CHAPTER 28

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION and OVERVIEW

According to popular belief, it's love that makes the world go round. But according to Rubin and NcNeil (1983), liking perhaps more than loving is what keeps it spinning. How are liking and loving related? Are there different kinds of love, and can this help us understand how romantic relationships develop over time and why some break down? How do we get into relationships in the first place?

The importance of relationships, both sexual and non-sexual, is 'obvious'. According to Duck (1999):

> We need merely to reflect for a moment on the sources of our greatest pleasure and pain to appreciate that nothing else arouses the extremes of emotion that are experienced in the course of personal relationships with other human beings

Relationships make life meaningful, whether they're good or bad. When asked 'What's necessary for your happiness?', most people say, before anything else, satisfying close relationships with friends, family and romantic partners (Berscheid, 1985).

Most relationship research has focused on 'voluntary' relationships. When describing relationships breaking up (or down), we often use language that implies a degree of choice ('Why don't you get out of that relationship?' or 'I wish I'd never got involved in the first place'). One way of trying to understand the *dissolution* of relationships is to see it as the process of relationship *formation* in reverse.

Traditionally, social psychologists have been interested in *interpersonal attraction*, which relates to the question: 'How do relationships start?' But during the last 20 years or so, the emphasis has shifted to relationships *as a process* (Duck, 1999), reflected in two further questions: 'What makes people stay in relationships (maintenance and progression)?' and 'Why and how do relationships go wrong (breakdown or dissolution)?'

AFFILIATION: THE NEED FOR OTHER PEOPLE

Affiliation is the basic human need for the company of other human beings. The need to belong and to be accepted by others is one of Maslow's basic survival needs (see Chapter 9), and is also a major motive underlying conformity (see Chapter 26). We also saw in Chapter 26 that conformity can be explained in terms of the need to evaluate our beliefs and opinions by comparing them with other people's, especially in ambiguous or unstructured situations. This is the central idea in Festinger's (1954) *social comparison theory*.

According to Duck (1988), we're more 'affiliative' and inclined to seek others' company under certain conditions than others, for example, when we're anxious, when we've just left a close relationship (the 'rebound' situation), and when we've moved to a new neighbourhood. *Anxiety* is one of the most powerful factors.

Key Study 28.1

'Anxiety loves anxious company' (Schachter, 1959)

- Female psychology students were led to believe they'd be receiving electric shocks. One group was told the shocks would be painful (*high-anxiety condition*), while another group was told they wouldn't be at all painful (*low-anxiety condition*).
- They were then told that there'd be a delay while the equipment was set up, and they were given the option of waiting either alone or with another participant (this was the dependent variable and no actual shock was given).
- As predicted, the high-anxiety group showed a greater preference for company (20 out of 32) than the low-anxiety group (10 out of 30).
- In a separate, related experiment, all the participants were told the shocks would be painful, but for half the choice was between waiting alone and waiting with another participant in the same experiment, and for the other half it was between waiting alone and waiting with another student who was waiting to see her teacher.
- For the first group, there was a strong preference for waiting with another high-anxiety participant, while the second group preferred to wait alone.

Ask Yourself

- What do these results tell you about the students' motives for affiliation?

Schachter's results strongly suggest that *social comparison* was the motive for affiliation (rather than distraction) – if we have something to worry about, we prefer to be with other worriers. As Schachter (1959) says, 'Misery doesn't love just any kind of company, it loves only miserable company'.

Kulik and Mahler (1989) reached the same conclusions when studying patients about to undergo coronary-bypass surgery. Most preferred to share a room with someone who'd already undergone coronary surgery, rather than another patient waiting for the same operation. The main motive for this preference seemed to be the need for information about the stress-inducing situation. Not only were those assigned a post-operative roommate less anxious, they were more mobile post-operatively and had faster post-operative recoveries (Kulik *et al.*, 2003).

LOVE AND INTIMACY

Ask Yourself

- What is a relationship and what makes a relationship a close one?
- What different kinds of relationship are there?
- Are there different types of love?

Relationships: definitions and varieties

According to Berscheid and Ammazzalorso (2004), the concept of a relationship:

> refers to two people whose behaviour is interdependent in that a change in behaviour in one is likely to produce a change in behaviour of the other

A 'close' relationship denotes an interaction pattern that takes place over a long period of time; the partners' influence on each other is strong and frequent, and many different types of behaviour are affected (Kelley *et al.*, 1983).

In common with other close relationships, romantic relationships involve interdependence, strong feelings, committed intent and overlapping self-concept. But unique to romantic relationships are passion and exclusive commitment (Fiske, 2004).

Voluntary/involuntary relationships

According to Moghaddam *et al.* (1993), interpersonal relationships in western cultures tend to be *individualistic*, *voluntary* and *temporary*; those in non-western cultures are more *collectivist*, *involuntary* and *permanent*. As they say:

> The cultural values and environmental conditions in North America have led North American social psychologists to be primarily concerned with first-time acquaintances, friendships and intimate relationships, primarily because these appear to be the relationships most relevant to the North American urban cultural experience.

In other words, western psychologists tend to equate 'relationships' with 'western relationships' (a form of *ethnocentrism*: see Chapter 47).

The examples given in the quote from Moghaddam *et al.* are all voluntary; but western psychologists have studied a wide range of such relationships during the past 20 years or so, some of which may seem more voluntary than others. Duck (1999) gives the following examples: relationships of blended families, cross-sex non-romantic friendships, romantic or friendly relationships in the workplace, relationships between cooperative neighbours, relationships between prisoners and guards, sibling relationships, children relating to other children, and adults' relationships with their parents.

Marriage is found in all known cultures (Fletcher, 2002) and is usually taken to be a voluntary relationship. But there are several reasons for asking if it really is.

- There are wide and important cultural variations in marital arrangements. From a western perspective, the 'natural' form of marriage is *monogamy* (marriage to one spouse at any one time). This belief is enshrined in the law (bigamy is a criminal offence) and reflects basic Judeo-Christian doctrine. But monogamy is only one of the forms that marriage can take.

Box 28.1

Culture and marriage

- *Polygamy* refers to having two or more spouses at once.
- It can take the form of *polygyny* (one man having two or more wives) or (less commonly) *polyandry* (one woman with two or more husbands).
- Another arrangement is *mandatory marriage to specific relatives*, as when a son marries the daughter of his father's brother (his first cousin: Triandis, 1994).
- A total of 84 per cent of known cultures allow polygyny, but only 5–10 per cent of men in such cultures actually have more than one wife (Fletcher, 2002).
- Probably fewer than 0.5 per cent of human societies have practised polyandry as a common or preferred form of marriage (Price and Crapo, 1999). However, throughout Tibet and the neighbouring Himalayan areas in India, Nepal and Bhutan, it's been common for generations. Usually, a woman marries two or more brothers (*fraternal polyandry*); this helps to keep family numbers down in order to cope with scarce resources.
- *Polyamory* ('group marriage') refers to open but committed relationships with more than one (same and/or opposite sex) lover or partner (or spouse) simultaneously. While polyamorists ('ethical sluts') are released from the burdens of traditional marriage vows, they seem to keep their long-term relationships intact (Newitz, 2006). They're found mainly in California, but increasingly in the UK (Frith, 2005).

Figure 28.1 Polygyny in Nevada, USA, is alive and well!

- According to Duck (1999), the choice to marry is voluntary, presumably. But once the marriage is a few years old, it's much less voluntary than it was, since getting out of it is accompanied by a great deal of 'social and legal baggage':

> Thus when we talk about 'voluntary relationships', we need to recognize not only that the exercise of apparently free choice is always tempered by the social realities and constraints that surround

us, but also that, once exercised, some choices are then disabled, and cannot be easily or straightforwardly remade. To that extent, therefore, their consequences become non-voluntary (Duck, 1999)

Arranged marriages

According to Kerckhoff and Davis's (1962) *filter model* (see below), our choice of potential (realistic) marriage partners is limited by demographic variables (age, education, ethnic and religious background, and so on). To this extent, most relationships are 'arranged'. As Duck (1999) says:

> Many of us would perhaps not recognize – or accept – that marriages are actually 'arranged' by religion, social position, wealth, class, opportunity and other things over which we have little control, even within our own culture

Conversely, parentally arranged marriages in some cultures are gladly entered into, and are considered perfectly normal, natural relationships that are anticipated with pleasure (Duck, 1999).

Gupta and Singh (1982) found that couples in Jaipur, India, who married for love, reported *diminished* feelings of love if they'd been married for more than five years. By contrast, those who'd undertaken arranged marriages reported *more* love if they weren't newlyweds. These findings reveal that passionate love 'cools' over time, and that there's scope for love to flourish within an arranged marriage.

In cultures where arranged marriages occur, courtship is accepted to a certain degree, but love is left to be defined and discovered after marriage (Bellur, 1995). This, of course, is the reverse of the 'Hollywood' picture, where love is supposed to precede marriage and be what marriage is all about. But even in traditional cultures that practise arranged marriages, brides (and grooms) are typically given some choice in the matter (Fletcher, 2002). For example, in Sri Lanka men, and women who like one another (or fall in love) usually let their parents know their choices in advance through indirect channels (de Munck, 1998). Families often use similar criteria that the individuals themselves might use if they had a free choice (including matching on attractiveness: see below). The classic example is the Jewish custom of having a *matchmaker* (Rockman, 1994).

Arranged marriages are far more common in *collectivist* cultures, where the whole extended family 'marries' the other extended family ('social networks motivate marriages': Fiske, 2004). For example, almost 25 per cent of marriages in Japan are arranged (Iwao, 1993). This contrasts with *individualist* cultures, in which the individuals marry one another (Triandis, 1994). Here, it's presumed that marriage is motivated by romantic love between two mutually attracted individuals, who freely choose to commit (Fiske, 2004).

In general, *divorce rates* among those who marry according to parents' wishes are much *lower* than among those who marry for love. This is an argument in favour of arranged marriages. Indeed, it's difficult to argue for the superiority of western (especially American) marital arrangements given the 50 per cent divorce rate and an average marriage that lasts for just seven years (Fiske, 2004). As Triandis (1994) argues:

> Marriage, when seen as a fifty-year relationship, is more likely to be a good one if people enter it after careful, rational analysis, which is more likely to be provided by older adults than by sexually aroused young people

Traditional forms of matchmaking are, however, on the wane in most cultures, reflecting the growing western influence, and divorce rates among 'arranged couples' are rising. Personal freedom is gaining in importance, and traditional structures that define set roles for family members are becoming less valid. Among the more liberal-minded Asians living in the West, arranged marriages operate more like a dating facility ('arranged meetings' rather than 'arranged marriages').

Gay and lesbian relationships

The focus on the long-term relationships of heterosexuals has now been supplemented with discussion of gay and lesbian relationships (Duck, 1999); this includes studies of their stability and dissolution (Kurdeck, 1991, 1992).

Compared with same-sex friendships and cross-sex non-romantic friendships, gay and lesbian partners experience extra social burdens in terms of the influence of other people's reactions (Huston and Schwartz, 1995). Weston (1991) argues that 'blood-family' is often replaced for homosexuals by 'families of choice'. Gays and lesbians often aren't 'out' to blood-family, or may be estranged from their blood-families specifically because of their homosexuality; as a result, the blood-family can function very differently for gays and lesbians compared

with heterosexuals. Not only are they less likely to tell their parents and siblings of 'new' relationships; they're less likely to talk about intimate relationships that have already developed (Huston and Schwartz, 1995).

According to Kitzinger and Coyle (1995), psychological research into homosexuality since the mid-1970s has moved away from a 'pathology model' towards one comprising three overlapping themes:

1. Rejection of the concept of homosexuality as a central organising principle of the personality in favour of recognising the diversity and variety of homosexuals as individuals
2. An assertion that homosexuality is as natural, normal and healthy as heterosexuality
3. Denial of the idea that homosexuals pose any threat to children, the nuclear family or the future of society as we know it.

According to Bee (1994), homosexual partnerships are far more like heterosexual ones than they are different. In terms of sexual behaviour, apart from their sexual preferences, gays and lesbians don't look massively different from their heterosexual counterparts (Fletcher, 2002).

Gender differences

Researchers have repeatedly found that many of the same gender differences between heterosexual men and women occur when comparing gays and lesbians. For example, straight men and gays have higher sex drives than straight women and lesbians, and females (straight or lesbian) are more relationship-focused than males (straight or gay). In other words:

> many central patterns of sexual attitudes and behaviour are more closely linked to gender than to sexual orientation. If one wants to understand gays and lesbians, a good place to start is by looking at heterosexual men and women respectively (Fletcher, 2002)

One danger of emphasising the sameness between heterosexual and homosexual couples is the failure to explore the *marginalisation* of the latter in the wider society (Clarke *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, Kitzinger and Coyle (1995) argue that certain factors are omitted or distorted when homosexual relationships are assessed in terms derived from heterosexual relationships.

'Electronic' friendships

Ask Yourself

- Have you had an online relationship?
- What do you think the potential benefits and dangers of such a relationship might be?

Probably one of the most unexpected uses of the Internet is the development of *online relationships* (or *cyber affairs*: Griffiths, 2000). In the UK, one newspaper reported

Figure 28.2 Does this couple conform to the stereotype of how gays are supposed to look?

that there have been over 1000 weddings resulting from Internet meetings. Cyberspace is becoming another 'singles bar'. There are now many sites aimed at those looking for romance or a sexual liaison. Some are directed at singles, while others seem to encourage or facilitate virtual adultery.

Online relationships can proceed through chat rooms, interactive games or newsgroups. What may begin as a simple email exchange or innocent chat-room encounter can escalate into an intense and passionate cyber affair – and eventually into face-to-face sexual encounters. Griffiths (2000) claims that 'electronic communication is the easiest, most disinhibiting and most accessible way to meet potential new partners'.

Different types of love

Berscheid and Walster (1978) distinguish between: (a) *companionate love* ('true love' or 'conjugal love'), 'the affection we feel for those with whom our lives are deeply entwined', including very close friends and marriage partners; and (b) *passionate love* (romantic love, obsessive love, infatuation, 'love sick' or 'being in love'). Romantic love is 'A state of intense absorption in another… A state of intense physiological arousal.' These are qualitatively different, but companionate love is only a more extreme form of liking ('the affection we feel for casual acquaintances').

Similarly, Sternberg (1988b) has proposed a 'triangular' model of love, in which three basic components (intimacy, passion and decision/commitment) can be combined to produce *consummate love*. When only two are combined, the resulting love is *romantic*, *companionate* or *fatuous* (see Figure 28.3).

The power of love

Is romantic love unique to western culture?

American researchers have focused mainly on romantic relationships as the basis for marriage (Fiske, 2004).
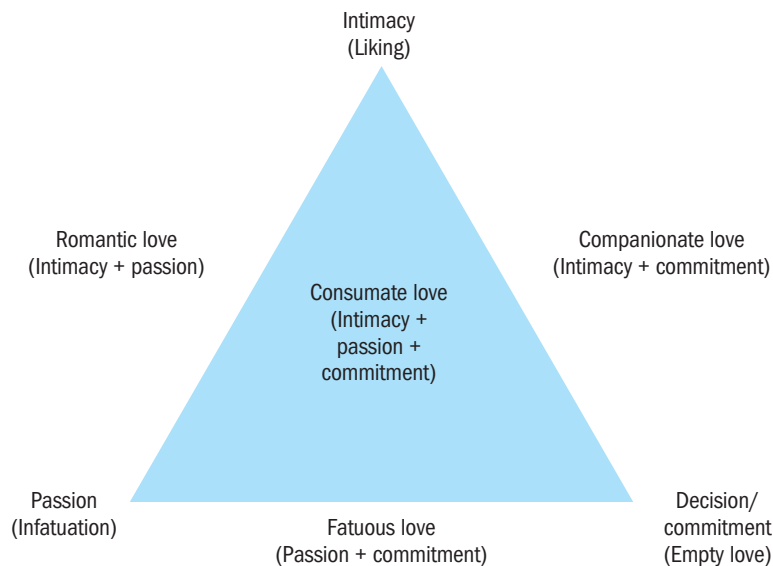
Figure 28.3 Robert Sternberg's (1988b) model of different kinds of love as combinations of three basic components of love (from Myers, D.G. (1994), *Exploring Social Psychology*. New York, McGraw-Hill)

The popular ('Hollywood') view is that people fall in love and then commit themselves to each other through marriage. Individuals learn that in order to be happy and fulfilled, they must be in love and live for love (Moghaddam, 2002). However, as we've seen, in cultures where arranged marriages occur, the relationship between love and marriage is the other way around, and marriage is seen as the basis on which to explore a loving relationship (Bellur, 1995). As Bellur notes, the cultural background in which people have learned about love is important in shaping their concept of it.

Ask Yourself

● If someone had all the other qualities you desired in a marriage partner, would you marry this person if you weren't in love?

When Kephart (1967) asked Americans this question, well over twice as many men replied 'no' as did women. When Simpson *et al.* (1986) repeated the study, more than 80 per cent of both men and women said 'no'.

Ask Yourself

● How might you account for the difference between Kephart's and Simpson *et al.*'s findings?

This can be explained at least partly by the fact that, 20 years later, financial independence has allowed women to choose marriage partners for reasons other than material necessity. But this doesn't explain why romantic love has become so central for both American men and women (Moghaddam, 1998).

As non-western societies become westernised, there's a greater tendency for young people to say 'no' to the

Figure 28.4 Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor in *Moulin Rouge* (2001)

question asked by Kephart and Simpson *et al.* Even in collectivist cultures (such as India and Pakistan), about 50 per cent of young people said 'no', and the indications are that this percentage is rising (Moghaddam, 2002).

However, cultural differences still exist. For example, Levine *et al.* (1995) studied young people in Australia, Brazil, England, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and the USA. Participants from India, Thailand and Pakistan gave the highest proportion of 'yes' replies, while those from England and the USA gave the lowest. These are collectivist and individualist cultures, respectively.

An evolutionary theory of love: love as attachment

An *evolutionary* account of love focuses on the functions that love evolved to meet. Compared with other primates, humans are dependent on their parents for an exceptionally long period of time. As length of

Table 28.1 The four stages of adult attachment in relation to Bowlby's four phases of infant attachment development

Bowlby's phases of infant attachment	Pre-attachment (0–3/4 months)	Attachment-in-the-making (3/4–6/7 months)	Clear-cut attachment (6/7–12/18 months)	Goal-directed partnership (12–18 months onwards)
Four stages of adult attachment	Attraction and flirting	Falling in love	Loving	Life as usual

based on Zeifman and Hazan (2000)

childhood (and related brain size) increased steadily over the last million years or so of *Homo* evolution, so there were strong selection pressures towards the development of (relatively) monogamous (one male, one female) *pair-bonding*. In other words:

> Love is … an evolutionary device to persuade couples to stay together for long enough to give their children a good shot at making it to adulthood (Fletcher, 2002)

In our hunter–gatherer ancestral environment, two parents were better than one. Attachment bonds between procreative partners would have greatly enhanced the survival of their offspring (Zeifman and Hazan, 2000).

Bowlby (1969) identified three basic behavioural systems that bond male–female pairs together: attachment, caregiving and sex. Shaver *et al.* (1996) have proposed a theory of adult romantic love in terms of these three systems. So, when we say 'I love you', we can mean any or all of the following.

- *Love as attachment:* 'I am emotionally dependent on you for happiness, safety and security; I feel anxious and lonely when you're gone, relieved and stronger when you're near. I want to be comforted, supported emotionally, and taken care of by you…'
- *Love as caregiving*: 'I get great pleasure from supporting, caring for and taking care of you; from facilitating your progress, health, growth and happiness…'
- *Love as sexual attraction*: 'I am sexually attracted to you and can't get you out of my mind. You excite me, "turn me on", make me feel alive … I want to see you, devour you, touch you, merge with you, lose myself in you, "get off on you"…'

Zeifman and Hazan (2000) believe that there are four stages of adult attachment that mirror Bowlby's (1969) four phases of infants' attachment to the mother(-figure). These are summarised in Table 28.1.

Evolutionary approaches are discussed further below, in relation to gender differences and sexual selection (see pages 438–41).

STAGE THEORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS

Ask Yourself

- Do you think there are any 'natural' stages that all intimate (romantic and non-romantic) relationships go through (assuming the 'romantic' ones last a reasonable amount of time – so one-night-stands don't count!).

Our own experience tells us that intimate relationships change and develop over time. Indeed, those that stagnate ('we're not going anywhere'), especially sexual/romantic relationships, may well be doomed to failure (Duck, 1988).

The filter model (Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962)

Kerckhoff and Davis compared 'short-term couples' (together for less than 18 months) with 'long-term couples' (18 months or more) over a seven-month period. According to their *filter model*:

- *Similarity of sociological* (or *demographic*) variables determines the likelihood of individuals meeting in the first place. To some extent, our choice of friends and partners is made for us; social circumstances reduce the *'field of availables'* (Kerckhoff, 1974) – that is, the range of people that are *realistically* (as opposed to *theoretically*) available for us to meet. There's considerable *preselection* of the types of people we come into contact with, namely, those from our own ethnic, racial, religious, social class and educational groups; these are the types of people we tend to find most attractive initially, since similarity makes communication easier and we've something immediately in common with them. At this point, attraction has little to do with other people's individual characteristics (this is the first 'filter').
- The second filter involves individuals' *psychological characteristics*, specifically *agreement on basic values*. This was found to be the best predictor of the relationship becoming more stable and permanent; those who'd been together for less than 18 months tended to have a stronger relationship when the partners' values coincided.
- For the long-term couples, *complementarity of emotional needs* was the best predictor of a longer-term commitment (the third filter). Complementary behaviours take account of each other's needs, helping to make a perfect whole and the relationship feel less superficial (Duck, 1999).

An evaluation of the filter model

- According to Winch (1958), happy marriages are often based on each partner's ability to fulfil the other's needs. For example, a domineering person could more easily satisfy a partner who needs to be dominated than one who's equally domineering. Despite some experimental support for this hypothesis regarding *interpersonal styles* (Dryer and Horowitz, 1997), the evidence is sparse, and we're more likely to marry others whose needs and personalities are *similar*

to ours (the *matching phenomenon*: e.g. Berscheid and Walster, 1978). In other words, 'Birds of a feather flock together' (rather than 'Opposites attract').

- Berscheid and Reis (1998) argue that the overwhelming evidence favours the *similarity-attraction principle*. In direct contradiction of the opposites–attract hypothesis, Felmlee (1998) examined 'fatal attractions' to a partner with qualities that differed from the partner and from the average. Descriptions of these terminated relationships indicated that even when these dissimilar, unique or extreme qualities might have been intriguing or appealing to begin with, it was the self-same qualities that eventually produced disenchantment.

- Instead of complementary needs, what about complementarity of *resources* (Brehm, 1992)? Men seem to give a universally higher priority to 'good looks' in their female partners than do women in their male partners. The reverse is true when it comes to 'good financial prospects' and 'good earning capacity'.

- From his study of 37 cultures, Buss (1989) concluded that these sex differences 'appear to be deeply rooted in the evolutionary history of our species' (see below, pages 438–41).

Figure 28.5 Jack and Vera Duckworth from *Coronation Street* – complementarity personified!

Stimulus-value-role theory (Murstein, 1976, 1986, 1987)

According to Murstein's *stimulus-value-role* (SVR) theory, intimate relationships proceed from:

- a *stimulus stage*, in which attraction is based on external attributes (such as physical appearance), through
- a *value stage*, in which similarity of values and beliefs becomes much more important, and finally to
- a *role stage*, which involves a commitment based on successful performance of relationship roles, such as husband and wife.

Although all three factors have some influence throughout a relationship, each one assumes greatest significance during one particular stage.
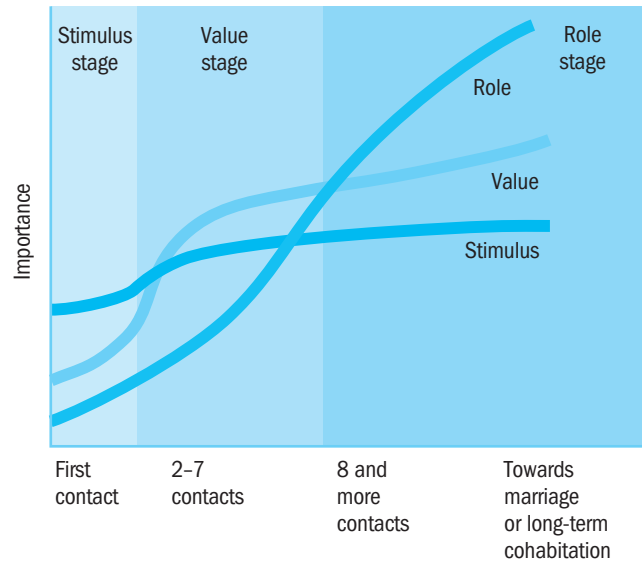
Figure 28.6 States of courtship in SVR theory (Murstein, 1987, based on Brehm, 1992)

An evaluation of stage theories

Brehm (1992) points out that many studies have provided only weak evidence for a fixed sequence of stages in intimate relationships. 'Stages' are probably best regarded as 'phases' that take place at different times for different couples. However, the claim that relationships change and develop isn't in dispute, and it's useful to think of this as involving a beginning, a middle and an end, corresponding to the three questions that were posed at the beginning of the chapter (see *Introduction and overview*). For example, how each partner understands the role of husband and wife, and how well each performs their role, are relatively late influences in a given courtship. The matching of partners' role concepts will be irrelevant to the success of the early stages of the courtship (Duck, 1999).

INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION: HOW RELATIONSHIPS GET STARTED

A general theoretical framework for explaining initial attraction is *reward theory* (Clore and Byrne, 1974; Lott and Lott, 1974). The more rewards someone provides for us, the more we should be attracted to that individual. A number of factors have been found to influence initial attraction through their reward value, including *proximity*, *exposure* and *familiarity*, *similarity* and *physical attractiveness*.

Proximity

Proximity (physical closeness or *propinquity*) represents a minimum requirement for attraction: the further apart

two people live, the lower the probability they'll ever meet, let alone become friends or marry. Festinger *et al.* (1950) studied friendship patterns in a university campus housing complex for married students. People were more friendly with those who lived next door, next most friendly with those living two doors away, and least friendly with those who lived at the end of the corridor. On any one floor, people who lived near stairways had more friends than those living at the end of a corridor.

However, physical proximity has become less important with the creation and expansion of Internet dating sites, chat rooms and email. It's much easier now to become friends, even lovers, with individuals at great geographical distance (Buunk and Dijkstra, 2008: see above, page 431).

Exposure and familiarity

Proximity increases the opportunity for interaction (*exposure*), which, in turn, increases *familiarity*. There's considerable evidence that, far from breeding contempt, familiarity breeds fondness (the *mere exposure effect*: Zajonc, 1968). For example, the more times university students saw photographs of men's faces, the more they liked them (Zajonc, 1968).
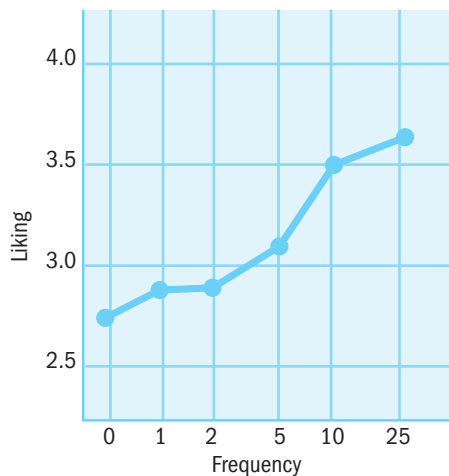
Figure 28.7 The relationship between frequency of exposure and liking. Participants were shown photographs of different faces and the number of times each face was shown was varied. The more they saw a particular face, the more they said they liked the person shown (based on Zajonc, 1968).

According to Argyle (1983), the more two people interact, the more *polarised* their attitudes towards each other become – usually in the direction of greater liking. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of further interaction, but only if the interaction is on an equal footing.

People form friendships with those they encounter frequently (as the mere exposure effect would predict). Asian Americans date Euro-Americans when they're in close proximity (Fujino, 1997), high-school students

form friendships within their own academic subjects (Kubitschek and Hallinan, 1998), and older, relocated adults make friends among their nearest neighbours (Dugan and Kivett, 1998).

Similarity

This was discussed above in relation to Kerckhoff and Davis's *filter model*.

Newcomb (1943) studied students at an American college with a liberal tradition among teaching staff and senior students. Many students coming from conservative backgrounds adopted liberal attitudes in order to gain the liking and acceptance of their classmates. Griffitt and Veitch (1974) paid 13 males to spend ten days in a fall-out shelter. Those with similar attitudes and opinions liked each other most by the end of the study, particularly if they agreed on highly salient issues.

According to Fiske (2004), if someone resembles prior experience or the self, then at least we have the illusion of knowing 'what makes them tick'. In this respect, familiarity and similarity influence attraction in comparable ways. We mostly seek out others who make us feel good about ourselves:

> People who resemble us or agree with us also reassure us. People who validate us and like us presumably won't do us any harm (Fiske, 2004)

According to the *similarity-attraction principle*, if familiarity underlies attraction, and if the most familiar people are those who are like us, then people like us are attractive. This stems in part from *consistency theories* of attitude change (see Chapter 24); the most relevant here is Heider's (1958) *balance theory*. We prefer and infer affective, cognitive and behavioural consistency – in ourselves and others: we like to agree with our friends and to befriend those who agree with us. This describes *interpersonal balance*, 'a harmonious state, one in which the entities comprising the situation and the feelings about them fit together without stress' (Heider, 1958).

Meet the Researcher

Interpersonal relationships

Relationships run right through everyday life, and for this reason everyone is interested in how relationships work and how to make them work better. Paradoxically, study of relationships is difficult because taken-for-granted assumptions make it hard to stand back and think about how they work.

RESEARCH DIFFICULTIES

One difficulty in relationship research is the direction of causality (what causes what). Friends may tend to be similar to one another in personality, but that is merely correlational data and, scientifically, does not demonstrate whether friends become more similar during acquaintance or they become friends in the first place because of similarity in personalities.

THE 'BOGUS STRANGER PARADIGM'

Donn Byrne (1971) revised an ingenious strategy – originally used by Smith (1957) – to test the hypothesis that similarity in attitudes caused people to be more attracted to one another, rather than the other way about (attraction causes similarity). The technique had a participant fill out a questionnaire and then a few minutes later read another questionnaire, allegedly filled out by a stranger in a different room, whom the participant would eventually meet. In fact this 'other participant' did not exist (i.e. was bogus) and the experimenter had, in the time that it took to apparently collect the other questionnaire from the stranger, created a questionnaire filled out to a precise percentage of similarity to the one filled out by the original participant (for example, 10 per cent similar, 20 per cent similar, 50 per cent similar). This controlling of the degree of similarity manipulates the independent variable accurately and makes it possible to observe the degree to which the similarity affects liking, because right after reading the stranger's questionnaire the participant was asked to say how much they liked the stranger. By this method, which became known as the 'bogus stranger paradigm', Byrne was able to state the effect of the degrees of similarity on the degrees of liking. He was therefore, for the first time from a scientific perspective, able to say which came first – the similarity or the liking. Similarity exactly predicted the degree of liking. Although many people were critical of the style of experiment as unrealistic and unrepresentative of real-life experience, it was a notable step in determining the importance of similarity in subsequent friendship.

Meantime, other early research was concerned with 'self-disclosure', a term created by Sidney Jourard (1971) to refer to the extent to which someone reveals inner thoughts/personal secrets. Jourard, a clinical psychologist, believed that a healthy person would show high self-disclosure. Relationship researchers, in turn, assumed that self-disclosure was a significant process in relationship development, with greater disclosure leading to greater intimacy (Derlega et al., 1993). It was also demonstrated that there are norms about self-disclosure: the more self-disclosure one person gives to another, the more it is expected in return. More recent research suggests a subtle twist – that women are expected to self-disclose more than men.
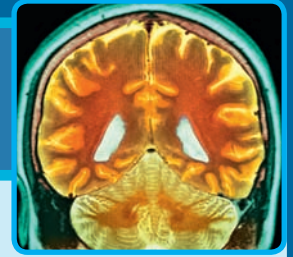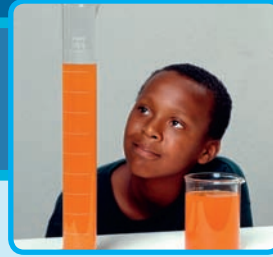
RELATING RESEARCH TO REAL LIFE

Two questions arising from these studies are: the extent to which self-disclosure outside of lab experiments is relevant to development of relationships; and whether experimental studies accurately reflect the processes that happen in everyday common experience. Along with other kinds of variables that have been investigated experimentally, I find it hard to believe that these methods tell us anything about real life, which is a blooming, buzzing confusion of conversation. From this conversation people are, of course, able to deduce the degrees of similarity that exist between them, but it is a process that takes work and effort – and nobody ever gives us their attitude scales to read, so we cannot even be sure that we have guessed right about someone else's personality.

It is important to recognise that everyday-life relationships are conducted through words and symbols. The self-disclosure that people do with one another displays subtle landscapes of their mental structure, and any particular direct reference to attitudes and beliefs can help us to understand more clearly how they function and think. In a series of studies, Duck *et al.* (1991) measured individual reports on the amount and style of talk as people engaged in everyday-life communication, using a measure that became known as the Iowa Communication Record. Among other things, they (i.e. the authors) were able to establish that more conflict happens on a Wednesday, and that the *quality of communication* is able to distinguish friends from distant acquaintances and strangers.

TECHNOLOGY AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

I have recently taken a more adventurous approach to the whole of social life (Duck and McMahan, 2010) and have interpreted all of everyday experience in terms of relationships that exist between the parties involved. For example, this approach recognises the importance of 'new technology' as in fact *relational* technology. It also explains such phenomena as the decisions taken in groups in terms of the relationships that exist between the members of the group. Even the uses and influence of mass media can be explained by the relationships that exist between individuals in the society: mass communication has its effects mediated by everyday communication between people who know one another.

NEW APPROACHES TO RELATIONSHIPS

Finally, I've gone further in Duck (2010) and proposed an entirely new approach to relationships as based on knowledge and shared understanding rather than emotion. I point out that personality can be reinterpreted as a person's understanding of the world based on the reactions of others from an early point in life. Physical sex affects each person's knowledge of the way in which the world is to be understood (and the relationships that may be had between people). Also, the knowledge shared between members of the society is what is responsible for the significance of exchange of gifts, love tokens, tie-signs and many other aspects of relationships previously explained by psychologists in terms of similarity of attitudes. By transforming Byrne's approach towards attitudes into one that deals with *knowledge* and *shared understanding*, this new look at relationships undermines many comfortable myths that most of us have previously been happy to live with.

Professor Steve Duck was the Founder and first Editor of the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and has written or edited 50 books on relationships. He was recently appointed a Collegiate Administrative Fellow in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Iowa.

Physical attractiveness

While it often takes time to find out about other people's attitudes and values, their physical attractiveness is immediately apparent. Physical attractiveness has been studied as an influence on attraction in its own right, as well as one aspect of similarity.

The attractiveness stereotype

As we saw in Chapter 22, we tend to perceive attractive-looking people as also having more attractive personalities (the *attractiveness stereotype*). Dion *et al.* (1972) found that photographs of attractive people, compared with unattractive people, were consistently credited with more desirable qualities – sexually warm and responsive, kind, strong, outgoing, nurturant, sensitive, interesting, poised, sociable, exciting dates, better character, happily married, socially and professionally successful and enjoying more fulfilling lives. So, 'what is beautiful is socially good' (Fiske, 2004).

The power of the physical attractiveness stereotype is demonstrated in a classic study by Snyder *et al.* (1977).

However, Dermer and Thiel (1975) found that extremely attractive women were judged (by female participants) to be egotistic, vain, materialistic, snobbish and less likely to be successfully married. Similarly, attractive people are judged as more snobbish, less modest and less faithful (Singh, 2004). This suggests that it's not always to our advantage to be seen as highly attractive, and one situation where this may apply is where a criminal's good looks played a part in the crime.

Dion and Dion (1995) observe that stereotyping based on facial attractiveness appears at least as early as six years old. They also suggest that this might be linked to the *just world hypothesis*, such that there's a positive bias towards 'winners', equivalent to 'blaming the victim' (see Chapter 23).

Is the attractiveness stereotype culturally relative?

Like most attractiveness research, studies of the attractiveness stereotype are largely American, the prime example of an individualist culture. Although a physical attractiveness stereotype can be found in some collectivist cultures (such as Korea and Taiwan), the content differs. For example, in Korea, attractive people aren't seen as more powerful but as showing more concern for others and more integrity. In other words, 'the beautiful receive the benefits of social status, embodying that culture's ideal values' (Fiske, 2004).

Different cultures have different criteria concerning physical beauty. For example, chipped teeth, body scars, artificially elongated heads and bound feet have all been regarded as beautiful, and in western culture, definitions of beauty change over time, as in the 'ideal' figure for women (see Chapter 44).

Figure 28.8 Size zero: the epitome of western female beauty?

The evolutionary approach: Sex differences and sexual selection – what do males and females find attractive?

Evidence suggests that humans are a *mutually* sexually selected species, that is, both males and females have evolved preferences for certain behavioural and/or anatomical features in the opposite sex. According to Ridley (1993):

> People are attracted to people of high reproductive and genetic potential – the healthy, the fit and the powerful

Figure 28.9 Ideas about what constitutes female beauty have changed over the centuries

Figure 28.10 The recent trend in cosmetic surgery for full lips has resulted, for some, in a bizarre change of appearance

So, how exactly do we choose our mates?

While the stage theories of Kerkhoff and Davis, and Murstein put physical (sexual) attractiveness into a social and also a temporal (time-related) context, evolutionary psychologists try to explain mate choice in terms of 'built-in' preferences that have developed through the course of human evolution.

Ask Yourself

- Think of someone you find extremely facially attractive; try to specify what it is about their face that you like.

The importance of facial symmetry

Although any two individuals can vary widely in what they consider facially attractive, these differences actually vary around an underlying norm, which is surprisingly consistent across cultures (Berry, 2000; Langlois and Roggman, 1990). Langlois *et al.* (1987) found that when babies under one year are shown faces that adults consider attractive or unattractive, they spend longer looking at the former (implying that they prefer them: see Chapter 16). Clearly, they're too young to have learned cultural standards of beauty.

Langlois and Rogmann (1990) took photographs of faces with standard pose, expression and lighting, and then scanned them into a computer. Each image was then divided into a very large number of tiny squares (or *pixels*), and the brightness of corresponding pixels in different same-sex faces were *averaged* to produce *computer-composite images* (see Figure 28.10). When people were asked to judge the attractiveness of these composite faces (made from 4, 8, 16, or 32 faces), they rated them as increasingly attractive the more faces that went into each image. This applied to both male and female faces.
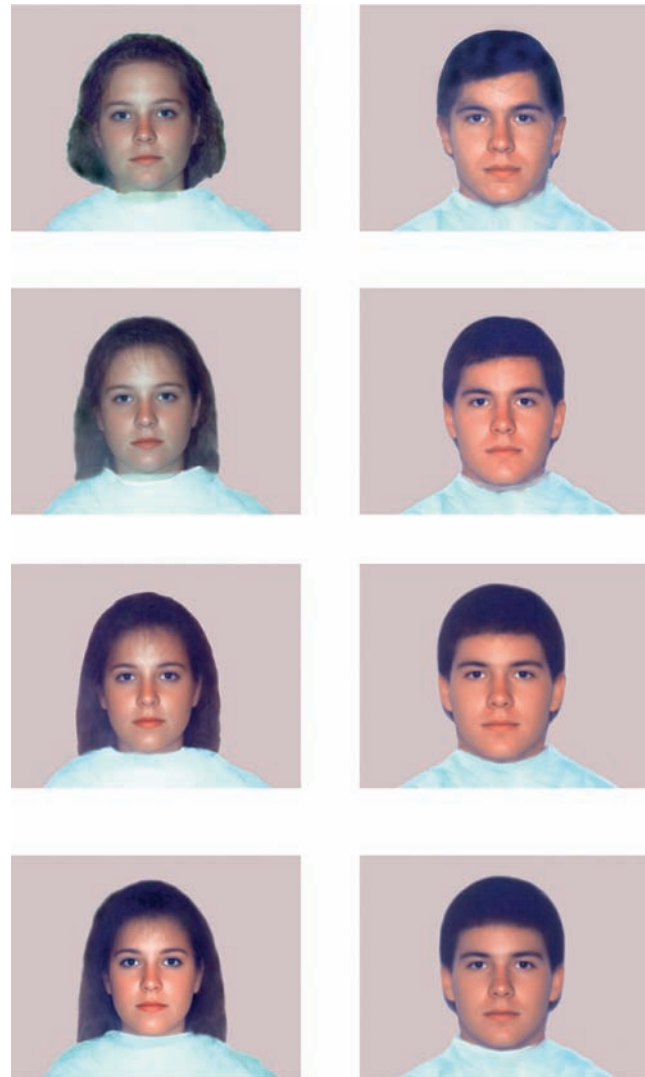

Figure 28.11 Computer-composite faces. The columns show composite sets created from female faces (left) or from male faces (right). From top to bottom, rows show composites created by averaging across 4, 8, 16 and 32 faces (from Bruce and Young, 1998).

The greater the number of faces making up a composite image, the more the peculiarities of particular faces become ironed out – that is, the more *symmetrical* they become. Most faces are (to varying degrees) asymmetrical around the vertical midline, and even those that are highly asymmetrical can be made more attractive. Hence, as Bruce and Young (1998) observe:

> It seems that moving a facial image closer to the average … increases its perceived attractiveness

Studies have shown men prefer photographs of women with symmetrical faces – and vice versa (Cartwright, 2000). It seems likely that symmetry (which shows a tendency to be inherited) equates with *reproductive fitness* (the capacity to reproduce one's genetic material).

Is attractiveness really no more than averageness?
This seems unlikely. For example, if we describe someone as 'average-looking', we usually mean that s/he is neither 'good-looking' nor 'ugly', and movie stars and sex symbols *aren't* obviously average (otherwise most of us would be sex symbols!).

According to Perret *et al.* (1994), the average derived from highly attractive faces is consistently preferred to the average of the entire set of photographs they were taken from. This wouldn't happen if 'attractive' equalled 'average'. When the difference between the average shape of attractive faces and the average shape of the entire set was increased, perceived attractiveness of the former also increased. But the effect of this was to make the resulting faces *more different* from the average. Perret *et al.* found exactly the same pattern of results for European and Japanese faces, regardless of whether they were judged by European or Japanese people.

Body symmetry and waist-to-hip ratio (WHR)
Facial symmetry is also the best predictor of *body symmetry*. Research indicates that women with symmetrical male partners have the most orgasms, and women with symmetrical breasts are more fertile than more asymmetrically breasted women (Cartwright, 2000). Males and females with near-perfect body symmetry report two to three times as many sexual partners as those with the most asymmetrical bodies. But it may not be symmetry itself that is directly attractive: other characteristics that are correlated with body symmetry, such as being more dominant, or having higher self-esteem, might be crucial.

Another physical characteristic shown to be a universally major determinant of attractiveness concerns *body shape*. In a series of studies conducted in the early 1990s, Singh (e.g. 1993) identified *waist-to-hip ratio* (WHR) as reliably conveying information about female mate value. WHR refers to fat distribution (regulated by sex hormones) that sculpts typical male–female body shape differences: after puberty, females have greater amounts of body fat deposited in the lower part of the body, such that their WHR is greater than men's, giving them their 'curves' or hour-glass figure.

Singh (1993) used archival data from the previous 50 years to examine the WHR of beauty contest winners and *Playboy* centrefolds. He found that a small waist set against full hips was a consistent feature of female attractiveness, while bust-line, overall body weight and physique varied over the years. He concluded that a larger WHR was associated with better health status and greater reproductive capacity (i.e. fertility). The optimum WHR is 0.7, which happens to correspond closely to the measurements of supermodels like Anna Nicole Smith (0.69), Kate Moss (0.66) and Cindy Crawford (0.69) (Swami and Furnham, 2006). (For males the ideal is more like 0.85–0.9.)

This fits in perfectly with Darwinian theories of human mate selection, which claim that both men and women select partners who enable them to enhance reproductive success, thus ensuring the survival of their genes into the next generation.

Although *Playboy* centrefolds have shown a 20 per cent decline in plumpness over the years (see Chapter 44), they've shown a consistent WHR of 0.7.

Figure 28.12 As well as her facial beauty, 1960s model Twiggy's WHR was (surprisingly) an attractive 0.733

However, cross-cultural replications haven't generally supported the claim that there's a universal preference for a low WHR (such as 0.7). Singh himself argued that the WHR acts as an initial 'filter' (screening out those who are unhealthy or have low reproductive capacity), after which the face and/or *body weight* (which may vary between cultures) are used in final mate selection (Swami and Furnham, 2006).

Is physical attractiveness more important to men?
A very general example of *sexual dimorphism* (the different characteristics of females and males of the same species)

is that the physical attractiveness of females is central to male mate preferences; in other words, men use physical attractiveness as an indicator of reproductive fitness to a much greater extent than women do. This was demonstrated in a much-cited study by Buss (1989) of 37 cultures (including Nigeria, South Africa, Japan, Estonia, Zambia, Columbia, Poland, Germany, Spain, France, China, Palestinian Arabs, Italy and the Netherlands) involving over 10,000 people. Men seem to give a universally higher priority to 'good looks' in their female partners, while the situation is reversed when it comes to 'good financial prospects' and 'good earning capacity'. According to Buss, these sex differences 'appear to be deeply rooted in the evolutionary history of our species'. Why should they have evolved?

Men value female partners in terms of *fecundity*, that is, the ability to produce and care for children. Men often have to rely on a woman's physical appearance in order to estimate her age and health, with younger, healthier women being perceived as more attractive ('fitter'). The preference for the large eyes and lips, and so on, is also related to the need to estimate a woman's age, and hence her reproductive fitness.

Women's reproductive success is less dependent on finding fertile males, for whom age is a much less reliable indicator of fertility. Also, male fertility cannot be assessed as accurately from their physical appearance as can females' (Buss, 1995). Consequently, women's mate selection depends on their need for a provider to take care of them during pregnancy and nursing: men seen as powerful and controlling resources that contribute to the mother and child's welfare will be seen as especially attractive. However, although physical attractiveness may be less important to females, they tend to be much more choosy in selecting a mate since they have greater *investment* in their offspring (Buss and Malamuth, 1996: see Gross and Rolls, 2009).

CRITICAL DISCUSSION 28.1
The tricky case of homosexuality

How can evolutionary psychology (in particular, *sexual selection theory*) account for same-sex romantic relationships? They seem to have existed in most cultures throughout recorded history, regardless of prevailing attitudes towards homosexuality and bisexuality. Both evolutionary accounts of mating and research into adult romantic relationships in terms of attachment theory (including Bowlby's evolutionary theory of attachment: see text above and Chapter 32) have been heavily biased towards heterosexual relationships.

According to McKnight (1997, in Mohr, 1999):

> Perhaps one of the cleverest challenges to confront evolutionary theory is homosexuality... How do we explain what is often a lifelong preference for non-reproductive sex?

McKnight asks why homosexuality hasn't died out as a less reproductive strain of humanity? For Bowlby, the sexual behavioural system of homosexuals isn't serving its functional goal of reproduction. But at the same time, he never denied that legitimate, psychologically healthy same-sex romantic attachments exist. Similarly, Ainsworth (1985) maintained that same-sex romantic attachments are likely to function in the same way as opposite-sex attachments: the main difference between them is that only the latter are socially acceptable.

Evolutionary theorists have assumed that there's a genetic component to homosexuality and bisexuality; further, 'gay genes' offer a direct reproductive advantage (such as homosexuals possessing traits such as charm, empathy and intelligence that are attractive to females: McKnight, 1997, in Mohr, 1999). Alternatively, one version of the *kin-selective altruism hypothesis* claims that males with gay genes instinctively feel at a reproductive disadvantage and decide to divert their energies into supporting the reproductive fitness of close relatives (e.g. Wilson, 1975).

However, the great variability in sexual behaviour among lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals, as well as recent developments in artificial insemination and family structures, means that significant numbers of LGB people do have children (Patterson, 1995; Roughgarden, 2004). Thus, same-sex romantic relationships may also increase individuals' ability to provide for their children, as appears to be the case for opposite-sex couples (Weiss, 1982). According to Roughgarden (2004), homosexuality is much too common for it to be considered a genetic aberration.

Arguably, the most viable explanation of same-sex relationships derives from the model proposed by Shaver *et al.* (1996) (see text above, page 433), which distinguishes between the evolved social-behavioural systems of *attachment, caregiving* and *sexuality*. Although romantic adult attachments typically integrate all three systems, they in fact have distinct origins, functions and underpinnings. Research into the brain substrates of both human and non-human sexuality and pair-bonding has confirmed this view (e.g. Bartels and Zeki, 2000, in Diamond, 2006).

This view of romantic love and sexual desire as fundamentally distinct has profound implications for our understanding of the nature and development of same-sex relationships. Specifically, if love and desire are based in independent systems, then one's *sexual orientation* toward same-sex or opposite-sex partners needn't correspond with experiences of *romantic attachment* to same-sex or opposite-sex partners.

> This, of course, runs directly counter to the implicit presumption among both scientists and laypeople that heterosexual individuals fall in love only with other-sex partners and lesbian and gay individuals fall in love only with same-sex partners. (Diamond, 2006)

Diamond (2006) reports on a study of 79 women (aged 18–23), most describing themselves as either lesbian or bisexual. One important finding was that the experience of being attracted to 'the person and not the gender' is appreciably distinct from that of needing an emotional bond with another person in order to be physically attracted to them. Unsurprisingly, non-gendered attraction was strongly associated with bisexuality.

The matching hypothesis

According to *social exchange theory* (e.g. Thibaut and Kelley, 1959: see below), people are more likely to become romantically involved if they're fairly closely matched in their ability to reward one another. Ideally, we'd all have the 'perfect partner' because, the theory says, we're all selfish. But since this is impossible, we try to find a compromise solution. The best general bargain that can be struck is a *value-match*, a subjective belief that our partner is the most rewarding we could realistically hope to find.

Several studies have tested the matching hypothesis (MH) (Walster *et al.*, 1966; Dion and Berscheid, 1974; Berscheid *et al.*, 1971; Silverman, 1971; Murstein, 1972; Berscheid and Walster, 1974).

This implies that the kind of partner we'd be satisfied with is one we feel won't reject us, rather than one we positively desire. Brown (1986), however, maintains that we learn to adjust our expectations of rewards in line with what we believe we have to offer others.

An evaluation of attraction research

According to Duck (1999), the 'magnetic metaphor' of attraction implies that people are unwittingly, and almost against their will, pulled towards one another's inherent, pre-existing characteristics. This caricatures real relationships as the 'unthinking domain of reactive magnetism'.

More recent research has considered the *dynamics* of relationships (how they develop and unfold over time), and how relationships are actually conducted in real life. Not surprisingly, this shift has involved fewer controlled laboratory studies, and more exploration of life as it's lived 'out there' (Duck, 1999). This now includes such diverse research areas as homosexual and electronic relationships (see above).

WHAT KEEPS PEOPLE TOGETHER?

You may say something to the effect that they provide you with security, happiness, contentment, fun, and so on, and (if you're honest) that they can also be complex, demanding and, at times, even painful. If all relationships involve both positive and negative, desirable and undesirable aspects, what determines our continued involvement in them?

Social exchange theory (SET)

Social exchange theory (SET) provides a general framework for analysing all kinds of relationship, both intimate and non-intimate, and is really an extension of reward theory (see above).

According to Homans (1974), we view our feelings for others in terms of *profits* (the amount of reward obtained from a relationship minus the cost). The greater the reward and lower the cost, the greater the profit and hence the attraction. Blau (1964) argues that interactions are 'expensive': they take time, energy and commitment, and may involve unpleasant emotions and experiences. Because of this, what we get out of a relationship must be more than what we put in.

Similarly, Berscheid and Walster (1978) argue that in any social interaction there's an exchange of rewards (such as affection, information and status), and that the degree of attraction or liking will reflect how people evaluate the rewards they receive relative to those they give.

An evaluation of SET

● SET sees people as fundamentally selfish and human relationships as based primarily on self-interest. But this is a metaphor for human relationships, and it shouldn't be taken too literally. However, although we like to believe that the joy of giving is as important as the desire to receive, we have to admit that our attitudes towards other people are determined to a large extent by our assessments of the rewards they hold for us (Rubin, 1973).
● Equally, though, Rubin (1973) believes that SET doesn't provide an adequate, complete account:

> Human beings are sometimes altruistic in the fullest sense of the word. They make sacrifices for the sake of others without any consideration of the rewards they will obtain from them in return

Altruism is most often and most clearly seen in close interpersonal relationships (see Chapter 30).
● Some psychologists make the distinction between 'true' love and friendship, which are altruistic, and less admirable forms that are based on considerations of exchange (Brown, 1986). Fromm (1962) defines true love as giving, as opposed to the false love of the 'marketing character', which depends upon expecting

to have the favours returned. Support for this distinction comes from studies by Clark and Mills (1979, 1993), who identified two kinds of intimate relationship:

(a) The *communal couple*, in which each partner gives out of concern for the other

(b) The *exchange couple*, in which each keeps mental records of who's 'ahead' and who's 'behind'.

- SET implies that all relationships are of the exchange variety. Exchange might describe some kinds of relationship, such as impersonal friendships and relationships between business associates, but in communal relationships, people don't track outcomes (who did what for whom: Clark, 1984). Instead, they track each other's needs, and one partner may need more than the other, at different times, or even throughout the relationship (Clark *et al.*, 1986). Fiske (2004) suggests that thinking of family relationships as communal explains why parents don't normally 'charge' their children for their upbringing. According to Clark and Grote (1998), communal relationships operate by different norms from exchange relationships.

- One of those norms is *reciprocity*, which involves the repayment of specific benefits ('you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours': see Chapter 27). Perhaps contrary to what most people would expect, reciprocity is particularly strong in most casual relationships, but weaker in more intimate communal relationships (Clark and Mills, 1993). Indeed, 'exchange' implies that people reciprocate benefit for benefit, resulting in an equivalence of outcomes (Fiske, 2004). The communal couple's responsiveness to each other's needs represents a broader type of reciprocity. In some form, reciprocity appears to be a fundamental aspect of human social exchanges (Dovidio and Penner, 2004), evident in all known cultures (Moghaddam *et al.*, 1993).

- Clearly, SET is a greatly oversimplified account of human relationships and cannot accommodate their rich diversity and complexity. At best, it may describe a certain type of superficial and probably short-term relationship.

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN AND DISSOLUTION

Ask Yourself

- Think of your most unsuccessful relationship(s).
- Why did it/they go wrong?
- Was it to do with you as individuals, or 'circumstances', or a mixture of the two?

Why do relationships go wrong?

According to Duck (2001), there's an almost infinite number of reasons why relationships break up. But they can be put into three broad categories:

1. *Pre-existing doom*: incompatibility and failure are almost predestined (for example, 'Schoolgirl, 17, marries her 50-year-old teacher, who's already a grandfather').

2. *Mechanical failure*: two suitable people of goodwill and good nature nevertheless find they cannot live together (the most common cause).

3. *Sudden death*: the discovery of a betrayal or infidelity can lead to the immediate termination of a romantic relationship (see below).

Duck believes that the 'official' reasons given to others (including the partner) to justify the break-up are far more interesting psychologically than the real reasons. The psychology of break-up involves a whole layer of individual psychological processes, group processes, cultural rules and self-presentation. But this applies mainly to romantic relationships, rather than friendships. When you fall out with a friend, there's usually no formal or public 'announcement': friendships aren't *exclusive* in the way that most sexual relationships are (it's 'normal' to have several friends at once, but not several partners!). As Duck (2001) says:

> Truly committed romantic relationships necessarily involve the foregoing of other romantic relationships and commitment to only one partner ('forsaking all others', as it says in the marriage ceremony)

Marital unhappiness and divorce

Duck (1988, 1992) has identified several factors that make it more likely that a marriage will be unhappy and/or end in divorce. Marriages that involve the following tend to be more unstable:

- Partners who are younger than average. This can be understood by reference to Erikson's concept of *intimacy* (see Chapter 38). Such marriages often involve early parenthood; the young couple has little time to adjust to the new responsibilities of marriage before financial and housing problems are added to with the arrival of a baby (Pringle, 1986).

- Couples from lower socio-economic groups and educational levels. These are also the couples that tend to have their children very early in marriage.

- Partners from different demographic backgrounds (race, religion, and so on) (see Kerckhoff and Davis's filter model).

- People who've experienced parental divorce as children, or who've had a greater number of sexual partners than average before marriage.

While these factors are important, only a proportion of marriages involving such couples actually end in divorce. Conversely, many divorces will involve couples who don't fit any of these descriptions. So what other factors may be involved?

According to Brehm (1992), there are two broad types of cause: *structural* (gender, duration of the relationship, the presence of children and role strain created by

competing demands of work and family) and *conflict resolution*.

Gender differences

In general, women report more problems, and there's some evidence that the degree of female dissatisfaction is a better predictor than male unhappiness of whether the relationship will end (perhaps because women are more sensitive to relationship problems than men). Alternatively, men and women may come into relationships with different hopes and expectations, with men's generally being fulfilled to a greater extent than women's.

Consistent with this possibility is evidence of gender differences in the specific type of problems that are reported. For example, divorcing men and women are equally likely to cite communication problems as a cause of their splitting up. But women stress basic unhappiness and incompatibility more than men do.

Men also seem particularly upset by 'sexual withholding' by a female partner, while women are distressed by a male partner's sexual aggression. This is consistent with the finding that men tend to fall in love more easily than women (Baumeister and Bratslavsky, 1999), which is contrary to the popular myth about women demanding commitment and men fighting shy of it. Men also seem to respond more quickly to any intimacy changes (positive and negative), at both earlier and later stages of a relationship (Fiske, 2004).

Duration of relationships and the passage of time

The longer partners have known each other before marriage, the more likely they are to be satisfied in the marriage, and the less likely they are to divorce. However, couples who've cohabited before marriage report fewer barriers to ending the marriage, and the longer a relationship lasts, the more people blame their partners for negative events.

According to Pineo's (1961) *linear model* (see Figure 28.12) there's an inevitable fading of the romantic 'high' of courtship before marriage. Also, people marry because they've achieved a 'good fit' with their partner, so any changes that occur in either partner will reduce their compatibility. For example, if one partner becomes more self-confident (ironically, through the support gained from the relationship), there may be increased conflict between two 'equals' competing for superiority.

Burr's (1970) *curvilinear model* (see Figure 28.13) proposes that marital happiness is greatest in the earliest years. Marital satisfaction declines as children are born and grow up, then increases again as they mature and leave home.

While it's generally agreed that there's a decline in satisfaction during the early years, whether there's an actual increase or just a levelling off after that remains a matter of debate. Gilford and Bengtson (1979) argue that it's an oversimplification to talk about 'marital satisfaction'. Instead, we should look at two life cycles: the pattern of positive rewards and the pattern of
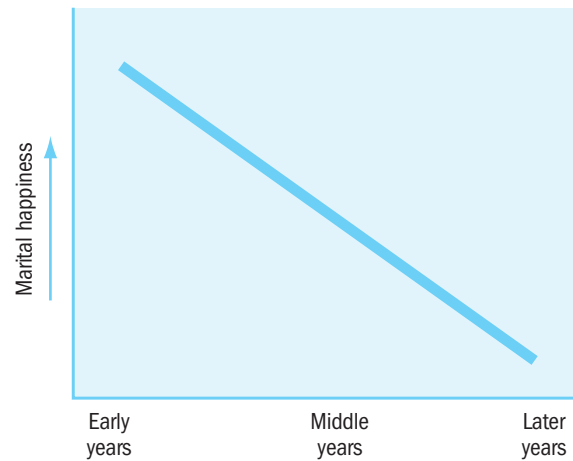
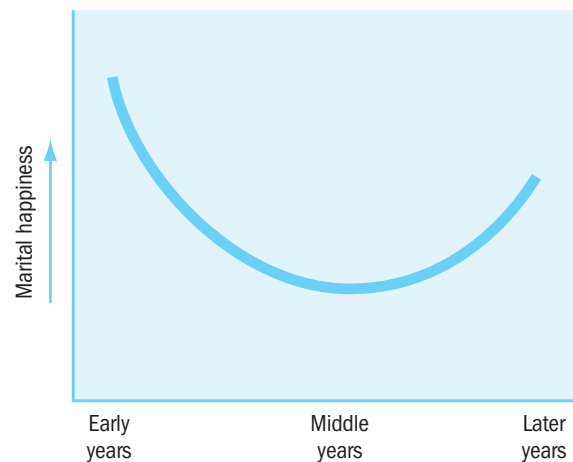**Figure 28.13** A linear life-cycle (based on Brehm, 1992)

Figure 28.14 A curvilinear life cycle (based on Brehm, 1992)

negative costs. The early years are associated with very high rewards and very high costs, while in the middle years there's a decline in both. In the later years, costs continue to decline, but there's an increase in rewards.

Conflict resolution

According to Duck (1988), some kind and degree of conflict is inevitable in all relationships. But the process of resolving conflicts can often be positive, promoting growth of the relationship (Wood and Duck, 1995). The important question, therefore, isn't whether there's conflict, but *how* it's handled. However, recurring conflicts may indicate an inability to resolve the underlying source; the partners may come to doubt each other as reasonable persons, leading to a 'digging in of the heels', a disaffection with each other and, ultimately, a 'strong falling out' (Berry and Willingham, 1997).

Some degree of overt conflict ('getting it out in the open') can improve a relationship – talking it through and working it out. But differences can result in destructive behaviour, in which partners fail to accommodate to each other's needs. This, in turn, can produce a *conflict spiral*, where one partner responds to the other's negative emotion with negative emotion, and so on. *Unregulated*
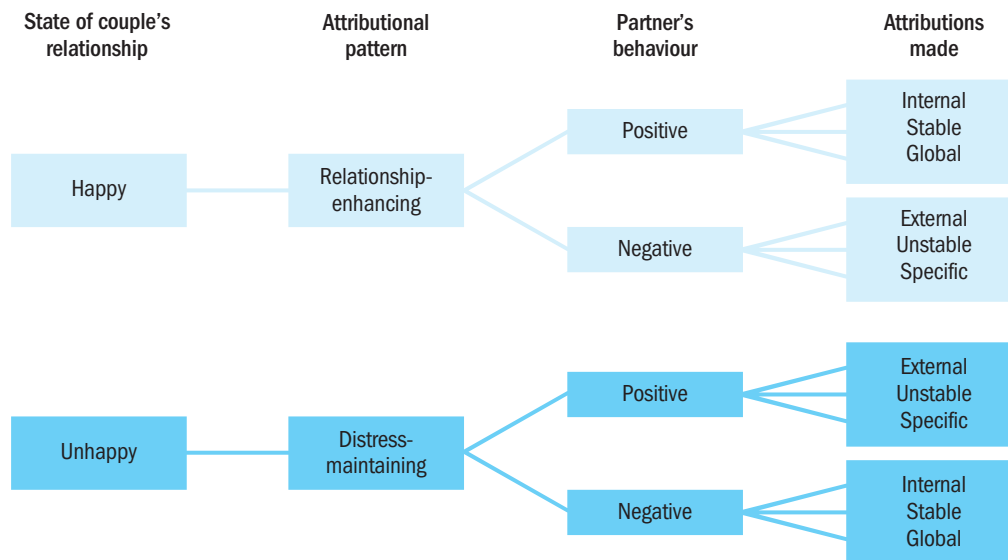
State of couple's relationship	Attributional pattern	Partner's behaviour	Attributions made
Happy	Relationship-enhancing	Positive	Internal Stable Global
		Negative	External Unstable Specific
Unhappy	Distress-maintaining	Positive	External Unstable Specific
		Negative	Internal Stable Global

Figure 28.15 Attributions made by happy and unhappy couples according to Bradbury and Fincham (1990). From Brehm, S.S. (1992) *Intimate Relationships* (2nd edition). New York, McGraw-Hill

couples, who don't balance their negative reactions with at least an equal number of positive ones, are headed for trouble (Fiske, 2004).

According to Bradbury and Fincham (1990), happy and unhappy couples resolve conflict in typically different ways, which can be understood as different *attributional patterns* (see Chapter 23). Happy couples use a *relationship-enhancing pattern*, while unhappy couples use a *distress-maintaining* (or *conflict-promoting*) *pattern* (see Figure 28.14).

According to Fincham (2004), support for the attributional hypothesis accumulated during the 1990s. Indeed:

the evidence for an association between attribution and marital satisfaction is overwhelming, making it possibly the most robust, replicable phenomenon in the study of marriage.

There's also increasing evidence that the causal link between attributions and marital satisfaction is *bidirectional* (they influence each other) (Fincham, 2004). However, couples' changing attributions over time predict their marital satisfaction more than satisfaction predicts attributions (Karney and Bradbury, 2000).

Rule-breaking and deception

Ask Yourself

- What's the worst thing that a friend or partner could do as far as your relationship is concerned?
- Is there anything that, in principle, you wouldn't tolerate?

Argyle and Henderson (1984) and Argyle *et al.* (1985) identified a number of rules thought to apply to all or most relationships, such as 'Should respect the other's privacy', 'Should not discuss what is said in confidence', 'Should be emotionally supportive'. There are additional rules for particular types of relationship. Relationships fall into clusters (such as (i) spouse, siblings, close friends; (ii) doctor, teacher, boss), with similar rules applying within a cluster.

Deception probably represents the most important rule that shouldn't be broken. Although what counts as deception will depend on the nature of the relationship, if you cannot trust your friend or partner, the relationship is almost certainly doomed.

Relationship dissolution as a process

People sometimes think about and plan their break–up, or maybe about how to prevent it: it doesn't always come at people 'out of the blue'. Recent research has begun to look more closely at the specific characteristics of those relationships that do break apart. For example, do troubled couples have particular ways of communicating and relating (Duck, 1999)? Researchers have also begun to look at the break–up of friendships, and the actions, strategies and persuasive techniques people deliberately take to cause break–up.

Duck's model

Duck's (1982) model comprises four phases, each of which is initiated when a *threshold* is broken. The ending of a romantic relationship indicates that the two people are now legitimately available as partners for other relationships. This requires them to create a story for the end of the relationship that leaves them in a favourable light as potential partners. Romantic relationships are, therefore, typically ended publicly in a way that announces the ex-partners' freedom from the expectations of exclusive commitment.

Table 28.2 A sketch of the main phases of dissolving personal relationships (based on Duck, 1982, from Duck, 1988)

Breakdown–dissatisfaction with relationship

Threshold: 'I can't stand this any more'

INTRAPSYCHIC PHASE

Personal focus on partner's behaviour

- Assess adequacy of partner's role performance
- Depict and evaluate negative aspects of being in the relationship
- Consider costs of withdrawal
- Assess positive aspects of alternative relationships
- Face 'express/repress dilemma'

Threshold: 'I'd be justified in withdrawing'

DYADIC PHASE

- Face 'confrontation/avoidance dilemma'
- Confront partner
- Negotiate in 'our relationship talks'
- Attempt repair and reconciliation?
- Assess joint costs of withdrawal or reduced intimacy

Threshold: 'I mean it'

SOCIAL PHASE

- Negotiate post-dissolution state with partner
- Initiate gossip/discussion in social network
- Create publicly negotiable face-saving/blame-placing stories and accounts
- Consider and face up to implied social network effect, if any
- Call in intervention team

Threshold: 'It's now inevitable'

GRAVE-DRESSING PHASE

- 'Getting over' activity
- Retrospective; reformative post-mortem attribution
- Public distribution of own version of break-up story

'Dressing the grave' involves 'erecting a tablet' that provides a credible, socially acceptable account of the life and death of the relationship. While helping to save face, it also serves to keep alive some memories and to 'justify' the original commitment to the ex-partner. As Duck (1988) puts it:

> Such stories are an integral and important part of the psychology of ending relationships… By helping the person to get over the break-up they are immensely significant in preparing the person for future relationships as well as helping them out of old ones.

Duck (2001) identifies a number of classic formats for a break-up story (such as 'X suddenly changed and I had to get out'; 'X betrayed me'; 'We grew apart'). The crucial ingredients of such stories are those that show the speaker:

- is open to relationships but doesn't enter them thoughtlessly
- is aware of others' deficiencies but isn't overly critical
- is willing to work to improve a relationship or take decisive action when partners turn nasty or break the rules of relating
- is rational and sensible, and brings closure to relationships only after trauma, hard work or on reasonable grounds after real effort to make things work.

Rollie and Duck's (2005) modification of the 1982 model emphasises the complexity and uncertainty of the dissolution process, including the psychological need to prepare oneself for the next step rather than to be preoccupied with what's going on now (Duck, 2005).

CONCLUSIONS: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DIVORCE?

One growing area of research interest is 'postmarital' and 'remarital relationships', and family reorganisation after divorce. The increasing incidence of divorce is making *blended families* the norm. Indeed, there's a shift in ideology, from viewing divorce as pathology to viewing it as an institution (Duck, 1999).

Once divorce is seen as a common *transition*, rather than as pathological, researchers can reasonably begin to attend to a much wider range of issues, such as 'getting over' and prevention, and as much to the processes of entering new relationships as to those to do with leaving the old ones (Masheter, 1997: see Chapter 38).

Even the most stable and loving relationships, inevitably, dissolve. As Berscheid and Ammazzalorso (2004) say:

> It is one of the saddest facts of the human condition that even the closest and happiest of relationships end – if not by some circumstance of fate that causes separation, then by the death of one of the partners

The loss, through death, of a loved one is often accompanied by the experience of the strongest negative emotions of which human beings are capable.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The **need for affiliation** represents a precondition for attraction, and can be related to the need for **social comparison**. Both are enhanced under conditions of increased anxiety.

- Interpersonal relationships in **western cultures** tend to be **individualistic**, **voluntary** and **temporary**, whereas those in **non-western cultures** tend to be more **collectivist**, **involuntary** and **permanent**.
- Western psychologists tend to equate 'relationships' with 'western relationships'. This is a form of ethnocentrism, specifically, **Anglo-** or **Eurocentrism**.
- **Marriage** is found in all cultures. But there are important cultural variations in marital arrangements, including **monogamy**, **polygamy** (**polygyny**, **polyandry**, **polyamory**) and **mandatory marriage to specific relatives**.
- **Arranged marriages** are far more common in collectivist cultures but, even here, brides and grooms are typically given some choice about who they marry. Traditionally, **divorce rates** have been much lower among 'arranged couples', but these are now increasing.
- The focus on long-term **heterosexual** relationships has now been supplemented with discussion of **gay** and **lesbian** relationships.
- Up to the mid-1970s, psychological research into homosexuality adopted a 'pathology model', which has been replaced by one that emphasises the underlying similarity between homosexuals and heterosexuals.
- One of the most unexpected uses of the Internet is in the development of online relationships (**cyber affairs** or **electronic friendships**).
- Berscheid and Walster distinguish between **companionate** ('true' or 'conjugal') and **passionate** (romantic or obsessive) **love**. These are **qualitatively** different, but companionate love is only a more extreme form of **liking**.
- Sternberg's **triangular theory** of love comprises three basic components (**intimacy**, **passion** and **decision/ commitment**), which can be combined to form different kinds of love.
- These models reflect the popular western ('Hollywood') view of the relationship between love and marriage, which isn't universal. However, the notion of people falling in love is found in one form or another in most human societies, even where marriages are traditionally arranged.
- Bowlby's **evolutionary** account of love focuses on love as **attachment**. This is one of three meanings of 'I love you', the others being love as **caregiving** and love as **sexual attraction**. This can help account for homosexuality, which cannot easily be explained in terms of **reproductive fitness**.
- In support of Kerckhoff and Davis's **filter model** (and other **stage** theories), it's generally agreed that relationships change and develop; although there's little

- evidence for the **complementarity** of **psychological needs**, there's more support for complementarity of **resources**.
- A general theoretical framework for explaining **initial attraction** is that the presence of others must be **rewarding**. This can help explain the impact of **proximity**, **exposure** and **familiarity**, **similarity** and **physical attractiveness**.
- **Similarity** of attitudes and values is a powerful influence on attraction, but this usually only emerges as the relationship develops. However, physical attractiveness is immediately apparent.
- There are important cultural differences in what counts as **physical beauty**, but there's a universal tendency for men to regard physical attractiveness as more important than women.
- Humans appear to be a **mutually** sexually selected species; **mate choice** is determined by 'built-in' preferences that have developed through the course of human evolution.
- The **symmetry** of the face around the vertical midline (its '**averageness**') appears to be an important determinant of attractiveness and is quite consistent across cultures. Symmetry equates with **fitness**.
- Symmetry is also important for bodily attractiveness (for both sexes), as is **waist-to-hip ratio** (**WHR**) (for females).
- The **matching hypothesis** (**MH**) is derived from **social exchange theory** (**SET**), which is a major explanation of all kinds of relationships, both intimate and non-intimate. Its different versions see people as fundamentally selfish, concerned only with getting as much out of a relationship as possible. But humans are capable of altruism as well as selfishness.
- Marriages are more **unstable** if the couple are teenagers, from lower socio-economic groups and different demographic backgrounds, whose parents were divorced, who've been sexually active prior to marriage, and who experience early parenthood.
- **Conflict** is an inherent part of all relationships; what's crucial is how constructively it's resolved.
- Happy couples tend to deal with conflict in a **relationship-enhancing way**, while unhappy couples use a **distress-maintaining pattern** of conflict resolution.
- **Rule-breaking** is a major cause of relationship breakdown, especially **deception**.
- Relationship breakdown is a **process**, involving a number of stages or phases. Research is increasingly concerned with the aftermath of relationship breakdown, especially divorce, and not just the breakdown itself.

LINKS WITH OTHER TOPICS/CHAPTERS

Chapter 22 → Interpersonal attraction, including the attractiveness *stereotype*, is really one aspect of *interpersonal* (or *social*) *perception*

Chapter 26 → Affiliation can be understood in relation to *conformity*, especially the need to belong. We also *compare ourselves with others* when we're unsure what to do or think

Chapter 47 → Ethnocentricism is a form of *bias* involved when western psychologists equate 'relationships' with 'western relationships'.

Chapter 43 → Homosexuality is discussed in relation to definitions and classification of *psychological abnormality*

Chapter 10 → Seeing love as a label we attach to our state of physiological arousal is consistent with the *cognitive labelling theory of emotion*

Chapters 32 and 2 → An evolutionary theory of love (love as *attachment*) is one aspect of *evolutionary psychology*

Chapter 24 → The similarity-attraction principle is related to *consistency theories of attitude change* (including Heider's *balance theory*)

Chapter 44 → Ideas about what makes people (especially women) physically attractive are relevant to the discussion of *eating disorders*

Chapter 14 → Analysing the factors that account for facial attractiveness is related to *facial perception* (including *face recognition*).

Chapter 39 → The tendency to equate beauty with youthfulness is the flip-side of *prejudice* against old age (*ageism*)

Chapter 30 → The SET view of people as fundamentally selfish is relevant to the discussion of *altruism*

Chapter 38 → Erikson's concept of *intimacy* is part of his *psychosocial theory of development*

DYNAMIC LEARNING RESOURCES

Student resources

Revision schema: interpersonal relationships (1) & (2)

Weblinks & further reading: subjects such as factors influencing interpersonal attraction

Tutor resources

Extension activities: subjects such as friendship, politics of love & equity theory

Multiple-choice questions: interpersonal relationships

Exam commentary & sample essay: western & non-western relationships

PowerPoint presentation: subjects such as sex differences & sexual selection