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Affiliation, Attraction and Close Relationships

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KEY CONCEPTS

affiliation
attachment theory
attraction
buffer effect of social
    support
commitment
emotional contagion
epidemiological studies
equity theory
evolutionary theory
intimacy
investment model
loneliness
passionate love
propinquity
reciprocity
social comparison theory
social exchange theory
social support

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Humans are a very social breed. They seek each other's company in a variety of situations, they make friendships with other people, and they seem to find their ultimate happiness and despair in their intimate relationships. But what is it that drives us to interact socially with others? What determines the fact that we often quite rapidly find ourselves liking some people more than others? Such issues are dealt with in the present chapter. We begin with a discussion of affiliation, followed by a section on attraction and friendships, focusing on the factors that make individuals like other people and become friends with them. Next, we deal with the nature of romantic attraction and, finally, we deal with the development and dissolution of close relationships.

Introduction

Carl is in general a happy man. He enjoys having fun and spending time with his friends. Recently, he fell in love with Carin, a beautiful woman whom he had known for some time; however, Carin does not reciprocate his feelings. Since then, Carl has felt quite unhappy and at times lonely. Although he needs company because of his unhappiness, even being with his friends hardly improves his mood. Carin likes Carl, but just does not have romantic feelings for him. She feels that Carl lacks ambition, and is not the type of man she is looking for. Her closest girlfriend, with whom she discusses everything, agrees that Carl is not right for her.

Why does Carl feel so lonely? Why does being with his friends not improve his mood? And why does Carin find ambition such an important attribute in a mate? The social psychology of personal relationships helps us to answer all these questions, and explains why our close relationships with others can be such sources of personal happiness and fulfilment, but also of great sadness, even despair. This chapter will provide you with the tools to answer these questions, beginning with a consideration of why people need others in the first place.

AFFILIATION: THE NEED FOR SOCIAL CONTACT

When do we like to be in the company of others?
Does social support for other people help to reduce stress?
What are the health consequences of a lack of affiliation?

Situations fostering affiliation: When do people affiliate?

Humans have a general need to affiliate with others, and they spend a considerable part of their life in the company of other people. By *affiliation* we mean the tendency to seek out the company of others, even if we do not feel particularly close to them. According to the homeostatic model (O'Connor & Rosenblood, 1996), affiliation can be seen as a drive, in that people look for an optimal range of social contact. This model states that, when individuals experience too much solitude, they seek out social contact until their affiliative drive is satiated; and when they experience excess social contact, they seek out solitude to restore the optimum level of affiliation. It is generally assumed that the human desire for affiliation stems in large part from our evolutionary past, when joining others in the face of threat, such as predators and aggressors, enhanced our chances of survival. It has indeed been found that individuals are particularly likely to affiliate under conditions of stress, in which survival issues may become salient (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Buunk & Schaufeli, 1993). Why would individuals affiliate when confronted with a stressful situation? Two theoretical answers to this question are particularly relevant, one stemming from social comparison theory and the other from attachment theory.

> **affiliation** the tendency to seek out the company of others, irrespective of the feelings towards such others

Social comparison According to *social comparison theory*, particularly in novel and stressful situations, individuals tend to seek out others to compare themselves with, to learn more about their own feelings and to obtain information about the most effective way of behaving. They may not know how to feel and respond: 'Am I too worried?', 'Should I be really concerned', 'Am I the only one who is so upset?' Affiliation with others facing the same situation gives individuals the opportunity to compare their responses with those of others, and thus to assess the appropriateness of their feelings (Festinger, 1954). In line with this theory, Schachter (1959) found that research participants under threat of receiving an electric shock preferred to be in the company of someone else who was also waiting to take part in the

> **social comparison theory** assumes that individuals seek out others to compare themselves with, to assess the appropriateness of their feelings and to obtain information about the most effective way of behaving

same experiment, rather than someone who was in a quite different situation, such as waiting for a professor. As Schachter concluded: 'Misery doesn't love just any kind of company, it loves only miserable company' (p. 24).

Knowledge about social comparison and affiliation has proven very useful in the area of psychology and health. Gump and Kulik (1997) found that participants who were faced with the prospect of undergoing experimentally induced pain spent more time looking at how other individuals responded who were to undergo the same threat than at individuals who were to participate in a very different experiment – their responses would not be relevant to compare with one's own responses. Social comparison with others may also provide individuals with valuable information, for example about how to deal with their own situation. As a result of this motive, individuals faced with a threat may prefer contact with someone knowledgeable, who may provide information about the potential threat. In their study Stanton, Danoff-Burg, Cameron, Snider and Kirk (1999) assigned breast cancer patients randomly to listen to an audiotaped interview in which another breast cancer patient's psychological adjustment and disease prognosis were manipulated to reflect good, poor or unspecified psychological and physical health status. Participants demonstrated a greater desire for information and emotional support from the patient with good rather than poor health status, but not more than from the patient with unspecified health status. Thus they did not profit from the opportunity to learn more about the patient with poor health status, which might in fact have been useful in putting their own situation into perspective and, indeed, making them feel comparatively better off.

Anxiety reduction A host of evidence indicates that individuals in threatening and stressful circumstances do often turn to sympathetic others who may offer them reassurance, comfort

Plate 10.1 *Social comparison with others may provide individuals with valuable information, for example about how to deal with their own illness.*

PIONEER

John Bowlby (1907–1990) started his intellectual career at the University of Cambridge where he studied developmental psychology and, later, child psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Upon returning from army service in 1945, Bowlby became head of the Children's Department at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Studying maladapted children, Bowlby felt that psychoanalysis was putting far too much emphasis on the child's fantasy world and far too little on actual events. As a result, Bowlby developed attachment theory, which states that a child's actual experiences within the family have far-reaching effects on his or her personality development. According to Bowlby, starting during the first months in their relationships with both parents, children build up so-called 'working models' of how attachment figures are likely to behave, and for the rest of their lives children's expectations are based on these models.

attachment theory proposes that the development of secure infant–caregiver attachment in childhood is the basis for the ability to maintain stable and intimate relationships in adulthood

and emotional support (e.g., Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996; Wills, 1991). The most important theory here is *attachment theory*, developed by John Bowlby (1969). This theory has both evolutionary and psychoanalytic underpinnings. With regard to evolution, in herds of social animals, stragglers on the open plains ran a greater risk of being attacked by predators, leading to a genetic propensity to respond to fear with a tendency to seek out the company of others. In psychoanalytic terms, attachment theory developed initially with a focus on new-borns and their relationships with caregivers. According to attachment theory, new-borns are equipped with a so-called attachment system, i.e., a set of built-in behaviours, such as crying and smiling, that helps keep the parent nearby, resulting in higher chances of survival and an increased level of protection. Attachment theory argues that affiliation is an innate tendency that is also apparent in other primates such as rhesus monkeys and chimpanzees, as well as in infants who, in response to danger signals, seek close contact with their mothers (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Shaver & Klinnert, 1982).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the tendency to seek out the company of reliable and dependable others in stressful situations. For instance, Kulik, Mahler and Moore (2003) found in a study of coronary-bypass patients that those who were assigned to a roommate who was post-operative rather than pre-operative were less anxious, were more mobile post-operatively and had shorter post-operative stays. Patients who had no roommate tended to have the slowest recoveries. The presence of others may, however, enhance anxiety and distress when the other person

present is nervous rather than calm. In such cases *emotional contagion* may occur: individuals unconsciously mimic others' facial expressions and feelings (e.g., Gump & Kulik, 1997, Study 2).

emotional contagion the unconscious mimicking of the facial expressions and feelings of another person

Social support and stress reduction

Whereas seeking out the company of others is an active strategy for reducing anxiety, having a supportive network of friends or relatives is something that is reliably associated with stress reduction. *Social support* refers to the feeling of being supported by others, and is usually divided into four components (House, 1981), i.e., *emotional* support

social support the feeling of being supported by others, usually divided into four components: emotional support, appraisal support, informational support and instrumental support

(feeling cared for, loved and appreciated); *appraisal* support (feedback and social comparison on how to evaluate things); *informational* support (such as information about how to handle situations); and *instrumental* support (receiving concrete aid and help). The first three of these components correspond to the two functions of affiliation under stress that were mentioned above. In addition, social support often takes place 'invisibly', without individuals noticing that others are supporting them. A person may, for instance, not explicitly notice that his or her partner had done chores around the house, but nevertheless feel happy as a result that things at home seem to be going so well (Bolger, Zuckerman & Kessler, 2000). Numerous studies have found that social support is beneficial in terms of stress reduction, an effect that occurs with respect to such divergent stressors as the transition to parenthood, financial strain, health problems, work stress and even pain (e.g., Brown, Sheffield, Leary & Robinson, 2003; Karlin, Brondolo & Schwartz, 2003; see Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996, for a review).

Social support researchers have been particularly interested in the so-called *buffer effects of social support*, i.e., those instances where people who perceive that they are supported are less affected by

buffer effect of social support the effect that those who perceive themselves to be supported are less affected by stressful events and conditions than those who feel unsupported

stressful events than those who feel unsupported, because support counteracts or 'buffers' the negative consequences of stress for health and well-being. If the beneficial effects of social support are really due to the fact that it reduces stress, then these effects should be stronger for individuals in stressful situations than for individuals who are not in stressful situations. To study the stress-buffering effect of social support, a research study needs at least two levels of stress and two levels of social support. Then the buffering effect (an interaction between stress and social support) can be separated from main effects of either social support or stress on their own.

For example, Winnubst, Marcelissen and Kleber (1982) found that individuals who felt more supported by their co-workers were less depressed when confronted with uncertainty about the future of their work. Another example of the buffering role of social support comes from a study by Cohen and Hoberman (1983). This
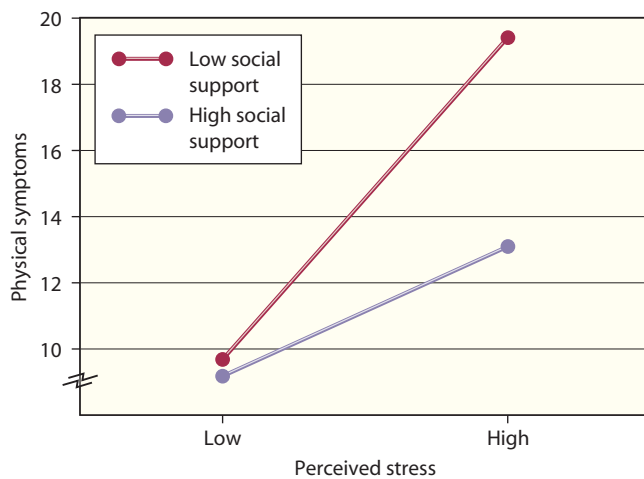
Figure 10.1 *The relationship between perceived stress and physical symptomatology for individuals low and high in social support (based on Cohen & Hoberman, 1983).*

study showed that individuals who felt that their life was very stressful had many more physical symptoms such as headaches, insomnia and weight loss if they also perceived themselves to have a low level of support from others (see Figure 10.1). Buffer effects may make individuals relatively immune to stress even when they simply *perceive* that there are others available who may be willing to help (Cohen & Wills, 1985). For instance, Sarason and Sarason (1986) found that participants who were informed they *could* turn to the experimenter if they had any questions or needed help for another reason (but actually never did) were better able to perform on a stressful task than were participants who did not have this opportunity, supposedly because this opportunity reduced feelings of stress. This effect, however, was found only for participants who scored low on the social support questionnaire, a measure of the number of others one can turn to for help, and the degree of satisfaction with this help.

Lack of affiliation, loneliness and health

One of the most direct and obvious signs of a lack of affiliation and social support is *loneliness*. Loneliness is a complex affective response stemming from a felt deficit in the number and nature of one's social relationships. According to Weiss (1975), there are two distinct forms of loneliness: *emotional loneliness*, which results from the absence of an intimate partner, and *social loneliness*, which is due to the absence of supportive friends and ties to a social network. In general, the absence of an intimate partner cannot be compensated for by supportive friends, or vice versa. Stroebe, Stroebe,

loneliness a complex affective response stemming from felt deficits in the number and nature of one's social relationships

Abakoumkin and Schut (1996) found, for instance, that widowed individuals experienced more emotional loneliness, but not more social loneliness, than married people. This study also reported that both widowed and married individuals with little social support experienced more social loneliness, but not more emotional loneliness, than individuals who had extensive social support available in their social network (see Jones & Hebb, 2003, for a review).

Why can't the loss of a marriage partner be compensated for by supportive friends? Attachment theory provides an explanation. Although attachment begins as a set of innate signals that call the adult to the baby's side, as time passes children form an enduring affectional bond with their caregivers. But the need for felt security is ageless: adult humans will also function optimally if they have a trusted figure on whom they can rely. Therefore, the attachment system will be functional throughout the human life span, with pair-bonds being the adult form of attachment in childhood. If adults lose the attachment bond with a partner, they will respond similarly to a child that is separated from her parents: they will experience great distress and, initially, a strong impulsion to re-establish contact, followed by a period of depressed mood and, eventually, emotional detachment.

A lack of affiliation not only leads to loneliness, it may also have serious health consequences. In a pioneering study, Berkman and Syme (1979) examined which individuals from a sample first questioned in 1965 had died nine years later. Those who had passed away appeared to have been socially isolated: they were more often unmarried, had fewer good and frequent contacts with friends and families, and were less often members of church and other organizations. Whereas for men being married was more important for survival, for women having intense relationships with friends and family played a key role. These differences in mortality were attributed to effects of affiliation as such, rather than the fact that those less socially connected lived more unhealthily, or that those with a disability were less well able to establish and maintain social ties. Since this pioneering study, over a dozen different *epidemiological studies* have shown mortality effects of a lack of social integration, particularly for men (e.g., Rutledge, Matthews, Lui, Stone & Cauley, 2003).

epidemiological studies research studies dealing with the incidence, distribution and possible control of diseases and other factors relating to health and illness

SUMMARY

Humans generally need to affiliate with others, especially under conditions of stress. We compare ourselves with others to reduce anxiety and to gain information and emotional support. Social support from others buffers the impact of high stress, staves off loneliness and promotes better health and longevity.

ATTRACTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FRIENDSHIPS

How does the physical environment affect interpersonal attraction and the development of friendships?
Do people tend to like others who have the same attitudes as they do?
Why is physical attractiveness so important?
What are the main characteristics of friendship?

In many situations individuals affiliate without consciously choosing the company of specific others (Berscheid, 1985). For example, individuals may join a sports club without feeling particularly attracted to the members of that club, or move to a new neighbourhood without knowing who their neighbours will be. Interestingly, however, there is ample evidence that affiliation may foster friendship. This occurs partly because of physical *propinquity*, or simply being close to others. In addition, factors such as similarity of attitudes and physical attractiveness play a role in the development of friendships.

> **propinquity** physical closeness to others, for example living in the same neighbourhood or sitting next to others in the classroom

The physical environment

Individuals tend to like those they are with – many studies have shown that simply being in the physical presence of another individual will enhance the probability of becoming friends with that person. The pioneering study on this issue was done over 50 years ago by Festinger, Schachter and Back (1950) in Westgate
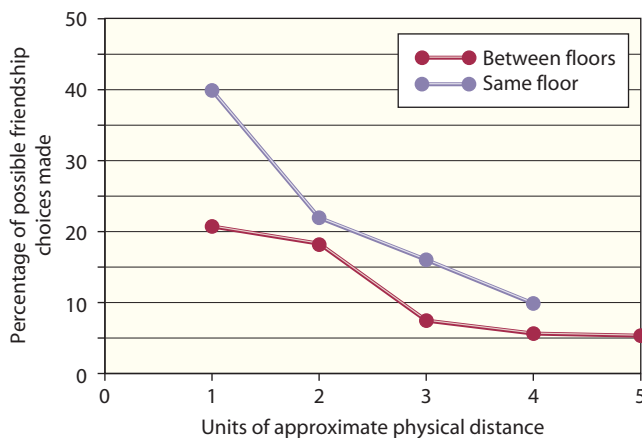
Figure 10.2 *Propinquity and friendship choice (based on Festinger et al., 1950).*

West, a housing complex for student couples consisting of 17 buildings, each with 10 apartments on two floors. Couples were assigned to them on the basis of a waiting list. After a number of months, more than 10 times as many friendships appeared to have developed with others within the same building than with others in different buildings. But even within the same building, physical propinquity, or proximity, was a powerful influence (see Figure 10.2). More friendships had developed with others on the same floor than with others on different floors, and the more doors away another couple lived on the same floor, the less often a friendship had developed with the other couple. Similar findings have been obtained in many other studies. For example, a study in a police academy found that cadets particularly became friends with those whose last names began with the same letter or with a nearby letter in the alphabet. This effect occurred because classroom seats were assigned in alphabetical order of cadets' surnames (Segal, 1974).

There may be several reasons why propinquity leads to *attraction*, as many other studies have shown. There are simply fewer barriers to developing a friendship with someone close by. Even climbing a stairway to see someone on a different floor is more trouble than just seeing the people next door. By regularly being in the company of another person, we also obtain more information about them, and have the opportunity to discover mutual interests and common attitudes. Propinquity may also lead to attraction through the so-called *mere exposure effect* (Bornstein & D'Agostino, 1992; see also Chapter 6, this volume). This was shown in a study by Saegert, Swap and Zajonc (1973), who manipulated frequency of exposure unobtrusively by having each participant spend a different number of trials of about 40 seconds with each of five other participants. The more often a participant had met another participant in the experiment, the more that person was liked.

> **attraction** positive feelings towards another individual, including a tendency to seek out the presence of the other

The role of environmental propinquity in fostering attraction may depend on various other factors. Perhaps the most important effect of propinquity is in increasing the likelihood of contact. This was shown in the Westgate West housing complex by the finding that, when asked whom they knew, apartment dwellers consistently chose next-door neighbours. If they lived on the upper floor they did not know anyone downstairs except the two families by the stairs (particularly the ones by the mailbox). The effects of propinquity are also especially pronounced when the participants are quite similar. For instance, in the Festinger et al. (1950) study, all participants were either war veterans or students. Propinquity may also *decrease* attraction by making the unpleasant characteristics of others more noticeable. As a consequence, it is often not only the most-liked others who live close by, but also the most-*dis*liked others (Ebbesen, Kjos & Konecni, 1976).

Compared to the early 1950s, when Festinger conducted his research, nowadays physical proximity seems of less importance, at least in the initial stages of affiliation and attraction. With the creation and expansion of the Internet, modern means such as dating sites, chat rooms and email have become available to large groups of individuals, making it much easier to affiliate and

become friends, even lovers, with individuals at a great geographical distance. In addition to overcoming geographical distance, the Internet can help individuals overcome other barriers to relationship initiation, such as inhibitions about one's appearance, shyness and traditional sex roles (Scharlott & Christ, 1995). Although, eventually, individuals may want to meet each other in person and geographical distance then does become salient, by that time the emotional attachment may have grown so strong that individuals perceive the geographical distance as less of an obstacle to continuing their relationship compared with individuals in relationships that are initiated and maintained face to face (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004). However, the lack of physical propinquity does seem to take its toll in another way: in general (romantic) relationships that are initiated and maintained through the Internet are less committed, less serious and contain more misrepresentations than face-to-face relationships (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001).

Despite all this evidence concerning the importance of proximity, we should emphasize that physical distance is not the only factor that determines the probability of meeting. Social factors (e.g., school, university, sports clubs) also influence the likelihood of meeting and, in addition, they have the effect of resulting in similarity on many factors. Homogamy (marriage between people from similar social or educational backgrounds) is not totally due to a preference for similar others, but to the fact that we mainly meet similar others (at least in situations that facilitate the development of romantic relationships).

The similarity of attitudes

Similarity is, in general, a potent factor fostering attraction and friendships. This is consistent with Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which states that we mostly compare ourselves with *similar* others. Friends have been found to be more similar to one another than non-friends in, for instance, age, marital status, race and intelligence (Hays, 1988). Attitude similarity, in particular, appears to lead to attraction. Just a century ago, in 1905, the Dutch psychologist Heymans and his colleague Wiersma found that people were more often married to others who had similar attitudes with respect to, for example, caring about good eating and drinking, politics and religion (Schuster & Elderton, 1906). However, this and other studies of similarity between married couples are open to various causal interpretations. Thus Newcomb (1961) undertook a classic study which measured attitudes *before* people met each other. In his study in a student housing complex, Newcomb found that students were most attracted to others with similar attitudes on a range of topics.

However Newcomb's evidence, like that of other studies on attitudinal similarity, was still only correlational. Therefore Byrne (1971) developed his now well-known *attraction paradigm*, in which participants fill out an attitude questionnaire such as the one presented in Figure 10.3. A few weeks later they are given an attitude questionnaire which they assume has been filled out by another person. In fact, it has been completed by the experimenter so as to express attitudes of varying degrees of similarity or dissimilarity to the participant. Experiments using this paradigm have consistently shown that attraction is a direct linear function of the

Classical Music (check one)
– I dislike classical music very much.
– I dislike classical music.
– I dislike classical music to a slight degree.
– I enjoy classical music to a slight degree.
– I enjoy classical music.
– I enjoy classical music very much.

Sports (check one)
– I enjoy sports very much.
– I enjoy sports.
– I enjoy sports to a slight degree.
– I dislike sports to a slight degree.
– I dislike sports.
– I dislike sports very much.

Welfare Legislation (check one)
– I am very much opposed to increased welfare legislation.
– I am opposed to increased welfare legislation.
– I am mildly opposed to increased welfare legislation.
– I am mildly in favour of increased welfare legislation.
– I am in favour of increased welfare legislation.
– I am very much in favour of increased welfare legislation.

War (check one)
– I feel strongly that war is sometimes necessary to solve world problems.
– I feel that war is sometimes necessary to solve world problems.
– I feel that perhaps war is sometimes necessary to solve world problems.
– I feel that perhaps war is never necessary to solve world problems.
– I feel that war is never necessary to solve world problems.
– I feel strongly that war is never necessary to solve world problems.

Strict Discipline (check one)
– I am very much against strict discipline of children.
– I am against strict discipline of children.
– I am mildly against strict discipline of children.
– I am mildly in favour of strict disciplining of children.
– I am in favour of strict disciplining of children.
– I am very much in favour of strict disciplining of children.

Divorce (check one)
– I am very much opposed to divorce.
– I am opposed to divorce.
– I am mildly opposed to divorce.
– I am mildly in favour of divorce.
– I am in favour of divorce.
– I am very much in favour of divorce.

Figure 10.3 *Attitude similarity questionnaire (based on Byrne, 1971).*

proportion of similar attitudes (i.e., the number of similar attitudes divided by the total number of similar and dissimilar attitudes). This so-called law of attraction has also been found to occur when the individual meets the other in person (e.g., Griffit & Veitch, 1974).

Why is attitude similarity so important? The major explanation given by Byrne (1971) is based on classical conditioning. Byrne showed that hearing someone express similar attitudes evokes positive affect, and that hearing someone express dissimilar attitudes evokes negative affect. Next, Byrne showed that such affective responses can be conditioned to other persons. A person whose

picture was present when participants were simultaneously listening to the expression of similar attitudes was liked more than when the same picture was presented while participants listened to someone expressing dissimilar attitudes. Of course, one could argue that this could be the result of thinking that the person in the picture was the one expressing the attitudes. However, in a subsequent study, Byrne showed that conditioning also occurred when the statements could not be attributed to the person in the picture, because he or she was of the opposite sex to the person expressing the attitudes.

Although the link between attitude similarity and attraction is a very robust one, there are a number of qualifications to this general pattern. First, attitude similarity affects attraction particularly for attitudes that are *important* for an individual (Byrne, London & Griffitt, 1968). Second, individuals tend to assume that others have attitudes similar to their own, and when no information is provided about another person, they may feel as attracted to him or her as when they learn the other has similar attitudes. That is, individuals may feel more put off by dissimilar others than attracted to similar others (Rosenbaum, 1986; Singh & Ho, 2000). Third, it may be that learning that someone prefers the same free-time activities, rather than attitude similarity, is important for friendship (Werner & Parmelee, 1979), casting some doubt upon Byrne's (1971) assumption that attitude similarity leads to attraction because it is intrinsically rewarding. Finally, complementarity is more important than similarity when it comes to interpersonal styles, such as dominance and submissiveness. For example, Dryer and Horowitz (1997) found that dominant individuals were most satisfied interacting with individuals who were instructed to play a submissive role, whereas submissive individuals were more satisfied interacting with individuals who were instructed to play a dominant role.

Physical attractiveness

Like similarity, physical attractiveness is a key determinant of attraction. Although physical attractiveness is more important for romantic relationships, it also influences the development of friendships. That is, individuals tend to like physically attractive individuals. Physical attractiveness has its effect via a positive stereotype, often called the 'what is beautiful is good' stereotype: when someone is beautiful, we automatically attribute many other positive characteristics to them (Feingold, 1992). Although attractive people are viewed as more snobbish, less modest and less faithful (e.g., Singh, 2004), they are especially perceived as more sexually exciting and more socially skilled than unattractive people, but also as more sociable, more assertive and in better mental health.

These stereotypes are not completely unfounded. Although the personality and behavioural characteristics of attractive people are, overall, not very different from those of unattractive people, attractive people have been found to be less lonely, less socially anxious, more socially skilled and more popular with the opposite sex (Feingold, 1992). Probably, from the beginning of their life, attractive people receive more positive attention and will, through a so-called *self-fulfilling prophecy* (see Chapter 3, this volume),
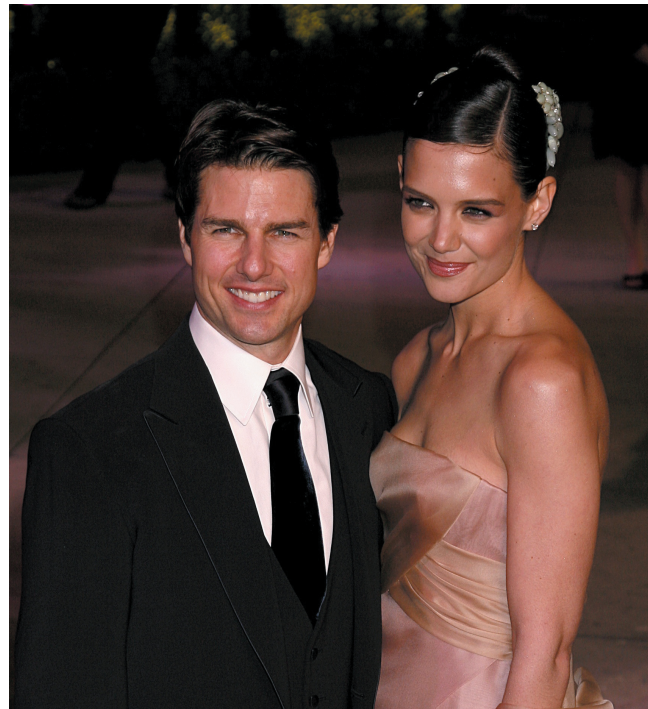

Plate 10.2 *Attractive people have been found to be less lonely, less socially anxious, more socially skilled and more popular with the opposite sex.*

become more self-confident in their social life. This process was shown in a study by Snyder, Tanke and Berscheid (1977). These investigators led male participants to believe that they were conducting a 'getting acquainted' telephone conversation with an attractive versus an unattractive woman. Remarkably, the women who were *believed* to be attractive (though they were not actually more attractive) became, as a consequence of the more positive behaviours of the males towards them, more friendly and sociable, whereas the women assumed to be physically unattractive became cool and aloof during the conversation.

It must be noted, however, that the physical attractiveness stereotype is not as strong or general as suggested by the phrase 'what is beautiful is good' (Eagly, Ashmore & Longo, 1992). Compared to unattractive targets, attractive targets are especially perceived as more socially competent and, to a lesser extent, better adjusted and intellectually competent. However, attractive targets are generally not perceived as higher in integrity and concern for others. In addition, the physical attractiveness stereotype has less effect when individuating information is presented, for example, information about the personality and background of a target person (Eagly et al., 1992).

Friendship as a relationship

Even when environmental factors are conducive, and even when a high degree of attitude similarity exists, a friendship between

two people may still not develop. The beginning of a friendship is characterized by *mutuality* of attraction, and this may give rise to the *voluntary interdependence* that is typical of friendships (Hays, 1988). That is, individuals involved in such relationships are motivated to invest in their relationship, to coordinate their behaviours and to take the interests of the other into account. In friendships throughout the life cycle, and in all social groups, such interdependence implies *reciprocity* in terms of helping, respecting and supporting each other (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; see also Chapter 9, this volume).

> **reciprocity** the basic rule in interpersonal relationships that one can expect to obtain assets such as status, attractiveness, support and love to the degree that one provides such assets oneself
>
> **social exchange theory** views social relations in terms of rewards and costs to those involved; argues that social relations take the form of social exchange processes

A useful theoretical model for analysing relationships, including friendship, is *social exchange theory*. This general approach views relationships in terms of rewards and costs to those involved. It emphasizes that individuals expect certain levels of 'outcomes' on the basis of what they put into a relationship. A related perspective is *equity theory*, according to which those who

> **equity theory** assumes that satisfaction is a function of the ratio of outcomes to inputs of the person as compared with those of a reference other, and that individuals will try to restore equity when they find themselves in an inequitable situation

have the feeling of giving more to their friends than they receive – the 'deprived' – as well as those who feel they receive more than they give – the 'advantaged' – will be less happy in their friendships than those who perceive a reciprocal, i.e., fair or equitable, exchange (Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978).

It is easy to see why 'deprived' individuals are unhappy in their relationships: they are being 'cheated' and may feel angry and resentful. But why should 'advantaged' individuals also experience discomfort? Because they are doing *too* well, and may feel guilty as a consequence. Thus although, of course, it is better to be

(a)

(b)

Plates 10.3a and b *Women disclose more intimate things in their relationships with friends than men do, while men look for friends with similar interests.*

'advantaged' than 'deprived', both being 'advantaged' and being 'deprived' undermine satisfaction with the relationship. Indeed, Buunk and Prins (1998) found that those who felt advantaged, as well as those who felt deprived, with respect to the giving and receiving of support in their relationship with their best friend felt more lonely than those who felt this relationship was reciprocal. The importance of reciprocity for friendships is also apparent from the most important rules in friendship: volunteering help in time of need, respecting the friend's privacy, keeping confidences, trusting and confiding in each other, standing up for the other in his or her absence and not criticizing each other in public (Argyle & Henderson, 1985). According to evolutionary theorists, the sensitivity to reciprocity in friendships and other relationships is the result of the evolution of the human species in which maintaining mutually supportive relationships was crucial for survival (Buunk & Schaufeli, 1999; see also Chapter 9, this volume).

Gender and friendship

In general, women want others as friends to whom they can talk about intimate issues such as feelings and problems. Women also disclose more intimate things in their relationships with friends than men do. In contrast, men look for friends with similar interests, emphasize more the joint undertaking of activities and do not give a high priority to discussing feelings (Fehr, 2004; Sherrod, 1989). When men and women interact with same-sex friends, men are also more dominant, whereas women are more agreeable (Suh, Moskowitz, Fournier & Zuroff, 2004).

Why are friendships between men less intimate than those between and with women? The main reason seems to be that women are simply more likely than men to engage in the kinds of behaviours that produce **intimacy**. Research shows that this difference is not due to the fact that men have a different conception of intimacy or are less socially skilled than women. For instance, in their study, Reis, Senchak and Solomon (1985) found that both men and women agreed that interactions involving personal self-disclosure (e.g., discussing a relationship break-up) are indicative of intimacy. However, when interacting with a same-sex friend, men chose not to engage in intimate self-disclosure. Thus, it seems that, although men and women agree on the path to intimacy, men simply *choose* not to follow it. The question then remains why men are less motivated than women to engage in intimate self-disclosure with same-sex friends. Evolutionary theorists argue that evolution has favoured a male preference for so-called instrumental friendships, i.e., relationships that revolve around common activities rather than shared emotions, because men had to collaborate in hunting and fighting. In contrast, women had to establish and maintain a network of nurturing relationships aimed at taking care of and raising children (De Waal, 1983).

> **intimacy** a state in interpersonal relationships that is characterized by sharing of feelings, and that is based upon caring, understanding and validation

SUMMARY

Many factors conspire to determine whether friendships develop, including physical proximity, similarity of attitudes and interests, and physical attractiveness. Friendship is a special form of relationship, guided by expectancies and rules. Women tend to be more intimate in their friendships and to disclose more than men.

ROMANTIC ATTRACTION

What characterizes and stimulates romantic attraction?
Which attachment styles can be distinguished and how does each style influence individuals' romantic relationships?
Is physical attractiveness equally important to men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals?

Romantic love

Falling in love or feeling sexually attracted to someone is experienced quite differently from liking someone and developing a friendship with him or her. To differentiate between different types of love, Sternberg and Barnes (1988) proposed the so-called triangular theory of love, which holds that three different ingredients combine to form different types of love. The first component of love is *intimacy* and refers to close, connected and bonded feelings in loving relationships. The second component is *passion*, characterized by physical arousal and emotional and/or sexual longing. The final ingredient of love is *commitment*, that is, the decision to remain with each other and work to maintain the relationship. Each component can vary in intensity, from low to high, and when combined, eight types of love occur (see Figure 10.4): (1) non-love (intimacy, commitment and passion are all absent, such as the relationship between client and shopkeeper); (2) liking (intimacy is high but passion and commitment are low); (3) infatuation (passion is high but intimacy and commitment are low, for instance, individuals feel sexually attracted to someone they barely know); (4) empty love (commitment is high but passion and intimacy are low); (5) romantic love (intimacy and passion are high but commitment is low, such as in summer love affairs); (6) companionate love (intimacy and commitment are high but passion is low, such as in lifelong friendships); (7) fatuous love (passion and commitment are high, while intimacy is low, such as in whirlwind courtships); and (8) consummate or 'complete' love (commitment, passion and intimacy are all high).

According to the triangular theory of love, passion (or sexual attraction) is one of the defining characteristics that distinguishes romantic love from platonic love or liking. Indeed, romantic relationships are, especially in the beginning, often characterized

Plate 10.4 *According to the triangular theory of love, passion (or sexual attraction) is one of the defining characteristics that distinguishes romantic love from platonic love or liking.*
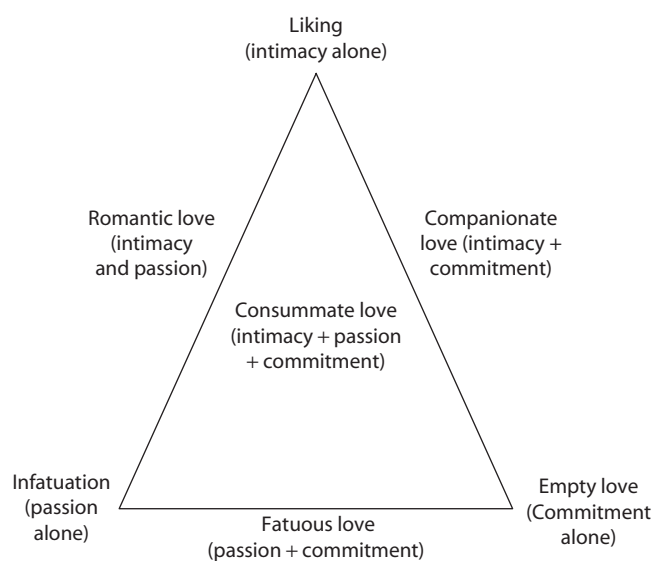

Figure 10.4 *The types of love as different combinations of the three components (Sternberg & Barnes, 1988).*
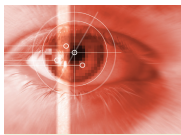
PIONEERS

Ellen S. Berscheid (b. 1936; PhD 1965, University of Minnesota; currently Regents Professor, University of Minnesota) and **Elaine Hatfield** (b. 1937; PhD Stanford University, 1963; currently Professor, University of Hawaii) have together made numerous major contributions to the study of close interpersonal relationships. Hatfield was awarded the Society of Experimental Social Psychology's Distinguished Scientist Award in 1993. Their key publications include four co-authored volumes: E. Berscheid & E. Hatfield, *Interpersonal attraction* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1969); E. Hatfield, G. W. Walster & E. Berscheid, *Equity: Theory and research* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1978); E. Hatfield & G. W. Walster, *A new look at love* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1978); and E. Berscheid & E. Hatfield, *Interpersonal attraction*, 2nd edn (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978). Berscheid also co-authored the chapter (with H. Reis) 'Attraction and close relationships' in D.T. Gilbert, S.T. Fiske & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology*, 4th edn (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), pp. 193–281.

by *passionate love* (Hatfield, 1988). Berscheid and Walster (1974) proposed that passionate love requires two components. The first is a state of physiological arousal, due to either positive emotions such as sexual gratification and excitement, or negative emotions such as frustration, fear and rejection. The second component of passionate love consists of labelling this arousal as 'passion', or 'being in love'.

> **passionate love** a state of intense longing for union with another individual, usually characterized by intrusive thinking and preoccupation with the partner, idealization of the other and the desire to know the other as well as the desire to be known by the other

What factors enhance the feeling of love or passion? Surprisingly, not only positive but also negative emotions may fuel passion (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna & Heyman, 2000; see also Research close-up 10.1). For example, White, Fishbein and Rutstein (1981, Experiment 2) showed that not only seeing a comedy but also watching a film depicting killing and mutilation enhanced romantic attraction to a woman seen subsequently on a videotape. Similarly, a study by Dutton and Aron (1974) found that men who had been frightened, by giving them the prospect of receiving an electric shock, found a woman with whom they were supposed to participate in a learning experiment much sexier and more attractive than did men who had learned they were just going to receive a barely perceptible tingle of a shock. To explain the finding that fear and adrenaline can fuel sexual attraction and feelings of passion, researchers proposed that a process of *misattribution of arousal* may be involved (Dutton & Aron, 1974; White et al., 1981; see also Chapter 3, pp. 54–55). That is, when

RESEARCH CLOSE-UP 10.1

Novel activities as a way to increase relationship quality

Aron, A., Norman, C.C., Aron, E.N., McKenna, C. & Heyman, R. (2000). Couples' shared participation in novel and arousing activities and experienced relationship quality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *78*, 273–283.

....

Introduction

This experiment examines the effect of shared participation in novel and arousing activities on relationship quality. In the early years of a relationship initial exhilaration is due to the novelty and arousal of forming the relationship. With the inevitable decline of this novelty and arousal, relationship satisfaction usually declines too. Aron et al. hypothesize that shared participation in novel activities will increase relationship quality and suggest several mechanisms that may account for this effect. Shared participation in novel activities may, for instance, enhance relationship quality through a process of misattribution of arousal or because it reinforces a sense of interdependence and closeness.

Method

Participants
Sixty-three married couples from New York participated in the experiment.

Design and procedure
The design was a 3 (condition: novel-arousing vs. mundane vs. no activity) $\times$ 2 (measurement phase: pre-test vs. post-test) 'mixed' design, with repeated measures on the second factor. First, in separate rooms, both partners filled in a questionnaire about the quality of their relationship (pre-test index of relationship quality). Next, couples were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: a novel-arousing condition, a mundane task condition and a no-activity condition. In the

novel-arousing condition, partners were invited into a large room, where they were bound to their partner on one side by means of straps at the wrist and ankle. Participants were instructed to travel back and forth throughout the room, remaining on their hands and knees, and to carry a pillow with them without using hands, arms or teeth (this could only be done by holding it between their heads or bodies). They were given four trials to complete the task in under 1 minute. The mundane task was designed to be as similar as possible but less novel and arousing. Partner 1 had to roll a ball to the centre of the room while on hands and knees. Partner 2 then crawled to the centre of the room and retrieved the ball from partner 1. Couples in the mundane task condition were ordered to carry out the task slowly. After the experiment both partners, in separate rooms, again filled in a questionnaire about their relationship containing different questions to those in the pre-test questionnaire (post-test index of relationship quality). While couples in the other conditions participated in the experimental activity, participants in the no-activity condition stayed in their separate rooms filling in some additional questionnaires.

Results

Consistent with the hypothesis, couples in the novel-arousing condition showed more change in relationship quality (between pre- and post-test) than couples in the mundane task condition and couples in the no-activity condition. The latter two showed a similar change.

Discussion

This experiment is the first to address issues of boredom and excitement in close relationships. It is also significant from an applied perspective. It shows that shared participation in novel activities provides an easily managed route for improving relationship quality. A limitation of this experiment is that it demonstrates an effect without identifying the specific mechanisms that are involved.

interpreting their feelings, individuals may attribute their arousal to the wrong source: other influences that are exciting are overlooked and individuals attribute their arousal to the presence of an attractive person. The process of misattribution, for instance, supposedly led the male participants in the Dutton and Aron study to believe that they were sexually attracted to the female participant rather than feeling apprehensive because of the prospect of receiving an electric shock.

According to Foster, Witcher, Campbell and Green (1998), the intensifying effect of arousal on attraction is not so much due to the misattribution of arousal, but rather reflects an automatic process that occurs immediately, without awareness of the person

involved. According to evolutionary theorists romantic attraction consists of such an automatic and intense emotional experience because, although affiliation and friendship may also have fostered survival, sexual attraction is crucial to the survival of the human species (Kenrick & Trost, 1989).

Individual differences in romantic love

Attachment style Intimate relationships are also affected by individual experiences and histories. According to attachment

theory, introduced earlier, children unconsciously develop a specific attachment style (that is, a global orientation towards relationships and love) in response to the way they are treated by their caregivers. Individuals whose caregivers were responsive to their needs when they were in distress will most likely develop a secure attachment style. They will view others as trustworthy, dependable and helpful. In contrast, individuals whose caregivers showed a lack of responsiveness, rejection or physical and emotional abuse are more likely to develop one of two insecure attachment styles. They may adopt either an 'avoidant' style, characterized by distance from others and a cynical view of others as untrustworthy and undependable, or an 'anxious-ambivalent' style, characterized by a strong desire to be close to others, combined with a fear that others will not respond to this desire (Gallo, Smith & Ruiz, 2003; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikelson, Kessler & Shaver, 1997; Reis & Patrick, 1996, see Figure 10.5). Because attachment styles are thought to be relatively stable over time, it is assumed that in adult life individuals' attachment style will influence their relationship with their partner in a manner comparable to the way that in childhood attachment styles influence the relationship between children and their parents. Research has shown that, with regard to many aspects of individuals' love lives, attachment styles exert a powerful influence. For instance, research has found that, compared to individuals with insecure attachment styles, those with a secure attachment are less jealous (e.g., Buunk, 1997), seek support more easily (Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992), are less afraid of being abandoned (Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003), tend to trust their partners more (Mikulincer, 1998), have more satisfying and stable relationships (Simpson, 1990) and report higher levels of the three components of love, that is, commitment, intimacy and passion.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) have argued that the avoidant attachment style is, in fact, more complex than originally assumed and have suggested two types of avoidant attachment. First, individuals may want intimate relationships with others but avoid them because they are afraid of being hurt (fearful attachment style). Second, individuals may avoid intimacy because they genuinely prefer freedom and independence to closeness with others (dismissing attachment style). Bartholomew and Horowitz

	Views of self	
	Positive	Negative
Positive	secure	preoccupied
Negative	dismissing	fearful

Views of others

Figure 10.6 *Four-category model of adult attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).*

(1991) therefore proposed a four-category model in which, in addition to the secure attachment style, three insecure attachment styles are distinguished, that is, a preoccupied attachment style (similar to the anxious-ambivalent attachment style in the three-category model), a dismissing attachment style and a fearful attachment style. These four styles can be arranged along two dimensions, namely global evaluations of self (1) and global evaluations of others (2) (see Figure 10.6).

It is important to note that classification systems such as attachment styles and the types of love proposed by Sternberg and Barnes should not be strictly considered as distinct categories. The more sophisticated way to think about attachment and love is to see individuals' orientations towards relationships being shaped around certain themes, such as intimacy, commitment and passion (triangular love theory) and evaluations of self and others (attachment theory).

Partner selection criteria Despite the differences between romantic and platonic love, to some extent the chances of developing a romantic relationship with someone else are determined by the same factors that are important for the development of friendship. Propinquity makes the beginning of romantic attraction more likely, and similarity is also important for love relationships. For example, individuals feel romantically most attracted to others with the same attachment style (Klohnen & Luo, 2003) and similar attitudes (Byrne, Ervin & Lambert, 1970). Physical attractiveness is also a strong determinant of romantic attraction (e.g., Walster, Aronson, Abrahams & Rottmann, 1966).

Gender differences in preferences for physical attractiveness and status Although both men and women value physical attractiveness in a potential partner, physical attractiveness is in general a more important determinant of romantic attraction for males than it is for females. Buss (1989) found in a study conducted in 37 cultures that, although both genders rated physical attractiveness as important in most cultures, men found it more important than women did. In a study among individuals of 20, 30, 40, 50 and 60 years of age, Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer and Kenrick (2002) found that in all age groups men preferred partners who were higher in physical attractiveness than themselves. The higher value placed by males upon physical attractiveness is in line with *evolutionary theory* (Buss, 1994). According to this perspective, males have been selected to prefer women who are likely

evolutionary theory explains human behaviour, including differences in partner preferences according to gender, from their reproductive value, i.e., their value in producing offspring in our evolutionary past

Question: Which of the following best describes your feelings?

Secure: I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

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

Anxious/Ambivalent: I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.

Figure 10.5 *Measure of attachment styles used by Hazan and Shaver (1987).*

Plate 10.5 *Males in different cultures are attracted by women who have an 'hourglass figure'.*

Plate 10.6 *Personal advertisements in newspapers are one way to find a partner.*

to produce healthy babies and who are likely to raise such children successfully. Therefore, men would have become particularly sensitive to signs of youth, health and reproductive value. Signs of youth are indeed important cues for female attractiveness in all cultures (Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen & Wu, 1995). Several studies, for instance, have found that males in different cultures are attracted by women who have a waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) of 0.7 (that is, an 'hourglass figure'). Medical research has found these women to be not only relatively more healthy but also more fertile, i.e., to have a higher conception rate than women with higher WHRs (Singh, 1993).

According to the evolutionary perspective, females had a better chance of their offspring surviving when they selected males who could provide them with the necessary resources, and women would thus have become particularly sensitive to signs of status and dominance. In his study in 37 cultures, Buss (1989) found that women valued a partner's social status and wealth more than men did. In addition, women also placed a relatively high value on a partner's social dominance, i.e., a partner's level of self-confidence, initiative, assertiveness, extraversion, ascendance and authoritativeness (Sadalla, Kenrick & Vershure, 1987). These characteristics will, in general, provide a dominant man a higher status and more resources than a non-dominant man. In addition, Buunk et al. (2002) found that in all age groups that they studied (from 20 to 60 years of age) women preferred partners who were higher in income, education, self-confidence, intelligence, dominance and social position than they were themselves. In part this can be explained on the basis of economic considerations on the part of women. Since traditionally the social status of women derived from that of the husband, they had to look for status and

were therefore less free to select a mate on the basis of physical attractiveness. However, women also value physical features in men that are related to a man's social status, such as height (Buss, 1994), and physical features that are indicative of a man's level of dominance, such as strength, muscularity, athleticism, prominent jaws (e.g., Cunningham, Barbee & Pike, 1990) and a V-shaped upperbody (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2001; see also Research close-up 10.2). These latter features signal high levels of testosterone, a hormone which is responsible for muscle development as well as for dominant behaviour (Dabbs & Dabbs, 2000).

Studies examining personal advertisements have shown that homosexual men and women have very similar mate preferences to heterosexuals of the same sex. However, compared to heterosexual men, homosexual men place an even stronger emphasis on physical and sexual characteristics of potential mates (e.g., Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Hatala & Prehodka, 1996).

Although individuals may desire partners who are physically highly attractive, they are most likely to end up with partners that have about the same degree of physical attractiveness as they have themselves (e.g., Yela & Sangrador, 2001). In general, individuals are more likely to approach those who offer acceptance than rejection. As a consequence, in order to reduce the risk of rejection, most individuals will adapt their standards for a partner to their own level of physical attractiveness (Stroebe, Insko, Thompson & Layton, 1971; Walster et al., 1966). They select as partners not those who are most attractive but those who are about as attractive as themselves and are relatively likely to respond positively to their approach. This is referred to as the *matching principle*. Matching is, however, a broad process. Although individuals tend to pair off with individuals of similar levels of physical attractiveness, sometimes notable mismatches in physical attractiveness may occur – as when, for instance, Anna Nicole Smith, a 26-year-old Play Mate, married J. Howard Marshall II, an 89-year-old billionaire (see Plate 10.7). In line with equity theory (Walster et al., 1978), however, differences in physical attractiveness such as these will be compensated for by other assets, such as money or status, as was the case in the Smith–Marshall match.
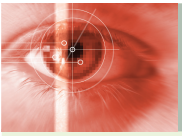
RESEARCH CLOSE-UP 10.2

Gender differences in sexual jealousy

Dijkstra, P. & Buunk, A.P. (1998). Jealousy as a function of rival characteristics: An evolutionary perspective. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *24*, 1158–1166.

Introduction

Jealousy is generated by a threat to, or the actual loss of, a valued relationship with another person, due to an actual or imagined rival for one's partner's attention. This experiment examines the extent to which men and women differ in the type of rival that evokes jealousy. In general, especially rivals with a high mate value, i.e., who are considered attractive by the opposite sex, will pose a threat to the relationship and will, consequently, evoke feelings of jealousy. According to evolutionary psychology, men and women, however, differ in the characteristics they value in a partner. Whereas men value a partner's physical attractiveness more than women do, women value a partner's social dominance – i.e., his level of self-confidence, assertiveness, extraversion, ascendance and authoritativeness – more than men do. As jealousy is evoked by characteristics of the rival that are important to the other sex, it was expected that jealousy in men would be evoked by a rival's social dominance whereas jealousy in women would be evoked by a rival's physical attractiveness.

Method

Participants
Seventy-five male and 77 female students were recruited as participants.

Design and procedure
The experimental design manipulated two factors, between subjects. The overall design was 2 (participant sex: male/female) × 2 (physical attractiveness of the rival: low/high) × 2 (social dominance of the rival: low/high). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. Participants were presented with a scenario in which the participant's partner was flirting with an individual of the opposite sex. Participants then received one of four profiles of an opposite-sex rival for their partner's attention, consisting of a photograph (low or high in attractiveness) and a personality description (low or high in social dominance). Participants rated how suspicious, betrayed, worried, distrustful, jealous, rejected, hurt, anxious, angry, threatened, sad and upset they would feel if this situation occurred to them in real life.

Results

Before analysing the main data, the researchers verified that they had successfully manipulated both a rival's social dominance and physical attractiveness. Analyses on the main dependent variable – jealousy – showed that the hypothesis was supported.

Discussion

This study contributes to the literature by illuminating sex differences in the impact of rival characteristics consistent with predictions from evolutionary psychology. A limitation of the study (for that matter, of most studies on jealousy) is that the method assesses 'projected' responses ('how would you feel if . . .') in contrast to 'real' responses. However, alternative methods hardly provide better solutions. Attempts to create jealousy in existing relationships would be unethical, whereas observations of naturally occurring incidents of jealousy would lack adequate experimental control.

Plate 10.7 *Mismatches in physical attractiveness may occur – as when Anna Nicole Smith, a 26-year-old Play Mate, married J. Howard Marshall II, an 89-year-old billionaire.*

SUMMARY

Psychologists have distinguished several different kinds of love and identified individual differences in romantic love, based on attachment styles. Physical attractiveness is an important factor in love for women and, especially, men, and for heterosexuals and, especially, homosexuals. But physical attractiveness is not all-important and can be offset by assets such as wealth or status.

CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS: SATISFACTION AND DISSOLUTION

What makes a close relationship happy and satisfying?
What is commitment, and how does it come about?
What consequences do break-up and divorce have for mental and
physical well-being?

Satisfaction in relationships

Once individuals have established a mutual attraction, they may begin to develop a voluntary interdependent relationship by increasing their mutual involvement. Some relationships will become happy, satisfying and stable, while others will be characterized by conflicts and problems and are likely to end sooner or later. In general, a high degree of intimacy is characteristic for happy couples. According to Reis and Patrick (1996), interactions are experienced as intimate when three conditions are met:

1. *Caring*: we feel that our partner loves us and cares about us.

2. *Understanding*: we feel that our partner has an accurate view of how we see ourself, and that our partner knows our important needs, beliefs, feelings and life circumstances (Swann, de la Ronde & Hixon, 1994). Evidence also suggests, however, that marital satisfaction is particularly high for those whose partner does not perceive them as *accurately* as possible, but in a *more positive way* than they see themselves (Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996).

3. *Validation*: we feel that our partner communicates his or her acceptance, acknowledgement and support for our point of view (Fincham, Paleari & Regalia, 2002). In contrast, couples are less happy the more they show conflict avoidance, soothing (ignoring and covering up differences) and destructive communication, such as criticizing and complaining (see Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Schaap, Buunk & Kerkstra, 1988).

Individuals with insecure attachment styles, in particular, have problems with developing intimacy: they are less likely to engage in cooperative problem solving, less effective in providing the partner with comfort and emotional support (Reis & Patrick, 1996) and more reactive to recent negative spouse behaviour (Feeney, 2002). When their partner says, for instance, something crude or inconsiderate, those with an insecure attachment style respond more often with destructive responses, either by actively harming the relationship (e.g., yelling at the partner) or by passively harming the relationship (e.g., refusing to discuss relationship problems). In contrast, those with a secure attachment style are more likely to respond by actively attempting to resolve the problem by,

for example, discussing the situation and suggesting solutions to problems (Gaines & Henderson, 2002; Gaines et al., 1997).

A typical feature of individuals with unhappy close relationships is that they tend to make *distress-maintaining* attributions that attribute a partner's negative actions to internal, stable and global causes. These attributions regard a partner's negative actions as deliberate, routine and indicative of the partner's behaviour in other situations. Unhappy partners also tend to attribute a partner's positive behaviour to external, unstable and specific causes, regarding it as unintended, accidental and specific to the situation. Happy people tend to make opposite, i.e., *relationship-enhancing*, attributions in which positive actions by the partner are judged to be intentional, habitual and indicative of the partner's behaviour in other situations, and negative behaviours are seen as accidental, unusual and limited. Thus, in contrast to unhappy people who blame their partner for their mistakes and flaws, happy people excuse their partner's negative behaviour with external, unstable and specific attributions. As a consequence, individuals satisfied with their relationship tend to give their partners more credit for resolving conflict, tend to blame themselves more for inconveniencing the other and tend to forgive their partners more easily for their mistakes (e.g., Fincham et al., 2002; McNulty, Karney & McNulty, 2004; Thompson & Kelley, 1981). Research has shown that a maladaptive attributional pattern predicts a decline in marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1991).

Happy couples also tend to interpret *social comparisons* with other couples in such a way that they feel better about their own relationship, whereas unhappy couples mainly look more at the negative implications of such comparisons. Unhappily married people often feel envious when they see others having a better marriage, and feel worried that the same might happen to them when they encounter couples with more serious marital problems than they have (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen & Dakoff, 1990). In contrast, partners in happy couples tend to perceive their own partner and their own relationship in a very positive light compared to other partners and relationships (Buunk & Van den Eijnden, 1997), feel that they have much more control over potential difficulties than people in the typical relationship, and are more optimistic about the future of their relationship (Murray & Holmes, 1997). Perceptions of the partner and relationship have been found to predict whether the relationship persists or ends (Rusbult, Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich & Verette, 2000).

A final aspect that distinguishes happy from unhappy couples is the degree of *equity*. As noted above, equity theory assumes that individuals in close relationships expect a reciprocal and fair exchange. In evaluating this exchange, individuals may consider a variety of inputs to and outcomes from the relationship, including love, support, financial contributions and household tasks (VanYperen & Buunk, 1991). As is the case in friendships, as mentioned previously, numerous studies have shown that in romantic relationships too distress occurs among the 'advantaged', who feel guilty because they receive more from the relationship than they believe they deserve. But distress is felt especially by the 'deprived', who feel sad, frustrated, angry and hurt because they receive less than they believe they deserve. As shown in Figure 10.7, a study by Buunk and VanYperen (1991) found that those who perceived equity in their relationship were most satisfied, followed by those
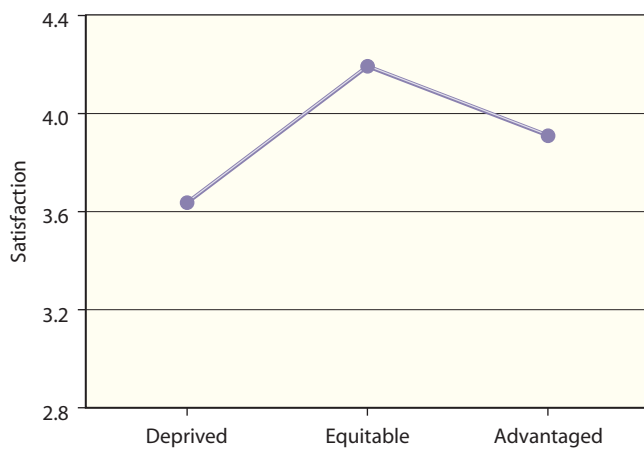
Figure 10.7 *Equity and satisfaction in intimate relationships (based on Buunk & VanYperen, 1991).*

Figure 10.8 *The investment model.*

who felt advantaged; those who felt deprived experienced the lowest level of satisfaction (see also Gleason, Iida, Bolger & Shrout, 2003; Sprecher, 2001). Inequity can have serious consequences for the relationship. For instance, women (but not men) in inequitable relationships are more likely to desire and to engage in extramarital relationships than are women in equitable relationships (Prins, Buunk & VanYperen, 1992).

Commitment in relationships

It would seem self-evident that people who are satisfied with their relationship will also stick with their partners, and that unhappy couples will eventually end their relationship. Nevertheless, social scientists have long observed that happy relationships are not necessarily stable relationships, and that stable relationships are not necessarily happy relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Rusbult (1983) proposed the ***investment model*** to explain what makes people motivated to maintain their relationships, i.e., what factors enhance ***commitment*** to these relationships (see Figure 10.8). According to Rusbult, commitment refers to the individual's tendency both to maintain a relationship and to feel psychologically attached to it. Such commitment is based upon three factors, the first two of which are: (1) a high level of *satisfaction*, i.e., an individual loves her partner and has positive feelings about the relationship, and (2) a low perceived *quality of alternatives*, i.e., the best imagined alternative relationship to the present relationship, the appeal of living alone, what is simultaneously available in addition to the present relationship (such as an interesting job or good friends) and the actual presence of an alternative partner (Buunk, 1987). When developing a relationship, individuals will gradually close themselves off,
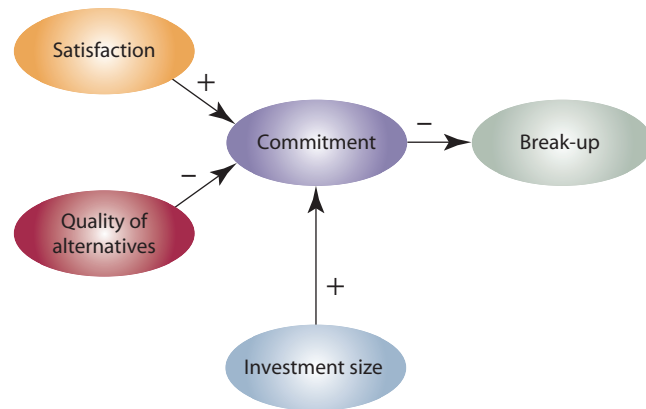
investment model theory that assumes that commitment to a relationship is based upon high satisfaction, low quality of alternatives and a high level of investments

commitment the individual's tendency both to maintain a relationship and to feel psychologically attached to it

behaviourally and cognitively, from attractive alternatives, for instance by derogating attractive individuals of the opposite sex (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989).

Many relationships suffer unhappy periods, even including extreme aggression (see Chapter 8, this volume). But even when the alternatives are quite attractive, that does not necessarily mean they fall apart. Therefore, the investment model proposes a third variable: (3) *investment size*. This refers to the variety of ways in which individuals become linked to their partner, by putting time and energy into their relationship, by making sacrifices, by developing mutual friends, by developing shared memories and by engaging in activities, hobbies and possessions that are integrated in the relationship. High investments increase commitment, regardless of the quality of alternatives and the level of satisfaction, by increasing the costs of leaving the relationship. According to Aron and his colleagues, during the course of a relationship the selves of both partners begin to overlap and become interconnected. Benefiting the other is seen as benefiting oneself and, through identification, one begins to feel as if one shares the traits and abilities of the other (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992; Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991).

A substantial number of studies have shown that all three factors – satisfaction, alternatives and investments – are necessary to predict commitment and the likelihood of breaking up a relationship, and this applies to both heterosexual and homosexual relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Moreover, commitment has been found to affect a wide variety of behaviours. In general, highly committed individuals are more willing to make sacrifices for their relationship: they are more likely to give up other activities in their life, such as career, religion or friends, in order to maintain their relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997). They are also more likely to forgive their partners for their betrayal and mistakes (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro & Hannon, 2002). Rusbult and Martz (1995), for instance, found that battered women who sought refuge at a shelter were more likely to return to their partner after departure from the shelter when they had a high commitment to their partner prior to entering the shelter. In addition, less-committed individuals are more inclined to engage in extradyadic sex (e.g., Drigotas, Safstrom & Gentilia, 1999) and are also more likely to have unprotected sex outside the relationship without

taking precautions to protect their steady partner against the possible health risks of this behaviour (Buunk & Bakker, 1997).

The consequences of break-ups

The break-up of a relationship, especially when marriage ends in a divorce, may have serious consequences, both financial and, of more interest here, psychological. Research has confirmed that the mental and physical health of divorced people is worse than that of married individuals, and even worse than that of people who have been widowed or those who never married. One of the reasons for this is that obtaining a divorce may in some cases be a consequence, instead of a cause, of mental problems (Cochrane, 1988; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1986). Nevertheless, ending a marriage through divorce is in itself a painful process. As attachment theory suggests, spouses usually develop – even in the face of the most serious hostility and fights – an emotional attachment that cannot easily be dissolved even if they want to. Indeed, many people who have divorced or separated remain emotionally attached to their ex-partner, as is shown by, for instance, spending a lot of time thinking about the former relationship, wondering what the ex-partner is doing or doubting that the divorce has really happened (Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Kitson, 1982). As suggested by attachment theory, individuals with different attachment styles respond differently to relationship break-ups. In a survey of 5,000 Internet users, Davis et al. (2003) found that preoccupied attachment was associated with more extreme emotional distress, exaggerated attempts to re-establish the relationship, angry and vengeful behaviour and dysfunctional coping strategies such as drug and alcohol use. Avoidant attachment was associated with more avoidant coping strategies, such as the suppression of emotions, whereas secure attachment was related to social coping strategies, i.e., using friends and family as 'safe havens'.

In addition to having to relinquish their attachment to a former spouse, divorced people are often confronted with the transition from being married to being single. Living alone, after having lived with a partner for a long time, usually requires considerable adjustment. It is often difficult to maintain earlier, couple-based friendships and, consequently, new relationships have to be initiated and built. Moreover, adapting to a different, lower social status can be a painful process, especially because there is still some stigma attached to being divorced. In addition, divorcees usually receive less support than widowed people, because friends may side with the former spouse. Furthermore, divorcees often have to deal with feelings of failure and rejection. Also, after the dissolution of marriage or cohabitation, former partners' economic standing often declines, leaving a substantial proportion of them, especially women, in poverty (e.g., Avellar & Smock, 2005). However, adjustment to divorce is easier for some individuals than for others. For example, individuals who took the initiative to divorce, who are embedded in social networks and who have found a new satisfying, intimate relationship are relatively better off. In addition, certain personality characteristics, including high self-esteem, independence, tolerance for change and egalitarian sex-role attitudes, facilitate coping with divorce (Price-Bonham, Wright & Pittman, 1983), as does attributing the break-up to

relationship problems rather than to oneself or one's ex-partners (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003).

SUMMARY

Happy and satisfied close relationships are characterized by high intimacy, based on caring, understanding and validation. Partners in such relationships tend to make relationship-enhancing attributions, positive social comparisons with other couples, and to perceive their relationship as equitable. People maintain their relationships because of their commitment to the relationship, based on satisfaction, low perceived quality of alternatives and high investment. The break-up of relationships is associated with serious psychological consequences which, however, can be surmounted by social support and new, satisfying relationships.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- The need to affiliate with others is a basic human drive that is particularly enhanced in stressful situations.

- Social comparison and anxiety reduction are two major motives underlying affiliation under stress.

- Those with deficiencies in their social relationships experience relatively more loneliness and health problems.

- The physical proximity of others, as well as similarity in attitudes, promotes the development of relationships such as friendships and love relationships.

- Reciprocity, interdependence and, particularly for women, intimacy are characteristic for all personal relationships.

- More than friendships, love relationships are fostered by feelings of passion and physical attractiveness, with men paying more attention to signs of youth and health, and women more to signs of status.

- Satisfying love relationships are characterized by constructive communication, positive interpretations of the partner's behaviour, equity and favourable perceptions of one's own relationship in comparison with that of others.

- Commitment develops on the basis of a high satisfaction, combined with increasing investments in the relationship, and with decreasing attention to alternative options.

- Due to the strong attachment that usually develops in intimate relationships, break-ups and divorces are painful processes.

- Various coping strategies and personality attributes may help divorced individuals adjust to the new situation.

Suggestions for further reading

Brehm, S.S., Miller, R.S., Perlman, D. & Campbell, S.M. (2002). *Intimate relationships*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. An accessible introduction to the field of close relationships.

Buss, D.M. (1994). *The evolution of desire: Strategies of human mating*. New York: Basic Books. An interesting, well-written book on the socio-evolutionary approach to romantic attraction and close relationships.

Fletcher, G. (2002). *The new science of intimate relationships*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. A thorough and up-to-date review of the theories about and processes in intimate relationships.

Harvey, J. & Wenzel, A. (Eds.) (2001). *Close romantic relationships: Maintenance and enhancement*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. A reader with a variety of perspectives on how individuals maintain close relationships.

Hinde, R.A. (1997). *Relationships: A dialectical perspective*. Hove: Psychology Press. A very thorough, broad and in-depth review of all aspects of close relationships.

Lerner, M.J. & Mikula, G. (Eds.) (1994). *Entitlement and the affectional bond: Justice in close relationships*. New York: Plenum Press. A useful reader on equity, social exchange and justice in dating, marital and family relationships.

Noller, P. & Fitzpatrick, M.A. (Eds.) (1988). *Perspectives on marital interaction*. Clevedon/Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters. A well-composed reader of chapters dealing particularly with marital communication.

Sarason, B.R., Sarason, I.G. & Pierce, G.R. (Eds.) (1990). *Social support: An interactional view*. New York: Wiley. An excellent volume on all aspects of and approaches to social support.

Sternberg, R.J. & Barnes, M.L. (Eds.) (1988). *The psychology of love*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapters review various approaches to love.