you can probably anticipate the answer. First, many social observers believe that the increased emphasis on passion/romance is linked to the increased emotional expectations for marriage (Miller et al., 2007; Myers, 2000b; Phillips, 1988). As practical reasons for marriage have faded, expectations of personal satisfaction and fulfillment seem to have taken their place. A marriage today seems to depend more and more on the “sweetness of its contents” (Berscheid & Campbell, 1981). Why should you stay married if you’re marriage is not happy, satisfying, exciting, and sexually/emotionally fulfilling? In the past, answers might have included children, finances, and social respectability. Today, the answer seems to be that if you’re not happy and fulfilled there is something wrong with your marriage. The concern here is that these expectations are simply too high and set people up for disappointment when the realities of marriage start to sink in. Disillusionment may then lead to divorce. Clearly, saying that people expect too much of marriage is a judgment call related to the scope and degree of expectations. A good marriage certainly is a significant source of personal happiness and no one expects or wants an unhappy marriage. But the exact point at which expectations become unreasonable is difficult to pinpoint.

However, a second problem with the romantic love–marriage connection helps clarify the issue of reasonable versus unreasonable expectations. Here, the evidence is fairly clear. One significant difficulty with passionate romance is that it does not last. Marrying for romance is one thing, but staying married only if passionate romance continues is quite another. Evaluating a marriage primarily on the strength of romantic and passionate emotions seems a recipe for disillusionment and divorce. Longitudinal studies consistently find a decline in men and women’s ratings of satisfaction with their marriages, ratings of overall marriage quality, and the frequency of expressions of positive affection (Bradbury, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1999). As you can see in Figure 11.2 based on Kurdek’s (1991) data, the decline in marital satisfaction is steepest in the first few years of marriage, then levels off to remain somewhat stable, and then shows another drop at 8 to 10 years. Studies of long-term marriages (20 years and more) do show more
stable levels of satisfaction and there is some debate about whether there is an upswing in satisfaction in very long-term marriages (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). These data do not mean that couples typically go from newlywed bliss to misery. The declines are relative to where most marriages start. The number of couples describing their marriages as “very happy” is high at the beginning, but much lower as the length of marriage increases. At one time, the decline in marriage satisfaction was thought to be associated with having children and assuming the challenges associated with parenthood. However, more recent research shows similar declines occurring among couples without children (Berscheid & Reis, 1998).

Research by Huston and his colleagues provides an instructive example of how these changes are related to divorce (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001; Huston, NiChuis, & Smith, 2001). This study is also known as the PAIR Project, which stands for The Process of Adaptation in Intimate Relationships. This is an ongoing longitudinal study of 168 couples that were married in 1981. Results for the first 13 years showed that 35% of the couples had divorced, another 20% were unhappy with their marriages, and only 45% were considered happily married. Even the happily married couples were less affectionate and less satisfied than they had been at the beginning of their marriages. PAIR Project researchers found strong support for a disillusionment model of marital satisfaction and divorce. The couples at greatest risk for divorce were those who experienced the steepest declines in marital satisfaction and feelings of love and romance. Ironically, couples that divorced after 7 years began their marriages with higher levels of both affection and romance. "As newlyweds, the couples who divorced after 7 or more years were almost giddily affectionate, displaying about one-third more affection than spouses who were later happily married. However, consistent with the disillusionment model, the intensity of their

![FIGURE 11.2 Decline in Marital Satisfaction for Husbands and Wives Over 10 Years](image-url)

and (b) because both probably co-exist in healthy length and developmental stage of a relationship, because the effect of each may depend on the appraisals may be more apparent than real: (a) strong feelings of intimacy. 

Swann (1990) put it, people want to be “known”—to the extent that this idealiza-
tion is mutual, it is easy to see how each person’s strengths and weaknesses. Imagine if excessive drinking were given a positive spin or if you glossed over your partner’s lack of financial planning and checkbook balancing ability. Probably both realism and a degree of positive idealization co-exist in healthy longer-term relationships. Research suggests that idealized and positive views of the partner contribute to satisfac-
tion and feelings of intimacy in short-term dating relationships and at the beginning of marriage. However, as relationships mature, more accurate information becomes important and contributes more to satisfaction and intimacy (Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Too much idealization may actually get a longer-term relationship in trouble. It is important to know with some degree of accuracy your partner’s strengths and weaknesses. IMAGINE if you glossed over your partner’s lack of financial planning and checkbook balancing ability. Probably both realism and a degree of positive idealization co-exist in healthy longer-term relationships. Realism about specific traits and abilities would seem to contribute both to feelings of intimacy and to more effective assignment of relationship roles and responsibilities according to each partner’s strengths and weaknesses.

On the other hand, some idealization is undoubtedly important in making people feel an overall sense of positive regard and acceptance. That is, we need to feel that, despite the reality of our imperfections, we are loved, appreciated, and positively viewed. A recent longitudinal study of married couples by Neff and Karney (2005) affirmed the dual importance of accuracy and global adoration. Feelings of mutual and global adoration (“you’re the greatest”) were widely shared among newlyweds. However, the benefits of this adoration depended on whether it reflected an accurate understanding of partners’ specific traits. Adoration alone was not enough. Neff and Karney concluded that “Global adoration lacking in specific accuracy not only leaves spouses vulnerable to disappointment as their partners’ faults surface over the course of the relationship but also may lead partners to doubt the credibility of their spouses’ love” (2005, p. 495).

REALISM OR IDEALISM? Most couples seem to go through a period of disillusionment, as the realities of marriage sink in and the idealization of one’s partner and one’s relationship begin to fade. Does this mean that the happy couples are those who began their marriages with more realistic views and avoided disillusionment? Or might it be that happy couples began with the same illusions, but found ways to maintain them? The research literature does not provide a definitive answer to these questions. The value of both realism and idealization are supported. Studies by Murray and her colleagues suggest that some degree of idealization contributes to a couple’s happiness and satisfaction (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b). Couples who had the most positive views of each other’s personal qualities were not only happier, but were less likely to break up. Murray and her colleagues believe that the tendency to view our partners more positively than they see themselves means that we overlook or put a positive spin on our partners’ shortcomings. This is the view that mothers often have of their children. They see the best in their kids and down-
play or ignore faults. To the extent that this idealiza-
tion is mutual, it is easy to see how each person’s self-esteem and satisfaction with a relationship would be enhanced.

Self-verification theory posits that people desire evaluations that affirm or verify their own self-views (Swann, 1983, 1987). Specifically, people want positive feedback about positive qualities and negative evaluations of their less desirable qualities. We each want verification of our own self-view. As Swann (1990) put it, people want to be “known”—not necessarily “adored.” Relationships are enhanced when your partner affirms your own self-view because this means that she or he knows you as you know yourself. The authenticity of your partner’s understanding of “who you really are” creates strong feelings of intimacy.

The opposing nature of idealistic and realistic appraisals may be more apparent than real: (a) because the effect of each may depend on the length and developmental stage of a relationship, and (b) because both probably co-exist in healthy relationships. Research suggests that idealized and positive views of the partner contribute to satisfac-
tion and feelings of intimacy in short-term dating relationships and at the beginning of marriage.
paying bills, to getting older kids to their many after-school activities, may take a toll on a marriage.

National surveys show some drop (5% or so) in the percentage of married couples describing their marriage as very happy today compared to the 1970s (Glenn, 1991; Glenn & Weaver, 1988). The cause of this decline is unclear. Does it reflect an actual decline in marital happiness, perhaps due to the increase in conflict? Or might it be the exaggerated expectations of marital happiness that are disappointed by the realities of marriage, or some combination of both? Whatever the case, it is worth remembering two facts: (1) married people are still consistently found to be significantly happier than never-married singles; and (2) there is a strong tendency for very happy people to report that their marriages are also happy and satisfying (Myers, 2000a). The question is, “What are the ingredients of a happy marriage?” Some of the answers are suggested by studies of what people bring to a marriage.

**WHAT PEOPLE BRING TO ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

Experts seem to agree that cultural changes have made happy long-term marriages somewhat more difficult to achieve today than in the past. The success or failure of marriage also depends on the particular mix of the two spouses’ characteristics. People bring a diversity of personality traits and beliefs to their romantic relationships (Fitness, 2006; Vangelisti, 2006). Some people are better suited to intimate relationships than others. For example, the emotional instability and negative emotionality of people high in the personality trait of neuroticism make satisfying relationships difficult for them to achieve, and we know that drug abuse, alcoholism, and physical abuse are frequent causes of divorce (see Miller et al., 2007). Some amount of failure undoubtedly also occurs because the wrong people got married. As they try to build a life together, a married couple’s differences may cause too much conflict, making love difficult to sustain. One of the more important things people bring to a marriage is their particular style of relating to intimate partners.

**Attachment Style**

Think for a minute about your first close and intimate relationship. When did you: first learn about trusting someone and having your emotional needs attended to and cared for; first reveal your deeper feelings, fears, and needs; first feel that no one else could replace this person in your life; first display lots of mutual affection, like hugging, kissing, and holding; first know that this relationship was for life? For most of us, our first “love” experiences were with parents—often our moms. Nearly all of us develop an intense attachment bond with our primary caretakers—most frequently our biological parents. **Attachment theory** raises the intriguing possibility that some of our most basic, and perhaps unconscious, emotional responses to intimacy are shaped by the kind of relationship we had with our parents. If this seems a bit far-fetched, consider this: Think of a romantic involvement in which you got to know your partner extremely well, including all his or her little quirks and peculiarities. Then, think of the first time you met your partner’s family. Did you have any “aha” experiences such as, “Now I see why you avoid emotionally charged issues in our relationship. Your whole family does!” Or, “No wonder you say whatever is on your mind, even if it’s negative and critical. Your family is like the show Brothers and Sisters on TV—absolute honesty in expressing feelings, no matter who it might offend!” How early relationships might affect later ones begins with studies of infants and young children.

**Infant Attachments**

Psychiatrist John Bowlby was one of the first to describe different types of attachment between children and their parents. During World War II, many British parents sent their children to the country where they would be safer from Germany’s nightly bombings of London. Bowlby observed that children’s reactions to separation from their parents were quite varied and seemed to reflect different kinds of parent—child bonds or attachments (see Bowlby, 1988, for a current review). Ainsworth and her colleagues developed a more formal assessment of attachment styles using what became known as the “strange situation test” (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Paralleling Bowlby’s earlier work, these researchers found three distinct attachment patterns between infants and mothers (or any caretaker to whom an infant is attached). The strange situation test involves observing an infant, its mother, and an adult stranger in an unfamiliar room with toys available. The mother and stranger move in and out of the room according to a set sequence.
Infants are sometimes with their mothers only, sometimes with the stranger only, and sometimes alone. A majority of infants tested in this situation show a secure attachment style. In this style, the infant explores the room and the toys confidently when its mother is present, becomes mildly upset and explores less when it is left by the mother (either alone or with the stranger), shows pleasure and reassurance when the mother returns, and then resumes exploring the room. Home observations show that mothers of securely attached infants responded warmly and promptly to their infants’ desires for contact comfort.

A minority of infants show an avoidant attachment style. Here, infants do not show any visible distress when separated from their mothers and, most tellingly, they actively avoid contact with their mothers when the mothers re-enter the room. At home, mothers of avoidant infants are consistently negative, rejecting, critical and often neglectful, in the form of failing to provide comfort when their infants are upset.

An even smaller minority of infants showed an anxious-ambivalent attachment style, in which the infant does not explore much, even when its mother is present, becomes very upset when she leaves, and both seeks and simultaneously resists her comfort when she returns. Mothers of this style are found to be unpredictable in their responses to their infants’ desires for comfort, sometimes showing a positive response and sometimes responding in a rejecting or controlling manner.

The nature of childhood attachment has been shown to predict behavior in later relationships (e.g., Ainsworth, 1989; Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardiff, 2001). As you might expect, securely attached infants generally go on to have healthier relationships with others. For example, longitudinal studies find that compared to insecure children, securely attached children tend to be more socially skilled and competent and are more likely to have close families, friendships, and longer-term romantic relations (e.g., Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004). Other studies find that attachment styles may be transferred from one relationship to the next, building upon early attachment histories (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006) and that a couple’s personal attachment styles are predictive of how they perceive, feel about, and relate to each other after the birth of their first child (Wilson, Rholes, Simpson, & Tran, 2007). In this latter study, anxious and avoidant styles were related to less supportive partner responses and more jealousy of the infant.

Researchers do not believe that early childhood experiences represent adulthood destiny (see Hazan et al., 2006). Despite evidence of moderate levels of stability in attachment style over the first 19 years of life (Fraley, 2002), people’s orientation toward relationships can be altered and changed by life experiences. Divorce, death of a spouse or parent, new relationship experiences, and new partners can all influence our basic attachment style. In addition, studies that do show stability may be confounded with genetically-determined temperament. Some infants are constitutionally “laid back” or “high strung,” making the infant’s temperament—not treatment by parents—primarily responsible for the nature of the parent–child relationship.

It also needs to be noted that the meaning and value of different attachment styles may be unique to Western individualistic societies like the United States. For example, Japanese parents appear to foster insecure attachment and “needy” children when evaluated by Western attachment criteria (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000). Japanese parents appear indulgent, permissive, and overly protective to Western eyes. They do not seem to foster the secure base necessary for independence and self-confidence that defines secure attachment. However, these judgments likely reflect Western standards and biases. The Japanese and all other cultures have their own criteria for relationships and they raise their children accordingly. They nurture healthy children who are well-adapted to their culture. Rothbaum and his colleagues point out that attachment theory and measurement, in its current Westernized form, simply does not fit other, non-Westernized cultures.

Despite these qualifications, the possibility remains that our childhood experiences, at least in the West, may be significant. For example, a person whose own childhood was marked by an absence of warmth and love might be strongly motivated to find an intense and all-absorbing romantic love relationship as a teen or adult. And it makes sense that a person who experienced harsh criticism and rejection when she sought the love of her parents may be “gun shy” when it comes to developing intimate adult relationships. Finally, if you experienced a healthy, warm, and loving relationship with your parents, wouldn’t this inform your ideas about desirable and undesirable relationships in the future, perhaps even influencing...

the qualities you look for in a spouse? Setting aside all the possible Freudian dynamics, why wouldn’t a young girl or boy think of marrying someone like Dad or Mom if they loved, respected, and admired their parents and experienced an enjoyable childhood because their parents were good parents who were happily married?

With both the possibilities and qualifications in mind, researchers have found attachment styles to be extremely useful in capturing adults’ cognitive and emotional orientation toward romantic and other close relationships (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Measures of adult attachment styles have a good deal of face validity in the sense that we can often “see” ourselves or someone we know as typifying one, or some combination of the different attachment styles.

**Adult Attachment Styles**

Which of the following would best describe how you think about close relationships? (from Hazan & Shaver, 1987):

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

B. 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 worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

C. I find 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 want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away.

Shaver and his colleagues found that this simple one-item test was sufficient for people to reliably classify themselves according to their attachment style (A is avoidant, B is secure, and C is anxious-ambivalent) (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Over time, both the conceptualization and measurement of adult attachment styles have been refined. The current view is that attachment styles are continuous rather than discrete categories and reflect two underlying dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998; Hazan et al., 2006). The anxiety dimension describes a fear of abandonment and rejection and is assumed to express low self-esteem and a negative view of self. A lack of self-confidence and a belief in one’s inadequacy causes anxiety in close relationships, perhaps because a person feels that her faults will be discovered or that he is not the kind of person that anyone would love. Conversely, people with a positive self-view are low in anxiety, do not fear abandonment, and are comfortable and confident in their intimate relationships.

The avoidance dimension describes the degree of trust and comfort (or lack thereof) in becoming intimate with others. High intimacy-avoidance presumably stems from viewing others with a mistrustful and suspicious eye or dismissing intimate relationships altogether as unnecessary because of a strong belief in one’s own self-reliance (i.e., “I don’t need intimate relationships”). Conversely, people low in avoidance are more trusting of others, enjoy intimacy, and do not worry that they will be mistreated. Because people can be high or low on the anxiety and/or the avoidance dimension, four different attachment styles can be described. These styles are overlapping, but for purposes of clarity they are described below as four distinct styles. Included in these descriptions are results from the multitude of studies that have examined the connection between individual differences in attachment style and characteristics of people’s close and romantic relationships (see Bartholomew, 1990; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney, 1999; Hazan et al., 2006, for reviews). Figure 11.3 shows the four styles defined by the two dimensions of avoidance and anxiety.

**Secure attachment** describes people with positive self-images who are low on both relationship anxiety and avoidance. These people are confident in themselves and the ability of their relationships to satisfy their needs. Compared to other attachment styles, the intimate and romantic relationships of people with a secure attachment style are characterized by greater trust and closeness, more positive than negative emotions, lower levels of jealousy, higher levels of marital satisfaction and adjustment, and more sensitive and supportive responses to the needs of one’s
FIGURE 11.3 Four Attachment Styles Defined by Level of Anxiety and Avoidance

partner. Securely attached people are comfortable seeking support from others in times of distress. Surveys suggest that about 60% of people fit this attachment style (Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver, 1997). Overall, secure attachment is associated with longer, stronger, and more satisfying intimate relations.

The preoccupied attachment style describes people who are low on avoidance because they want and enjoy intimacy, but are high in anxiety as a result of their low self-esteem. This style was referred to as anxious/ambivalent in previous classifications. The preoccupied style reflects a need for the approval and affection of others to prop up one’s own lack of self-esteem. Such people might be described as “needy,” “clingy,” or even “greedy” in their need for intimacy and acceptance. While they may appear to be sensitive, caring, and supporting, these behaviors stem more from their own self-centered needs than from genuine concern for their partner. Their fear of abandonment may cause them to be highly controlling of their partners, to experience wide mood swings, and to experience intense jealousy concerning their romantic involvements. Although an extreme example, one can’t help but think about the neurotic lover portrayed by Glenn Close in the movie Fatal Attraction as exemplifying the worst features of preoccupied attachment.

People with a fearful avoidant attachment style are high in avoidance and high in anxiety. A fear of rejection keeps people with this style from getting close to others, and their low opinion of themselves seems to be the major reason. If you don’t like or love yourself you may assume others won’t love you either. A fear of being unlovable and, therefore, likely to be rejected when people get to know you well is strong motivation to avoid intimacy. People with this style view others as untrustworthy and likely to let them down. They feel that relying on others is too risky and are more pessimistic about lasting love. As you might expect, fearful attachment is associated with a variety of interpersonal difficulties including less willingness to provide comfort and support to others and being perceived by others as emotionally distant and even hostile.

Dismissing avoidant attachment combines high avoidance with low anxiety. This style describes people who are confident, self-reliant, and take pride in their independence. They view others as essentially irrelevant. That is, whether people like them or not is not a major concern, because they believe they can make it on their own. Intimate involvements with others are thought to be fraught with problems and not worth the trouble. The relationships of people with this style are marked by lower enjoyment, less commitment, and less intimacy compared to those with secure and preoccupied styles. If you recall our earlier discussion of the universal need for human attachments, you may wonder if people who dismiss the importance of relationships are exceptions to this general rule. A recent study titled, “No man is an island: The need to belong and dismissing avoidant attachment style,” suggests that the answer is no (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006). In this study, people with a dismissive orientation were found to experience more positive feelings in response to feedback that others liked and accepted them than people with a low dismissive view. Perhaps because dismissive types typically receive less affirmation from others, they are more affected when they do. Contrary to their claims, dismissive individuals do seem to care about how people think of them. Carvallo and Gabriel conclude that “...people with a dismissive attachment style also have a fundamental need to feel connected to others but because they have buried it under denial and a hard shell of indifference, it can only be glimpsed by giving them a taste of what all people need and desire most: inclusion and acceptance from others” (2006, p. 707).

Overall, secure attachment is a strong foundation for healthy and satisfying relationships, particularly if this style is shared between romantic partners. In their review of studies, Miller and his
colleagues (2007) provide a long list of positive outcomes associated with this style. Compared to the other styles, secure people are more supportive of their partners, particularly in times of distress. They are more disclosing of intimate life details and have more satisfying social lives with their friends and lovers. Secure people also enjoy higher levels of emotional well-being and lower levels of emotional distress. Securely attached people seem to recapitulate the health of their relationships with their parents, which built a strong foundation for the rich and satisfying relationships that contribute so much to a happy life.

Research suggests that the majority (60%) of us fit, moreso than less, into the secure attachment style. However, it is important to remember that the four types are meant to be continuous—not discrete—categories. So, despite the virtues of secure attachment, most of us are probably a combination of attachment orientations defined by our degree of anxiety and avoidance. The more problematic styles are in the minority, although we can probably think of someone who fits the preoccupied, fearful avoidant, or dismissive style. The point here is to resist believing that, just because you are not overly confident in yourself or that you are somewhat cautious in opening up to others, this means you fit one of the negative styles and will have relationship problems, or that this fully explains the problems you have. The distance between high self-esteem and low self-esteem and between caution and avoidance is large. Even if we are not “pure” secure attachment types, we can still have satisfying relationships.

**Conflict and Communication Skills**

Attachment styles describe important features of people’s global orientation toward intimate relationships. More specific behaviors and ways of thinking that enhance or damage relationships have also been studied extensively. A great deal of research has focused on how relationship partners deal with conflict and interpret negative behaviors. This is because some amount of conflict is inevitable in our intimate relations. Married couples may confront differences in their expectations and desires regarding managing finances, spending habits, frequency of sex, displays of affection, raising kids, dealing with in-laws, and keeping the house clean. Studies make clear that the success of a marriage depends heavily on open communication about disagreements and the ability to resolve them.

**Focus on Research: The Power of the “Bad”**

A curious implication of relationship research is that once a relationship is well established, its success seems to depend more on the absence of conflict (the bad) than it does on the presence of affection (the good) (Reis & Gable, 2003). A couple’s satisfaction with their marriage is tied significantly more strongly to the level of conflict than it is to the level of positive behaviors. A well-known daily diary study found that nearly two-thirds of couples’ marital satisfaction was related to the occurrence (or lack) of negative behaviors and conflict, and much less so to the occurrence (or lack) of positive behaviors (Wills, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). In our intimate relationships, the bad seems much stronger than the good. A single negative act appears capable of “undoing” countless acts of affection and kindness.

The most extensive studies of marital conflict have been conducted by John Gottman and his colleagues (Gottman, 1994, 1998, 1999; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Among his many studies were intensive observations of married couples in his “love lab.” This was an apartment set up to video-tape verbal, nonverbal, and physiological responses of couples as they talked about topics posed by Gottman. Some topics concerned sources of conflict and how they viewed each other’s strengths and weaknesses, but the main point was to get couples to talk and to analyze their style of communication. Both the husbands’ and wives’ verbal and nonverbal behaviors were carefully recorded. Observations captured both subtle nonverbal behaviors (like a faint frown or raised eyebrows), and more obvious behaviors (such as smiling, one spouse interrupting the other, and expressions of anger, resentment, affection, and support).

Gottman and his colleagues consistently found that negative communication patterns were more predictive of marital satisfaction level and overall relationship quality than were displays of affection and kindness. Patterns of negative interaction were summarized as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” because of their destructive effects on relationships. The “Four Horsemen” are:
1. Criticism: A high percentage of negative as compared to positive comments, remarks, and nonverbal communications.

2. Defensiveness: Taking comments and criticism personally and responding to the feelings they created, rather than to the behavior they describe. This included rehearsing defensive thoughts such as “I’m not going to take it any more,” or “Next time he/she says that, I am going to say…”

3. Stonewalling: Punishing a partner with the “silent treatment” by clamping up, refusing to respond and holding in anger, resentment, hurt feelings, and the real reasons for refusing to talk.

4. Contempt: Showing scorn, anger, and rejection through verbal and nonverbal means (e.g., rolling of eyes) and generally condemning the actions, motives, or personality of the other.

All marriages involve some amount of mutual criticism and hurtful things said in the heat of argument. Gottman’s research found that it was not simply the presence of negative behaviors that distinguished happy/stable couples from those headed for divorce. Instead, what mattered was the ratio of positive to negative behaviors and the degree of reciprocation of negative behaviors (“negative affect reciprocity”). Somewhat amazingly, in counting up the positives and negatives in “love lab” observations, a ratio of 5 positive interactions to 1 negative interaction was found to be the dividing line between successful and unsuccessful relationships. That is, in healthy relationships, likely to last, there were five times more positive than negative interactions. Troubled relationships had very low ratios, meaning that negatives and positives were about equal, or that negatives out numbered positives. The 5-to-1 ratio supports the general principle that “bad is stronger than good.” Evidently, the harm done by one bad thing needs to be offset by five good things for marriages to be satisfying. The 5-to-1 ratio suggests a fairly obvious approach to improving the quality of a relationship—namely, find ways to reward your partner! Gottman and Levenson (1992) argue that frequent and simple acts of kindness, concern, care, and affection can shift the ratio into the positive range. This makes conflict less likely and easier to resolve when it occurs.

Negative affect reciprocity may be one reason unhappy couples have a low positive-to-negative ratio. This term describes a tit-for-tat exchange of negative expressions, both verbal and nonverbal, that Gottman and his colleagues found contributes to the downward spiral of a relationship. If you think about your own relationships, you know that it’s hard not to retaliate against a critical or hurtful comment made by an intimate partner. One partner’s negative critical comment invites reciprocation from the other, which invites further retaliation, which may then escalate into a heated argument. As Gottman notes, anger, conflict, and disagreements can all be opportunities for deepening mutual understanding and increasing future satisfaction. Successful couples find ways to turn disagreements into growth in their relationship, and ways to repair the damage of conflict. However, distressed couples seem stuck in this negative affect reciprocity pattern and are unable or unwilling to respond in more constructive ways.

Demand/withdraw can be added to the list of negative interaction patterns described by Gottman’s research. This pattern reflects what seems to be a fairly typical gender difference in response to conflict (Grossman & Wood, 1993). Women, who are often more attuned to and concerned about the ongoing quality of close relationships, make more demands to resolve problems and to improve a marriage than men (Christensen & Heavey, 1993). Relationship problems raised by one partner are sensitive issues because they directly or indirectly imply criticism of the other partner. In raising these issues, women are generally more emotionally expressive and report more intense emotions than men (Grossman & Wood, 1993). Men seem generally less sensitive to relationship problems and less comfortable talking about them. These differences may produce a pattern of interactions in which the woman makes demands to talk about a concern and the man withdraws or becomes defensive and refuses to confront the issue (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). This frustrates the wife, who then makes more demands, which may lead to more strident withdrawal on her husband’s part, like stomping off and slamming the door on the way out. This interaction pattern would likely frustrate both husband and wife and decrease the odds that problems will be resolved.

Attributions

In addition to negative communication patterns, people’s characteristic style of explaining their partner’s transgressions and faults also has much to do
with relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). If your partner forgets to do a favor you requested, or misses an important occasion like your birthday or anniversary, how do you explain it? Does it mean they really don’t care about you, or do you give them the benefit of the doubt and assume there must have been a good reason? As you probably guessed, satisfied couples assume the best and unhappy couples assume the worst. Relationship-enhancing attributions are explanations for a partner’s faults and transgressions that “excuse” the behavior because it is seen as determined by situations, rather than as a reflection of an enduring trait or lack of concern for the other partner. “Having a bad day” or “just being forgetful because of preoccupation with other things,” puts a positive spin on otherwise negative and potentially hurtful actions. Enhancing attributions also work on the positive side. Positive behaviors are seen as stemming from a partner’s desirable qualities and from their care and concern for the relationship. When good things happen, they are attributed to the person—not the situation. “He or she is so thoughtful and loving, look what I got for our anniversary.” In contrast, unhappy couples show a distress-maintaining pattern of attributions. Negative behaviors, hurtful comments, and forgetting special occasions are attributed to permanent characteristics of the individual. “This just shows that you don’t really care, and nothing is going to change because that’s just the way you are!” It is little wonder that longitudinal studies have linked distress-maintaining attributions to low marital satisfaction throughout the course of a marriage (Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 2000).

**Implicit Theories and Expectations**

People come into relationships with different implicit or informal theories about how relationships are supposed to work. These general ideas may shape the more specific ways people respond to, and evaluate, intimate relations. Knee and his colleagues have identified two distinct implicit theories, defined either by a belief in romantic destiny or by a belief in relationship growth (Knee, 1998). The basic premise of the romantic destiny theory is that two people are either compatible or they are not. If a marriage runs into difficulty, this signals a lack of compatibility—namely, an assumption that “we aren’t right for each other.” The growth theory, on the other hand, assumes relationships are challenging and will grow and develop over time. As Knee and his colleagues described it, people following the growth theory “... are primarily interested in developing the relationship, and believe that relationships grow, not despite obstacles, but rather because of them” (Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary, 2003, p. 41). Sample items from their Implicit Theory of Relationship Scale make the distinction between the two theories very clear. People who hold to the romantic destiny theory endorse items such as, “A successful relationship is mostly a matter of finding a compatible partner right from the start,” and “Early troubles in a relationship signify a poor match between partners.” Growth theory advocates would agree with items like the following: “Challenges and obstacles in a relationship can make love even stronger,” and “It takes a lot of time and effort to cultivate a good relationship” (Knee et al., 2003, p. 41).

Research by Knee and his colleagues suggests that these general beliefs influence many aspects of a relationship—perhaps most importantly, the decision to stay or leave (Knee, Nanayakkar, Vietor, & Neighbors, 2002; Knee, Patrick, Vietor, Nanayakkar, & Neighbors, 2002; Knee, Patrick, Vietor, & Neighbors, 2004). A strong belief in romantic destiny leads to an interpretation of conflict as a sign of incompatibility over which couples can exert little control (i.e., “We’re either right for each other or we’re not”). Attributions for problems are likely to focus on individual traits (such as personality incompatibility) rather than circumstances. This makes relationship problems seem more stable and enduring and thus, unfixable. As marriages progress, a romantic destiny view may cause that typical drop in marital satisfaction (described earlier) to be seen as a sure sign of a bad choice. In fact, research shows that people with strong destiny beliefs are more likely to end a relationship if they are not satisfied with how it goes at the beginning (Knee, 1998).

The work-it-out perspective of the relationship growth theory is clearly a more hopeful and, many would say, more realistic approach to marriage, unless of course there really is one “right” person for each of us, and our job is to find that person for a marriage made in heaven. A belief in relationship growth provides a more positive and accepting perspective on the inevitable conflicts and disappointments married couples confront. From a growth perspective, conflict is a natural part of all relationships and does not mean that someone has
to be at fault or that partners are incompatible. Instead, problems are seen as temporary and situational and, thus, solvable and likely to pass. Therefore, effort and commitment can make the difference between failure and success.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE CONTOURS OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Two lessons of positive psychology that you have hopefully learned by now are: (1) The absence of the “bad” does not mean the presence of the “good.” (2) Positive and negative emotional experiences are independent of one another. Applied to marriage, this means that, while the negative relationship behaviors we just reviewed make a marriage bad, their absence does not necessarily make a marriage good. It also means that good relationship behaviors are not simply the opposite of destructive behaviors. As Reis and Gable put it, “Relating well is not the same thing as not relating badly” (2003, p. 152). What takes a marriage above zero? Beyond just the absence of the bad to some level of enjoyment, contentment, and happiness? Studies of long-term and happily married couples provide some clues.

What Can Happy Couples Tell Us?

In a seminal study by Lauer and Lauer, 351 couples (married 15 years or more) were asked to select from a list of 39 statements those that best explained why their marriages had lasted (Lauer & Lauer, 1985; Lauer et al., 1990). Husbands and wives responded separately. The overwhelming majority of couples (300) described their marriages as happy ones. And men and women showed an amazing degree of agreement as to why their marriages were happy and successful. The most frequently endorsed reasons for a happy and enduring marriage can be grouped into two general categories: friendship and commitment.

FRIENDSHIP Deep and abiding friendship was the top reason couples gave for their lasting marriages. Both husbands and wives agreed, “My spouse is my best friend.” Other statements clarified what they meant. “I like my spouse as a person.” “My spouse has grown more interesting.” “I confide in my spouse.” In response to the more open-ended questions on the survey, one woman commented that she would want her husband as a friend even if they weren’t married—that’s how much she liked him. A man married over 30 years said it had almost been like being married to “a series of different women” because he had watched his wife grow and change over time (Lauer & Lauer, 1985, p. 24). He found his wife more interesting now than when they first married. Others shared that they thought liking was as important as loving in a marriage. These positive views of marriage partners were reflected in the enjoyment of shared activities. “We laugh together.” Men endorsed, “We share outside hobbies and interests” and women, “We have a stimulating exchange of ideas.” Shared activities that are fun, exciting, and arousing may be very important in offsetting the boredom that can set in, in long-term marriages. This possibility received experimental support from a study that found an increase in global marital satisfaction after couples completed a novel and physiologically arousing activity (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000). In this study, married couples traversed an obstacle course while holding a cylindrical pillow between their bodies or heads. No hands, legs, or teeth were allowed to keep the pillow from falling to the ground. Couples found this activity, reminiscent of sack races at summer camp, to be fun and exciting. Evidently, the positive emotion they experienced generalized to their relationship, resulting in a more favorable evaluation. One ingredient in a successful marriage seems to be the ability to find exciting and fun things to do together.

Husbands and wives in happy marriages also share similar views on many of the potentially contentious issues within a marriage. “We agree on aims and goals.” “We agree on a philosophy of life.” “We agree on how and how often to show affection.” “We agree about our sex life.” Interestingly, fewer than 10% of these couples believed that enjoyable sex kept their marriages together. Most couples were happy with their sex lives, but others, even if they weren’t, or had stopped having sex altogether, were still happy with their marriages (Lauer, et al., 1990). Evidently, if you have an enjoyable intimate friend as a spouse, sex is not critical to the success of your marriage, at least after you have been married for 15 years or more.

COMMITMENT Happy couples recognized the importance of strong commitment to making their
marriages work and agreed with the statement, “Marriage is a long-term commitment.” The basis of their commitment was also suggested by other responses (e.g., “Marriage is sacred.” “An enduring marriage is important to social stability.” “I want the relationship to succeed.”). Consistent with Knee’s work on the growth theory of relationships, successful couples believed that all marriages run into troubles and that you just have to “take it” until you can find ways to work it out. Agreement that “We discuss things calmly” suggests that happy couples take a positive approach to resolving conflicts.

These results affirm our earlier discussion of the differences between friendship and passionate romance. The deep friendship, intense liking, respect, comfort, and enjoyment expressed by the happy couples in the Lauer’s study stand in contrast to marriages based on the more tenuous and fickle nature of passionate romance. The stable solidarity of friendship makes passion look like a shaky basis for a stable marriage. Many relationship researchers would agree that companionate love built on friendship is more enduring than romantic love built on passion. Contemplating the future of marriage, Hendrick and Hendrick (2002) see hopeful signs that companionate love and passionate love are being brought into better balance in young people’s thinking about intimate relationships. They point to studies showing that college students frequently name their romantic partners as their closest friends. Hendrick and Hendrick conclude that “If one could also be good friends, perhaps even best friends with one’s passionate lover, then perhaps the relationship could survive the turbulent comings and goings of passion” (2002, p. 473). Couples in the Lauer and Lauer study provided strong affirmation of this possibility.

Humor and Compatibility

One final morsel of food-for-thought: Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the importance of teasing, humor, and laughter to all our close relationships. Social support, intimacy, and concern are all significant, but for sheer pleasure and enjoyment you can’t beat having fun with people you care about. It’s no accident, then, that happy couples say they laugh together and that a sense of humor is high on the list of desirable qualities people seek in a potential mate. We know that frequency of sex declines even in good marriages, although Hendrick and Hendrick (2002) argue that “sexual expression” might show up as declining far less if researchers included hugs, kisses, and other physical displays of affection as part of sexual behavior. Humor, however, apparently does not decline. Why else would 50-years-married couples say laughing together is what made their marriages last (Lauer et al., 1990)? Humor is undoubtedly one major reason happy couples enjoy each other’s company. Given the benefits of positive emotions described throughout this book, it’s no wonder successful couples enjoy enhanced health and happiness. In addition, as we mentioned earlier in this chapter, humor can detoxify conflict and relieve stress in a relationship.

The value of humor may go beyond its role in making a couple’s life together more enjoyable. Husbands and wives who share a similar sense of humor may also share something deeper—namely a match of personalities and emotional orientations. The idea that what a person honestly finds funny might be a window into his or her personality is widely shared among humor theorists and researchers (see Martin, 2007). The logic of the argument is that laughter is an emotional reaction that most people cannot fake (accomplished actors may be an exception). An obligatory and forced laugh is easily distinguished from the real thing. Because it is less subject to conscious control, a genuine laugh is thought to be an honest expression of how a person really feels. This, in turn, is assumed to reflect significant and genuinely expressed aspects of personality. Both research and everyday interactions affirm this possibility. Studies show that humor and personality are connected and tend to reflect traits that are prominent in our personalities (see Martin, 2007, Chapter 7, for review). For example, aggressive people prefer harsh and aggressive jokes; conservatives prefer “safe” jokes such as puns; and people who are intelligent risk-takers with a high tolerance for ambiguity and openness to new experiences enjoy more bizarre and highly imaginative humor. In our own experience, most of us have been in the company of people who laugh heartily at a joke that we find personally offensive. This can be an immediate source of alienation. We may think, “If you find that funny, you’re not my kind of person.” Shared humor can create an opposite feeling: “That’s my favorite kind of joke, so you’re my kind of person.”
The idea that humor is a window to thoughts and feelings that lie beneath the surface of conscious awareness is exemplified in an engaging book by Leon Rappoport titled, *Punchlines: The Case for Racial, Ethnic and Gender Humor* (2005). Rappoport argues that racial, ethnic, and gender-based forms of humor are typically viewed as insulting and prejudicial, which they certainly can be. However, at a deeper level such humor serves the important function of expressing those forbidden thoughts and feelings that are buried deep beneath the veneer of polite society and, more recently, the culture of political correctness. Comedians who make fun of their own race, ethnicity, or gender open the door to honest consideration of stereotypes and hostilities by reducing the anxieties, tensions, and guilt experienced by people who hold them. Laughing releases the tension created by consciously denied, but honestly felt emotions and beliefs, and brings them out in the open. Because humor detoxifies stereotypes and prejudices by holding them up for public ridicule, Rappoport argues that the net effect is to reduce—not increase—their potency.

Rappoport believes that humor may serve a similar function in marriage (L. Rappoport, personal communication, April 20, 2007). Because people differ in what they find funny, humor reflects something important about a person’s personality. Most intriguing is the idea that humor represents accurate information about a person because genuine laughter is spontaneous and cannot be produced on demand. Much of what people reveal to others is disingenuous, not necessarily because of manipulative intentions, but because people are being polite, want to make a good impression, or are following their expectations about how to act in a particular kind of relationship. Compared to the similarities revealed in people’s consciously controlled actions, responses to humor may represent honest and deeper similarities between two people.

Studies support the value of similarity as an essential foundation for successful close relationships (Noller & Feeney, 2006). Opposites may be interesting, but they don’t seem to attract, as conventional wisdom suggests. Significant differences, not similarities, cause spouses the most trouble. However, knowing if you are similar to someone at a deeper level is difficult to determine. How many couples wonder after a year of marriage why their spouse seems so different from when they were dating or first married? A shared sense of humor may increase the odds that when the distorting effects of self-conscious impression management fade, some basic compatibility will remain.

While there is not a large literature examining the relationship value of a shared sense humor, what there is does provide some support (see Martin, 2007, Chapter 5). Similarity in humor is affirmed as a basis for initial attraction. We like people who share our sense of what’s funny, in part because we assume we also share other beliefs and qualities. Married couples do tend to share a similar sense of humor. However, higher ratings of humor similarity do not reliably predict marital satisfaction. Part of the problem here may have to do with the limitations of self-report assessments of shared humor. Because humor in real life is spontaneous, self-report questionnaires may not be the best way to measure it, because they are far-removed from the moments of actual humor that occur in the context of everyday life. To this point, Gottman’s “love lab” observational studies do show that happy couples’ interactions are characterized by a good deal of humor and reciprocated laughter. Humor, marital harmony, and effective relational problem-solving were found to go together. Perhaps we need a “humor lab” to specifically assess couples’ shared and non-shared humorous reactions to situations, issues, and problems that typically occur in a marriage.

Though the empirical jury is still out, a shared sense of humor is an intriguing way to think about an index of basic compatibility between intimate partners. Similarity in humor may be important in knowing whether someone is “right” for you, and in sustaining a mutually enjoyable and enduring future relationship. Our guess would be that successful couples have humor in common, whether or not they realized this at the beginning of their relationships. As research shows, we are attracted to people who laugh at the same things we do.

So there you have it. Friendship, humor, and commitment. Three essential ingredients in the complex recipe for a successful marriage. Looking for a romantic partner? Find yourself a best buddy/best friend who laughs at all the same things you do and you should find it easier to make and sustain a long-term commitment!
Chapter Summary Questions

1. a. What evolutionary arguments support the conclusions that belongingness is a fundamental need?
   b. How does oxytocin figure into biological foundations for relationships with others?
2. How does disclosure reciprocity help build close relationships?
3. How do trust and caring contribute to close relationships?
4. What does it mean to say that close relationships are characterized by high levels of interdependence and mutuality?
5. Why is commitment important to close relations with others?
6. How do the descriptions of exchange and communal relationships describe the differences between casual acquaintances and close relationships?
7. What does research suggest about the role of teasing and humor in developing close relationships, and in successful long-term marriages?
8. How does capitalization enhance individual and relationship well-being, according to the research by Gable and her colleagues?
9. How do clarity of rules, complexity of feelings, and differing expectations explain the differences between friendship and romantic love?
10. What are love’s three essential ingredients, according to Sternberg’s triangular theory of love?
11. Why doesn’t cohabitation increase the success of a future marriage?
12. What evidence supports the importance of increased freedom and decreased restraints as explanations for our culture’s 50% divorce rate?
13. Is romantic love as a basis for marriage unique to American culture?
14. a. How might the increasing importance of love as a basis for marriage contribute to high divorce rates?
   b. How does research by Huston and his colleagues support a disillusionment model of divorce?
15. How does the research by Neff and Karney show the importance of both realism and idealism in marital satisfaction?
16. What arguments support a connection between infant–parent relationships and adult romantic relationships, according to attachment theory?
17. How may the different adult attachment styles reflect two underlying dimensions of anxiety and avoidance?
18. In his “love lab” studies, what critical ratio did Gottman find made the difference between good and bad marriages?
19. What qualities characterize long-term happily married couples, according to the Lauers’ study?
20. What arguments and evidence suggest that a shared sense of humor may be an important measure of compatibility between romantic partners and may contribute to a satisfying marriage?

Key Terms

- oxytocin 240
- self-disclosure 241
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- relationship growth 263
Web Resources

**Relationship Research—Gottman**

[www.gottman.com/research/about](http://www.gottman.com/research/about) This is the Gottman Institute site for the study of relationships. Links to an abundance of useful information, research articles, John Gottman's love lab studies, and other relevant sites and articles.

**Love and Intimate Relationships**

[www2.hawaii.edu/~elaineb](http://www2.hawaii.edu/~elaineb) This site by Elaine Hatfield offers many research references as well as commonly used measures of passionate and companionate love.

**Triangular Theory of Love**

[psychcentral.com/lib/2007/sternbergs-triangular-theory-of-love-scales](http://psychcentral.com/lib/2007/sternbergs-triangular-theory-of-love-scales) This site for PsychCentral is run by mental health professionals. It has a variety of useful information. The address above is for Sternberg’s triangular theory of love and a questionnaire that measures each of the three basic dimensions of love.

**Attachment Theory**

[psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/Shaver/measures.htm](http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/Shaver/measures.htm) This site is for the Attachment Lab of Phillip Shaver and R. Chris Farley. In addition to listing recent publications, many links to the labs and research of other attachment theorists are listed.

Suggested Readings


