

Attraction, Relationships, and Love

What's it about?

(Social Psychology pp. 438–481)

This chapter is about the development from initial attraction to a **close relationship**, and to breaking up.

The study of attraction, relationships, and love is a challenge for many reasons, but more recent research using a variety of methods and studying people from different cultures has increased our understanding of this topic.

This chapter discusses factors that influence initial attraction (physical attraction, interaction, similarity, and liking). Relationships then become more intimate when processes of exchanging rewards and self-disclosure continue smoothly. When transforming to a close relationship, the nature of exchange rewards and the type of rewards change, and people become cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively interdependent. People can also feel passionate love; they experience sexual feelings and intense longing for the partner, and want to be close to the person for whom they feel passionate love. Satisfaction with sex, just like other mutual activities, affects satisfaction in a relationship.

However, when being interdependent in a close relationship, conflicts are inevitable. Factors are discussed that influence the ways people deal with conflicts (idealization, **commitment** level, and **attachment styles**). Two constructive approaches to reducing conflicts are: avoiding generalization and communicating about feelings. When in conflict, levels of intimacy, satisfaction, and commitment decrease, and these are the most important factors in maintaining relationships. Finally, the most effective response to cope with loneliness after breaking up is trying to meet new people, and making something valuable.

Chapter topics

- From attraction to liking (*SP pp. 440–449*)
- From acquaintance to friend: Relationship development (*SP pp. 449–453*)
- Close relationships (*SP pp. 453–465*)
- Romantic love, passion, and sexuality (*SP pp. 465–470*)
- When relationships go wrong (*SP pp. 470–479*)

FROM ATTRACTION TO LIKING

Ask yourself

- What factors influence initial attraction?
- Why are we attracted to beautiful people?
- Why do we usually like people we frequently interact with and people that are similar to us?

What you need to know

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS (<i>SP pp. 441–444</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biological bases of physical attractiveness• Experiential bases of physical attractiveness
SIMILARITY (<i>SP pp. 444–446</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why similarity increases liking
POSITIVE INTERACTION (<i>SP pp. 446–448</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why interaction increases liking

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

(*SP pp. 441–444*)

People are attracted to physically beautiful people.

What is perceived as attractive differs among cultures.

Characteristics of the person being observed, as well as the observer, also play a role in attractiveness. For instance, when a person is liked more, this person is seen as more physically attractive.

We like to be around attractive people because of the esthetic pleasure we obtain, and because interactions with attractive people are generally positive and pleasant. The common stereotype of attractive people is that they are warm, friendly, and social. This

stereotype becomes self-fulfilling when people act differently around attractive people because of their expectations, which as a result brings out the best in attractive people.

Biological bases of physical attractiveness

People prefer individuals with symmetrical faces because such faces signal good health, good genes, and freedom from disease.

Weblink: Researchers discover “golden ratios” for female facial beauty

<http://phys.org/news180195066.html>

In long-term relationships, men attach more importance to physical attractiveness than women do. From an evolutionary perspective this is explained by differences in parental investments for men and women. The investment for men is small, thus men can maximize their reproduction. They look for beautiful women because this is an indicator of women being young (so more fertile) and healthy. For women the investment is bigger, so they search for a supporting male, and thus seek for indicators of men's resources, such as dominance, status, etc.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Investigating personal ads [see ch12-RA-01.doc]

The evolutionary perspective is supported by evidence showing that women's preferences for men vary across the fertility cycle.

Another explanation for differences in emphasis on attractiveness is that in most cultures women have fewer resources themselves, and therefore seek a partner with resources.

Experiential bases of physical attractiveness

We like what we see most of, and we see those we like as being more attractive than those we dislike.

SIMILARITY

(SP pp. 444–446)

Weblink: Do opposites attract?

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2011/4/14/do-opposites-attract.html

Similarity signals who is “Me and mine”: Similar others validate our beliefs and attitudes, which leads to liking those similar others because we tend to view our own characteristics as desirable, and because support for our views is rewarding. Similarity is also a signal of in-group membership, and we tend to prefer in-group to out-group members.

Similarity signals familiarity: When others seem similar to us, this makes them seem familiar, which increases our liking for them.

Similarity contributes to mastery: Similarity between people leads to attraction because we tend to interact with similar others. The interaction also tends to be positive when people are similar.

Similarity validates connectedness: Similarity breeds attraction because we assume that similar others like us. Being liked by someone is a strong reason to like this person back.

POSITIVE INTERACTION

(SP pp. 446–449)

We like people with whom we interact frequently, even when we are together by sheer chance and do not initially share characteristics that usually lead to attraction. People living near to each other, or sitting close to each other in classrooms tend to like each other (see SP pp. 446–447).

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Where did you get your friends? [see ch12-RA-02.doc]

Why interaction increases liking

Interaction increases liking because interacting with others helps us to master the world; when an interaction is rewarding and meets our personal needs, we tend to like our interaction partner.

Interaction also increases liking because interacting with others helps us to feel connected. An important contributor to these feelings of connectedness is mimicry. This sense of connectedness is an important reward of interactions.

Finally, interacting with others increases familiarity. This familiarity leads to more liking and perceived similarity.

When an interaction is not rewarding or even harms us, it does not lead to liking. Negative interaction leads to repulsion, resulting in less liking for the interaction partner.

Similarity, liking, and interaction all influence one another. Similarity encourages interaction, and when people interact they discover similarities. Interaction also creates liking, and liking encourages interaction. Finally, we like similar others, we think those we like are similar, and we assume similar people will like us.

CASE STUDY: Liking, similarity, interaction, and mimicry: Mutually reinforcing processes [see ch12-CS-01.doc]

So what does this mean?

Physical attraction leads to more liking. From an evolutionary perspective, gender difference in the importance of physical attractiveness is explained by differences in parental investments for men and women. **Interaction** also increases liking because it helps us to master the world, it helps us to feel connected, and it increases familiarity. However, when the interaction is negative, this leads to less liking. Finally, **similarity** leads to attraction because: (1) we interact with similar others; (2) we assume that similar

others like us; and (3) similar others validate our beliefs and attitudes. Liking, similarity, and interaction mutually reinforce each other, which results in deeper and more intense relationships over time.

FROM ACQUAINTANCE TO FRIEND: RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Ask yourself

- What turns acquaintances into friends?
- What roles do exchanging rewards and self-disclosures play in developing relationships?

What you need to know

EXCHANGES OF REWARDS: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME AND FOR YOU? (<i>SP pp. 450–451</i>)
SELF-DISCLOSURE: LET'S TALK ABOUT ME AND YOU (<i>SP pp. 451–452</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effects of self-disclosure

Friendships develop through interactions that fulfill our need to master the social environment, and the need for connectedness with others.

EXCHANGES OF REWARDS: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME AND FOR YOU?

(*SP pp. 450–451*)

At the beginning of a relationship partners exchange rewards. These relationships are **exchange relationships**.

Exchange relationships turn into **communal relationships** when benefits are provided because of care rather than in order to receive benefits in return.

Actions like offering a favor without expecting one in return are important signals that indicate whether people want to make a transition from exchange to communal relationships.

Weblink: More information about exchanging rewards

www.uky.edu/~drlane/capstone/interpersonal/socexch.html

SELF-DISCLOSURE

(SP pp. 451–452)

Self-disclosure is the act of sharing facts, inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions about one's life and situation. Depth (level of intimacy) and breadth (range of topics) increase as relationships develop.

Effects of self-disclosure

Self-disclosure leads to more liking and deeper relationships because it signals trust, and because knowing each other's abilities, preferences, and needs leads to easier coordination of mutual activities and more understanding.

Self-disclosures are often exchanged in relationships; the norm of reciprocity is at work. However, when people disclose more than is appropriate, it makes others feel uncomfortable.

There is a strong gender difference in self-disclosure; women disclose more than men, especially in a same-sex relationship. In addition, men's disclosures often reflect an effort to deepen the relationship, while women's disclosures reflect their feelings about the relationship.

CASE STUDY: Who says "I love you" first? [see ch12-CS-02.doc]

People from individualistic cultures tend to self-disclose more than those from collectivist cultures. The greater individual mobility found in individualistic cultures contributes to the increased level of self-disclosures.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Playing hard to get [see ch12-RA-03.doc]

So what does this mean?

Friendships develop through interactions that fulfill our need to master the social environment and the need for connectedness with others. People exchange rewards to help each other find individual satisfaction, and exchange self-disclosure to get to know each other intimately. If processes of exchanging rewards and self-disclosure continue smoothly, relationships between people transit from **exchange relationships** to **communal relationships**, and become more intimate.

CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Ask yourself

- What aspects are involved in close relationships?
- How do different types of people approach close relationships?
- What effects do relationships have on physical and mental well-being?

What you need to know

COGNITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE: THE PARTNER BECOMES PART OF THE SELF (<i>SP pp. 453–455</i>)
BEHAVIORAL INTERDEPENDENCE: TRANSFORMATIONS IN EXCHANGE (<i>SP pp. 455–458</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes in the distribution of rewards
AFFECTIVE INTERDEPENDENCE: INTIMACY AND COMMITMENT (<i>SP pp. 458–462</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Psychological intimacy• Intimate interactions and health• Commitment
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS: ATTACHMENT STYLES (<i>SP pp. 462–465</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attachment styles• Relationships in cultural perspective

A **close relationship** is defined as a connection involving strong and frequent interdependence in many different areas of life.

Interdependence means that each partner's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors influence the other's. There are three types of interdependence: cognitive, behavioral, and affective.

Cognitive interdependence means that partners think of themselves as linked parts of a whole, and it is strongly tied to feelings of intimacy and relationship stability.

Behavioral interdependence means partners have great influence on each other's decisions, activities, and plans. They also spend a lot of time together. This type of interdependence is tied to the duration of the relationship.

Finally, affective interdependence means that each partner's emotional well-being is deeply affected by what the other does.

Aron and Aron (1991, p. 26) defined love as the "thoughts, feelings, and actions that are associated with a desire to enter or maintain a close relationship with a specific person."

COGNITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE: THE PARTNER BECOMES PART OF THE SELF

(SP pp. 453–455)

In a close relationship, differences between the self and the other are erased; through self-disclosure and extensive interaction: (1) one gets to know the other person's inner life; (2) one gets to know every aspect of the other person's life; (3) one gets to know the reasons behind the other person's behaviors and preferences (shares the other person's perspective); and (4) one influences the other person's behavior. This way, mental representations of self and other are linked into a single unit, and partners become cognitively interdependent.

Through processes of interdependence, the partner becomes linked to a person's self-concept.

Feelings and intentions that are conveyed by an act are more important than the act itself in close relationships.

Because the partner is part of the self, attributions of the partner's behaviors are also biased in a self-serving way; positive behaviors are inflated in significance and attributed to inner qualities, whereas negative behaviors are minimized and attributed to situational causes.

BEHAVIORAL INTERDEPENDENCE: TRANSFORMATIONS IN EXCHANGE

(SP pp. 455–457)

Changes in the distribution of rewards

The nature of exchange of rewards is different in close, communal relationships; rewards are exchanged out of affection and care. Because the partner becomes part of the self, his or her needs and desires are not ignored.

As well as the reasons for rewards, the type of reward is also different in close relationships; whereas material rewards are exchanged in casual relationships, love and emotional support are exchanged in close relationships.

AFFECTIVE INTERDEPENDENCE: INTIMACY AND COMMITMENT

(SP pp. 458–462)

Feelings of closeness change the sense of intimacy and the level of commitment to the relationship.

Psychological intimacy

Intimacy is defined as a positive emotional bond that includes understanding and support.

Intimacy is enhanced by interactions that involve self-disclosure (step 1), which is responded to with acceptance, acknowledgment, and understanding (step 2). This response, in turn, makes the self-discloser feel understood, valued, and esteemed (step 3).

Intimate feelings are deeply linked with positive emotions of warmth, connectedness, and caring, and are so important to human needs that this is the most central reward of close relationships.

Bowlby (1969; see SP p. 463) even suggested this link has an evolutionary basis; an innate system binds people emotionally to specific others by leading them to feel good when having contact with those specific others, and to feel anxious or distressed when apart.

Sharing a positive event is an important benefit of close relationships, because it gives an opportunity for re-living and re-experiencing the positive event. When sharing positive events with others, people experience more positive emotions and increased satisfaction in life.

Intimate interactions and health

Because a partner becomes part of the self, relationships influence our feelings, behaviors, and physical and mental well-being.

Social support increases physical health and psychological well-being because it offers opportunities for self-disclosure, companionship, and enjoyable interactions. These are the same factors that are present in a satisfactory, close relationship, so satisfactory close relationships improve people's well-being.

Research also demonstrated that people with cancer who participated in support groups had more effective immune systems and lived longer than people with cancer who were not in a support group, but received the same medical treatment.

The effects of social support are stronger when given to women, and when provided by family and friends.

Commitment

Commitment reflects the intention and desire to maintain a relationship for the long term, as well as a strong emotional bond to the partner.

When partners are committed, they feel comfortable relying on each other for intimacy, advice, and support, and this influences their actions and feelings.

Three factors are involved that create and maintain commitment. The first is satisfaction with the relationship. This is an evaluation of the rewards of a relationship compared with the rewards one believes would be available in alternative relationships (a comparison level for alternatives). The second factor is seeing the rewards of your relationship as unique, as not available in alternative relationships. The final factor is psychological and/or financial barriers, such as feelings of embarrassment, loss of investments of time, energy and self-disclosures, and financial, emotional, and legal difficulties.

For all of these reasons, relationships with stronger commitment last longer.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS: ATTACHMENT STYLES

(SP pp. 462–465)

People have an innate tendency to form emotional attachments to others. Our experience with other people influences the ways in which we approach close relationships. Our beliefs about the self, other people, and the nature of relationships are summarized by our attachment style.

Four different **attachment styles** can be distinguished, with two underlying dimensions; view of others and view of self. People with *secure* attachment styles feel positive about the self and others, and are most likely to feel trust and happiness in close relationships. Those with a *dismissing* attachment style have positive views of the self, but negative

views of others; they are low in expressiveness and intimacy in their relationships. *Preoccupied* individuals feel negative about themselves, but positive about others. They are high in emotional expressiveness and show the most reliance on other people. Finally, *fearfully* attached people think negatively about themselves and about others.

These different attachment styles influence the way partners give and receive support. Securely attached people seek more support when they are upset and give more support when someone else is upset, whereas people with dismissing and fearful attachment styles seek and give less support. This demonstrates how attachment styles influence the ways people attain intimacy and experience love.

Weblink: More information about attachment styles

www.personalityresearch.org/attachment.html

Relationships in cultural perspective

Research in Western, independent cultures places an emphasis on voluntary “Western” relationships. However, many cultural differences can be found, for instance in the nature of the bond between mother and child. Gupta and Singh (1982; see SP p. 464) found that love grows in arranged marriages, while it decreases in voluntary marriages.

So what does this mean?

In a **close relationship**, people have a connection involving strong and frequent cognitive, behavioral, and affective **interdependence**. Many things change when transforming to a close relationship; the nature of exchange rewards and the type of rewards change, differences between the self and the other are erased, and feelings of closeness change the sense of intimacy and the level of commitment to the relationship. People can have different orientations in relation to the self and others in an intimate relationship: *secure*, *dismissing*, *preoccupied*, or *fearful*. The way partners give and receive support is also influenced by these **attachment styles**. **Social support** increases

physical health and psychological well-being. Sharing positive events results in experiencing more positive emotions and increased life satisfaction.

ROMANTIC LOVE, PASSION, AND SEXUALITY

Ask yourself

- What is romantic love or passion?
- Is sexual activity related to relationship satisfaction?
- Why is sex such a unique expression of love for relationships?

What you need to know

PASSIONATE FEELINGS (<i>SP p. 465</i>)
MATE PREFERENCE: WHO'S LOOKING FOR WHAT? (<i>SP pp. 466–469</i>)
SEX IN THE CONTEXT OF A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP (<i>SP pp. 469–470</i>)

PASSIONATE FEELINGS

(*SP p. 465*)

Passionate love involves sexual feelings, intense longing for the partner, and euphoric feelings of fulfillment and ecstasy. Desired actions are actions involving closeness and contact with the person for whom one feels passionate love. Components of love such as commitment, intimacy, trust, and attachment are relatively less involved. According to Berscheid (1988), the source of the arousal that underlies and strengthens passion is mostly sexual desire.

Weblink: Chemistry + Timing = Relationship Success

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2013/5/23/chemistry-timing-relationship-success.html

The experience of passionate feelings differs between men and women; men tend to fall in love more quickly, while women tend to fall out of love more easily. In addition, cultural differences exist in the views on passion; some cultures see passion as desirable and natural, while others view it with suspicion or even negatively (see *SP p. 465*).

As intimacy and commitment develop over time in a relationship, passion tends to fade.

CASE STUDY: Reduced cognitive control in passionate lovers [see ch12-CS-03.doc]

Arousal from other external sources, such as a few minutes of exercise, can intensify passionate feelings.

CASE STUDY: The triangular theory of love [see ch12-CS-04.doc]

Weblink: More information about how passion relates to other kinds of love

<http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/love.htm>

MATE PREFERENCE: WHO'S LOOKING FOR WHAT?

(SP pp. 466–469)

Most research finds that men place more importance on attractiveness, whereas women place more importance on a partner's status and financial success. Evolutionary psychologists have proposed that these differences in preference stem from the much higher cost of successful reproduction for women than for men.

When it comes to short-term sexual encounters, both men and women rate physical attractiveness highly. In contrast, when men and women are seeking long-term relationships, personality traits are rated as one of the most important factors in partner choice.

Weblink: The sexual double standard

<http://spsptalks.wordpress.com/2013/06/20/motives-for-the-sexual-double-standard-a-test-of-female-control-theory/>

Many people find and meet romantic partners online. Compared to couples who meet offline, couples who meet online tend to stay together longer.

Weblink: So many fish in the (online) sea

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2012/5/22/so-many-fish-in-the-online-sea-is-all-this-choice-a-good-thi.html

Weblink: The science behind three popular dating apps

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2013/6/12/the-science-behind-3-popular-dating-apps.html

SEX IN THE CONTEXT OF A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

(SP pp. 469–470)

Neither the timing of sex, nor the emphasis on intimacy, affect satisfaction in a relationship. Satisfaction with sex is related to relationship satisfaction, however, just as other mutual activities are related to relationship satisfaction.

Men tend to be sexually dissatisfied when sexual activity is not as frequent and as varied as they want it to be, whereas women are dissatisfied when there is a lack of warmth, love, and care in their sexual relationship. This gender difference diminishes among older people.

Sex is a unique and appropriate expression of love in close relationships because two fundamental processes involved in forming and maintaining a relationship are combined: mutual pleasure and enjoyment, and intimate self-disclosure.

Weblink: What is normal, sexually?

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01212yz

So what does this mean?

People who feel passionate love experience sexual feelings, intense longing for the partner, and euphoric feelings of fulfillment and ecstasy, and want to be close to and have contact with the person for whom they feel passionate love. Some people see sex as an enjoyable activity, regardless of **commitment**, while others see it as an expression of intimacy and commitment. Sex is a unique expression of love in **close relationships**

because people give and receive pleasure and enjoyment, and self-disclose intimately. Neither the timing of sex, nor the emphasis on intimacy, affects satisfaction in a relationship, but satisfaction with sex does, just as other mutual activities are related to relationship satisfaction.

WHEN RELATIONSHIPS GO WRONG

Ask yourself

- What are the factors that create conflicts?
- What resources help people handle conflict?
- How do people cope with breaking up?

What you need to know

THREATS TO RELATIONSHIPS (<i>SP pp. 471–472</i>)
HANDLING CONFLICT: MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FACE OF THREAT (<i>SP pp. 472–476</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constructive and destructive accommodation to negative acts• Relationship conflict and social problems• Resources for constructive accommodation• Relationship conflict and clinical psychology• Declining intimacy and commitment
BREAK-UP, BEREAVEMENT, AND LONELINESS (<i>SP pp. 476–479</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After the break-up: Grief and distress for two• Till death do us part• Loneliness

THREATS TO RELATIONSHIPS

(*SP pp. 471–472*)

Conflicts are inevitable when people are interdependent in a relationship.

When factors like illness, disability, or personal change reduce a partner's willingness or ability to meet the other person's need, fewer rewards are derived from the relationship, and satisfaction and commitment decline.

External factors, such as job or family responsibilities, or social norms, such as women being the housekeeper and men being the breadwinner, can easily create conflicts.

Reasons for breaking up include desires for autonomy, or a lack of psychological support from the partner. In addition, women mention more often a lack of openness and intimacy, and men mention the absence of romance or passion, as reasons for breaking up. Finally, envy arising from performance comparison can spark conflicts; areas that are high in self-relevance can more easily become a source of conflict.

People experience jealousy when a real or imagined rival appears. When feeling jealous, one might feel depressed and anxious because of the threatened loss of a valued relationship. One might also feel angry due to loss of self-esteem when being rejected for someone else.

Weblink: Are you the jealous type?

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2013/3/8/are-you-the-jealous-type.html

HANDLING CONFLICT: MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FACE OF THREAT

(SP pp. 472–476)

Constructive and destructive accommodation to negative acts

Patterns of accommodation are the processes of responding to a negative action by the partner. Accommodations are constructive when acting in ways that help to maintain the relationship, such as actively discussing problems, loyally waiting for the situation to improve, and forgiving the partner. Destructive responses include screaming, refusing to spend time with the partner, and endangering the relationship.

A couple's pattern of accommodations, especially the absence of negative ones, influences relationship satisfaction.

Weblink: Seven ways to improve your relationship: An infographic

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2013/3/24/infographic-7-ways-to-improve-your-relationship.html

Accommodation is more likely to be constructive when couples have secure attachment styles and are committed to the relationship. The more troubled a relationship is, the more prone it is to misunderstanding and misattributions.

Four especially problematic types of communication often used in conflict are: (1) criticism that characterizes the person as a whole; (2) contempt; (3) defensiveness; and (4) stonewalling.

Weblink: The top 15 sources of conflict in relationships

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2011/10/3/what-are-we-fighting-about-the-top-15-sources-of-conflict-in.html

Relationship conflict and social problems

Violence and spousal abuse are related to the same factors that lead to relationship conflict and break-up, according to Berscheid and Reis (1998).

Women sometimes remain in abusive relationships because of the quality of their alternatives, and their investment in their relationship.

Severe conflicts in families lead to psychological problems for the children during the conflict itself. After parents are separated, they generally turn out to be fine.

Resources for constructive accommodation

1. Attachment style

People's attachment styles influence the way they handle conflicts.

Securely attached people show constructive behaviors in conflict situations, and view their partner and their relationship as more positive after discussing a problem.

Preoccupied or fearfully attached individuals behave in a less constructive way, and have outbursts of negative emotions. During discussion of a problem, they show anxious and stress responses, feel anger towards their partner, and view their relationship as involving less love and commitment.

Dismissive men behave in distant and nonsupportive ways when discussing a problem.

2. Commitment

Commitment leads to more motivation for people to overlook their partners' flaws, to communicate their needs, to change their own behaviors, and to be willing to sacrifice. Couples who perform behaviors that are linked to commitment are more likely to stay together.

3. Idealization of the partner

Idealization helps people to deal with conflict; having favorable beliefs about the partner is related to less overt conflict and using fewer destructive ways to handle conflicts.

CASE STUDY: Ideal partner preferences predict divorce [see ch12-CS-05.doc]

4. Beliefs about relationships

People differ in their views about what it takes for a relationship to succeed. Research has focused on two types of beliefs (i.e., implicit theories of relationships): growth and destiny beliefs.

People who believe in *growth*, believe that occasional conflicts can be overcome with any partner. These people tend to have a relationship for a longer period of time. People believing in *destiny*, believe that a particular partner is either inherently compatible or not. Initial satisfaction influences whether the relationship will last for a long period of time or end very quickly.

Relationship conflict and clinical psychology

Constructive ways to handle conflict can be taught to couples (see SP p. 472).

Declining intimacy and commitment

When in conflict, partners may spend less time with each other and be less open about their inner feelings. Because intimacy is one of the most important rewards in a relationship, dissatisfaction is easily felt.

Conflict and dissatisfaction can also influence commitment levels. Then, partners may see other people as more attractive, and when receiving positive attention from these alternative partners, comparison with the dissatisfying relationship will lead to a growing sense of leaving the relationship.

BREAK-UP, BEREAVEMENT, AND LONELINESS

(SP pp. 476–479)

Ending a relationship is often a long and complex process, with repeated conflicts and reconciliations.

The fact that women tend to experience more distress in a conflict may explain why women terminate relationships more often than men do.

When a relationship has ended, each ex-partner blames the other for the decline in the relationship.

People adjust the best after a break-up when attributing the divorce to the relationship itself, rather than to themselves or to external factors.

Weblink: More information about terminating a relationship

http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/terminating_relationships.htm

After the break-up: Grief and distress for two

Break-ups mostly occur because of rising dissatisfaction and frustration from the relationship and not because of falling out of love.

Feelings of control or believing one understands what happened influence the cognitive and emotional consequences of the end of a relationship and increase the chances of success in future relationships.

Weblink: The science of heartbreak

www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2013/9/15/the-science-of-heartbreak-video.html

Till death do us part

The death of a spouse is the most stressful major life event, causing serious threats to mental and physical health. People whose spouses have died unexpectedly and people who believe they have little control over the future experience the worst problems.

Loneliness

Loneliness is an emotion arising from unmet needs for affection and self-validation from a psychologically intimate relationship. When feeling lonely, people experience distress, desperation, boredom, and depression.

The most effective response to cope with loneliness is trying to meet new people, and making something valuable; while dwelling on bad qualities, drinking, and drug abuse are the worst reactions to loneliness.

Seeing loneliness as arising from transitory, potentially controllable causes can be easily overcome, while loneliness attributed to stable, internal qualities cannot.

Weblink: The United States of marriage and divorce

www.pewresearch.org/2009/10/15/the-states-of-marriage-and-divorce/

So what does this mean?

Conflicts are inevitable when people are interdependent in a relationship. Reasons for breaking up include desires for autonomy and a lack of psychological support from the partner. Idealization, **commitment** level, and **attachment styles** influence the way people deal with conflicts. Negative attributions and destructive accommodations can lead to a vicious cycle of conflict. Two constructive approaches to reducing conflicts are: avoiding generalizing about the partner, and trying to communicate about feelings. When in conflict, levels of intimacy, satisfaction, and commitment decrease. Break-ups mostly occur because of rising dissatisfaction and frustration from the relationship. The most effective response to cope with loneliness after a break-up is trying to meet new people, and making something valuable.