Objectives

1. Explain how friendships change from childhood through adulthood.
2. Explain how adolescent, young adult, and adult friendships differ.
3. Describe similarities and differences between same-sex and cross-sex (opposite-sex) friendships.
4. List and describe the three qualities of romantic relationships.
5. Explain the challenges and expectations associated with first dates and dating.
6. Describe the skills and strategies used to initiate a relationship.
7. Describe the skills and strategies used to initiate and/or escalate relationships.
8. Describe the skills and strategies used to maintain and/or escalate relationships.

Outline

- Friendship
- Romantic Relationships
- Skills and Strategies for Developing Interpersonal Relationships
Chris and Lee have been friends since fourth grade. They hung out together throughout high school, sharing secrets, playing in band together, and often staying at each other’s homes. In college, they roomed together and continued to depend on each other for support and companionship. During their junior year, Chris began to develop a significant romantic relationship with Jan. Chris often sought Lee’s advice as the romantic relationship developed. Chris, Lee, and Jan often hung out together, and Lee became good friends with Jan. After graduation, Chris and Jan got married, with Lee providing support and assistance to both.

This scenario provides a very brief introduction to several types of relationships—same-sex best friends, romantic relationships, and opposite-sex friends. Underlying the scenario are some subtle but significant questions: Why did Chris feel the need to develop a romantic relationship? Why wasn’t the relationship with Lee sufficient to meet Chris’s needs for companionship and love? What needs are met by romantic relationships that aren’t satisfied through friendship?

Both friendship and romance are relationships of choice; for the most part, we can opt out of them whenever we want. When we begin each relationship, we don’t know how intimate it will become—although, as mentioned in Chapter 9, we probably try to predict the likelihood of an intimate and satisfying relationship. Both friendships and romantic relationships can lead to close, intimate, loving relationships.

Intimacy comes in two forms: friendship-based intimacy, based on feelings of warmth, understanding, and emotional connection; and passion-based intimacy, based on romantic and sexual feelings. Friendship and romance differ in that friendships develop solely from friendship-based intimacy, whereas romantic relationships involve both friendship-based and passion-based intimacy. Chris’s relationship with Lee evolved from friendship-based intimacy, whereas his relationship with Jan reflected both types.

Another obvious difference between friendship and romance is that romance includes sexual expectations and, ultimately, the prospect of creating a family. Romantic loving relationships are typified by a high degree of intimacy, attachment, and sexual activity and/or attraction. Historically, marriage was considered the most intimate relationship, rooted in the goal of procreation and forming a family. Today, we recognize that gays and lesbians may also form intimate romantic relationships with relational dynamics similar to those of heterosexual relationships, including marriage and child rearing.

Both friendships and romantic relationships significantly contribute to mental and physical well-being throughout our lives. This chapter discusses the qualities of each type of relationship; their similarities and differences; the role each plays in our lives; and the skills needed to initiate, escalate, and maintain them.

Friendship

Friendship is a relationship of choice that exists over time between people who share a common history. A friend is someone we like and who likes us. We trust our friends. We share good and bad times with them. We want to be with them, and we make time for that purpose.

Here’s a list of some of the qualities of friendship identified in a variety of research studies.

- Self-disclosure/feeling free to express intimate information
- Openness/honesty/authenticity
- Compatibility/similarity
Your own expectations of friendship probably include some of the items from this list, as well as additional qualities. How well a given person meets these expectations is one factor you use to decide whether to establish a friendship. As we noted earlier, friends represent relationships of choice. Friendship develops naturally into an interdependent relationship that is different from other interpersonal relationships; friends have no external constraints that keep them together, such as a job, school, or family, even though we often make friends with people in these situations. Usually, we form friendships with our equals, whereas we often form other types of relationships with people of different ages or social backgrounds. In contrast to what we accept from our family relationships, we tend to expect equality and equity in our friendships, with both partners providing similar amounts of emotional and material support and neither one becoming overly indebted.

Besides helping us enjoy a healthy life, friends help us cope with stress and take care of physical needs, and even contribute to the development of our personality. Friends significantly contribute to our social support networks, providing assistance in times of crisis. Friends also help shape our attitudes and beliefs. Especially during periods of change in our lives, such as adolescence and retirement, friends help us cope with uncertainty and have a profound influence on our behavior.

One of the most important functions that friends perform is to help us manage the mundane. Most friendships are not based on unusual activities. On the contrary, most of us seek out friends just to talk, share a meal, or enjoy entertainment together.

How many friends do you need? Typically, people have up to five close friends, fifteen other friends, twenty or more members in a social network (which could include family members), and many more people who are simply acquaintances. In all our social interactions, we are happiest when we are in the company of our friends. Perhaps the ancient Roman orator Cicero said it best: A friend multiplies our joys and divides our sorrows.

Friends also perform other functions, such as bolstering our self-esteem. Most of us need people who provide encouragement and tell us that we are decent and likable. It is confirming to have a friend become indignant on our behalf when we have experienced an injustice. Friends can help keep a stream of positive acceptance flowing to counteract the numerous nicks and bruises that our self-worth suffers in the course of daily living.

Friends also provide material help when you need it. When you are away on vacation, you might ask a friend to feed your cat and water your plants. If you run out of gas, you might call a friend to bring you some or pick you up.

Making Friends

How do you go about making friends? The first requirement is to interact with new people. Fortunately, you are surrounded with opportunities: You can meet people at school or work; people living near you; people with whom you share activities; and people in your existing friends’ social networks (mutual acquaintances). Unfortunately, making friends is like finding the perfect pair of new shoes: You might try on a lot until you find one that fits just right. Whatever your personality or interests, there are people who will
like you and be open to becoming your friends, but the process of finding these people might involve discarding a lot of shoes that don’t fit. An important rule of making friends is to be yourself—it needs to be your own foot you’re putting in the shoe. Being yourself increases the likelihood of finding real commonalities with someone.

One factor that helps in making friends in college is that you already share similarities with people you meet there—interest in education, in bettering yourself, and pursuing a career. Repeated polling of our students who were randomly assigned dorm roommates shows that about half of them become friends. That’s a pretty good success rate that can be partially attributed to shared similarities, combined with the chance to talk and learn about each other. The five factors that most affect the development of college friendships are similarity of attitudes, an expectation that the other person will like us, reciprocated self-disclosures, proximity, and accessibility or availability.

### Friendships at Different Stages in Life

Establishing intimacy with another person takes time, so most of us have a limited number of intimate relationships. We also have different needs for intimacy at various stages of our lives.

Psychologist Howard Markman and his colleagues found that self-disclosure, one of the most important components of friendship, did not seem to change in either depth or amount from young adulthood through age ninety-one. They did report, however, that as friends get older, they engaged in more negative self-disclosure; apparently, as we age, we are more willing to tell our friends less positive things about ourselves, rather than limiting our disclosures to information that makes us “look good.”

Another change that occurs as we age is the development of a more complex view of friendship. Young adults tend to lump “best friends” together, while older adults differentiate among best friends from their youth, best friends from work, best friends to do activities with, and so on. Relationship scholars W. J. Dickens and Daniel Perlman examined the differences among friendships at four stages in life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age, but current research suggests an additional delineation, called “young adulthood,” that occurs between adolescence and adulthood.

#### Childhood Friendships.

At about the age of two, when we start to talk, we begin parallel play with others. As toddlers, we perceive our playmates as people who can help meet our needs. Our first friendships are usually superficial and self-centered. Childhood friendships can be categorized into five sometimes overlapping stages.

From ages three to seven, we have momentary playmates—we interact with those in our presence. From ages four to nine, our friendships involve one-way assistance. We still view friendships from a “take” perspective, as instruments to help meet our needs, rather than from a “give” or “give-and-take” perspective.

The third stage, ages six to twelve, is the fair-weather friend stage. There is more give and take in friendships, but the reciprocity occurs when things are going well; the relationship is likely to end if problems and conflicts develop. The fourth stage, ages nine to fifteen, is called mutual intimacy. With the closeness that develops, relationships become more possessive. The last stage (beginning at about age twelve and continuing through adulthood) allows for more independence in friendships, as well as deepening interdependence with friends that permits greater levels of intimacy and sharing.

#### Adolescent Friendships.

During adolescence, beginning with the onset of puberty at around age twelve, we move away from relationships with parents and other adults and toward greater intimacy with our peers. During adolescence, peer relationships significantly influence our identity and social skills. We explore values, negotiate new relationships with family members, discover romantic and sexual opportunities, become more other-oriented, and seek increased intimacy. Adolescents
consider spending time with friends their most enjoyable activity, and they view friends as more committed, loyal, accepting, tolerant, and supportive than younger children do. In addition, adolescents place more value on personality (character, trustworthiness, similarity) and interpersonal qualities (companionship, acceptance, intimacy) in both same-sex and cross-sex friendships.

In adolescence, we develop cliques of friends and form friendship networks. Boys are more likely to join groups—either socially acceptable groups such as a sports or debate team or less socially desirable groups bent on violence and destruction of property. Girls are more likely to develop intimate relationships with one or two good friends. During adolescence, boys seem to have more friends, whereas girls appear to develop closer, more intense, and more intimate relationships. The number of friendships usually peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood, before we select a mate.

Young Adult Friendships. Young adult friendships, those occurring in our late teens through our early thirties, are linked to a succession of significant changes in our lifestyles and goals. The post–high school experience of young adults typically includes going to college, getting a job, pursuing more serious romantic relationships, getting married, and starting a family.

Those who go directly into the workforce after high school experience different friendship experiences than those who leave home to continue their education. Those who opt out of college seek to sustain their high-school–based friendships while developing new friendships at their workplace. As a college student, you probably have such friends, and you’ve probably noticed your relationships with them changing.

For college students who maintain their best friendships from high school, either because they commute or because they attend the same college as their high school friends, the likelihood of forming new best friends in college is reduced. Close high school friendships help new college students manage the stress and successfully adjust to college, but further adjustment requires the development of new friendships during the first year at college.

For those who move away to attend college, high school relationships often de-escalate because of changing interests and the time and energy needed to maintain the friendships. The loss of these relationships, changes in family interactions, and the challenge of forming new relationships often result in feelings of loneliness; however, new friendships are usually developed that are regarded as even more satisfying than previous ones.

Young adults and adolescents share some similar friendship values, such as loyalty, warmth, and having shared experiences. Young adults particularly value friends who reciprocate their caring, trust, commitment, self-disclosure, helpfulness, and support, while also having strong character. Finally, our friendships during this period of our lives help us learn and hone the skills needed for successful romantic relationships, as well as providing confidants with whom to discuss romantic experiences.

Adult Friendships. While the actual age ranges that define friendships is debatable, we consider adult friendships as those we have from the thirties through the sixties—in essence, those relationships during the prime of our work and family lives. Some young adult friendships continue as adult friendships, with friends experiencing similar life courses that act as a foundation for mutual empathy and support.

As you graduate, get married, and have children, the college friends with whom you
maintain relationships are likely having similar experiences, which can become focal points for interaction—talking about work, home life, and the kids.

Adult friendships are among our most valued relationships, providing emotional support, partners for activities, and socializing opportunities. In addition to continued friendships from young adulthood, friendships emerge with coworkers, neighbors, relatives, or members of organizations we become involved in. Since these often start as relationships of circumstance, they may be temporary and fade away as circumstances change, such as when someone moves or takes a new job. The importance of the marital relationship may cause friendships to become secondary, and the likelihood of opposite-sex friendships diminishes. The number of friends married people have declines over the course of their lives. On the other hand, romantic relationships and marriage introduce partners to each other’s social networks, thus affording additional opportunities for new friends. Marriage can also lead to developing friendships with brothers- or sisters-in-law or other family members. You and your spouse may become friends with other couples. Unfortunately, single friends can feel left out as couples gravitate to other couples.

Late Adulthood Friendships. Although people make new friends during their late adulthood, they value their long-established friendships the most. During retirement, when people have more time for socializing, friendships become increasingly important, but older adults are less likely to form new friendships. Instead, they tend to maintain a small, highly valued network of friends. Some friendships are rekindled as the elderly act on their longing to reconnect with close friends with whom they have lost contact. Late adulthood friendships keep individuals socially integrated as they reminisce, share stories, or engage in activities; in addition, their shared experiences add to their ability to be caring and supportive. These friendships often provide richer interactions than older adults experience with their own family members, though family relationships remain an important part of their lives.

Same-Sex Friendships

An ongoing debate surrounds how men and women approach friendship, particularly their same-sex friendships. One claim is that women define their female friendships by intimacy, whereas men define their male friendships in terms of activities. In one study, men reported having more “best friends” than women; but women spent more hours talking with their best friends. No such difference in the amount of talking was found with their “close” friends. Men also reported engaging in more physical activities in groups, whereas women spent more time discussing social relationship and school issues. However, men also value their close friendships with other men, and women do develop friendships with other women on the basis of their mutual activity.

What are your expectations for relationships with same-sex friends? The answer to this question was the focus of a study by personal relationship scholar Beverley Fehr, who examined prototypes (our expectations about relationships). Both men and women reported that self-disclosure, emotional support, loyalty, and trust contributed the most to a sense of intimacy in their same-sex friendships. However, although men understood what contributes to intimacy, women rated all of these behaviors as more likely to produce intimacy than did men and appeared to have a stronger need or desire for intimacy in same-sex friendships. Additionally, Fehr found that friendship satisfaction for women was related to these behaviors, but they did not affect men’s friendship satisfaction.
Close same-sex relationships serve similar functions for both men and women. Both value intimacy, trust, interpersonal sensitivity, emotional expressiveness, and authenticity in their same-sex friendships. Both men and women also value engaging in activities, conversing, having fun, and relaxing with their same-sex friends. Overall, men’s and women’s same-sex friendships appear to differ not in the qualities they possess but in the degree to which they possess them. Compared to men, women see their same-sex friendships as more satisfying, more enjoyable, and more intimate or close. Women’s same-sex friendships also involve more talk about talking (metacommunication), and are more person-centered and expressive. Females in same-sex friendships have more physical affection for each other and compliment each other more, whereas men are more openly competitive. While very close friends are not very interpersonally competitive, one study did find that same-sex male friends are more competitive than either same-sex female friends or cross-sex friends. Men acted less interpersonally competitive in their friendships with women, but women’s competitiveness increased in their friendships with males. For all friendships, being more competitive related to less friendship satisfaction.

As with all such generalizations, the conclusions of these studies don’t fit every relationship. For example, a person’s preference for same-sex or cross-sex friends might color the applicability of the conclusions. A recent study found that such preferences had a significant impact on the qualities respondents associated with each type of friendship. Males who preferred being best friends with a male saw friendships with males as more caring, supportive, and trustworthy than friendships with females. Women who preferred male best friends rated friendships with men as more trustworthy, more caring, and more supportive than female friendships, and similar in closeness. We all have our own friendship preferences and expectations that we use in judging the value of each of our female and male friendships.

Cross-Sex Friendships

Perhaps as you grew up, you had close friends of the opposite sex. Adolescents often develop opposite-sex, or cross-sex, friendships that are not romantic. However, the development of male–female friendships between heterosexual adults is sometimes a challenge because of underlying sexual attraction. In the movie *When Harry Met Sally*, Harry proclaims that “... men and women can’t be friends. The sex part always gets in the way.” Fortunately, research and your own experiences might indicate that Harry wasn’t totally correct. We can develop cross-sex adult friendships with minimal sexual attraction or redefine romantic relationships as friendships. Adult cross-sex relationships are facilitated by opportunities for men and women to interact nonromantically—in college, at work, and in leisure activities. Heidi Reeder, a communication researcher, conducted two studies on cross-sex relationships: one in which she interviewed twenty pairs of cross-sex friends, and the other in which 231 students completed questionnaires. Both studies found that romantic attraction and physical/sexual attraction diminished as the relationship progressed over time, while friendship attraction increased. While sexual attraction might indeed be an issue within cross-sex relationships, it is reduced when there is a commitment to developing and maintaining the relationship as friends.

Not all cross-sex friendships are devoid of sex. Friendship, romantic relationships, and sex have been found to connect in several ways. People in relationships labeled friends with benefits (FWB) have both sexual and nonsexual interactions but value their friendship above all; such relationships contrast with relationships that are primarily sexual and in which the couple are only minimally friends. FWB relationships are sometimes intentionally or unintentionally used as stepping stones to romantic relationships, both successfully and unsuccessfully. FWB relationships can also include instances in which going out with a mixed-sex group leads to “hooking up” at the end of the night or
in which partners in a post-romantic relationship still engage in sex. Surveys of college students reveal that around half of the respondents have had such a relationship.\textsuperscript{43} Reasons for engaging in FWB relationships include the avoidance of relational commitment, a desire to engage in sex with a friend, a perception that such relationships are simpler and less problematic than romantic ones, a desire to feel closer to the friend, and finally just a general desire to have a friends-with-benefits experience.\textsuperscript{44} Participants in such relationships appear to discuss and establish specific relational maintenance rules, with the most frequent being emotional rules (not falling in love or being jealous) and communication rules (guidelines about honesty, topics, and phone calling).\textsuperscript{45} However, the term \textit{friends with benefits} seems to imply that friendships without sex do not have benefits, which misrepresents the values of same- and cross-sex friendships.

Cross-sex friendships can be important relationships, as can the other relationships that have just been discussed, because through such relationships you can gain insights into how other people think. In this case, your friends can help you better understand the opposite sex. On the basis of interviews with 300 men and women about their cross-sex friendships, psychotherapist and author Lillian Rubin found that the men reported feeling a higher level of intimacy and friendship than their female counterparts (some women were surprised to find out they were even considered friends).\textsuperscript{46} Men seemed to gain more from their friendships with women than women did from men. Men valued their friendships with women for providing more nurturance and intimacy than their male friendships. Women did not feel their male friendships were as intimate or rewarding as their female friendships. However, women did enjoy the masculine interaction style, the fun activities, and learning about the male perspective.

In interacting with people of either sex, focus on working toward a mutual understanding and acceptance of what your expectations are for your friendship. There is great value in forming relationships with individuals who are different from you; not only can you learn about other people, but you can also gain a better sense of yourself. Learning how another person’s age, race, ethnicity, or sex affects his or her values, thoughts, and behaviors can increase your awareness of how those factors have influenced you.

\textbf{Diverse Friendships}

Most of our friendships are with people who are fairly similar to us. Similarity makes it easier to communicate effectively and to reach mutual understanding. The more we differ from other people, the greater the challenges that must be overcome to maintain a relationship, as discussed in Chapter 4. However, both friendships and romantic relationships do develop between people who differ in culture, age, and race. Part
of the success of these relationships depends on whether the difference is more superficial than profound.

**Intergenerational Friendships.** The impact of a ten-year age difference between you and another person is likely to be minimal if you both have the same interests and similar values. However, someone forty years older might have a very different outlook on life from yours. Usually, the older people become, the less impact age differences have on them. A fifteen-year-old’s interactions with a thirty-year-old represent a very different kind of relationship than that of a thirty-year-old and a forty-five-year-old.

How many close friendships do you have with anyone significantly older or younger? Developing and sustaining such relationships often requires special effort; so we are more likely to have casual intergenerational friendships. One study compared close friendships between peers of similar age and between friends who were at least ten years different in age. The sample included participants who ranged from eighteen to seventy-six. Close relationships with peers, as compared to relationships with those who were of a different age, were seen as providing more companionship, satisfaction, intimacy, and nurturance and as being more likely to continue in the future.

**Intercultural and Interracial Friendships.** The qualities and expectations associated with being a friend differ among cultures, ethnic groups, and racial groups. You might engage in behavior that you think is appropriate in your friendship with a person from another culture, only to find that you have offended your friend by violating his or her culturally based expectations. In fact, one study that examined the qualities associated with friendship in various ethnic groups in the United States found that “Latinos emphasized relational support, Asian Americans emphasized a caring, positive exchange of ideas, African Americans emphasized respect and acceptance, and Anglo Americans emphasized recognizing the needs of the individual.” Realize, of course, that such generalities may not be valid for a particular member of an ethnic group. However, the study also found that in developing interethnic relationships, individuals seemed unaware of cultural or ethnic differences; rather, they developed a unique relationship defined by their own relational rules rather than by cultural rules. This is similar to the notion of developing a third culture, as discussed in Chapter 4. True respect for and deep understanding of a partner’s culture develops as the relationship becomes very close, at which point cultural violations are viewed less negatively and are even joked about.

As in the development of most relationships, factors such as proximity and communication affect attraction in intercultural friendships. However, four factors have been identified that specifically affect the development of intercultural friendships.

1. **Cultural similarities** exist across cultures, creating common ground that nurtures the development of friendship—for example, sharing the same passion for soccer as someone from Brazil or a love of anime with someone from Japan.

2. **Cultural differences** can actually heighten interest in the other person and prompt initial conversations. You might seek more information about another culture’s use of arranged marriages or observance of Ramadan.

3. **Prior intercultural experiences** help reduce uncertainty about developing friendships with people from other cultures and

Couples who choose to establish relationships outside of a culture’s norms face challenges and social pressures.
Relational Expectations

Canadian researcher Beverly Fehr found that people hold certain expectations (prototypes) for the kinds of interactions that lead to a sense of intimacy in friendships. People use these expected interaction patterns as a standard that helps them determine the level of intimacy in a relationship and evaluate that intimacy. Changes in the number and intensity of your prototype interaction patterns let you know whether you are moving toward or away from intimate friendships. How aware are you of your expectations? Do you have the same expectations for all relationships, or do they differ depending on the type of relationship? The statements on the facing page reflect the top patterns (prototypes) of relating found in Fehr’s study. Think about your general expectations for each of the listed relationships. Put 2 on the line if the interaction pattern strongly reflects your explanation of what should occur in each relationship, 1 if it somewhat reflects your expectation, and 0 if it doesn’t apply.

Building Your Skills

by Whites. According to Rawlins, friends of different races need to recognize that racism is a reality that affects our relationships; we are all potentially racist, and racism can appear in many different forms. For example, thinking you’re doing a favor for someone of another race by being his or her friend might reflect an inherent belief in your superiority. Finally, friends of different races need to guard against either overaccommodating or overassimilating—each person needs to retain his or her own racial identity while appreciating that of the other. Rather than changing to gain acceptance, interracial friends need to accept each other’s race as part of who each person is.

Romantic Relationships

The closest relationship you ever develop with another human being will probably be a romantic one, perhaps a marriage. However, even without being married, 47 percent of students surveyed in one study indicated their closest relationships were with romantic partners. This closeness is reflected in many behaviors; for example, romantic couples are more likely than friends to talk about what attracted them to each other, to celebrate anniversaries, and to mark other milestones in formal ways, such as with a card or a special dinner.

At the most rudimentary level, romantic relationships are about mating and creating a family. Your immediate reaction might be to exclaim that this was the last thing on your mind during your high school and college romances. Nonetheless, the complex process of seeking a mate begins with fairly innocuous interactions with the opposite sex. Chapter 9 provided a general model of relational stages, but romantic relationships can be further delineated along a continuum (Figure 11.1) that reflects increasing commitment, love, sex as emotional expression, exclusivity (fidelity), and self-disclosure.

Romantic relationships exist both between cross-sex couples and between same-sex couples. Gay and lesbian romantic relationships share many of the same qualities as heterosexual relationships, although homosexual couples often face added pressure of
The triangular theory of love, developed by psychologist Robert Sternberg, identifies three dimensions that can be used to describe variations in loving relationships: intimacy, commitment, and passion. In this model (Figure 11.2), intimacy includes such attributes as trust, caring, honesty, supportiveness, understanding, and openness. The second dimension, commitment, includes loyalty, devotion, putting the other first, and needing each other. The final dimension, passion, includes excitement, sexual interest and activity, and extreme longing. These three dimensions relate to relationship satisfaction, with passion identified as the most important dimension for developing romantic relationships.

These dimensions provide a useful way of thinking about how love manifests itself in relationships. According to the triangular theory of love, the presence and strength of each of these dimensions varies from relationship to relationship, with each combination defining a style of love. For example, relationships strong in intimacy and
commitment but weak in passion are identified as companionate love, and relationships strong only in passion constitute infatuation. Where would your current or past romantic relationship(s) be placed around the triangle? Relationships don’t stay at the same place, but rather vary as each dimension ebbs and flows.

A simpler approach presents romantic love as having just two parts: passionate love and companionate love. Passionate love serves to establish attraction to, interest in, and focus on one person and usually, but not always, declines in the early years of marriage. Companionate love is love that develops over time as partners become more entwined, mutually responsive to needs, and attached, while feelings of trust and caring increase.

Sociologist John Alan Lee created a similar scheme that defined six types of love found in both romantic and nonromantic relationships: eros, ludis, storge, mania, pragma, and agape.

Eros is sexual love based on the pursuit of beauty and pleasure. The physical need for sex brings many couples together. Erotic lovers crave sexual intimacy and passionately seek sexual activity to satisfy their need. Sexual attraction brings special needs and emotions to a relationship, sometimes obscuring other concerns. Shakespeare described this phenomenon when he wrote “But love is blind, and lovers cannot see the petty folly that themselves commit.”

Ludis describes love as a game, something to pass the time. Ludic lovers are not seeking long-term relationships; rather, they seek immediate gratification and their partners’ affection. Their goal is to be in love and to enjoy their partners rather than to achieve a sexual victory.

Early dating relationships are often of the ludic type. Going on a date to a junior high dance is a casual pleasure, not a prelude to a lifelong commitment. Ludis lasts as long as the partners have fun and find the relationship mutually satisfying.

Storge is the sort of love found in most friendships and in relationships with siblings and other family members. Sexual consummation is not a factor in this sort of love, although sexual attraction may be present. A storgic relationship usually develops over a long period of time, and it is solid and more resistant to change than erotic love. Trust, caring, and compassion are high; selfishness is low.

Mania describes a love relationship that swings wildly between extreme highs and lows. A manic lover is obsessed with the relationship with the other person. Each of the lovers may have an insatiable need for attention, often fueled by a low self-concept.

passionate love Romantic love that serves to establish attraction to, interest in, and focus on one person.

companionsate love Romantic love that develops over time as entwinement, mutual responsiveness to needs, trust, caring, and attachment increase.

eros Sexual, erotic love based on the pursuit of physical beauty and pleasure.

ludis Game-playing love based on the enjoyment of another.

pragma Solid love found in relationships with siblings and other family members.

mania Obsessive love driven by mutual needs.
Pragma is the root word for pragmatic, meaning practical. This kind of relationship works because the partners’ individual requirements, personalities, backgrounds, likes, and dislikes are compatible. In some cultures, parents prearrange marriages because of pragmatic concerns, and if the couple is lucky, passion develops later on as the relationship takes its course.

Agape love is based on a spiritual ideal of love. It involves giving of yourself and expecting nothing in return. This kind of “pure” love may characterize the relationship between a parent and a child, or the relationship between a spiritual leader and his or her followers.

Commitment. Commitment is our intention to remain in a relationship. As we progress along the continuum of romance, commitment increases and clearly differentiates even serious dating from engagement and marriage. Turning points often mark significant changes in our romantic relationship commitments—declaring our love for someone, pledging to date exclusively, proposing marriage, and making wedding vows. We also communicate our commitment to another through our behaviors. A recent study of married and romantically involved couples found that the level of commitment was related to six sets of behaviors:69

1. Being supportive and encouraging (e.g., listening and being courteous)
2. Reassuring our partner of our feelings (e.g., expressing love and confirming the importance of the relationship)
3. Offering tangible reminders (e.g., giving gifts and assistance)
4. Creating a relationship future (e.g., doing things together and making plans together)
5. Behaving with integrity (e.g., being honest, being faithful, and keeping promises)
6. Working on the relationship (e.g., talking out problems and expressing trust)

Women, more than men, showed commitment by being supportive, creating a relationship future, and behaving with integrity; men showed commitment by offering tangible reminders more than women. What behaviors do you display to implicitly convey commitment to your partner?

We each have specific expectations that we apply to our romantic relationships, depending on the relationship’s progress. In general, we expect partners in committed relationships to be faithful, to respect us, to help maintain our face when the relationship is troubled, and to help us through hard times. This list of expectations almost sounds like wedding vows, which are in essence a statement of our commitment to our partner.

Physical Affection and Sex. Physical affection is the use of touch to convey emotional feelings of love and caring for another person. We express affection through touch in romantic relationships, and as the relationships change, so does our physical affection. The need for touch and its relationship to intimacy is discussed in Chapter 7. As that chapter points out, more affectionate touching occurs in the earlier part of a romantic relationships than later. Touch is one way we establish intimacy; as intimacy is achieved, the need to continue displaying physical affection appears to decline. Although we might engage in touching without having feelings of affection or have feelings of affection without being physically demonstrative, physical affection depends on both parts—the physical (actual behavior) and the emotional (affection). Physical affection, in and of itself, is not unique to romantic relationships. It is also a part of our interactions with friends and family—hugs, kisses, and snuggling, for example. However, physical affection can also occur as a precursor to sexual activity or in concert with sexual activity.

The ultimate goal of many romantic relationships is producing children and a family; sex is obviously the way to accomplish this goal. However, humans frequently engage in sexual intercourse with no intention of producing children, which makes the role of sex in romantic relationships complex and perplexing. Besides a desire to procreate, sex can be motivated by a desire to feel valued by the partner, to show that the partner is valued, to release stress, to show or feel power, for pleasure, and to nurture the partner. Motivation to engage in sex has been linked to people’s attachment styles (discussed in Chapter 2), with attachment anxiety related to engaging in sex to please a partner and express love. The stronger a person’s attachment avoidance, the less sex occurs as an expression of love, a show of intimacy, or to please the partner, and the more it occurs to avoid angering the partner. Traditionally, sexual activity and intercourse were reserved for marriage, as they still are for some. However, romantic relationships today most often involve and are even defined by sexual activity, and sex occurs even outside the bounds of romantic relationships. Research shows that relationship satisfaction in intimate relationships (married and dating couples) positively correlates with sexual satisfaction, but this correlation might be because another variable (such as good communication) is responsible for both relationship and sexual satisfaction.

Talking to your partner about sex, self-disclosure, and discussing previous sexual activity all affect both sexual and relational satisfaction. Talking about sexual intentions and desires was found to increase sexual satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and intimacy. In one study, those who engaged more in nonsexual self-disclosing and those whose partners disclosed sexual information were more likely to disclose sexual expectations, which in turn related to sexual and relational satisfaction. Explicit communication surrounding first sex creates a more accurate shared perception and
reduces uncertainty about both sexual and relational expectations.\textsuperscript{78} You might find such open discussion about your sexual history and expectations threatening. In some instances, such disclosures might even damage the relationship. Nonetheless, informing partners about potential risks by disclosing previous sexual activity is considered a safe-sex practice. However, 32 percent of students in one survey reported withholding this information from at least one partner, and 17 percent withheld it from all their partners; in addition, 25 percent misrepresented their sexual histories.\textsuperscript{79} Such deceptions ultimately impair relational development and intimacy. In exclusive romantic relationships, especially marriage, infidelity is a form of deception that similarly puts a partner at risk. Agreeing to an exclusive sexual relationship might be more about committing to an intimate, romantic relationship than about limiting sexual partners; infidelity thus threatens the very essence of the relationship. As you develop your own romantic relationships, strive to be as direct and explicit as you can in discussing your expectations for all aspects of the relationship, including sex.

### From Friendship to Romance

Many romantic relationships begin as friendships. Establishing friendship-based intimacy first is an effective way to determine, with less risk and commitment, the potential for a more passion-based relationship. With the primary focus on compatibility, attraction, and other qualities of friendship, if the relationship fails to escalate or no romantic relationship develops, the end result is less loss of intimacy.

To move from friendship to romance involves adding passion-based intimacy to the existing friendship-based intimacy. This transition to a romantic relationship is accompanied by causal and/or reflective turning points, such as significant and intimate self-disclosure, a shared interaction that is seen as a “first date,” or the occurrence of sex.\textsuperscript{80} Such turning points might precipitate relationship talk: discussing roles and expectations, assessing the costs and rewards (benefits and risks), managing dialectical tensions (particularly the balance between autonomy and connectedness), and managing the relationship within each partner’s social networks.

However, a direct statement of a desire for a romantic relationship could be face-threatening to both parties, and even a failure event, if it violates an agreement to remain platonic. The dilemma is further complicated by the fact that expressing such a desire might cause the loss of the friendship, but not expressing the desire might mean a missed opportunity for romance.\textsuperscript{81} In such a situation, you might be better served by using secret tests to reduce uncertainty about the partner’s feelings and to indirectly signal your interest.\textsuperscript{82} A secret test is a behavior strategically chosen to indirectly determine a partner’s feelings. For example, you might rely on indirect suggestions (hinting or joking about becoming romantic to test your partner’s response); separation tests (decreasing or eliminating time together to see if you are missed, or not contacting your partner to see whether he or she will initiate contact); endurance tests (increasing demands on or costs to your partner to see whether he or she is willing to “pay” the price to sustain the relationship); and triangle tests (disclosing potential romantic relationships to test for jealousy, or determining your partner’s interest in others to test his or her fidelity to you).\textsuperscript{83} Each secret test is intended to determine your partner’s interest and commitment to the relationship, while protecting your face and the relationship.

### The First Date and Dating

So when is a social interaction with someone considered just hanging out, and when is it a date? Calling an interaction “a date” changes expectations, roles, and the relationship. When you label an interaction with someone as a date, you are usually signaling an openness to a romantic relationship with the other person. “Dating” tends to be the term for any ongoing romantic relationship that precedes “being engaged.”
So what is a date? Maybe you’ve never been on one. Regardless of how you initiated and developed romantic relationships in high school and college, dates and dating play a significant role in the development of romantic relationships outside of school.

If you are a typical college student between the ages of 18 and 21, then most of your experiences with the opposite sex have probably occurred in group interactions and as “hooking up.” Sociologist Kathleen Bogle writes that hooking up has essentially replaced dating on college campuses. Although the term hooking up has lots of meanings, generally students use it to describe a nonromantic, short-term, physical encounter. Hooking up is like being friends with benefits, but without the friendship requirement. The level of physical intimacy ranges from kissing to sexual intercourse, and the interaction is generally without attachment, although some students, particularly women, report hoping for more. Bogle found that most hookups were not one-night stands or “randoms” with strangers, but rather encounters between friends or classmates, often preceded by the consumption of alcohol. Although it happens infrequently, hookups can lead to romantic relationships, particularly if the hookup produced a positive emotional experience for both partners, there was some small talk and talk of future interactions, and both had similar motivations.

Given the limited number of dates college students experience, it is understandable that they would have different goals for and expectations of a date than would other single adults. Both groups see dates as activity-focused events involving couples sharing information to reduce uncertainty. However, college students see dates as more social, more public, and more about attraction. Single adults see dates as being more about both immediate enjoyment and a future relationship, initiated by one person, and involving someone’s paying for whatever activity is involved. Bogle’s interviews with recent graduates found that they had abandoned hooking up for dating, which for many was the first time they actually had been on a date. If you are among those who have not been on a formal date, then understanding dating dynamics and your partner’s expectations should help reduce your uncertainties and anxiety.

Moving from being friends to going on a date involves different issues and concerns than asking an acquaintance for a date. Students in one study were asked to imagine asking for a date with a classmate who might not even know their name. The students reported they would feel anxiety, fear, and discomfort, but also excitement, a sense of pride in taking a risk, and a positive feeling for finally making the attempt. They hoped the other person would feel flattered and maybe good or great, but also saw the possibility for uncertainty, surprise, awkwardness (maybe even creepiness), or discomfort. Among the general concerns students expressed about asking for a date were the possibility of rejection, discovery that the other was already involved, uncertainty about what the person was really like, lack of reciprocal interest, and awkwardness in future class periods. Students also expressed concerns about their own physical attractiveness, as well as about appearing too pushy, too desperate, a “psycho,” a fool or stupid, or a loser.

To actually ask someone for a date probably requires feeling that the risk is worth the potential loss of face, that the predicted outcome value of the relationship is high, and that you see a good chance that your request will actually be accepted. You could use secret tests to reduce some uncertainty about the other person’s interest, find out what your mutual friends know about him or her, use affinity-seeking strategies (such as showing up at activities or parties you know the other person will be attending), or simply get more acquainted before seeking a date.
So what happens on a date? People bring to dates expectations about how the date will proceed. How a date proceeds depends on your relationship with the other person prior to the date, the event that is the focus of the date (a concert, a movie, a party), the cost of the date, and who initiated the date. Nonetheless, one study found that respondents shared many of the same expectations for a first date. These expectations, reflecting traditional gender roles, included men picking up the women and taking them home, as well as paying for the date, even if the women initiated the date. Men were more likely to expect more than kissing, especially if the women initiated the date. Besides the expectation that the couple will engage in the agreed-on activity (going to a movie, for coffee, to a party), a significant expectation is that dating partners will talk. Talk is an important component of a date because both partners understand the need to begin self-disclosing and gaining information about each other to reduce uncertainty. As the date winds down, both have an expectation that there will be some discussion of future plans to call or text each other, an expression of interest in getting together again, and perhaps some discussion of another date, either specifically or generally. Neither partner wants to be put in a position of having to directly reject the other, so in order for each person to save face, plans for the future are usually rather vague.

The indirect manner in which we often choose to communicate, particularly when dating, causes misperceptions and awkwardness. For example, when asked why you don’t ask someone out, you are likely to indicate a fear of rejection. However, you are likely to assume the reason the other person doesn’t ask you out is because he or she lacks sufficient interest in you. Sadly, the other person might be just as interested in a date but also fear rejection. Another problem is that when women confirm their attraction and affection toward their dates with smiles and other positive nonverbal affiliative cues, men may read these behaviors as cues of sexual interest. Both examples reflect difficulties in reading another person’s nonverbal cues and the need to practice the suggestions discussed in Chapter 7 for improving your nonverbal sensitivity. Although there is an inherent taboo about directly discussing attraction and
the relationship during the early part of dating, direct but tactful expression of interest, expectations, and goals by both parties contributes to clarity and understanding.

**Unrequited Romantic Interest**

What happens when you attempt to redefine a friendship as a romantic relationship, but your partner rejects your attempt? One partner’s desire for a more intimate, romantic relationship than the other partner creates unrequited romantic interest. One study of college students found that unrequited romantic interest between friends was fairly common, leading to feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment; when students expressed their romantic interest, over half the relationships actually ended. In friendships that persevered, both partners worked toward maintaining the friendship; the friendship was solid, long-established, open, and honest; and the partner who wanted more accepted that the feelings were not mutual. Friendships that ended did so because both partners felt embarrassed or awkward, the rejected partner felt hurt, and the other partner felt pressured to act differently. The results of this study suggest what you might do to preserve a friendship if your expression of romantic interest is not reciprocated:

1. Affirm the importance of the friendship to you and continue to work on it.
2. Tell your partner you accept his or her position and then drop the issue.
3. To reduce embarrassment and awkwardness, try to go back to old relational patterns.
4. Avoid pressuring your partner to feel more than he or she does: Don’t flirt, accept his or her interest in others, and give up on developing a romantic relationship.
5. Don’t complain about the difference in feelings.
6. Don’t suggest that maybe the relationship can be romantic sometime in the future.
7. Don’t tell other friends about what happened.

On the other hand, how should you handle someone else’s overtures to you if you don’t feel the same way? People in this position tend to use either (1) indirect strategies—being rude or ambiguous or avoiding the other person; (2) a direct strategy without justification—simply stating a lack of reciprocal feelings; (3) a direct strategy of blaming themselves while stating lack of mutual interest (“I’m just not ready for a romantic relationship right now”); or (4) a direct strategy of blaming external factors while indicating lack of interest (“I’m involved with someone else”). Have you ever encountered such strategies, or have you used any of them? A study in which college students recalled times they expressed interest in developing a romantic relationship found that the results differed depending on whether the relationship was initially a friendship or was a romantic relationship that one person wished to deepen. The indirect strategy was found to be the least desirable strategy for rejecting a friend’s attempt to escalate the relationship, since it was seen as inappropriate. Similarly, blaming external factors was found to be undesirable for rejecting a romantic partner’s attempt to escalate the relationship, perhaps because people don’t expect a romantic partner to be evasive. Interestingly, students accepted rejection of their attempts to escalate friendships better than rejection of their attempts to escalate romantic relationships. We probably have expectations for romantic relationships to escalate as part of the relational development process, meaning that rejection of escalation is unexpected and disappointing. Regardless of whether you are the one whose effort to escalate a relationship is rejected or the one rejecting another’s request, you both need to assess the
Electronically mediated communication (EMC) provides avenues for initiating, maintaining, and ending both friendships and romantic relationships. A national survey of the Pew Internet & American Life Project found a growing number of adults on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace in 2008, with 78 percent of 18–24-year-olds, 57 percent of 25–34-year-olds, and 20 percent of 35–44-year-olds surveyed reporting having an online profile. However, your grandparents probably don’t have online profiles, as only 7 percent of those 65 and older reported having them. Eighty-nine percent of the adults used such networks to stay in touch with friends; 57 percent used them to make plans with friends (compared with 72 percent of teens); and almost half used them to make new friends. Social networking sites provide opportunities for greatly expanding your network to include new people with whom you connect through listings of mutual friends.

Your profile provides information about you (some of which you might not even realize you are revealing) that affects other’ impressions of you and that might either enhance or detract from a friendship. For example, one study found that with everything else held constant, a person whose profile included 302 friends was rated as more socially attractive than one reporting 102, 502, 702, or 902 friends. Those with 102 friends (who were perhaps seen as too aloof) and those with 902 friends (who were perhaps too indiscriminate) were the least attractive. Those with 502 friends were seen as the most extroverted, and those with 102 or 302 friends were seen as the least.

In face-to-face interactions, you control and tailor what you disclose, withholding information from those you are less interested in. Your online profile also involves self-disclosing, and you choose what to include or exclude—relationship status, attitudes, beliefs, interests, names of clubs or organizations you belong to, your online group memberships, pictures, video clips, quiz results. However, unlike your tailored, face-to-face disclosures, the information in your online profile is not restricted. Your wall and your posts are also visible. Anyone you accept as a friend—whether a new acquaintance, a romantic partner, a parent, or a best friend—has access to the same information. And those people can cut and paste any of that information and circulate it freely to others.

Can you form intimate romantic relationships strictly through the Internet? Assuming an open and honest exchange of information, individuals can learn as much about another person through e-mail disclosures as they might in face-to-face interactions. In another survey by Pew in 2005, 11 percent of respondents reported having visited an online dating site; however, 66 percent viewed online dating as dangerous because it requires placing personal information online. Nonetheless, of those visiting a dating site, 43 percent actually went on dates, and 17 percent developed long-term relationships or got married. Friends can also act as go-betweens, suggesting an e-mail exchange or instant messaging between individuals they think could hit it off. EMC provides the opportunity for appropriately introduced individuals to enter the acquaintance stage of a relationship by sharing information and engaging in casual banter before moving to the exploration stage. Online networks such as Facebook can also allow people to initiate romantic relationships.

Skills and Strategies for Developing Interpersonal Relationships

So far, this chapter has focused on the nature of friendship and romantic relationships. Now the focus shifts to discussing specific strategies and skills for starting, escalating, and maintaining those relationships. The skills described are not fail-safe, and the lists provided are not complete—they are intended primarily to stimulate consideration of your own thoughts and behaviors as you develop new relationships. Some skills are better suited for developing friendships and others for romance, but the foundations for both are similar.

When you meet someone you initially like, how do you go about fostering a friendship or a romance? Once you have established a relationship, how do you ensure that it remains healthy and at the level of intimacy with which you are most comfortable? The following three sections provide strategies you can use to address these questions. The first section discusses skills and strategies used primarily to initiate type of relationship you are willing to accept and decide whether such a relationship is possible, knowing that one of you feels more romantically inclined than the other.
interaction. The next section covers skills and strategies used in both initiating and escalating relationships. The final section focuses on skills used in either maintaining a relationship or moving it toward more intimacy once it has been established.

**Skills and Strategies Used Primarily to Initiate a Relationship**

There are two paths to relationship initiation, depending on whether the people involved have reached the pre-interaction awareness stage of relationship development. One path begins with interacting with a complete stranger for the very first time. The other begins after you have observed and formed an initial impression of the other person before interacting. The following sections explain some of the principles to follow as you proceed down either of these two paths.

**Observe and Act on Approachability Cues.** Subway riders around the world learn to avoid eye contact because it is a signal of approachability. Besides making eye contact, you can choose to signal approachability by turning toward another person, smiling, being animated, using an open body posture, winking, and waving. In the absence of these cues, we generally conclude that a person wants to be left alone. Saying hello lets people know that you are approachable, and it tests approachability.
If the other person responds with a warm smile and a few words, then the door might be open for further interaction. But if the person gives you a silent half-smile and hurries on, you can take this as a signal that the door is closed.

**Identify and Use Conversation Starters.** By being observant, you can identify a certain amount of “free” information that you can use as a starting point for a conversation. If someone is walking a dog of the same breed as your childhood pet, you can open a conversation by commenting on some peculiarity of the breed. If someone is carrying a book from a class you took last semester, you might ask how the course is going. Logos on T-shirts, tags or stickers on backpacks, or even tattoos can be conversation starters. There is no perfect line to use to begin a conversation, so being direct is probably your best bet.109

**Follow Initiation Norms.** Many of the initial interactions in a relationship are almost ritualistic, or at least scripted. In the United States, when two strangers meet for the first time, they typically follow the same general pattern of conversation:110 greetings; introductions; discussion of initial topics such as the weather, hometown, majors, education, or occupations; followed by discussion of general topics such as sports, TV, movies, or family. If the conversation goes well, they might discuss getting together, and then end by exchanging pleasantries, closing the conversation, and saying goodbye. As you follow the script, take advantage of opportunities to expand and develop the conversation in safe ways. Listen for details about the person’s background and interests that you can inquire about, and share information about your own interests.

Following a script provides some comfort and security because it reduces the uncertainties associated with meeting a stranger; deviating from the script might increase uncertainty and be a turnoff. For example, how would you react to a stranger who begins with “Nice to meet you, too. Don’t you agree that television is becoming the vast wasteland of American intellect, draining the very life blood of our youth?” You might be leery of continuing this interaction.

**Ask Questions.** The very act of asking questions can enhance your partner’s attraction to you.111 Asking questions shows your interest in the other person and promotes reciprocity of liking. Asking questions allows you to gain information, reduce uncertainty, and improve your ability to adapt to your partner. Ask open questions that invite elaboration and discussion, and learn to ask meaningful follow-up or probing questions without appearing to interrogate the other person. Starting with impersonal, specific questions, often about the circumstance or surroundings, encourages a response by reducing a person’s reluctance to answer (for example, while standing in a movie line, you might ask “Have you heard any reviews of this movie?”). After the initial question, advance the conversation by asking open and encompassing questions related to his or her answer (“What did the reviewers have to say?”).

Short responses without any reciprocal questions may be a signal that the person you’re talking to is not particularly interested in interacting. If so, you’re probably better off not pursing the interaction any further. Usually, however, the other person will also ask you questions. Be open and provide information about yourself that is relevant to the questions.

Recognize that the thoughts and feelings that might be evoked by your questions will differ from person to person. A question that is easy and comfortable for you to answer may not be for others. Be sensitive to how the other person responds to your questions, and be prepared to adapt your comments appropriately. Other-oriented communication skills can help you manage sensitive situations. Be prepared to adapt to any unusual response or nonverbal cues you observe.
Don’t Expect Too Much from the Initial Interaction. Initial interactions do not necessarily determine the future of a relationship; the scripted nature of an initial interaction limits the opportunity to achieve an in-depth relationship. Regardless of how the first conversation might seem to go, if you sense relationship potential, you should follow up with a suggestion that the two of you get together again; the other person’s response will be a gauge of his or her interest. Many relationships have started out awkwardly, with both partners feeling less than enthusiastic about the encounter, but when given the chance to interact again, they develop a more positive perspective.

Skills and Strategies Used to Initiate and/or Escalate Relationships

“No kidding! I love chocolate-covered strawberries, too.” “It’s nice to be able to talk to someone else who’s a fan of Survivor.” Statements like these emphasize commonalities and are used to encourage a listener to like the speaker (affinity seeking). We sometimes make these types of statements when we are first getting to know someone, but we also use such statements when trying to escalate a relationship. Trying to increase someone’s attraction to us is just one strategy that is common to both the initiation and the escalation of interpersonal relationships.

Communicate and Cultivate Attraction. Communicating your attraction to someone increases the likelihood that your partner will reciprocate, thus cultivating his or her attraction to you. Simply spending time talking is one way to show interest and commitment. You can also use indirect strategies to communicate your liking, such as nonverbal immediacy, and direct strategies such as verbal cues. For instance, you might sit closer to someone, make more eye contact, increase your touching, lean forward, and smile more. Verbally, you might use more informal and personal language and the person’s first name and increase your use of “you and I” and “we.” You display and cultivate interest by asking questions and probing for details, listening responsively, and referring to previously shared information. All these behaviors confirm that you value the other person and what he or she is saying, which can be very rewarding. A more subtle approach would be to offer a compliment, such as praise for a particular trait or ability, outfit, hairstyle, or the way the person handled an irritating customer. Table 11.1 lists other ways we try to increase another person’s liking of us, using what are labeled affinity-seeking strategies.112 Displaying nonverbal immediacy cues and verbally confirming the other person not only communicate your attraction to the other person but also increase the likelihood that he or she will like you.

Be Open and Self-Disclose Appropriately. You need to self-disclose to other people so they can decide whether to progress with a relationship with you. Even if you have enough information about your partner and want to escalate the relationship, your partner might not know enough about you. Chapter 9 discussed the need for mutual self-disclosure to form a truly intimate relationship. Restricting the amount of self-disclosure is one way to control the development of a relationship. For example, you can reduce how much you are self-disclosing if you feel a relationship is moving too fast. The level of self-disclosure needs to be appropriate to the level of development of the relationship, and both partners must be sensitive to the timing of disclosures.

BEING Other-ORIENTED

A lack of specific knowledge about a new acquaintance means that being other-oriented involves drawing on your own thoughts, feelings, and perspective to understand the other person, and/or drawing on your understanding of people in general. Which of the affinity-seeking strategies listed in Table 11.1 would raise your attraction to another person the most? Which do you believe would raise the attraction of other people in general the most? What information are you most comfortable disclosing? What information do you think most people in general are comfortable disclosing? What do you want to learn initially to reduce your uncertainties? What do you think most people want to learn?
Gather Information to Reduce Uncertainty. We all seem to get uneasy when faced with the unknown or the unexpected, including interactions with strangers whose behavior we cannot predict or unexpected behaviors from our friends. According to uncertainty reduction theory, we want control and predictability in our lives; therefore, when we are faced with uncertainty, we are driven to gain information to reduce that uncertainty. Generally, we gather as much information as we can about our partners to increase predictability and reduce anxiety. We are particularly motivated to gain information early in a relationship, when
uncertainty is greatest and when we are trying to evaluate the relationship’s predicted outcome value.\textsuperscript{114} We also are likely to seek out information if others behave in unexpected ways.\textsuperscript{115} If your close friend who watches \textit{South Park} every night suddenly begins reading during that time slot, you’ll probably want to reduce your uncertainty about this unexpected behavior, so you’ll ask why. Besides asking direct questions, we can decrease uncertainty by engaging in active perception, explicitly seeking information from other people, and using secret tests.

Sometimes we experience uncertainty about the very nature and definition of our relationships and our partners’ regard for us. Such uncertainty can hamper the development, escalation, and maintenance of those relationships. What does your new friend think about the relationship? How intimate a relationship does your boyfriend or girlfriend want? Why hasn’t your best friend called you in the last two weeks? The most obvious approach to addressing these questions would be simply to ask the other person; however, we risk “losing face” in using such direct strategies to reduce uncertainty. There are also times when uncertainty is preferable to certainty—for example, uncertainty about your romantic partner’s desire to end the relationship can be preferable to finding out for sure. Researchers Leanne Knobloch and Denise Solomon have conducted numerous studies on uncertainty in relationships. In one study, they found that uncertainty hampered the ability to identify and interpret relational information, while also making interactions more difficult (for example, it can lead partners to be overly concerned about avoiding certain topics).\textsuperscript{116} However, these researchers also believe that the more intimate the relationship, the more likely we are to use direct approaches to reduce uncertainty, which means stronger communication and the possibility of more positive outcomes.\textsuperscript{117} In general, our level of satisfaction in a relationship is linked to feelings of certainty,\textsuperscript{118} because the relationships that are the most satisfying are also those in which partners have a strong mutual understanding and a shared vision of the relationship.

\textbf{Listen Actively and Respond Confirmingly.} As you learned in Chapter 5, listening is critical to effective interpersonal communication and relationships. Listening clues you in to people’s needs, wants, and values, and it enables you to respond to people in appropriate ways. You gain information by listening, but you also demonstrate your ongoing interest in the other person. In all relationships, no matter how intimate, it is always important to stop, look, and listen—to put down the newspaper or turn off your iPod when your close friend begins talking to you. You also need to listen actively and provide confirming responses, as discussed in Chapter 5. Using confirming responses increases your partner’s sense of self-worth and communicates the value you place on him or her.

\textbf{Socially Decenter and Adopt an Other-Oriented Perspective.} Social decentering helps you better understand your partner, and that understanding allows you to choose effective strategies for accomplishing your communication goals, adapting to your partner’s current behavior, and anticipating his or her responses. For example, on a first date, would you tell your partner about a very intimate relationship that had just ended, or would you wait? What information do you have that can help you determine this person’s reaction? Would you want someone you just met to tell you about his or her recent breakup? How would most people feel about hearing that information so early?

Even individuals weak in general social decentering skills can develop relationship-specific social decentering—decentering skills based on the knowledge and understanding gained in a specific intimate relationship.
and understanding they have gained in a specific intimate relationship. In studies conducted by one of your authors, respondents’ relationship-specific social decentering scores were higher the more intimate the relationship, and both partners also had higher relational satisfaction.\(^{119}\) The study does not show which causes which—whether increases in intimacy increase relationship-specific social decentering, or whether increases in relationship-specific social decentering lead to greater intimacy. Nonetheless, we usually expect our intimate partners to understand us and to adapt accordingly. Failure to display relationship-specific social decentering behaviors is likely to create dissatisfaction and possibly lead to an end of the relationship. As you develop intimate relationships, your interactions with your partner should reflect your understanding and appreciation of your partner’s thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Skills and Strategies Used to Maintain and/or Escalate Relationships

Certain skills and strategies can be used to keep a relationship at a given stage or to further escalate it. These skills can be continually improved, and while you might not be adept at all of them, the absence of most of them will likely undermine relational satisfaction for you or your partner.

Express Emotions. Expressing emotions is a particular form of self-disclosure—sometimes the most intimate kind—which is why trust and commitment usually must be established before certain feelings can be shared. You might be uncomfortable expressing your feelings, but in order for a relationship to fully develop, you will need to share them. The more intimate the relationship, the higher the expectation and need for sharing feelings. You might show your love for someone by your behaviors, but your partner might need you to actually declare your love; the words “I love you” are powerful and enduring.

Many of the emotions you share are not related to your partner, such as your sadness over the death of a family member, or fears about what you’ll do after graduation. Other feelings relate to your partner—feelings of attraction, love, anger, or disappointment. Most of us are comfortable sharing positive emotions, such as happiness and joy, but are more reserved about sharing negative emotions, such as fear or disappointment, because of a concern that we might appear weak or vulnerable. In a study of 46 committed, romantic couples, the participants reported that the number-one communication problem was partners’ withholding the expression of negative feelings (“When she gets upset, she stops talking” or “He just silently pouts”).\(^{120}\) We generally want to know how our intimate partners are feeling, even if those feelings are negative.

However, a constant barrage of negative expressions can also alienate a partner. Not surprisingly, research has found that marital satisfaction rises with the number of positive feelings the partners disclose, not with the number of negative ones.\(^{121}\) Happy couples tend to display their positive emotional state in their smiles, laughs, and affectionate behavior; distressed couples display agitation, anger, and coldness.\(^{122}\)
In a balanced relationship, partners can express both positive and negative emotions at the right times in a constructive and confirming manner.

**Provide Comfort and Social Support.** The ability to provide comfort, social support, and ego support is a quality associated with being a best friend. We expect to be able to turn to our friends to help us through emotionally trying events. Offering social support and comfort not only directly benefits the partner but also confirms the value of the relationship and the partner. Communication scholar Brant Burleson found that being other-oriented was a key factor in being able to offer effective comforting messages. Other-oriented comforting messages confirm and accept the other person’s feelings, help him or her express and examine those feelings, and help put the feelings into a broader context. One research study found three outcomes of comforting messages: (1) They put the distressed person in a more positive mood, (2) they empower the person to better manage the issues, and (3) they help reduce brooding (rumination) about the problems.

It can be challenging to provide social and emotional support, and sometimes our attempts even produce negative effects, making the situation worse and/or negatively affecting the other person’s self-esteem. For example, if you try to give a friend advice, you might be viewed as controlling or implying that your friend is incompetent at decision making (plus, the advice might be wrong!). Displaying empathy to a distressed friend by sharing your similar experiences can provide some insight but also risks disconfirming your friend, because you changed the discussion to focus on you and your life. Use social decentering to consider what you’d like to hear if you were in the other person’s situation, while adapting to differences between you and the other person—what is comforting to one person can be threatening to another.

One pair of researchers, Ruth Ann Clark and Jesse Delia, studied how people wanted to be treated by their friends in six different distressing situations. Clark and Delia found that people did not have a strong desire to talk about the situations. When people were distressed, they wanted to be the ones to decide whether to bring up the issue. There was wide variation in how people wanted their friends to approach the six issues. Clark and Delia also found that people wanted their friends to keep attempts at comforting short. There are times where the best support involves saying nothing at all, but simply being with the other person or providing a hug. Another study found three behaviors on the part of comfort providers that were important in helping the partners manage the distress while maintaining face: (1) encouraging the partner to express and discuss feelings, (2) recognizing and praising the efforts already being made by the partner to cope with the problem, and (3) being pleasant and respecting the partner’s autonomy to make decisions—not taking over control. How well do you do these things when providing comfort to others?

**Engage in Relationship Talk.** *Relationship talk* is talk about the nature, quality, direction, or definition of a relationship. For example, “I’m happy with how close we’ve become. How are you feeling about the relationship?” or “Since I’m about...
to graduate, it doesn’t make too much sense to me to get very involved right now” or “I’d like to have more say in how we spend our time on the weekends.” However, relationship talk is generally considered inappropriate in the early stages of a relationship, and if one partner starts talking about a relationship too early, it can scare the other person away.

Willingness to talk about the relationship is one way to implicitly signal your level of interest and commitment to it. One study of cross-sex friendships found that those in which both partners had an interest in becoming romantic included more relational talk than those in which the friends wished to maintain a platonic relationship.¹²⁹ As relationships move toward greater intimacy, the amount of direct relationship talk increases. For example, you are likely to discuss the future of the relationship, how to manage the relationship during summer break, or what will happen to the relationship after graduation. As a relationship escalates, we should be prepared to discuss our thoughts and feelings about it.

In more intimate relationships, relationship talk helps the partners resolve differences in their perceptions of the relationship that might be contributing to conflict and dissatisfaction. Although it can be difficult, expressing your concerns about whether you want the relationship to escalate or de-escalate might be unavoidable. Unwillingness to engage in relationship talk in an intimate relationship can send a negative message that ultimately drives a partner away. Relational talk appears to be viewed differently by men and women. Men tend to view talk as instrumental and as a way to fix problems. While women might share this view, they also see relationship talk as part of the routine for maintaining the relationship.¹³⁰ Relationship talk is not just about solving problems; it is an important part of maintaining the relationship.

Be Tolerant and Show Restraint. The most satisfying relationships are those in which both partners learn to accept the other and refrain from continually disagreeing, criticizing, pointing out flaws or failures, and making negative comments to each other. One study found that well-adjusted couples focus their complaints on specific behaviors, whereas maladjusted couples complain about each other’s personal characteristics.¹³¹ Well-adjusted couples are also kinder and more positive and have more humor in their interactions. They tend to agree with each other’s complaints: “You’re right honey, I wasn’t listening—let me turn the TV off so I won’t be distracted,” whereas the partners in maladjusted relationships launch counter-complaints: “I was listening!—you just chatter on and on about the same garbage!” In addition, happy couples display more affection through positive nonverbal cues, display more supportive behaviors, and make more attempts to avoid conflict than unhappy couples do.¹³²

Maintaining relationships requires tolerance. You must learn to accept your partners for who they are and put up with some things you dislike. When couples lose their tolerance, they begin focusing on and criticizing what they used to accept. Then relationships begin to deteriorate.

Manage Conflict Cooperatively. Conflicts are inevitable in interpersonal relationships. As relationships develop, the individuals share more personal information and spend more time together, so the likelihood for conflict increases. The key to successful relational development and maintenance is not to avoid conflict, but rather to manage it effectively. As we discussed in Chapter 8, a cooperative management style can actually transform conflict into an experience that strengthens a relationship. It can clarify the definition of a relationship, increase the exchange of information, and create a cooperative atmosphere for problem solving.
Chapter 11  Interpersonal Relationships: Friendship and Romance

RECAP  Skills and Strategies for Developing Interpersonal Relationships

Skills and Strategies Used Primarily to Initiate a Relationship
- Observe and act on approachability cues
- Identify and use conversation starters
- Follow initiation norms
- Ask questions
- Don’t expect too much from the initial interaction

Skills and Strategies Used to Initiate and/or Escalate Relationships
- Communicate and cultivate attraction
- Be open and self-disclose appropriately
- Gather information to reduce uncertainty
- Listen actively and respond confirmingly
- Socially decenter and adopt an other-oriented perspective

Skills and Strategies Used to Maintain and/or Escalate Relationships
- Express emotions
- Provide comfort and social support
- Engage in relationship talk
- Be tolerant and show restraint
- Manage conflict cooperatively

APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION

to Friends and Romantic Partners

As you develop friendships and romantic relationships, you continue to gain more information about your partners—about their beliefs, values, attitudes, needs, interests, desires, fears, and hopes. This accumulation of knowledge provides the foundation for a better understanding and ability to predict your partners’ behaviors and reactions and creates the expectation that you will anticipate and adapt to the person’s behaviors and needs. From a partner’s perspective, it is a failure event when you don’t incorporate your accumulated knowledge and understanding of your partner into your actions. For example, forgetting that your friend dislikes horror movies when you rent a horror movie for your weekly Friday night movie is likely to evoke a comment such as “But you know I hate horror movies; I can’t believe you rented it anyway.” Imagine the impact on a relationship of frequently committing such failure events. Your partner might interpret your failure to be other-oriented and to adapt as a lack of caring and concern for his or her needs and desires, or as a move toward withdrawing from the relationship.

On the other hand, increasing knowledge of your friends and romantic partners improves your ability to adapt to their behavior and to anticipate responses. Knowledge of your closest same-sex friend and closest cross-sex friend should lead you to unique interpretations of their behaviors and to adaptation of your behavior, particularly in your selection of relevant communication strategies. Such empowerment does not necessarily mean greater relational satisfaction. For example, understanding that your romantic partner’s discomfort with physical affection is a result of his or her upbringing won’t necessarily offset your own desire for physical affection.

The most significant challenge to being other-oriented in our friendships and romances is overcoming egocentric biases or distorted perceptions of our friends and lovers. In essence, we make errors in our mind-reading of others. The perceptual barriers identified in Chapter 3 undermine your ability to gain the accurate information needed to be other-oriented. Another error occurs when you assume similarities between you and your partner that don’t really exist. Assuming similarity leads to projecting your feelings, motivations, and needs on your partner, which leads to errors when relevant differences are unaccounted for. On the other hand, when you and your partner are indeed similar, then such projecting can provide accurate understanding. A final barrier to effective other-orientation occurs when your perspective and your feelings are so strong that they prevent you from accurately recognizing your partner’s perspective and feelings. For example, after discovering that your partner has cheated on you, the weight of your emotional pain can prevent you from understanding your romantic partner’s perspective. As a matter of fact, you might not even be motivated to try. Ultimately, the application of any other-orientation to your friendships and romantic relationships will require a motivation to do so.
**Friendship**  
(pages 312–320)

Friends play an important part in our lives by providing support, helping us manage the mundane and cope with stress, shaping our personalities, and providing material help. Our friendships change as we move from childhood through adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and then late adulthood. Same-sex friendships for men and women have similarities and differences; for example, both men and women see intimacy in the same way, but women tend to view their friendships as more satisfying, enjoyable, and intimate than men do. Cross-sex friendships are generally nonsexual but some include sexual activity, as in friends with benefits. We also form intergenerational, intercultural, and interracial friendships. These friendships require a special sensitivity to how the differences affect our partner and the relationship.

**Key Terms**

- Friendship-based intimacy 312
- Passion-based intimacy 312

**Critical Thinking Questions**

1. What qualities are most important to you in a friend? Why?
2. How do your friendships with same-age friends differ from friendships you have with anyone substantially older or younger than you?
3. Ethics: What ethical responsibilities do you have toward a person you consider your best friend?
4. Ethics: Would you be okay with your spouse having a close friendship with someone of the opposite sex? Why or why not?

**Activities**

Write down all the qualities you can think of that you associate with being a friend. Now write down the qualities you associate with being an intimate romantic partner (lover). In groups of four or five students, compare your lists. What qualities have you listed that nobody else has? Why do you think you included that quality in your list? What qualities did everyone in the group list? To what degree are the qualities defined by your culture? Which qualities are the same for friends as for lovers? Which are different?

List five very close friendships between two TV characters. Think about those five friendships and write down the most positive qualities you see in them. Now list the negative qualities you see in those friendships. Which of the positive qualities do you exhibit the most in your own close friendships? Which of the negative qualities? How can you increase the positive qualities and reduce the negative ones?

**Web Resources**

![Web Resources](http://www.queendom.com/jff_access/the_friendship_test.htm)

This site on relationships includes a self-test on friendship.

![Web Resources](http://www.penpalworld.com/index.asp)

This web site is designed to put you in contact with pen pals throughout the world. This is a way to develop and explore online intercultural friendships.

**Romantic Relationships**  
(pages 321–330)

Romantic relationships differ from friendships because lovers expect more, talk more about the relationship, and are more passionate, more intimate, and more committed. Three qualities particularly distinguish romantic relationships: love, commitment, and physical affection and sex. Passion, intimacy, and commitment are three dimensions that make up the triangular theory of love. Another theory defines six types of love: eros, ludis, storge, mania, pragma, and agape. Interpersonal communication plays a significant role in both relational and sexual satisfaction in romantic relationships. Some romances begin as friendships and either partner may use secret tests to determine the prospect for romance. Other romances begin with a first date, which differs from hooking up. Expectations for dating outside of college life tend to follow traditional gender roles. Some attempts to develop or escalate a romantic relationship are rejected, creating unrequited romantic interest.

**Key Terms**

- Triangular theory of love 322
- Pragma 324
- Passionate love 323
- Agape 324
- Companionate love 323
- Physical affection 325
- Eros 323
- Secret test 326
- Ludis 323
- Unrequited romantic interest 329
- Storge 323
- Mania 323

**Critical Thinking Questions**

1. Write a short answer to the question “What is love?” within the context of a romantic relationship. Why is defining love so difficult? How well do you think you know what love is? Why is love so important to humans?
2. What would be the best course of action if you found yourself becoming romantically interested in a friend with whom you had agreed not to become romantically involved?
3. Ethics: What types of secret tests to determine another person’s feelings toward you are ethical? What type would you consider unethical?
4. Ethics: You are in a romantic relationship that has become physically intimate. How ethical is it for you to say, “I love you” if you really aren’t sure you do? If your partner says “I love you,” should you say it too, even if you don’t mean it?
Activities
In your life right now, you love many things, even if you’re not currently in a romantic relationship: You no doubt love your parents, siblings, and friends, and you may love beer, chocolate, vacations, or your car. Write down a list of the things you love. Next, put down three words by each item or group of related items that describe your feelings without using the word love. Compare your results with classmates and decide the degree to which you agree on the meaning and use of the word love.

Web Resources
http://www.quizstop.com This site offers a wide variety of self-tests on love plus other subjects of interest.
http://www.askmen.com/dating/index.html This is a web site directed primarily to men that provides articles and advice on romance.
http://www.marsvenus.com/relationships/ This is a web site addressing a variety of relationship issues and includes self-tests. The site is associated with author John Gray, who wrote Men Are from Mars, Women are from Venus, and registration is required to access some material.
http://www.perfectlovestories.com/ This is a lovely site of poems, video, and music dealing with people’s experiences of love.

Skills and Strategies for Developing Interpersonal Relationships (pages 330–339)
A variety of strategies and skills can be applied to the initiation, maintenance, and escalation of interpersonal relationships. Certain skills and strategies are used primarily during the initiation of a relationship, including observing and acting on approachability cues, identifying and using conversation starters, following initiation norms, asking questions, and controlling expectations. Another set of skills and strategies is applicable to both the initiation of a relationship and the escalation of relationships toward greater intimacy. These include communicating and cultivating attraction with affinity-seeking strategies, being open and appropriately self-disclosing, gathering information to reduce uncertainty, listening actively and responding confirmingly, and socially decentering and adopting an other-oriented perspective. The final set of skills and strategies covered in this section are used primarily for maintaining existing relationships or moving a relationship toward greater intimacy. This set includes expressing emotions, providing comfort and social support, engaging in talk about the relationship, being tolerant and showing restraint, and managing conflict cooperatively. All of these skills and strategies can be learned and enhanced to help you more effectively manage your interpersonal relationships.

Key Terms
Affinity-seeking strategies 333
Uncertainty reduction theory 334
Relationship-specific social decentering 335
Relationship talk 337

Critical Thinking Questions
1. Of all the skills for developing interpersonal relationships, which three are the most important? Why? Which three are the least important? Why?
2. Can a person have a happy and effective intimate relationship without having any of the interpersonal communication skills covered in this chapter? How? If not, why not?
3. Ethics: Assuming you were very skilled and adept at using strategies for developing interpersonal relationships, how ethical would it be for you to use those skills to satisfy your interpersonal needs in a given relationship, knowing that your partner was less skilled at getting his or her own needs met?

Activities
Which three of the skills for developing interpersonal relationships are your strongest? How do you know? Which three do you most need to improve? What can you do to improve them?
Describe two conversations you began with strangers that you think were successful. What made them successful? What was the outcome? Describe two conversations with strangers that you think were unsuccessful. What made them unsuccessful? Compare your responses to those of your classmates. To what degree are your answers similar or different? What did they do well that you could try? What did you learn to avoid?

Web Resources
http://www.csulb.edu/~tstevens/conversational_skills.htm This site includes a large number of tips on meeting people, carrying on conversations, and developing romance.
http://www.essortment.com/all/meetnewpeopl_rbhr.htm This site offers a list of 25 ideas and places for meeting new people.