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Relationship Development



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Summary

In Chapter 2, we discussed how initial encounters with potential partners can lead to the establishment of a more permanent relationship. We also considered the behavioral strategies that men and women use to communicate romantic interest to a partner and to intensify the relationship and propel it along its developmental trajectory. In this chapter, we review a variety of theories that have been proposed to explain exactly how romantic relationships progress and develop over time.

❖ THE SEQUENCE OF RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Early theories of relationship development proposed that couples move through a sequential series of stages that are characterized by increasing amounts of commitment and involvement. Each stage was assumed to revolve around a particular developmental issue whose resolution propelled the couple into the next stage. Although largely supplanted by process-oriented theories, these *stage models* represent an important historical first step toward understanding relationship progression.

Filter Theory

Based upon a longitudinal study of the experiences of dating couples, Alan Kerckhoff and Keith Davis (1962) proposed that various “filtering factors” operate during the process of mate selection. According to *Filter Theory*, specific filters come into prominence at different phases of courtship. First, potential partners are screened or evaluated in terms of their similarity on *social attributes*, including religion, education, and social class. People who are deemed to be too different with respect to these social attributes are filtered out from the field of potential mates. At that point, possible partners are screened with respect to similarity of attitudes and values, or *value consensus*. As before, those who are judged to be too dissimilar are filtered out. Finally, partners are evaluated on *need complementarity* or whether they possess complementary or compatible traits, behavioral characteristics, or interpersonal styles.

The notion that different aspects of the “fit” between two partners would become important at different times in their courtship makes implicit sense. During early courtship stages, demographic similarity might be of utmost importance in promoting a couple’s relational growth. Later, as the couple begins to enter more committed or involved stages of courtship, similarity of underlying values and belief systems, and compatibility with regard to interpersonal styles, might

become more important in determining whether or not the relationship continues. However, although Filter Theory is conceptually interesting, subsequent research generally has not supported this model of relationship development (e.g., Levinger, Senn, & Jorgensen, 1970; for a review, see Levinger, 1983).

Wheel Theory

Sociologist Ira Reiss (e.g., 1960, 1980) also proposed one of the first developmental models of mate selection. According to his *Wheel Theory of Love*, the "mate-selecting process" involves four sequential but highly interrelated phases. During the initial stage, called *rapport*, potential partners assess the extent to which they feel at ease with, understand, and feel free to talk with each other. The process of establishing and feeling rapport is facilitated by similarity; Reiss suggests that we are most able to feel rapport for those who resemble us on key social and cultural variables (e.g., religious upbringing, educational background). Feelings of rapport, in turn, increase the likelihood that individuals will begin a process of mutual *self-revelation*, in which they reveal or disclose varying degrees of information about their values and belief systems to each other. These acts of self-revelation, in turn, contribute to *mutual dependency*, such that each partner becomes dependent on the other to behave in ways that help him or to enact specific habits or obtain certain goals. For example, Reiss (1980) wrote, "One needs the other person as an audience for one's jokes, as a confidant(e) for the expression of one's fears and wishes, as a partner for one's sexual needs, and so forth" (p. 127). When these goals or habits are not fulfilled, the person will experience frustration and loneliness; consequently, these habits tend to perpetuate a relationship. The fourth and final process in the development of love relationships is called *intimacy need fulfillment*. Here, the partners evaluate whether their relationship and their interactions with each other satisfy basic intimacy needs, including love, sympathy, and support. These needs, as they are fulfilled, "express the closeness and privacy of the relationship" (p. 128).

Stimulus-Value-Role Theory

Another popular early theory of romantic relationship development was proposed by Bernard Murstein (e.g., 1970, 1976). *Stimulus-Value-Role Theory* suggests that couples progress through three stages in mate selection. In the *stimulus* stage, the potential mates perceive each other's external attributes, physical appearance, and behavior,

and each also evaluates his or her own attributes in terms of how attractive they might be to the partner. Based upon this comparison, the individuals estimate the likelihood that their attraction will be reciprocated and that future interaction with the other will be rewarding. If this estimate is favorable (i.e., if each believes that the other will like him or her and find his or her attributes desirable, and if each thinks that additional interaction will be rewarding), then the individuals are propelled into the next stage. During the *value* stage, the partners appraise their compatibility on various values and attitudes. This process of value appraisal allows them to continue to assess the potential benefits or rewards of the relationship. During the final *role* stage, the partners evaluate themselves and each other for suitability in various roles (e.g., spouse, parent). These stages are seen as relatively distinct; for example, Murstein (1987) asserted that stimulus information is gathered during the first encounter, that value information is collected during the second to seventh encounters, and that role assessments are made during and after the eighth encounter. However, he also noted that individuals make stimulus, value, and role assessments of each other throughout the entire courtship process; each factor simply becomes more prominent during a particular stage.

Although historically interesting, stage models of relationship development have fallen out of scientific favor for a number of reasons. First, stage theorists do not agree on the number, the sequence, or even the characteristics of the various stages of courtship. Second, not all relationships progress through the same stages. Third, couples differ in the rate at which they pass through particular courtship stages. And finally, a number of process models have been developed that seem to more accurately capture the how and why of relationship progression.

❖ THE PROCESS OF RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The majority of theorists now agree that romantic relationships develop gradually over time rather than by passing through a series of discrete stages. *Process models* suggest that relationship development is fueled by sometimes imperceptible changes in intimacy, self-disclosure, and other interpersonal processes that occur between partners.

Self-Disclosure and Intimacy

Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973) proposed one of the first process models of relationship progression. *Social Penetration Theory*

targets self-disclosure as the fuel that propels couples along their developmental trajectory. Specifically, romantic partners are believed to become progressively more committed to each other as they increase both the *depth* (degree of intimacy) and *breadth* (number of areas) of their self-disclosure. At first, relationships are characterized by superficial, shallow exchanges in which the partners reveal relatively impersonal information (low depth) along a very few dimensions (low breadth). Meeting for the first time at a college party, for example, Ramani and Charlie might exchange information about their majors, their musical preferences, and the food being served by the host of the party. If these initial disclosures are rewarding and if each believes that future interactions will also be rewarding, then presumably they will progress to more intimate exchanges in which they reveal increasingly intimate, emotional, and detailed personal information about themselves along a greater number of dimensions. Following their enjoyable conversation at the party, Ramani and Charlie might begin to meet a few times a week for coffee. During these interactions, Charlie might disclose his ambivalent feelings about his parents and their expectations about his future career. Ramani, in turn, might reveal the problems she is experiencing with her roommate and her secret desire to spend a year scuba diving in the Yucatan.

Other theorists have subsequently expanded this theory by proposing that it is not only the depth and breadth of self-disclosure that propels a couple's relationship along its courtship path but also how responsive each partner is to the other's disclosures. According to *Intimacy Theory* (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), responses that leave the partner feeling validated, understood, cared for, accepted, and nurtured promote the growth of intimacy and the subsequent development of the relationship. In the above example, Ramani's acknowledgment of Charlie's statements about his parents, her expressions of sympathy, her responsiveness and willingness to continue the conversation, and her reciprocal disclosures all serve to communicate that she understands the situation and that she respects Charlie's point of view. This, in turn, will increase Charlie's sense of trust and security and will promote intimacy and the development of the relationship. To the extent that Ramani fails to reciprocate ("Let's talk about something else"), challenges ("I've never had those feelings about my own parents"), or dismisses ("Hey, I didn't come here to listen to you whine about your personal problems") Charlie's revelations, intimacy will decrease and the relationship may stall or be compromised. Thus, it is not simply the act of disclosing information or making personal revelations that

contributes to relationship development. Rather, *reciprocal* disclosures that contribute to *feelings of intimacy*—in other words, disclosures that reflect mutual perceptions of understanding, caring, and validation—are what encourage and sustain the growth of romantic relationships.

Many of these theoretical statements have received empirical support. For example, self-disclosure and intimacy appear to be integrally connected with both relationship satisfaction and stability. Research conducted with dating and married couples generally reveals that people who self-disclose, who perceive their partners as self-disclosing, and who believe that their disclosures and confidences are understood by their partners experience greater need fulfillment, satisfaction, and love than people whose relationships contain lower levels of intimacy and disclosure (e.g., Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005; Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998; Prager & Buhrmester, 1998; Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991). In one study, for example, Susan Sprecher and Susan Hendrick (2004) asked a sample of 101 dating couples to complete measures of their own level of self-disclosure to the partner, their partner's level of self-disclosure to them, their overall satisfaction with the relationship, and the extent of their commitment to the relationship. Correlational analyses revealed strong positive associations between self-disclosure and relationship quality (i.e., satisfaction and commitment) for both men and women. Specifically, participants who believed that they self-disclosed and that their partners also self-disclosed tended also to be very satisfied with and personally committed to the relationship.

In fact, men and women often consciously use self-disclosure and expressions of intimacy as strategies for intensifying and maintaining their romantic relationships. Communication researchers Stephen Haas and Laura Stafford (1998) asked a convenience sample of men and women involved in committed (homosexual) romantic relationships to report on the behaviors that they used to maintain their relationships. Although participants generated a number of maintenance strategies, one of the most commonly cited was self-disclosure. Specifically, 57% of the sample specified open and honest communication about thoughts and feelings, including disclosures about the relationship, as an effective way to maintain the romantic relationship. Less "deep" communication, akin to "small talk," was mentioned by close to 25% as a means by which the relationship is maintained. Research conducted with heterosexual samples corroborates these findings (for a review, see Dindia, 2000).

The process of revealing oneself to another, particularly when accompanied by reciprocity and validation, appears to play an essential role in the progression of romantic relationships.

Social Exchange

Many theories of relationship development are grounded in principles of *social exchange* (e.g., Adams, 1965; Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979; Homans, 1961; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). These theories focus on the exchange of rewards and costs that occur between partners in ongoing mating relationships. Although a number of social exchange theories exist, each with its own particular terminology and “take” on the process of relationship development, all share a few basic assumptions (some of which we reviewed in Chapter 1).

Principle 1: Maximize Rewards, Minimize Costs

The first assumption is that individuals seek to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs in any given relationship. *Rewards* are anything that the individual considers valuable; they can range from the concrete and tangible to the abstract and intangible. For example, Bob’s marriage with Vicki may provide him with a number of concrete benefits that he values, including financial security, sex, children, and the social profit that comes from having an attractive and intelligent partner. This relationship also may provide Bob with a variety of less tangible rewards, including love, emotional support, and the fulfillment of life goals involving marriage and fatherhood. *Costs* are those things that the individual considers to be unrewarding or that involve time, effort, compromise, and lost opportunity. In order to maintain his relationship with Vicki, for instance, Bob contributes to the housework, shares parenting tasks, listens supportively to Vicki’s complaints about her new co-worker, and spends vacations with his (greatly detested) in-laws.

Of course, what is rewarding or costly for one person may not be for another. Fresh-baked cookies are rewarding to a child but distinctly costly to an adult trying to stay on a diet; an invitation to the opera might fill some with glee, while it fills others with dismay; and a foot massage might be pleasing when offered by a loved one but creepy if offered by a casual business associate. In addition, two individuals in a relationship may not agree about the value of a particular reward or cost. For example, Bob may place greater worth on the housework he does than Vicki places on Bob’s housework.

Principle 2: Relationships Are Dynamic

The second assumption shared by social exchange theories is that relationships themselves are dynamic; they change over time.

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Relational partners are assumed to engage in a continual process of evaluation whereby they assess each other's gains and losses, profits and expenditures, and rewards and costs. This means that a relationship that is seen as equitable and satisfying at one point in time may come to be viewed as less equitable and satisfying (and even as inequitable and dissatisfying) as the gains and losses of each partner change over time. This happens, in part, because of the shifting nature of rewards and costs. A particular event, behavior, or occurrence may become less rewarding and/or more costly as it occurs repeatedly or as the relationship progresses. Two people caught up in the thrill of a new love might find sexual activity to be highly rewarding and not at all costly. Over time, as they become used to each other and the novelty of their passion decreases, they may come to view sexual activity as less rewarding.

Principle 3: Evaluations Influence Relationship Development

Third, social exchange theories assume that the result of each partner's cost-benefit evaluation determines the course of the relationship. For example, two strangers might meet at a party. Following their initial contact, each person evaluates the immediate outcomes of that interaction and makes a prediction about the outcomes of future interactions. If these evaluations and predictions are positive ("What a fun conversation; she seemed to really like me and we have so much in common"), then the individuals are likely to continue down the path to romantic involvement. If the evaluations and predictions are negative ("He didn't listen to a thing I said; we have nothing in common, and what's with those clothes?"), then the two are unlikely to maintain anything other than a superficial relationship; they may even cease to interact altogether.

Principle 4: Evaluations Influence Relationship Satisfaction

A fourth (and related) assumption is that the partners' perceptions of the outcomes they obtain from the relationship are strongly linked with their level of satisfaction. Exchange frameworks posit that people will be most satisfied with a relationship when the ratio between the benefits derived from the relationship and the contributions made to the relationship is similar for both partners; that is, when they perceive the relationship to be characterized by *equity*:

$$\frac{\text{Vicki's benefits}}{\text{Vicki's contributions}} = \frac{\text{Bob's benefits}}{\text{Bob's contributions}}$$

It is the ratio of benefits to contributions that determines equity rather than the exact number that each partner receives or makes. Thus, a relationship in which one partner receives more benefits than the other may still be equitable so long as he or she makes a correspondingly higher number of contributions.

Principle 5: Inequity Causes Distress

A final assumption of this theoretical framework is that people who find themselves in an inequitable relationship—who are underbenefited or overbenefited relative to the partner—will experience distress and seek to restore equity. Equity can be restored to a relationship in a number of ways. For example, a woman who believes that her steady dating partner contributes much more to the relationship than she does may attempt to restore *actual equity*. She may increase her own contributions (e.g., by making an effort to return his phone calls more promptly, by paying him more compliments) and/or decrease her own benefits (e.g., by asking him to fix fewer things around her apartment). Alternatively, she can try to restore *psychological equity*. She may, for instance, convince herself that equity actually does exist (“It’s not like I’m taking advantage of our relationship; he likes fixing things, and he already owns all the tools”). And finally, if the distress caused by the inequity should prove too great, then she can simply *end the relationship*.

Empirical Evidence

Some of the principles set forth by social exchange theories have received empirical support. For example, there is evidence that the nature of rewards and costs shifts over time and within relationships. Sociologist Diane Felmlee (e.g., 1995, 1998, 2001) has conducted research on what she labels “fatal attractions.” Her work demonstrates that a partner’s attributes that are seen as particularly attractive, rewarding, and valuable at the beginning of a relationship can later come to be viewed as unpleasant, costly, and detrimental to the relationship. For example, a woman who values her lover’s “spontaneous and carefree” nature may later perceive that same attribute as an annoying “flightiness.” A man who is attracted to his dating partner’s “refreshing innocence” may later find that it has become an irritating “lack of maturity.”

We also know that people differ in terms of what they consider costly and/or rewarding; in particular, there appear to be several sex differences. In one study, Constantine Sedikides, Mary Beth Oliver, and Keith Campbell (1994) investigated the perceived benefits and costs of

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romantic relationships in a sample of heterosexual college students. Participants were reminded that romantic relationships are likely to result in both benefits and costs and then were asked to list the five most important benefits they had enjoyed, and the five most serious costs they had incurred, as a result of all the romantic relationships they had personally experienced. Analysis of these lists revealed a variety of *benefits*, including the following:

- Companionship or affiliation (cited by 60% of the total sample)
- Sexual gratification (46%)
- Feeling loved or loving another (43%)
- Intimacy (42%)
- Relationship expertise or knowledge (40%)
- Self-growth and self-understanding (37%)
- Enhanced self-esteem (32%)
- Exclusivity (32%)
- Feeling secure (28%)
- Social support from the partner's friends or relatives (22%)
- Feelings of happiness or elation (16%)
- Learning about the other sex (12%)

Although men and women reported experiencing similar kinds of benefits from their romantic relationships, significantly more men (65%) than women (26%) cited sexual gratification as a particularly important benefit. Conversely, significantly more women (49%) than men (14%) specified enhanced self-esteem (including higher self-respect and self-confidence) as a romantic relationship benefit.

Participants also generated a number of different *costs*, including the following:

- Loss of freedom to socialize (cited by 69% of the total sample)
- Loss of freedom to date (68%)
- Time and effort investment (27%)
- Nonsocial sacrifices, such as falling grades (24%)
- Loss of identity (22%)
- Feeling worse about oneself (22%)
- Stress and worry about the relationship (20%)
- Fights (16%)
- Increased dependence on the partner (13%)
- Monetary losses (12%)
- Loss of privacy (10%)
- Loss of innocence about relationships and love (9%)

As before, there were sex differences. More men than women cited loss of freedom to socialize (77% vs. 61%) and to date (83% vs. 56%) as particularly heavy costs associated with their romantic relationships, and more men than women specified monetary losses (18% vs. 6%) as a dating burden. More women than men mentioned loss of identity (29% vs. 14%), feeling worse about themselves (29% vs. 14%), and increased dependence on the partner (23% vs. 3%) as important costs they had experienced in their relationships.

In a second study, the authors asked another sample of men and women to rank order the list of benefits and costs generated by the first group of participants in terms of their perceived importance; these results confirmed and extended those of the first study. Specifically, women in the second study viewed intimacy, self-growth and self-understanding, and enhanced self-esteem as more important benefits than did men, whereas men in the second study perceived sexual gratification and learning about the other sex as more important benefits than did women. Also in the second study, women regarded loss of identity, increased dependence on the partner, feeling worse about oneself, and loss of innocence about relationships and love as greater costs to romantic involvement than did men, who considered monetary losses and time and effort investment to be more serious costs than did women.

Other researchers, rather than exploring perceptions of costs and benefits, have tested the theoretical prediction about the association between equity and relationship satisfaction. People clearly *assume* that equity is an important determinant of relationship quality, *expect* to experience distress if confronted by inequity in close relationships, and *believe* that equity should be restored to inequitable relationships (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Haas & Stafford, 1998). In one study (Sprecher, 1992), for example, college students were asked to imagine that they were in a long-term romantic relationship that had recently become inequitable. Participants first imagined that the inequity benefited their partner (i.e., that the relationship was one of *underbenefit* for themselves): "You feel that you are contributing more (in love, effort, time, emotions, tasks) than your partner is. In other words, you feel that you are currently getting a worse deal than your partner is" (p. 60). They then were asked to imagine the opposite situation—a relationship that was inequitable due to *overbenefit* for themselves. For each scenario, participants indicated how they would respond emotionally to the inequity. The results revealed that men and women expected to become distressed—to experience increased anger and depression and decreased happiness, contentment, satisfaction, and love—in response to underbenefiting inequity. In addition,

although participants did not expect to experience a great deal of distress in response to overbenefiting inequity, they did expect their feelings of guilt to increase. Clearly, inequity is believed to be associated with some form of emotional distress and dissatisfaction.

However, there is mixed evidence about whether equity and satisfaction actually are associated in ongoing romantic relationships. Some studies find that equity is associated with a higher degree of satisfaction than is inequity (for a review, see Sprecher & Schwartz, 1994). For example, Susan Sprecher, Maria Schmeekle, and Diane Felmlee (2006) asked a sample of men and women in dating relationships to report the degree to which they and their partners were emotionally involved in the relationship. Three groups of participants were identified: those who perceived equal involvement, those who viewed the partner as more involved, and those who saw themselves as more involved. All participants then completed a measure of relationship satisfaction. The results revealed that participants who reported that their current romantic relationship was characterized by equal levels of emotional involvement were more satisfied than were participants in the two groups characterized by unequal emotional involvement.

However, other researchers find that inequity—specifically, overbenefit—is related to higher levels of satisfaction than is equity (as we might expect from Sprecher's 1992 belief study). Yoshinori Kamo (1993) examined the relationship between perceived fairness in the allocation of household chores and self-reported marital satisfaction in a sample of American and Japanese couples. Among American couples, being overbenefited (believing that the spouse does more than his or her fair share of tasks around the house) was positively associated with marital satisfaction—for both husbands and wives. The same result was found for Japanese wives; that is, the more that Japanese wives felt that they benefited from the relationship in terms of household task allocation, the more satisfied they were with their marriage.

Although the evidence in support of the social exchange framework is mixed, these theories nonetheless provide insight into how the exchange of rewards and costs between romantic partners can promote relationship development and continuity.

Interdependence

We have seen that the exchanges between partners—their disclosures and revelations, their contributions and benefits—can propel a relationship toward increasing closeness (or, alternatively, toward dissatisfaction and dissolution). *Interdependence frameworks* also focus on partners' exchanges, their perceptions of rewards and costs, and the process by

which they evaluate and regulate their relationship (see Holmes, 2000). In addition, these models add to our understanding of relationship development in two important ways. First, interdependence models distinguish between *relationship satisfaction* (how the partners feel about the relationship) and *relationship stability* (whether the relationship will be maintained over time). They recognize that a highly satisfying relationship may ultimately prove unstable, and that a deeply unsatisfying one can endure for a lifetime. Second, these frameworks propose that relationship outcomes are affected not only by what happens between the partners but also by external forces that can serve to cement or weaken the partners' bond. For example, sociocultural taboos against divorce may prevent an unhappily married couple from terminating their relationship; legalization of same-sex marriage may enable another couple to publicly acknowledge their commitment to each other; and parental interference may heighten (or extinguish) the passion between two young lovers.

Interdependence Theory

John Thibaut and Harold Kelley's (1959) *Interdependence Theory* proposes that two people involved in a relationship are interdependent with respect to the outcomes of their behavior; that is, the thoughts, feelings, and actions of one partner influence his or her own outcomes as well as those of his or her partner. Because each partner generally cannot achieve his or her best possible outcome at the same time, some degree of compromise is necessary for both partners to obtain at least minimally satisfactory outcomes. Thus, as their relationship develops, the partners are likely to coordinate their behaviors in order to achieve mutually rewarding outcomes ("We'll spend this vacation doing what you want, and next year we'll do what I want"). This process of coordination is called *transformation of motivation* and is assumed to produce satisfaction and to enhance commitment to the relationship.

The fact that partners experience a transformation of motivation and achieve beneficial outcomes is not enough, however, to guarantee that their union will be satisfying or that it will endure. Interdependence Theory proposes that relationship partners rely upon two standards when evaluating the outcomes they are receiving from a relationship. The first, called *comparison level (CL)*, is the standard against which a partner evaluates the attractiveness of a relationship or how satisfactory it is. The comparison level is determined by the individual's expectations about the level of outcomes (rewards and costs) that the relationship ought to provide, and it is influenced by personal experience as well as general knowledge of outcomes commonly experienced in that type of

relationship. To the extent that the outcomes the person actually experiences in the current relationship meet or exceed what is expected (outcomes \geq CL), he or she is likely to view the relationship as attractive and to be satisfied; to the extent that the outcomes fall short of expectations (outcomes $<$ CL), dissatisfaction is likely to result. Thus, it is possible for someone who benefits immensely from a relationship to nonetheless be unhappy—if he or she expects more. Conversely, it is possible for someone who appears to be in a highly unrewarding relationship to be relatively satisfied—if he or she believes things could be worse.

The second standard upon which partners rely when evaluating their interpersonal outcomes is called the *comparison level for alternatives* (CLalt). CLalt is the standard the partners use in determining whether or not to remain in the relationship, and it reflects the outcomes the partners feel that they could obtain from available alternatives to the present relationship. If a person's current outcomes meet or exceed his or her expected outcomes in alternative relationships (outcomes \geq CLalt), then the relationship is likely to endure. If current outcomes fall below perceived alternative outcomes (outcomes $<$ CLalt), however, the relationship will be unstable and may dissolve. Thus, an unhappy relationship may persist if there are no acceptable alternatives, and a blissful union may dissolve in the face of a particularly appealing alternative (see Figure 3.1).

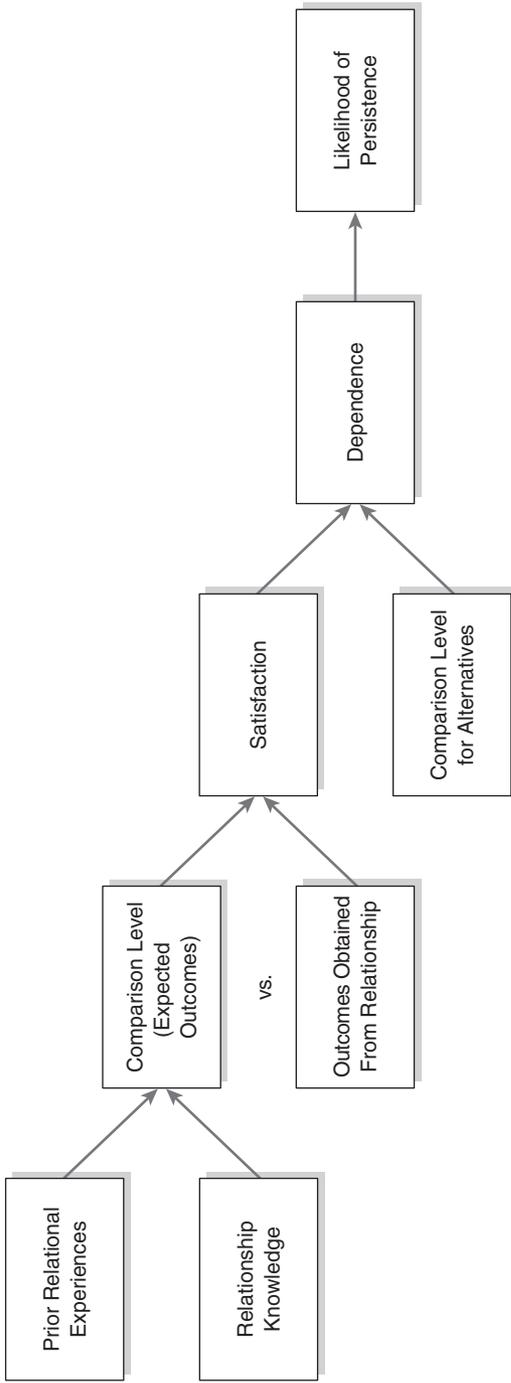
In sum, this theory predicts that the most stable relationships will be those in which partners do not expect a great deal (have a low CL) but actually get quite a lot (receive many positive outcomes) from the relationship (and consequently experience high levels of satisfaction) and have very few attractive alternatives to the relationship (have a low CLalt). These factors work together to produce a high level of *dependence* on the relationship; the partners need the relationship in order to obtain the outcomes they desire, and they have no other viable options for attaining those desired outcomes. Their dependence, in turn, promotes the stability and endurance of their union.

Interdependence Theory reminds us that satisfaction and stability are not necessarily one and the same and that relationships develop as a function of changes in the partners' needs, motives, and expectations as well as shifts in the surrounding social context.

Extensions of Interdependence Theory: Cohesiveness and Commitment

Other theorists have elaborated upon the basic principles of Interdependence Theory. For example, George Levinger's (e.g., 1965,

Figure 3.1 Thibaut and Kelley's Interdependence Theory

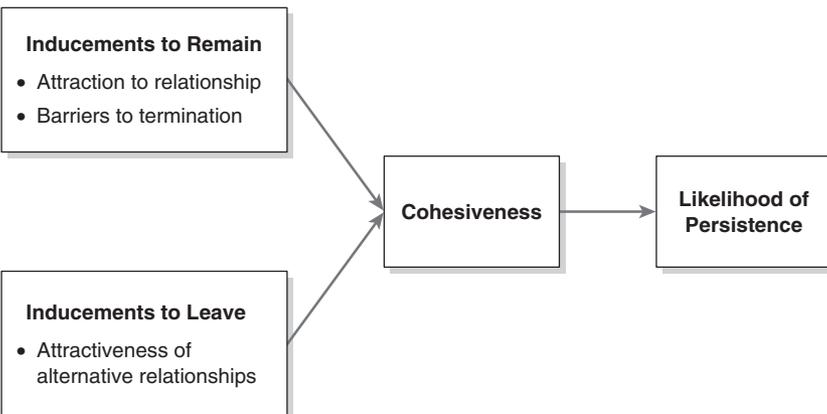


NOTE: Interdependence Theory predicts that relationships will endure to the extent that the partners are highly dependent on each other and the relationship for desirable outcomes. Dependence is a function of satisfaction with the relationship (which is highest when people's actual outcomes meet or exceed the outcomes they expect to obtain, i.e., their comparison level) and the comparison level for alternatives (or what is believed to be available from other relationships or partners). Thus, both internal (satisfaction) and external (quality and quantity of alternatives) forces determine whether a relationship will continue.

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1976) *Marital Cohesiveness Model* posits that the strength of the bond between partners is a function of two basic factors: the various inducements to remain in the relationship and the inducements to leave it (see Figure 3.2). *Inducements to remain* include all of the sources of *attractions* to the marriage and the spouse, which range from affectional rewards (e.g., love, companionship, sexual enjoyment), to socioeconomic rewards (e.g., income, material possessions, social prestige), to similarity between the spouses on important demographic dimensions. Other inducements to remain in a relationship include the restraints or *barriers* against its dissolution. Barriers derive from the social structure in which people live and from the social contracts into which they enter. For example, feelings of obligation to the partner, the marriage, and existing children; moral proscriptions stemming from religious values; and external pressures from kin, community, and social institutions all may serve as potent barriers to termination. *Inducements to leave* the relationship include the various attractions or rewards that can be obtained from alternative relationships (including no relationship at all). Essentially, this model proposes that “marital strength is a function of bars as well as bonds” (Levinger, 1965, p. 20). Thus, the bond

Figure 3.2 Levinger’s Marital Cohesiveness Model



NOTE: Like Interdependence Theory, the Marital Cohesiveness Model proposes that both internal and external factors determine whether a relationship will endure over time. Highly cohesive relationships are the most likely to last. Cohesiveness (the strength of the relational bond between partners) is determined by the level of rewards and costs experienced in the relationship, which produces attraction; by the number of costs associated with terminating the relationship, or barriers; and by the presence or absence of acceptable alternatives to the relationship.

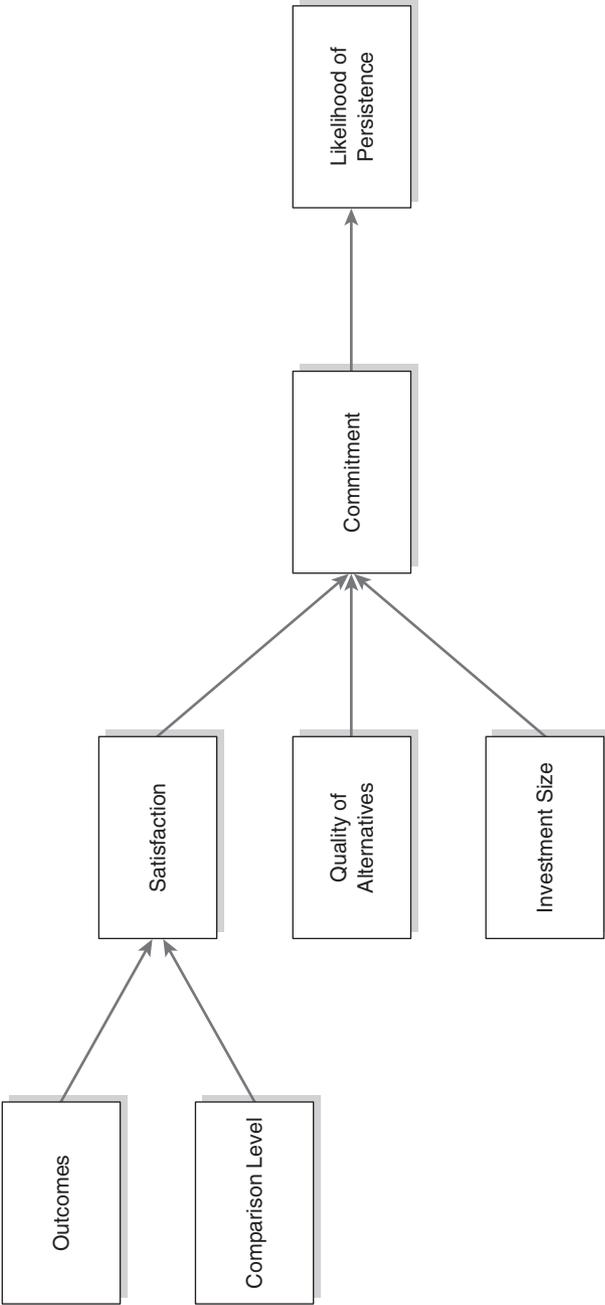
between two people is likely to be cohesive (strong and stable) to the extent that they experience high attraction to the relationship, many barriers to terminating the relationship, and low attraction to alternative relationships.

Another extension of Interdependence Theory was proposed by Caryl Rusbult (1983; see also Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Her *Investment Model* proposes that commitment, defined as the individual's feelings of attachment to the partner and his or her intention and desire to remain in the relationship, is a function of three factors: (a) the person's level of *satisfaction* with the relationship, which is a function of rewards and costs (outcomes actually experienced) and comparison level (the level of outcomes people believe they deserve); (b) the perceived *quality of alternatives* to the relationship, or the degree to which the individual believes that important needs could be met outside the relationship (e.g., by specific others, by friendships, by hobbies and other activities, by no relationship at all); and (c) the size of the person's *investment* in the relationship, which refers to the ways he or she is connected to the partner and bound to the relationship. These can be of a direct nature (e.g., time, emotional energy, personal sacrifice) or an indirect nature (e.g., mutual friends, shared memories, shared possessions). Thus, this model proposes that people will feel committed to their relationship to the extent that they feel satisfied (i.e., their relationship provides abundant rewards, does not involve heavy costs, and closely matches their beliefs and assumptions about an ideal partnership), they believe that they have few and/or poor-quality alternatives to the relationship, and they have invested important resources in the relationship that serve as powerful inducements for its continuation. Commitment, in turn, influences whether or not the relationship will endure (see Figure 3.3).

Empirical Evidence

There is strong support for many of the basic propositions just outlined (e.g., Attridge & Berscheid, 1994; Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Kurdek, 2000; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). For example, both Interdependence Theory and the Investment Model propose that relationship satisfaction will be greater to the extent that the partners' actual outcomes exceed their expectations (outcomes > CL). Research supports this contention. Marianne Dainton (2000) gave people currently involved in romantic relationships a list of everyday behavioral strategies that can be used to maintain or promote a relationship. These maintenance activities encompassed five general dimensions: *positivity*

Figure 3.3 Rusbult's Investment Model



NOTE: Like Interdependence Theory and the Marital Cohesiveness Model, the Investment Model recognizes that the outcomes an individual obtains in his or her relationship, as well as the perceived quality of alternatives to that relationship, are important contributors to relationship stability. Specifically, this model proposes that people will feel committed to their relationships to the extent that they feel satisfied, believe that they have few good alternatives to the relationship, and have invested important resources in the relationship. This feeling of commitment, in turn, influences whether or not a relationship will last.

(e.g., behaving in a cheerful and optimistic manner), *openness* (e.g., engaging in self-disclosure or direct discussion of the relationship), *assurances* (e.g., providing messages stressing commitment to the partner and the relationship), *social networks* (e.g., relying on common friends and affiliations), and *sharing tasks* (e.g., being equally responsible for accomplishing tasks that the couple faces). For each activity, participants were asked to consider their partners' behavior and to indicate the extent to which their current relationships compared, either favorably or unfavorably, with their expectation levels. They also completed a measure of relationship satisfaction. The results revealed a strong and positive correlation between expectation fulfillment and satisfaction; the more an individual perceived his or her partner as using the various maintenance behaviors relative to his or her expectations, the more satisfied the individual was with the relationship.

More recently, psychologists Benjamin Le and Christopher Agnew (2003) conducted a *meta-analysis* to test several of the basic propositions of the Investment Model. (A meta-analysis is a quantitative technique that allows researchers to synthesize the results of many studies testing the same basic hypothesis. Because a meta-analysis uses data from multiple investigations, it usually provides a more reliable test of the hypothesis than would any one individual study.) Le and Agnew first searched the literature for published studies in which the researchers had collected measures of satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment, and commitment. Overall, 52 studies met these criteria, with data collected from the late 1970s through 1999. The studies included a total of more than 11,000 participants from five countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Israel, and Taiwan). Le and Agnew then gathered statistical information from each study and computed the average correlation across all studies between commitment and its proposed bases (satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment). Their findings supported the Investment Model: across the 11,582 participants represented in the 52 studies, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size consistently and strongly predicted commitment. Moreover, this result held across ethnic groups, for men and women, and for homosexual and heterosexual respondents alike. The more satisfied with and invested in their relationships participants were, and the lower the perceived quality of their alternatives, the stronger was their commitment to those relationships. Interestingly, because a subset of studies also included information about relationship stability (i.e., whether the partners stayed together or dissolved their relationships), Le and

Agnew were able to examine whether commitment predicted relationship persistence as the Investment Model suggests. It did. The higher the participants' commitment levels, the more likely they were to remain in their relationships.

In sum, interdependence models provide a compelling view of relationship development. Both the internal characteristics of a relationship (satisfaction, perceptions of rewards and costs, investment level) and the external forces surrounding the partners (availability and quality of alternatives, presence or absence of societal barriers to divorce) influence whether the relationship continues and influence the well-being of the partners.

Summary

Recognizing that only a very few relationships survive beyond initial interactions and first dates, social and behavioral scientists have devoted a great deal of time and effort to understanding the how and why of relationship development. In their quest, they have proposed a number of theoretical frameworks. Those who adopt a stage approach have charted the phases or stages of relational progression. Others have focused on the processes—self-disclosure and intimacy, exchange of rewards and costs, interdependence—that occur between partners and that fuel relationship development. Regardless of the framework utilized, researchers and theorists acknowledge that relationships are dynamic entities that fluctuate over time as a result not only of changes in the partners but also of alterations in the social environment and in the properties of the relationship itself.

Key Concepts

Stage models of relationship development (p. 40)	Intimacy need fulfillment (p. 41)
Filter Theory (pp. 40–41)	Stimulus-Value-Role Theory (pp. 41–42)
Social attributes (p. 40)	Stimulus stage (pp. 41–42)
Value consensus (p. 40)	Value stage (p. 42)
Need complementarity (p. 40)	Role stage (p. 42)
Wheel Theory (p. 41)	Process models of relationship development (p. 42)
Rapport (p. 41)	Social Penetration Theory
Self-revelation (p. 41)	(pp. 42–43)
Mutual dependency (p. 41)	

Depth of disclosure (p. 43)	Transformation of motivation (p. 51)
Breadth of disclosure (p. 43)	Comparison level (p. 51)
Intimacy Theory (pp. 43–44)	Comparison level for alternatives (p. 52)
Social exchange theories (p. 45)	Dependence (p. 52)
Rewards (p. 45)	Marital Cohesiveness Model (p. 54)
Costs (p. 45)	Attractions (p. 54)
Equity (p. 46)	Barriers (p. 54)
Actual equity (p. 47)	Investment Model (p. 55)
Psychological equity (p. 47)	Satisfaction (p. 55)
Interdependence frameworks (pp. 50–51)	Quality of alternatives (p. 55)
Relationship satisfaction (p. 51)	Investment (p. 55)
Relationship stability (p. 51)	Meta-analysis (p. 57)
Interdependence Theory (p. 51)	

Discussion Questions

1. What are the basic premises of stage models of relationship development? Why have these models fallen out of favor?
2. Think about your current (or a previous) romantic relationship. Using Social Penetration Theory and Intimacy Theory, explain how your relationship developed.
3. Identify and describe the five basic assumptions of social exchange models of relationship development.
4. Discuss the concept of inequity, and identify the ways in which theorists say that people can restore equity. Have you ever been in an inequitable relationship? How did you respond to the inequity? Does your response support theoretical assumptions or not?
5. Evaluate the following three statements from the perspective of Interdependence Theory:

Statement 1: "A rewarding marriage is a happy marriage."

Statement 2: "If he or she were really unhappy, then he or she would leave."

Statement 3: "A good relationship will last forever."

Recommended Readings

These reviews present several theories of relationship development, with an emphasis on process models.

Berscheid, E., & Reis, H. T. (1998). Attraction and close relationships. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 193–281). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Holmes, J. G. (2000). Social relationships: The nature and function of relational schemas. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30, 447–495.

4

Marriage and Mate Selection



Chapter Outline

Mating Systems Across Cultures

The Nature of Marriage

 The “Rules” of Marriage

 Types of Marriage

 Division of Labor

Marital Satisfaction: How Happy Are Married Couples?

Has Marriage Changed Over Time?

Same-Sex Marriage

Cohabitation: An Alternative to Marriage

Summary

As discussed in Chapter 3, some romantic relationships pass beyond initial attraction and continue to develop over time until they reach a state of relative permanence; the partners become “steady” dates, they move in together, they form a civil union or domestic partnership, or they marry. In this chapter, we examine research on mate