chapter 8

Relationships and Communication

in this chapter . . .

- **The ABC(DE)'s of Romantic Relationships**
  Not-So-Small Talk: An Audience for Building a Relationship
  
  A CLOSER LOOK: They Say You Can’t Hurry Love . . . But How about Speed Dating?
  “Opening Lines”: How Do You Get Things Started?
  Self-Disclosure: You Tell Me and I’ll Tell You . . . Carefully
  Intimacy: Sharing Innermost Thoughts and Feelings
  Jealousy: Is the World a Real-Life “Temptation Island”?
  A CLOSER LOOK: Does the Nose Know How to Maintain a Relationship?
  Responses to Deterioration of a Relationship

- **Loneliness: “All the Lonely People, Where Do They All Come From?”**
  Coping with Loneliness

- **Satisfaction in Relationships: Communication as Key**
  Relationships between Heterosexuals, Gay Males, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgendered Individuals
  Conflict Resolution

- **Communication Skills for Enhancing Relationships and Sexual Relations: How to Do It**
  Obstacles to Sexual Communication

- **Relationships and Communication—The 3 R’s: Reflect, Recite, and Review**
  Reflect
  Recite
  Review

---

Which of the following statements are the truth, and which are fiction? Look for the Truth-or Fiction icons on the pages that follow to find the answers.

1. Small talk is an insincere method of opening a relationship.  **T**  **F**
2. Only phonies practice opening lines.  **T**  **F**
3. Swift self-disclosure of intimate information is the best way to deepen a new relationship.  **T**  **F**
4. People can have intimate relationships without being sexually intimate.  **T**  **F**
5. Many people remain lonely because they fear being rejected by others.  **T**  **F**
6. Conflict is destructive to a relationship.  **T**  **F**
7. “Love is all you need.” That is, when partners truly love one another, they instinctively know how to satisfy each other sexually.  **T**  **F**
8. If you are criticized, the best course is to retaliate.  **T**  **F**
9. Relationships come to an end when the partners cannot resolve their differences.  **T**  **F**
CHAPTER 8 • Relationships and Communication

Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you, will you join the dance?
—Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

No man is an island, entire of itself.
—John Donne, No Man Is an Island

“O
ne, two. One, two.” A great opening line? In the film Play It Again, Sam, Woody Allen plays Allan Felix, a nerd who has just been divorced. Diane Keaton plays his platonic friend Linda. At a bar one evening with Linda and her husband, Allan Felix spots a young woman on the dance floor who is so attractive that he wishes he could have her children.

The thing to do, Linda prompts him, is to begin dancing, then dance over to her and “say something.” With a bit more prodding, Linda convinces Allan to dance. It’s so simple, she tells him. He need only keep time—“One, two, one, two.”

“One, two,” repeats Allan. Linda shoves him off to his dream woman.

Hesitantly, Allan dances up to her. Working up courage, he says, “One, two. One, two, one, two.” He is ignored and finds his way back to Linda.

“Allan, try something more meaningful,” Linda implores.

Once more, Allan dances nervously back toward the woman of his dreams. He stammers, “Three, four, three, four.”

“Speak to her, Allan,” Linda insists.

He dances up to her again and tries, “You interested in dancing at all?”

“Get lost, creep,” she replies.

Allan dances rapidly back toward Linda. “What’d she say?” Linda asks.

“She’d rather not,” he shrugs.

So much for “One, two, one, two” and, for that matter, “Three, four, three, four.” Striking up a relationship requires some social skills, and the first few conversational steps can be big ones.

In this chapter we define the stages that lead to intimate relationships. We define intimacy and see that not all relationships—not even all long-term, committed relationships—achieve this level of interrelatedness. Moreover, some of us remain alone, and, perhaps, lonely. However, there are steps that people can take to overcome loneliness, as we illustrate in the pages ahead. Finally, we discuss satisfaction in relationships and enumerate ways of increasing satisfaction by enhancing communication skills.

The ABC(DE)’s of Romantic Relationships

**Social-exchange theory** The view that the development of a relationship reflects the unfolding of social exchanges—that is, the rewards and costs of maintaining the relationship as opposed to ending it.

**ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**, like people, undergo stages of development. According to **social-exchange theory**, the development reflects the unfolding of social exchanges, which involve the rewards and costs of maintaining the relationship as opposed to dissolving it. During each stage, positive factors sway partners toward maintaining...
and enhancing their relationship. Negative factors incline them toward letting it deteriorate and end.

Numerous investigators have viewed the development of romantic relationships in terms of phases or stages (Dindia & Timmerman, 2003; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000; Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). From their work, we can build a five-stage ABCDE model of romantic relationships: (1) attraction, (2) building, (3) continuation, (4) deterioration, and (5) termination (or ending).

Attraction occurs when two people become aware of each other and find one another appealing or enticing. We may find ourselves attracted to an enchanting person “across a crowded room,” in a nearby office, or in a new class. We may meet others through blind dates, through introductions by mutual friends, by way of computer match-ups, or by “accident.” According to the NHSLS study (Michael et al., 1994), married people are most likely to have met their spouses through mutual friends (35%) or self-introductions (32%) (see Figure 8.1). Other sources of introductions are family members (15%) and coworkers, classmates, or neighbors (13%). Unmarried couples also most commonly report meeting through mutual friends and self-introductions (Michael et al., 1994).

Being in a good mood apparently heightens feelings of attraction. George Levinger and his colleagues (Forgas et al., 1994) exposed 128 male and female moviegoers to either a happy or a sad film. Those shown the happy film reported more positive feelings about their partners and their relationships. (Think twice about what you take your date to see.)

Factors that motivate us to build relationships include similarity in physical attractiveness, similarity in attitudes, and mutual liking. Factors that deter building of relationships include lack of physical appeal, dissimilar attitudes, and lack of liking.

Many studies show that males tend to be more “romantic” (meaning passionate) than women in choosing whether to build relationships. For example, men are more likely than women to focus on sex and fun, whereas women are more likely to focus on issues such as communication ability and reciprocity (Hassebrauck, 2003; Holmberg et al., 2009). Thus, in male–male relationships, both partners are likely to entertain sexual behavior relatively early. In female–female relationships, both partners are likely to be relatively cautious, unless they are rebelling against female stereotypes. These findings fit with the evolutionary view that the male is more likely to be the initiator of sexual activity and that the female is more likely to be contemplating the value of the male as a reliable provider.

**Figure 8.1  • How People Met Their Partners.**

According to the NHSLS study (Michael et al., 1994), two-thirds of married people met their partners through either mutual friends or self-introductions. Mutual friends and self-introductions were also the main ways of meeting for unmarried couples in committed relationships.

---

**Not-So-Small Talk: An Audition for Building a Relationship**

**Truth or Fiction Revisited:** Small talk is not an insincere method of opening a relationship. It is a useful way of seeking common ground (Cunningham & Barbee, 2008). Successful small talk encourages a couple to venture beneath the surface. At a get-together or a club, individuals may flit about from person to person, exchanging small talk, but now and then a couple finds common ground and pairs off.

Small talk enables people to probe one another during the early stages of building a relationship. It helps people find an overlapping of attitudes and interests—and
They Say You Can’t Hurry Love . . . But How about Speed Dating?

This is a short story about two cable news network reporters who tried speed dating in the line of duty. But of course they also thought that it wouldn’t hurt if they found someone spectacular along the way.

Allie, age 25, is a fresh field reporter from the Midwest who is looking for someone who is a professional, a bit older but not too much older, who loves animals, who likes traveling, who is well groomed, who speaks well, and who meets her minimal physical standards. He doesn’t have to be celebrity Daniel Craig, but he has to take care of himself, Allie says.

Michael is a 24-year-old news editor from Delaware who would like to find someone who knows a good bottle of wine, likes the theater, reads, and is good looking.

Allie and Michael tried speed dating so they could do a story about it. The idea behind speed dating is that singles without a lot of time to spare can meet a whole bunch of people in a short amount of time (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). Using HurryDate, the Manhattan dating service, Allie and Michael talked to potential soulmates for only four minutes each.

They paid HurryDate a fee, signed up for an event, posted their profiles on the HurryDate website, and attended the event at a conveniently located bar where they were matched with other single people who were each assigned a number—no names.

Then the men played musical chairs, with a switch taking place every four minutes, except that no chairs were pulled out of the bunch. A part of the bar was cordoned off and the men sat down across from the women, with just four minutes to chat them up, back and forth. Then a whistle blew—literally!—and the men moved over a seat, and the process continued, couple by couple. After each conversation, both parties jot down quick notes on a sheet provided by HurryDate next to their current partner’s number so they can remember how they reacted to them later on.

Once the event is over and the participants have returned home, they can log on to the HurryDate website and search for the numbers of the people they met at the event. They can indicate whether they would like to hear from them by entering a “yes” or a “no.” Then the yesses are matched and participants can send messages through HurryDate to their matches.

What happened with Allie and Michael?

Keep reading.

Allie

I did this for a story and I didn’t expect much from it. To be honest, I got from it what I expected—very little. I thought it might be amusing, and sometimes it was, but it was also sort of hectic, and if I didn’t distance myself from it a bit, I think I would have found it sort of emotionally churning, if you know what I mean. I didn’t think for a

to check out feelings of attraction (Knapp & Vangelista, 2000). Small talk stresses breadth of topic coverage rather than in-depth discussion. Engaging in small talk may have a “phony” ring to it, but it is a legitimate trial balloon for a relationship. Moreover, the ability to make small talk is a valuable social skill.

“Opening Lines”: How Do You Get Things Started?

One kind of small talk is the greeting, or opening line (Cunningham & Barbee, 2008). We usually precede greetings with eye contact and decide to try talking if eye contact is reciprocated. Avoidance of eye contact may mean that the person is shy, but it can also signify lack of interest. If you are interested in somebody, try a smile and eye contact. If the eye contact is reciprocated, try an opening line, or greeting. These include:

- Verbal salutes, such as “Good morning.”
- Personal inquiries, such as “How are you doing?”
- Compliments, such as “I like your outfit.”
minute there would be a chance of meeting Mr. Right, and I was right about that. Twenty faces in an hour and a half were sort of tough-going if you take this sort of thing too seriously, I guess.

Almost all the guys told me what they did for a living, though I didn’t ask. Maybe they thought that was strange, but when I saw them, I guess I really didn’t feel like I had to know. Some said they were into finance with some sort of emphasis as if that was supposed to mean millions. There were a couple of teachers, no college professors. No doctors. Oh, yes—“sales,” generic. Some said they lived in Manhattan, again emphasizing Manhattan, like to say they could afford it.

They asked me what I did, as if I was supposed to contribute to the rent or the mortgage. They also wanted to know where I lived and what I liked to do in my spare time.

I did ask them if they traveled or liked foreign films.

I wound up with 15 guys saying “yes” on the website. Truth is I’m going to find Mr. Right another way.

Michael Allie told me about her experience, and, frankly, I guess mine was a bit better than hers. She’s sort of outgoing and guys sort of flock to her, if you know what I mean. I’m outgoing when I know people, but people don’t flock to me the way they flock to Allie, so the idea of meeting twenty people in an hour and a half isn’t a negative for me. In fact, six of them said “yes,” meaning that they’re willing to have more contact with me, and of that six, I find two attractive enough in one way or another. Now, you could say that’s low odds, right? One in ten. I mean I met twenty women and something could happen with two of them. But that’s not bad at all. If I were out with my friends at a bar on the weekend, I might wind up talking with one woman, and the chances of her having an interest in seeing me again might be, what, one in five?

I’ll say this about the four minutes. It may sound like very little, but it’s more than you think. I mean you say, like, “What do you do?” and “What do you like?” and stuff, and she asks you “What do you do?” and “What do you like?” and a couple more questions, and if the answers are pretty short, you can be done in pretty much two minutes. Well, let me put it this way: If you’re both kind of shy and you’re both not long-winded, you might run out of stuff to say fairly quickly. Well, that’s one of my problems, looking at someone and wondering what to say next.

Anyhow, and don’t ask me how, with one of the women who said yes, my favorite, somehow we wound up talking about Gilbert and Sullivan and all sorts of mutual cultural interests. I guess she’s the one who did it. I’m really looking forward to seeing her again!

A simple “Hi” or “Hello” is very useful. A friendly glance followed by a cheerful hello ought to give you some idea of whether the attraction is reciprocated. If the hello is returned with a friendly smile and inviting eye contact, follow it up with another greeting, such as a reference to your surroundings, the other person’s behavior, or your name.

Truth or Fiction Revisited: It is not true that only phonies practice opening lines. It can be helpful for everyone to practice opening lines.
EXCHANGING “NAME, RANK, AND SERIAL NUMBER”
Early exchanges are likely to include name, occupation, marital status, and hometown. This has been likened to exchanging “name, rank, and serial number” with the other person. Each person seeks a sociological profile of the other to discover common ground that may provide a basis for pursuing the conversation (Cunningham & Barbee, 2008). An unspoken rule seems to be at work: “If I provide you with some information about myself, you will reciprocate by giving me an equal amount of information about yourself. Or . . . I’ll tell you my hometown if you tell me yours” (Knapp & Vangelista, 2000). If the other person is unresponsive, she or he may not be attracted to you. But you may also be awkward in your approach or perhaps turn the other person off by disclosing too much about yourself at the outset.

A generation or two ago, women rarely approached men to signal romantic interest or initiate relationships. Today, however, many women in developed nations do precisely that (Wade et al., 2009). Moreover, both women and men rate direct opening lines—lines that signal interest—as most effective in launching relationships (Wade et al, 2009).

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN CYBERSPACE
On the other hand, rapid self-disclosure seems to be something of a new norm when people meet in cyberspace (Brunet & Schmidt, 2008; Punyanunt-Carter, 2006). Cyberspace allows for relative anonymity and enables people to control what they want to reveal—to safeguard their privacy even as they increase their emotional closeness and openness. The very nature of privacy changes in cyberspace, because matters that are usually kept under wraps tend to be discussed.
If the surface contact provided by small talk and initial self-disclosure has been mutually rewarding, partners in a relationship tend to develop feelings of liking for each other (Abell et al., 2006; Collins & Miller, 1994). Self-disclosure may build through the course of a relationship as partners come to trust each other enough to share intimate feelings.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN SELF-DISCLOSURE  A woman complains to a friend, “He never opens up to me. It’s like living with a stone wall.” Women commonly declare that men are loath to express their feelings. Researchers find that masculine-typed individuals, whether male or female, tend to be less willing to disclose their feelings, perhaps in adherence to the traditional “strong and silent” masculine stereotype (Derlega et al., 2008). Susan Basow and Kimberly Rubenfeld (2003) found that feminine-typed individuals are more likely to be empathic and to listen to other people’s troubles than masculine-typed individuals, regardless of their anatomic sex.

Factors that encourage continuation of relationships include seeking ways to introduce variety and maintain interest (such as trying out new sexual practices and social activities), showing evidence of caring and positive evaluation (such as sending birthday or Valentine’s Day cards), trusting one’s partner, perceiving fairness in the relationship, and experiencing feelings of general satisfaction. One of the developments in a continuing relationship is that of mutuality, which leads a couple to regard themselves as “we,” not just two “I’s” who happen to be in the same place at the same time (Avivi et al., 2009; Deci et al., 2006). Mutuality favors continuation and further deepening of the relationship. It also implies cognitive interdependence. Planning for the future, both in little ways (What will I do this weekend?) and in big ways (What will I do about my education and my career?), includes consideration of the needs and desires of one’s partner. Cognitive interdependence is related to intimacy, as we will see in the following section.

CRITICAL THINKING

Do you believe it is possible for a person to maintain complete individuality while at the same time investing in mutuality with another person? Explain.
Intimacy: Sharing Innermost Thoughts and Feelings

Intimacy consists of feelings of emotional connectedness with another person and the desire to share innermost thoughts and feelings (Yela, 2006). Partners in the throes of romantic love usually want to disclose everything to, and know everything about, one another (Kito, 2005; Vaculík & Hudecek, 2005). Along with sex, intimacy is one of the key ingredients in passionate relationships (Firestone et al., 2006a; Korobov & Thorne, 2006). Feelings of intimacy and affection tend to grow as romantic relationships develop (Aron et al., 2008; Derlega et al., 2008). Relationships also develop from being more casual and superficial to being relatively committed. As couples age, intimacy becomes one of the most valued—if not the most valued—components of the relationship (Villar et al., 2005). Intimate relationships are also characterized by trust, caring, and acceptance.

Sternberg’s (2007) triangular theory of love regards intimacy as a basic component of romantic love, but people can be intimate and not in love, at least not in romantic love. Close friends and family members become emotionally intimate when they care deeply for each other and share their feelings and experiences.

**Truth or Fiction Revisited:** People need not be sexually intimate to be emotionally intimate. Nor does sexual intimacy automatically create emotional intimacy. Often, people who are sexually involved may not achieve emotional closeness. They can be more emotionally intimate with friends than with lovers.

Since intimacy involves the sharing of innermost thoughts and feelings, honesty is a core feature of intimacy. A person need not be an “open book” to develop and maintain intimacy, however. Some aspects of experience are better kept even from one’s most intimate partners, especially when they are embarrassing or threatening (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000; Korobov & Thorne, 2006). We would not expect partners to disclose every passing sexual fantasy. Nor should we expect intimate partners to divulge the details of past sexual experiences. Honesty means saying what one means, not providing hurtful details.

Intimacy is important not only to interpersonal relationships but also to one’s health. Researchers have found that intimacy fosters well-being and that its absence can be psychologically and physically harmful (Driver et al., 2003).

### Real Students, Real Questions

**Q. When is the best time in a relationship to tell someone you love him or her? When is it too early? Too late?**

**A.** Wait until you’ve gotten to know the person—at least a few weeks. Let it be “true love” and not merely infatuation, which you can feel pretty quickly, even immediately. You can say the other person is “wow” or something like that right away, but save the word love until you’ve had a while to show your head is screwed on right. When is it too late? We don’t hear that question very often, but it could be too late if your partner has concluded that your feelings are too shallow or that you’re not the kind of person who can make the commitment he or she is looking for. But that’s not likely to happen out of the blue. You’re likely to get lots of hints, like “So where is this relationship going?”
INTIMACY AND SELF-ESTEEM  Some social scientists suggest that getting to know and like yourself is an initial step toward intimacy with others. By coming to know and value yourself, you identify your own feelings and needs and develop the security to share them. Research suggests that partners with low self-esteem are more likely to harbor self-doubts that can interfere with the development and maintenance of romantic relationships (Murray & Holmes, 2000). For example, experiments show that when their partner is in a “bad mood,” people with low self-esteem tend to feel more responsible for that mood, to feel more rejected, and, consequently, to behave in a more hostile manner (Bellavia & Murray, 2003). Yet, people with high self-esteem seem to be more likely to use their partners’ acceptance and approval as a way of maintaining their self-esteem when self-doubts arise (Murray et al., 2001). That is, even when we feel rather good about ourselves, we can come to rely on our partners’ impressions of us.

Too much self-esteem can also be detrimental to a relationship if it takes the form of narcissism, or being wrapped up in oneself. Research shows that narcissists tend to play love games with their partners; they show less commitment and are more likely to have alternatives handy if relationships do not work out (Campbell et al., 2002). The same researchers found that self-esteem, as opposed to narcissism, was positively linked to romantic love.

Two other ingredients of an intimate relationship are trust and caring. Trust enables partners to feel confident that disclosing intimate feelings will not lead to ridicule or rejection. Trust usually builds gradually, as partners learn whether it is safe to share confidences.

A German study of 72 adolescents who were followed from the ages of 14 through 20 found that the quality of their relationships with their parents contributed to their ability to trust romantic partners (Seiffge-Krenke & Kuehnemund, 2001). Research also shows that people come to trust their partners when they see that their partners have made sincere investments in the relationship, as evidenced, for example, by making sacrifices to be with them, such as incurring the disapproval of their family (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Wieselquist et al., 1999). Commitment and trust in a relationship can be seen as developing according to a model of mutual cyclical growth:

- Feelings that one needs one’s partner promote commitment to and dependence on the relationship.
- Commitment to the relationship encourages the partners to do things that are good for the relationship (that is, to perform “pro-relationship acts”).
- One’s partner perceives the pro-relationship acts.
- Perception of the pro-relationship acts enhances the partner’s trust in the other partner and in the relationship.
- Feelings of trust increase the partners’ willingness to depend on the relationship.

Caring is an emotional bond that allows intimacy to develop. Caring means that partners try to satisfy each other’s needs, gratify each other’s interests, and make sacrifices, if necessary. Research shows that willingness to sacrifice is connected with commitment to the relationship, level of satisfaction in the relationship, and, interestingly, poor alternatives to the relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997). In other words, it may not be easy to find partners if one does not sacrifice for relationships (Katz & Tirone, 2009). Is self-sacrifice thus self-serving?
Because intimacy involves the sharing of innermost thoughts and feelings, honesty is a core feature of intimacy. But must a person be an “open book” to develop and maintain intimacy? Should some embarrassing or threatening experiences be kept from even one’s most intimate partner? Perhaps. We would not expect partners to disclose every passing sexual fantasy. Nor would it be reasonable to expect intimate partners to divulge the details of past sexual experiences. Honesty means saying what one means, not providing hurtful details. Nor is intimacy established by frank but brutal criticism, even if it is honest.

**MAKING A COMMITMENT** People may open up to strangers on airplanes or trains, or to health care providers, and still find it hard to talk openly with people to whom they are closest. This phenomenon is true even though we know that we will not see the strangers again, or that the health professionals are required to keep our personal matters confidential. Truly intimate relationships are marked by commitment to maintain the relationship through thick and thin (Sternberg, 2004).

Numerous studies find that men tend to be more reluctant than women to make commitments. David Popenoe, co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University in New Jersey, conducted a study with 60 unmarried heterosexual men and found that the commonness of cohabitation is one reason why they are reluctant to make a commitment. In cohabitation, sex—traditionally a key reason for men to marry—is readily available. Popenoe notes, “In a sense, with cohabitation he gets a quasi-wife without having to commit” (Hussain, 2002).

In committed relationships, a delicate balance exists between individuality and mutuality. In healthy unions, a strong sense of togetherness does not eradicate individuality. Partners in such relationships remain free to be themselves. Neither seeks to dominate or submerge himself or herself into the personality of the other. Each partner maintains individual interests, likes and dislikes, needs and goals.

Factors that can throw continuing relationships into a downward spiral include boredom, as in falling into a rut in leisure activities or sexual practices. Yet, boredom does not always end relationships. Consider a study of 12 men who admitted to experiencing sexual boredom in long-term heterosexual relationships (Tunariu & Reavey, 2003). The men were not happy with sexual boredom, particularly in a culture in which men are viewed as highly sexual and romantic love is supposed to remain passionate. On the other hand, they viewed their boredom as a normal trade-off for so-called true love and long-term companionship.

Other factors that contribute to the discontinuation of a relationship include evidence of negative evaluation (such as bickering, and forgetting anniversaries and other important dates or pretending that they do not exist), lack of fairness in the relationship (such as one partner’s always deciding how the couple will spend their free time), jealousy, and general dissatisfaction. Question: How does jealousy affect relationships?

**Jealousy: Is the World a Real-Life “Temptation Island”?**

_O! beware, my lord, of jealousy;_  
_It is the green-ey’d monster . . ._  
—William Shakespeare, _Othello_

Thus was Othello, the Moor of Venice, warned of jealousy in the Shakespearean play that bears his name. Othello could not control his feelings, however, and killed his
Does the Nose Know How to Maintain a Relationship?

One of the keys to maintaining a relationship is ignoring—or at least not responding to—attractive alternatives of the other sex (Maner et al., 2008). Many researchers suggest that “selective inattention” to physically attractive alternatives of the other sex has evolved as a means of protecting relationships that are valuable in rearing children.

A study into the biological mechanics of romantic love leads us to our noses and—at least in many developed nations—to a factor that might seem unlikely to cement relationships: body odor. Lundström and Jones-Gotman (2009) note that although romantic love is one of our strongest emotions, we know very little about its hormonal and psychological correlates. Romantic love is likely the key emotion that helps intimate partners remain committed, and Lundström and Jones-Gotman (2009) explored how biological mechanisms might contribute to attention deflected away from other potential partners. The researchers found that one such mechanism is women’s preference for the body odors of their boyfriend. They found that women could discriminate between the body odors of their boyfriend, a female friend, and a male friend. Then they related this discriminative ability to the amount of romantic love the women expressed toward their boyfriend.

The researchers hypothesized that an increase in attention toward one’s partner would be associated with a positive correlation between identification of a boyfriend’s body odor and the degree of romantic love expressed for him. They also hypothesized that a negative association between identification of the body odor of the boyfriend and the male friend would lead to deflection of attention from the male friend. The results supported “deflection theory” in that the researchers did find a negative correlation between the amount of love expressed for subjects’ boyfriends and their ability to identify the body odor of the male friend but not of their boyfriend or female friend. Thus, romantic love appeared to deflect attention from potential new partners. The researchers suggest that these deployments of attention are related to circulating chemicals in the women and suggest a way to conduct further research in the area.

Deflection Theory. Does her preference for her boyfriend’s body odor help deflect her attention from other males?

Beloved wife, Desdemona. The English poet John Dryden labeled jealousy a “tyrant of the mind.” Anthropologists find evidence of jealousy in all cultures, although it may vary in amount and intensity across and within cultures. It appears to be more common and intense among cultures with a stronger machismo tradition, in which men are expected to display their virility. It is also powerful in cultures in which men view a woman’s infidelity as a threat to their honor. But jealousy is found among gay males and lesbians as well as among heterosexuals (Peluso, 2008).

The emotion of jealousy accounted in part for the popularity of the reality TV show Temptation Island. On this show, people in committed relationships were exposed to attractive others, and the audience was apparently intrigued by the question of how much temptation the contestant on the show could withstand. No doubt, members of the audience also speculated on how much temptation they themselves could withstand.
Sexual jealousy is aroused when we suspect that an intimate relationship is threatened by a rival (Buss, 2009). Lovers can become jealous when others show sexual interest in their partners or when their partners show an interest (even a casual or nonsexual interest) in another. Jealousy can lead to loss of feelings of affection, feelings of insecurity and rejection, anxiety and loss of self-esteem, and feelings of mistrust of one’s partner and potential rivals. It is one of the commonly mentioned reasons why relationships fail. Feelings of possessiveness, related to jealousy, also place stress on a relationship. In extreme cases, jealousy can cause depression or give rise to spouse abuse, suicide, or, as with Othello, murder (Harmon-Jones et al., 2009). But milder forms of jealousy are not necessarily destructive to a relationship. They may even serve the positive function of revealing how much one cares for one’s partner. For this reason, we can distinguish between normal jealousy, which reflects occasional self-doubts and the belief that one’s partner is attractive, and obsessional jealousy, in which the individual, like Othello, is consumed by his or her fears of interference in the relationship.

What causes jealousy? Experience and personality variables play roles. People may become mistrustful of their partners because former partners had cheated. People with low self-esteem may experience sexual jealousy because they become overly dependent on their partners. They may fear that they will not be able to find another partner if their present partner leaves.

JEALOUSY AND EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

David Buss, Todd Shackelford, and their colleagues (e.g., Buss, 2009; Murphy et al., 2006, Shackelford et al., 2005) note that sex differences in jealousy appear to support evolutionary theory. Males seem to be more upset by sexual infidelity, females by emotional infidelity (Buss, 2009; Miller & Maner, 2009). That is, males are made more insecure and angry when their partners have sexual relations with someone else. Females are made more insecure and angry when their partners become emotionally attached to someone else. Why? Evolutionary theory hypothesizes that sexual jealousy was shaped by natural selection as a method of ensuring males that their female partner’s offspring are their own, and of ensuring females that their male partners will continue to provide resources to facilitate childrearing (Buss, 2009).

Real Students, Real Questions

Q  My boyfriend wants me to move in with him, but I am not sure if I am ready. How can I decide? Also, how do you know when you are ready to marry someone?

A  If you’re not sure you’re ready, don’t do it. If he cares about you, he’ll wait until you’re ready. If he won’t wait, you haven’t lost anything you need to worry about. (We can talk tough when we have to.) How do you know when you are ready to marry someone? One thing we’re rather sure of is that you’ll know when it’s time. You’ll probably know who you are, where you’re going, who he is, where he’s going, and whether you want to go there together.
Lack of Sex Differences in Responses to Affairs Among Gay Males and Lesbians

Interestingly, the hypothesized sex difference in reactions to infidelity disappear when one’s partner has an affair with someone of his or her own sex (Sagarin et al., 2003). Is it because the affair carries no threat of impregnation (a view that would be consistent with evolutionary theory)? Or is it because the victim consoles himself or herself by thinking that he or she really isn’t competing in the same arena with the intruder? Are both explanations and other explanations possible?

A Cognitive Perspective

In recent years, cognitive theory has gained importance in many areas of the behavioral sciences, and sexual jealousy is no exception. In two studies, Stacie Bauerle and her colleagues (2002) presented 156 college undergraduates and 128 members of the general population with various scenarios in which their partners were unfaithful. By and large, jealousy increased when the individuals attributed their partner’s infidelity to internal causes, such as clear personal choice. When they attributed the infidelity to external causes, such as alcohol or social pressure, the individuals in the study reported feeling significantly less jealous. (“Don’t blame me; it was the alcohol.”)

Many lovers—including many college students—play jealousy games. They let their partners know that they are attracted to other people. They flirt openly or manufacture tales to make their partners pay more attention to them, to test the relationship, to inflict pain, or to take revenge for a partner’s disloyalty.

Responses to Deterioration of a Relationship

A relationship begins to fail when it becomes less rewarding than it was. Couples can respond to deterioration in active or passive ways. Active means of response include doing something that may enhance the relationship (such as working on improving communication skills, negotiating differences, or seeking professional help) or deciding to end the relationship. Passive methods of responding include merely waiting for something to happen, doing little or nothing. People can sit back and wait for the relationship to improve on its own (occasionally it does) or for the relationship to deteriorate to the point where it ends. (“Hey, these things happen.”)

It is irrational (and damaging to a relationship) to assume that good relationships require no investment of time and effort. No two people are matched perfectly. When problems arise, it is better to work to resolve them than to act as though they don’t exist and hope that they will just disappear.


According to social-exchange theory, relationships draw to a close when the partners find little satisfaction in the affiliation, when the barriers to leaving the relationship are low (that is, the social, religious, and financial constraints are manageable), and especially
People Who Have Been Rejected Sometimes Stalk Their Former Partners. Stalking includes behaviors such as breaking into their e-mail. (Hint: Change your passwords from time to time.)

when alternative partners are available. Problems in jealousy and communication are common reasons for ending a relationship. The availability of alternatives decreases one’s commitment to a relationship (Knox et al., 1997a; Rusbult et al., 1998). This fact has been widely recognized throughout the ages, which is one reason why patriarchal cultures like to keep their women locked up—or, in the Middle East, literally “under wraps”—as much as possible.

Breaking up, as the song goes, can be hard to do—both for the person terminating the relationship and for the other party. A study of more than 5,000 people, who responded to a survey on the Internet, found that anxious people were more likely to be highly preoccupied with the lost partner, to suffer more physical and emotional distress, to attempt to reestablish the relationship, and to be angry and vengeful (Davis et al., 2003). Emotionally secure individuals were most likely to seek social support among their friends and their families. Insecure individuals were most likely to turn to alcohol and drugs. A survey of 92 college undergraduates found that many believed they would grow from the experience of breaking up (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Individuals’ “attributional styles” entered the picture: People who blamed themselves for the breakup experienced more stress than those who blamed external factors, such as the situation.

Breaking up is sometimes followed by stalking, or other “unwanted pursuit behaviors” (UPBs), such as unwelcome phone calls, e-mails, or texting, asking third parties about the person who dissolved the relationship, and following, threatening, or attacking that person or new partners of that person (Davis et al., 2002; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2002). Jealousy, abusiveness, and physical violence in relationships are key predictors of unwanted pursuit (Puente & Cohen, 2003). Stalkers and violent individuals also tend to have a strong need to control others (Dye & Davis, 2003). We will see in the chapter on sexual coercion that a need to control other people is also connected with the violent crime of rape.

Various factors can save a deteriorating relationship. For example, people who continue to find some sources of satisfaction, who are committed to maintaining the
relationship, or who believe that they will eventually be able to overcome their problems are more likely to invest what they must to prevent the collapse.

On the other hand, the swan song of a relationship—moving on—can be a sign of healthful decision making, not a sign of failure. When people are highly incompatible, and when genuine attempts to preserve the relationship have failed, ending the relationship can offer each partner a chance for happiness with someone else.

Real Students, Real Questions

Q What is the relationship like?
A It’s never easy. Nor should it be. The other person has invested in you, and losing someone a person cares about hurts. A lot. But once you’ve made up your mind, do it as quickly as possible to give the other person as much time as possible to rebuild his or her life. In the “old days,” people would pick public places, so the person who was “dumped” was unlikely to make a scene. Now people often use e-mail. The most decent thing to do is to tell the person face to face in private. Just say that it no longer works for you—not that the other person is somehow bad or a loser. And don’t be surprised if the other person has suspected something was wrong. After all, how good an actor can you be?

Loneliness: “All the Lonely People, Where Do They All Come From?”

MANY PEOPLE START RELATIONSHIPS BECAUSE OF LONELINESS. Question: What is loneliness? Loneliness and solitude (being alone) are not synonymous. Loneliness is a state of painful isolation, of feeling cut off from others (Long et al., 2003). Solitude, however, can be quite positive. Inner-directed solitude can be characterized by self-discovery and inner peace (Long et al., 2003). Outer-directed solitude can refer to spirituality or allow us to reflect on the world around us. Solitude is usually a matter of choice; loneliness is not.

Lonely people tend to spend a lot of time by themselves, eat dinner alone, spend weekends alone, and participate in few social activities. They are unlikely to date. Some lonely people report having many friends, but a closer look suggests that these “friendships” are shallow. Lonely people are unlikely to share confidences. Loneliness tends to peak during adolescence, when peer relationships begin to supplant family ties. A study of 90 adolescents aged 16 to 18 found that feelings of loneliness were connected with low self-confidence, introversion, unhappiness, and emotional instability (Cheng & Furnham, 2002). Loneliness is also often connected with feelings of depression. A study of 101 dating couples with a mean age of 21 found that poor relationships contributed to feelings of loneliness and to depression—even though the individuals had partners (Seegrin et al., 2003).

Loneliness is connected with physical health problems as well as with psychological problems such as depression. One study, for example, found that lonely
Loneliness or Solitude? Solitude can be a positive experience, allowing us to think or read or write. But loneliness is painful social isolation that can be detrimental to both our psychological and our physical health.

People had higher blood pressure than people who were not lonely (Hawkley et al., 2003). Lonely people also found stressful experiences to be more discomfiting, an observation that suggests the value of social support when we are undergoing stress (Hawkley et al., 2003). Social isolation has also been shown to predict cancer, cardiovascular disease, various other diseases, and a higher mortality rate (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2003). It appears that one causal pathway between loneliness and illness involves stress. Stress impairs the functioning of the immune system, and lonely people perceive stress to be more aversive (Cacioppo et al., 2003).

The causes of loneliness are many and complex. Lonely people tend to have several of the following characteristics:

- Lack of social skills. Lonely people often lack the interpersonal skills to make friends or cope with disagreements.
- Lack of interest in other people.
- Lack of empathy. Empathy is a key aspect of satisfaction in romantic relationships (Cramer, 2003).
- Truth or Fiction Revisited: It is true that many people remain lonely because of fear of rejection. This fear is often connected with self-criticism of social skills and expectations of failure in relating to others (Vorauer et al., 2003).
- Failure to disclose personal information to potential friends.
- Cynicism about human nature (for example, seeing people as only out for themselves).
- Demanding too much too soon. The lonely perceive other people as cold and unfriendly in the early stages of a relationship.
- General pessimism. When we expect the worst, we often get . . . you guessed it.
- An external locus of control. That is, lonely people do not see themselves as capable of taking their lives into their own hands and achieving their goals.
Coping with Loneliness

Helping professionals encourage lonely people to develop more adaptive ways of thinking and behaving. Often, lonely people have distorted views of others. They may have one or two unfortunate experiences and jump to the conclusion that people are generally selfish and not worth the effort of getting involved. Yes, some people are basically out for themselves, but the belief that everyone is selfish can perpetuate loneliness by motivating us to avoid others.

What can you do to deal with loneliness in your own life? Here are some suggestions:

1. Challenge your feelings of pessimism. Adopt the attitude that things happen when you make them happen.

2. Challenge your cynicism about human nature. Yes, lots of people are selfish and not worth knowing, but if you assume that all people are like that, you can doom yourself to a lifetime of loneliness. Your task is to find people who possess the qualities that you value.

3. Challenge the idea that failure in social relationships is unbearable and is therefore a valid reason for giving up on them. Sure, social rejection can be painful, but unless you happen to be George Clooney or Angelina Jolie, you may not appeal to everyone. We must all learn to live with some rejection. But keep looking for the people who possess the qualities you value and who will find things of equal value in you.

4. Get out among people. Sit down at a table with people in the cafeteria, not off in a corner by yourself. Smile and say hi to people who interest you. Practice opening lines for different occasions—and a few follow-up lines. Try them out in front of the mirror.

5. Make numerous social contacts. Join committees for student activities. Try intramural sports. Join social-action groups, such as environmental groups and community betterment groups. Join the photography club or the ski club. Get on the school yearbook or newspaper staff.


7. Become a good listener. Ask people how they’re doing. Ask them for their opinions about classes, politics, or the campus events of the day. Then actually listen to what they have to say. Tolerate diverse opinions; remember that no two of us are identical in our outlooks (not even your “perfectly” matched first and third authors). Maintain eye contact. Keep your face friendly. (No, you don’t have to remain neutral and friendly if someone becomes insulting toward a religious or ethnic group.)

8. Give people the chance to know you. Exchange opinions and talk about your interests. Yes, you’ll turn some people off—who doesn’t?—but how else will you learn whether you and another person share common ground?

9. Fight fair. Friends will inevitably disappoint you, and you’ll want to tell them about it. Do so, but fairly. You can start by asking if it’s okay to be open about something. Then say, “I feel upset because you . . . .” You can ask your friend whether he or she realized that his or her behavior upset you. Try to work together to find a way to avoid recurrences. Finish by thanking your friend for helping you resolve the problem.
10. Remember that you’re worthy of friends. It’s true—warts and all. None of us is perfect. We’re all unique, but you may connect with more people than you imagine. Give people a chance.

11. Use your college counseling center. Many thousands of students are lonely but don’t know what to do about it. Others just cannot find the courage to approach others. College counseling centers are very familiar with the problem of loneliness, and you should consider them a valuable resource. You might even ask whether there’s a group at the center for students seeking to improve their dating or social skills.

Satisfaction in Relationships: Communication as Key

SOME RELATIONSHIPS WORK OUT. Others don’t. In Western culture, where people tend to form relationships with more than one partner as they develop, perhaps the majority of relationships draw to an end. Termination of a relationship is not always a bad thing. As people spend time together, they learn more about whether they are well matched or poorly matched. Most also learn how to compromise to help build relationships and how to approach resolving conflicts in a constructive way (Rosenblatt & Rieks, 2009).

Relationships between Heterosexuals, Gay Males, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgendered Individuals

Numerous researchers have studied the factors that predict satisfaction in a relationship or the deterioration and ending of a relationship (Holmberg et al., 2009). Much of this research has sought to determine whether there are differences in the factors that satisfy heterosexual and homosexual couples, and the interesting finding is that we are hard-pressed to find differences (Holmstrom, 2009). One difference that stands out favors the gay and lesbian couples: They tend to distribute household chores evenly and not in terms of gender-role stereotypes (Kurdek, 2005, 2006). Now for the similarities: Sexual satisfaction is tied to satisfaction with the relationship in both heterosexual and lesbian women (Matthews et al., 2006; Schwartz & Young, 2009). Gay, lesbian, and male–female couples are all more satisfied when they receive social support from their partners, there is sharing of power in the relationship, they fight fair, and they perceive their partners to be committed to the relationship. But there are a couple of differences that favor stability in the relationships of the male–female couples: They are more likely to have the support of their families and less likely to be stigmatized by society at large.

Couples therapists who work with gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals and couples will find problems akin to those in heterosexual couples, such as infidelity, and many that need special sensitivity to these commonly stigmatized subpopulations (Schwartz & Young, 2009):

- Lesbian-gay-bisexual (LGB) identity development and how it affects the functioning of the couple
Satisfaction in Relationships: Communication as Key

- Parenting and its impact on the couple
- LGB individuals as members of families
- The kinds of stressors that impact individuals who are underrepresented in the LGB literature, including older LGB people, LGB individuals who are members of ethnic minority groups, and LGB individuals who are members of religious groups
- Legal issues and their impact on the couple
- Workplace issues and their impact on the couple

Conflict Resolution

Some researchers, such as John M. Gottman (Gottman & Gottman, 2008; Yoshimoto et al., 2006), have focused on the ways in which couples resolve conflicts. Gottman has videotaped couples as they do so and also monitored their physiological responses, including their heart rates, sweating, and large motor movement. He found that deterioration of satisfaction in the relationship could be predicted by physiological measures, particularly on the part of the male. The calmer the couple’s bodily responses, the more their relationship improved as time went on. On the other hand, couples whose heart rates were more rapid, who sweated more, and who moved about agitatedly had relationships that deteriorated over the next three years.

Truth or Fiction Revisited: Gottman also found that conflict itself is not necessarily destructive to a relationship (Gottman & Gottman, 2008). The important thing is the way in which the couple attempts to resolve it. Couples who were open and calm during the conflict tended to improve their satisfaction. Couples who were defensive experienced deterioration in the relationship. A notable trait that contributed to deterioration was stonewalling by the male. Stonewalling means that there is little movement of the head, few if any nods, and few of the verbal acknowledgments made by listeners who are participating in a discussion. Deterioration of the relationship was also predicted by excessively agreeable, compliant behavior on the part of the female or by her verbalizing feelings of contempt. Facial expressions predicted deterioration, especially facial expressions that suggested disgust on the part of the female, fear on the face of the male, and then miserable smiles by both parties. These nonverbal behaviors were accompanied by more defensiveness, excuses, and denial of responsibility.

Stonewallers suffer not only in terms of their relationships. Stonewalling predicted loneliness after the relationship ended, and loneliness, in turn, was connected with deteriorating health.

Good outcomes for relationships could also be predicted by positive attributes during conflict, such as displays of humor, empathy, and affection; by mutual effort to solve problems; and by determination to listen to one’s partner nondefensively. These positive elements kept physiological responses in check as well.

Other researchers have generally found evidence in support of Gottman’s conclusions about couples in conflict. For example, Holman and Jarvis (2003) also found that the ways in which couples communicate to resolve conflicts are the key to the survival or termination of a relationship. Couples who validated each other’s
feelings in a respectful and helpful manner were most satisfied with their relationships. Couples who were hostile or explosive, or who attempted to avoid conflict, were less satisfied with their relationships.

**Communication Skills for Enhancing Relationships and Sexual Relations: How to Do It**

**Truth or Fiction Revisited:** Despite the Beatles’ song lyrics, love is not all you need. You also need communication. Couples learn about each other’s desires and needs through communication. Otherwise, this knowledge remains a mystery.

Couples therapists and sex therapists might find less work if more couples communicated effectively about their sexual feelings. Unfortunately, when it comes to sex, *talk* may be the most overlooked four-letter word.

Many couples suffer for years because one or both partners are unwilling to speak up. Or problems arise when one partner misinterprets the other. Clear communication can take the guesswork out of relationships, avert misunderstandings, relieve resentments and frustrations, and increase sexual and general satisfaction with the relationship (Gottman & Gottman, 2008).

**Obstacles to Sexual Communication**

Why is it so difficult for couples to communicate about sex? There are several reasons. Some couples believe that talking about sex is vulgar. But vulgarity, like beauty, is to some degree in the eye of the beholder. One couple’s vulgarity may be another couple’s love talk. Some people may maintain a Victorian belief that any talk about sex is not fit for mixed company, even between intimate partners. Sex is something you may do, but not something to be talked about. Other couples may be willing in principle to talk about sex but may find it difficult to actually do so because they lack an agreeable, common language.

How, for example, are they to refer to their genitals or to sexual activities? One partner may prefer to use coarse four-letter (or five-letter) words to refer to them. The other might prefer more clinical terms. A partner who prefers slang for the sexual organs might be regarded by the other as vulgar or demeaning. One who uses clinical terms, such as *fellatio* or *coitus*, might be regarded as, well, clinical. Some couples try to find a common verbal ground that is not vulgar at one extreme or clinical at the other. They might speak, for example, of “doing it” or “having sex” rather than “engaging in sexual intercourse.” (The title of the Eddie Cantor musical of the 1930s suggests that some people once spoke of “making whoopie.”) Or they might speak of “kissing me down there” rather than of practicing fellatio or cunnilingus.

Many couples also harbor irrational beliefs about relationships and sex, such as the notion that people should somehow know what their partners want, without having to ask. The common misconception that people should know what pleases their partners undercuts communication. Men, in particular, seem burdened with the stereotype that they should have a natural expertise at sex. Women may feel it is
“unladylike” to talk openly about their sexual needs and feelings. Both partners may hold the idealized romantic notion that “love is all you need” to achieve sexual happiness.

A related irrational belief is that if our partners truly loved us, they would somehow “read our minds” and know what types of sexual stimulation we desire. Unfortunately, or fortunately, others cannot read our minds. We must assume the responsibility for communicating our preferences.

Some people communicate more effectively than others, perhaps because they are more sensitive to others’ needs or because their parents served as good models as communicators. But communication skills can be acquired at any time. Learning takes time and work, but the following guidelines should prove helpful if you want to enhance your communication skills. These skills can also improve communication in areas of intimacy other than sexual.

**GETTING STARTED** How do you broach tough topics? Here are some ideas.

You can start by talking about talking. You can inform your partner that it is difficult for you to talk about problems and conflicts: “You know, I’ve always found it awkward to find a way of bringing things up” or “You know, I think other people have an easier time than I do when it comes to talking about some things.” You can allude to troublesome things that happened in the past when you attempted to resolve conflicts. This approach encourages your partner to invite you to proceed.

Broaching the topic of sex can be difficult. Couples who gab endlessly about finances, children, and work might clam up about sex. So it may be helpful to agree first to talk about talking about sex. You can admit that it is difficult to talk about sex. You can say that your sexual relationship is important to you and that you want to do everything you can to enhance it. Gently probe your partner’s willingness to set aside time to talk about sex, preferably when you can dim the lights and avoid interruptions.

The “right time” may be when you are both relaxed, rested, and unpressed for time. The “right place” can be any place where you can enjoy privacy and speak undisturbed. Sex talk need not be limited to the bedroom. Couples may feel more comfortable talking about sex over dinner, when cuddling on the sofa, or when just relaxing together.

Another possibility is to request permission to raise an issue. You can say something like this: “There’s something on my mind. Do you have a few minutes? Is now a good time to tell you about it?” Or you can say, “There’s something that we need to talk about, but I’m not sure how to bring it up. Can you help me with it?”

You can also tell your partner that it is okay to point out ways in which you can become a more effective lover. For example, you can say, “I know that you don’t want to hurt my feelings, but I wonder if I’m doing anything that you’d rather I didn’t do?”

**LISTENING** Effective listening involves such skills as active listening, paraphrasing, the use of reinforcement, and valuing your partner even when the two of you disagree. To listen actively rather than passively, first adopt the attitude that you may actually learn something—or perceive things from another vantage point—by listening.

Even when you disagree with what your partner is saying, you can maintain good relations and keep channels of communication open by saying something like “I really appreciate your taking the time to try to work this out with me” or “I hope
you’ll think it’s okay if I don’t see things entirely in the same way, but I’m glad that we had a chance to talk about it.”

When you disagree with your partner, do so in a way that shows that you still value your partner as a person. In other words, say something like “I love you very much, but it annoys me when you . . .” rather than “You’re really contemptible for doing. . . .” In this manner, you encourage your partner to disclose sensitive material without risk of attack or of losing your love or support.

**LEARNING ABOUT YOUR PARTNER’S NEEDS**

Listening is basic to learning about another person’s needs, but sometimes it helps to go a few steps further. You can ask open-ended questions that allow for a broader exploration of issues, such as

“What do you like best about the way we make love?”
“Do you think that I do things to bug you?”
“Does it bother you that I go to bed later than you do?”
“Does anything disappoint you about our relationship?”
“Do you think that I do things that are inconsiderate when you’re studying for a test?”

Closed-ended questions that call for a limited range of responses are most useful when you’re looking for a simple yes-or-no type of response: “Would you rather make love with the stereo off?”

Self-disclosure is essential to developing intimacy (Derlega et al., 2008). You can also use self-disclosure to learn more about your partner’s needs, because communicating your own feelings and ideas invites reciprocation. For example, you might say, “There are times when I feel that I disappoint you when we make love. Should I be doing something differently?”

You can ask your partner to level with you about an irksome issue. You can say that you recognize that it might be awkward to discuss it but that you will try your best to listen conscientiously and not get too disturbed. You can also limit yourselves to one such difficult issue per conversation. If the entire emotional dam were to burst, the job of mopping up could be overwhelming.

**PROVIDING INFORMATION**

There are skillful ways of communicating information, including “accentuating the positive” and using verbal and nonverbal cues. It is irrational to expect that your partner can read your mind. He or she can tell when you’re wearing a grumpy face, but your expression does not provide much information about your specific feelings. When your partner asks, “What would you like me to do?” don’t say, “Well, I think you can figure out what I want” or “Just do whatever you think is best.” Only you know what pleases you.

Let your partner know when he or she is doing something right! Speak up or find another way to express your appreciation. Accentuating the positive is rewarding and also informs your partner about what pleases you. In other words, don’t just wait around until your partner does something wrong and then seize the opportunity to complain!

Sexual activity provides an excellent opportunity for direct communication. You can say something like “Oh, that’s great” or “Don’t stop.” Or you can ask for feedback, as in “How does that feel . . . ?”
Feedback provides direct guidance about what is pleasing. Partners can also make specific requests and suggestions.

Sexual communication also occurs without words. Facial expressions and body language communicate likes and dislikes. Our partners may lean toward us or away from us when we touch them, or they may relax or tense up. In any case, they speak volumes in silence. The following exercises may help couples use nonverbal cues to communicate their sexual likes and dislikes.

- **Take turns petting.** Taking turns petting can help partners learn what turns one another on. Each partner takes turns caressing the other, stopping frequently enough to receive feedback by asking questions like “How does that feel?” The recipient is to provide feedback, which can be expressed verbally (“Yes, that’s it—yes, just like that” or “No, a little lighter than that”) or nonverbally, as in making appreciative or disapproving sounds. The knowledge gained through this exercise can be incorporated into the couple’s regular pattern of lovemaking.

- **Direct your partner’s hand.** Gently guiding your partner’s hand—to show your partner where and how you like to be touched—is a most direct way of communicating sexual likes. Women might show partners how to caress the breasts or clitoral shaft in this manner. Men might cup their partners’ hands to show them how to stroke the penile shaft or caress the testes.

- **Signal your partner.** Couples can use agreed-upon nonverbal cues to signal sexual pleasure. For example, one partner may rub the other in a certain way, or tap the other, to signal that something is being done right. The recipient of the signal takes mental notes and incorporates the pleasurable stimulation into the couple’s lovemaking. This is a sort of “hit or miss” technique, but even near misses can be rewarding.

**MAKING REQUESTS** A basic part of improving relationships or lovemaking is asking partners to change their behavior—to do something differently or to stop doing something that hurts or is ungratifying. The skill of making requests now comes to the fore.

Communication. Would it have been easier for him if he had just listened to her? Listening can take some skills, especially when a couple are in conflict.
Be specific in requesting changes. Telling your partner something like “I’d like you to be nicer to me” may accomplish little. Your partner may not know that his or her behavior is not nice and may not understand how to be “nicer.” It is better to say something like “I would appreciate it if you would get coffee for yourself, or at least ask me in a more pleasant way.” Or, “I really have a hard time with the way you talk to me in front of your friends. It’s as if you’re trying to show them that you have control over me or something.” Similarly, it may be less effective to say, “I’d like you to be more loving” than to say, “When we make love, I’d like you to kiss me more and tell me how you care about me.”

Of course, you can precede your specific requests with openers such as “There’s something on my mind. Is this a good time for me to bring it up with you?”

You are more likely to achieve desired results by framing requests in I-talk than by heaping criticisms on your partner. For example, “I would like it if we spent some time cuddling after sex” is superior to “You don’t seem to care enough about me to want to hold me after we make love.” Saying “I find it very painful when you use a harsh voice with me” is probably more effective than “Sometimes people’s feelings get hurt when their boyfriends [girlfriends] speak to them harshly in front of their friends or families.”

You can try out I-talk in front of a mirror or with a confidante before using it with your partner. In this way, you can see whether your facial expression and tone of voice are consistent with what you are saying. Friends may provide constructive feedback.

**DELIVERING CRITICISM** Delivering criticism effectively is a skill. It requires focusing partners’ attention on the problem without inducing resentment or reducing them to trembling masses of guilt or fear.

First, weigh your goals forthrightly. Is your primary intention to punish your partner, or are you more interested in gaining cooperation? If your goal is punishment, you may as well be coarse and disparaging, but understand that you are inviting reprisals. If your goal is to improve the relationship, however, a tactful approach may be in order.

Deliver criticism privately—not in front of friends or family. Your partner has a right to be upset when you make criticism public. Making private matters public prompts indignation and cuts off communication.

Be specific about the behavior that disturbs you so that you bypass the trap of disparaging your partner’s personality or motives. For example, you may be more effective by saying, “I could lose this job because you didn’t write down the message” than by saying, “You’re completely irresponsible” or “You’re a flake.” Similarly, you may achieve better results by saying, “The bathroom looks and smells dirty when you throw your underwear on the floor” than “You’re a filthy pig.” Complain about specific, modifiable behavior rather than trying to overhaul another individual’s whole personality.

Your partner will feel less threatened if you express displeasure in terms of your own feelings rather than by directly attacking his or her personality. Attacks often arouse defensive behavior, and sometimes retaliation. When confronting your partner for failing to be sensitive to your sexual needs when making love, it will likely be more effective to say, “You know, it really upsets me that you don’t seem to care about my feelings when we make love” than to say, “You’re so wrapped up in yourself that you never think about anyone else.”

Keep criticism and complaints to the present. Think how many times you have been in an argument and heard things like “You never appreciated me!” or “Last
summer you did the same thing!” Bringing up the past muddles current issues and heightens resentments. When your partner forgets to jot down a telephone message, it is more useful to state, “This was a vital phone call” than “Three weeks ago you didn’t tell me about the phone call from Chris, and as a result I missed out on seeing Terminator 17.” It’s better to leave who did what to whom last year (or even last week) alone.

Avoid blunt criticisms or personal attacks and suggest constructive alternatives. Avoid saying, “You’re really a lousy lover.” Say instead, “Can I take your hand and show you what I’d like?”

Whenever possible, express criticism positively and combine it with a concrete request. When commenting on your partner’s failure to display affection during lovemaking, say, “I love it when you kiss me. Please kiss me more” rather than “You never kiss me when we’re in bed and I’m sick of it.”

RECEIVING CRITICISM

Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger.

—Franklin P. Jones

Truth or Fiction Revisited: Retaliation is not the best course of action when you are criticized. We suggest that you do not seize the opportunity to strike back by saying, “Who’re you to complain about the bathroom? What about your breath and that pig sty you call your closet?” Retaliation is tempting and may make you feel good at the moment, but it can do a relationship more harm than good in the long run.

Delivering criticism can be tricky, especially when you want to inspire cooperation. Receiving criticism can be even trickier. Nevertheless, the following suggestions offer some help.

When you hear “It’s time you did something about . . . ,” it is understandable if the hair on the backs of your arms does a headstand. After all, it’s a blunt challenge. When we are confronted harshly, we are likely to become defensive and think of retaliating. But if your objective is to enhance the relationship, take a few moments to stop and think. To resolve conflicts, we need to learn about the other person’s concerns, keep lines of communication open, and find ways of changing problem behavior.

So when your partner says, “It’s about time you did something about the bathroom,” stop and think before you summon up your most menacing voice and say, “Just what the hell is that supposed to mean?” Ask yourself what you want to find out.

Just as it’s important to be specific when delivering criticism, it helps if you encourage the other person to be specific when you are on the receiving end of criticism. In the example of the complaint about the bathroom, you can help your partner be specific and perhaps avert the worst by asking a clarifying question, such as “Can you tell me exactly what you mean?” or “The bathroom?”

Consider a situation in which a lover says something like “You’re one of the most irritating people I know.” Rather than retaliating and further harming the rela-
CHAPTER 8 • Relationships and Communication

tionship, you might say something like “How about forgoing the character assassination and telling me what I did that’s bothering you?” This response requests an end to insults and asks your partner to be specific.

Even when you disagree with a criticism, you can keep lines of communication open and show respect for your partner’s feelings by acknowledging and paraphrasing the criticism.

On the other hand, if you are at fault, you can admit it. For example, you can say, “You’re right. It was my day to clean the bathroom and it totally slipped my mind” or “I was so busy, I just couldn’t get to it.” Now the two of you should look for a way to work out the problem. When you acknowledge criticism, you cue your partner to back off and look for ways to improve the situation. What if your partner then becomes abusive and says something like “So you admit you blew it?” You might then try a little education in conflict resolution. You could say, “I admitted that I was at fault. If you’re willing to work with me to find a way to handle it, great; but I’m not going to let you pound me into the ground over it.”

Now, if you think that you were not at fault, express your feelings. Use I-talk and be specific. Don’t seize the opportunity to angrily point out your partner’s shortcomings. By doing so, you may shut down lines of communication.

NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCES Negotiate your differences if you feel that there is merit on both sides of the argument. You may want to say something like “Would it help if I . . . ?” And if there’s something about your obligation to clean the bathroom that seems totally out of place, perhaps you and your partner can work out an exchange—that is, you get relieved of cleaning the bathroom in exchange for tackling a chore that your partner finds equally odious.

If none of these approaches helps resolve the conflict, perhaps your partner is using the comment about the bathroom to express anger over other issues. You may find out by saying something like “I’ve been trying to find a way to resolve this thing, but nothing I say seems to be helping. Is this really about the bathroom, or are there other things on your mind?”

WHEN COMMUNICATION IS NOT ENOUGH: HANDLING IMPASSES Communication helps build and maintain relationships, but sometimes partners have profound, substantial disagreements. In fact, it is normal to have disagreements from time to time. Even when their communication skills are superbly tuned, partners now and then reach an impasse. Couples who reach an impasse may find these suggestions helpful.

Research shows that taking your partner’s perspective (that is, looking at things from your partner’s point of view) during a dispute results in more positive feelings about the relationship and greater effort to respond in a constructive manner (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Driver et al., 2003). Thus, if there is an impasse, ill feeling may be resolved by (honestly) saying something like “I still disagree with you, but I can understand why you take your position.” But if you do not follow your partner’s logic, you can say something like “Please believe me: I’m trying very hard to look at this from your point of view, but I can’t follow your reasoning. Would you try to help me understand your point of view?”

Sometimes when you reach a stalemate, it helps to allow the problem to “incubate” for a while. If you and your partner put the issue aside for a time, perhaps a resolution will dawn on one of you later. Although we tend to form relationships with people who share similar attitudes, there is never a perfect overlap. A partner who
pretends to be your clone will most likely become a bore. Assuming that your relationship is generally rewarding and pleasurable, you may find it possible to tolerate some differences. Part of respecting other people is allowing them to be who they are. When we have a solid sense of who we are as individuals and what we stand for, we are more apt to tolerate differentness in our partners.

**Truth or Fiction Revisited:** It is not necessarily true that relationships come to an end when the partners cannot resolve their differences. You and your partner can agree to disagree on various issues (Rosenblatt & Rieks, 2009). Remember that disagreement itself is not necessarily destructive to a relationship—unless you are convinced that it must be. Two people cannot see everything in the same way. Failure to disagree ever will leave at least one partner feeling frustrated now and then. Conflict is nearly inevitable in a relationship. The key to satisfaction with the relationship is how the couple go about trying to resolve the conflict.

---

**Real Students, Real Questions**

**Q** How do you keep relationships going, long term?

**A** It takes two of you to do that, and the answer may surprise you: *Work.* People often get fed up with one another’s weak points, but also think about the strong points. Don’t only build—also rebuild. Be open about what’s wrong and talk about ways to make things right, or more right. If passion fades, try some new things (read that magazine about the 647 things that will drive her or him crazy). Check out some new films, new restaurants. Go somewhere for the weekend. Confide in a friend. Call a therapist. And sometimes the reality is you don’t keep the relationship going. Add up the pluses and minuses, figure out where you are in life, and make a decision that works for you.
The 3 R’s: Reflect, Recite, and Review

Your text uses the PQ4R method. Congratulations on completing the first R—reading the chapter. The remaining 3 R’s—reflect, recite, and review—will help you understand and recall the material in the chapter, as well as test your mastery.

Reflect

- Do you find it difficult to make small talk? Explain. Have you ever had trouble deciding how much intimate information to disclose to a dating partner? What are the dangers in disclosing too much too soon to a partner? Are there some things that you feel that you should never share with a partner?
- Would you want a partner to experience feelings of jealousy? Explain.
- Have you experienced loneliness? What did you do about it?
  ► CRITICAL THINKING: Evaluate yourself as a communicator. Do you follow any of the suggested behavior patterns in the section on communication? What obstacles prevent you from communicating? What types of things can you do to improve communication with a partner?

Recite

1. How do relationships develop?
- According to the “ABCDE” model, relationships develop through five stages: attraction, building, continuation, deterioration, and ending. Small talk enables people to learn whether they share interests, attitudes, and feelings of attraction. The opening line—or greeting—enables individuals to begin surface contact. Self-disclosure allows people to get below surface contact to determine whether they have things in common. Too little self-disclosure prevents development of intimacy; too much may appear to be socially inappropriate. Intimacy involves feelings of emotional closeness with another person and the desire to share each other’s innermost thoughts and feelings. Intimacy involves trust, caring, tenderness, honesty, and commitment. According to evolutionary theory, males are more jealous when their partners have sexual relations with an outsider, whereas females are more concerned when their partners develop emotional closeness with an outsider.

2. What is loneliness? What can people do about it?
- Loneliness is a state of painful isolation, of feeling cut off from others. Solitude, by contrast, can be a positive experience. Causes of loneliness include lack of social skills, lack of interest in other people, lack of empathy, fear of rejection, lack of self-disclosure, cynicism about people, demanding too much too soon, pessimism, and an external locus of control. People can overcome loneliness by challenging self-defeating attitudes, developing social skills, and placing themselves among others.

3. What factors are associated with satisfaction in relationships?
- Factors such as caring, lack of excessive jealousy, perceived fairness, mutual respect, and ability to communicate are connected with satisfaction in relationships. Lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, and transgendered people have problems in relationships similar to those of heterosexuals, but also unique problems such as those associated with LGB identity development, LGB parenting, and LGB issues with the law and in the workforce.

4. How can couples enhance their communication skills to maintain and improve their relationships?
- Couples may find it difficult to talk about sex because of the lack of an agreeable common language or because they harbor irrational beliefs about relationships and sex. Therapists help couples develop communication skills such as getting started in communicating, listening to one’s partner, learning about one’s partner’s needs, providing information, making requests, delivering and receiving criticism, and coping with impasses. Controversy exists over whether active listening helps couples communicate.
Review

1. Sexual satisfaction for lesbians is connected with
   (a) their sexual orientation.
   (b) their relationship.
   (c) social stigmatization.
   (d) issues in the workplace.

2. Evolutionary theory predicts that _________ will be most jealous about their partner’s sexual infidelity.
   (a) heterosexual males
   (b) heterosexual females
   (c) gay males
   (d) lesbians

3. Married people are most likely to have met their spouses through
   (a) church activities.
   (b) school activities.
   (c) mutual friends.
   (d) family activities.

4. Which of the following is not part of an intimate relationship?
   (a) narcissism
   (b) trust
   (c) caring
   (d) honesty

5. “Small talk”
   (a) is a phony way to begin a relationship.
   (b) is an in-depth discussion of issues.
   (c) promotes premature self-disclosure.
   (d) stresses breadth of topic coverage.

6. It is not true that
   (a) good relationships require no work.
   (b) jealousy harms a relationship.
   (c) partners need to work to keep relationships strong.
   (d) communication skills are important to relationships.

7. Which statement is accurate?
   (a) People need to be sexually intimate to have an emotionally intimate relationship.
   (b) People need not be sexually intimate to have an emotionally intimate relationship.
   (c) Love is necessary for intimacy.
   (d) Intimacy requires total honesty.

8. According to the text, _________ are most reluctant to make commitments in relationships.
   (a) men
   (b) heterosexual women
   (c) lesbians
   (d) transgendered individuals

9. Kurdek finds that LGB couples tend to differ from heterosexual couples in that they
   (a) distribute household chores more evenly.
   (b) avoid conflict at all costs.
   (c) do not consider sexual activity per se to be an important aspect of their relationship.
   (d) believe that love conquers all and that it is not necessary to work on relationships.

10. Gottman’s research challenges the view that _________ is a valuable aspect of communication skills.
    (a) knowing how to receive criticism
    (b) active listening
    (c) being specific about complaints
    (d) knowing when to agree to disagree

ANSWERS: 1. b; 2. a; 3. c; 4. a; 5. d; 6. a; 7. b; 8. a; 9. a; 10. b