Kaley is crushed. “I’ve never felt so hurt in my life,” she tells her friend Aaliyah. “I am a wreck since Noah left me. It was so out of the blue.” Since Noah broke up with Kaley last week, she has suffered greatly. She can’t sleep at night. She has missed work. She can’t study. Worse, she left desperate, pleading text messages on Noah’s phone that must make him think she is a psycho. The only thing that seems to help is having long talks with Aaliyah while they go shopping or have lunch. For Noah, the breakup was building for years. He thinks that Kaley is too traditional, too religious, not spontaneous enough, and too preoccupied with money and social media. When they talked about these issues, it became clear to Noah that they were way too different. The gap between their values and goals was just too wide to bridge. He felt like he was losing his “real self” by trying to be someone he is not to please Kaley. Finally, he ended the relationship despite feeling terrible about hurting someone he loved. Noah wished there was a nicer way to break up. At first, he thought Kaley would get the hint when he spent more time with his friends and stopped texting and Snapchatting her as much. When she didn’t get the hint, he eventually had to tell her straight out that he wanted to break up. Kaley insisted that they could work it out, but Noah was firm that his decision was made and it was definitely over.

In Paul Simon’s classic song “Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover,” breakups sound so easy. We are told to “Slip out the back, Jack. Make a new plan, Stan. You don’t need to be coy, Roy. Just set yourself free.” Rarely, however, is it that easy. For a person in either Kaley’s or Noah’s position, breakups are some of the most difficult episodes in life. For decades, relationship researchers who have examined the ends of relationships have come to understand how and why relationships end and the central role played by communication before, after, and during relationship breakups.

The goal in this chapter is to provide a better understanding of the relational disengagement process. Think about relationships in your own life that have ended. Some probably ended abruptly, whereas others disintegrated slowly. You and your partner may have had different perceptions of how and why the relationship ended, like Kaley and Noah. It was probably painful to end some relationships and a relief to end others. To help disentangle the complexity of relationship disengagement, this
chapter focuses on four areas of relational disengagement research. First, we examine the reasons relationships end. Second, we review phases that people often go through during a breakup, while also acknowledging that some people do not go through these phases; instead, their relationship ends suddenly. Third, we discuss communication strategies people use to leave their partners. Finally, we take a look at the aftermath of relational disengagement, including both negative and positive consequences of ending relationships.

WHY RELATIONSHIPS END

All relationships end. Regardless of whether they are brief or close encounters, last 60 days or 60 years, or are friendships or marriages, all relationships end eventually. Sometimes they end voluntarily through our personal choice. Other times they end involuntarily because someone breaks up with us, moves away, or dies. Baxter (1982) stated, “The breaking up of a relationship is a phenomenon known to most and dreaded by all. It accounts for some of our most intense and painful social experiences” (p. 223). Most of us experience this at least once; 85% of adults in the United States have experienced a romantic relationship breakup (Battaglia, Richard, Datteri, & Lord, 1998).

Many marriages also end in divorce, although the prognosis for having a successful marriage is better than you might think. Most people believe the divorce rate is around 50% and climbing, but that is not the case. An analysis of U.S. census data by sociology professor Philip Cohen revealed that the divorce rate dropped from 2008 to 2016, mostly due to educated Millennials divorcing at a lower rate than the generations before them (R. W. Miller, 2018). Trends suggest that the divorce rate was highest in the 1980s and 1990s but has started to decline over the past 20 years, with trends suggesting the divorce rate could be as low as 35% for those getting married today (C. C. Miller, 2014). The divorce rate is also somewhat inflated because people who have divorced once are more likely to divorce again if they remarry.

One reason for the declining divorce rate is that educated Millennials are waiting until they are ready. Getting married young is more likely to result in divorce, due to immaturity, lack of money, perceptions of being tied down too early in life, and marrying to escape an unhappy home environment (Huston, 2009). The probability of divorce within the early years of marriage decreases from 40% for 18- to 19-year-olds to 24% for individuals 25 or older (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). In relationships, experience matters. So does education. College-educated people are actually more likely to get married as well as less likely to get divorced. In fact, national survey data show that if trends continue, 78% of college-educated women who married for the first time between 2006 and 2010 will still be married 20 years later (W. Wang, 2015).

Culture also matters. Just as people from different cultures date, love, and marry differently, they also break up differently. In the United States and in most of Europe, dating, marriage, and divorce are matters of free choice and up to the individual. But that is not the case in parts of the world. Dating and marriage are regulated by strong cultural and religious rules in many countries. In some cultures, the family helps decide who a person will marry and may virtually prohibit separations or divorces.
Although divorce is common in some cultures, it is quite rare in others. In European countries, a third to half of all marriages end in divorce (“Divorces and Crude Divorce Rates,” 2008; “Divorce Rates,” 2011). Other countries have remarkably low divorce rates. India, Sri Lanka, and Japan had divorce rates less than 2% during the same time period. The success rate of arranged marriages around the world is high—less than 10% of arranged marriages end in divorce. In many cultures, love-based marriages are considered strange and risky. We have no idea if all or most arranged marriages are happy, but they do last (Coontz, 2005). Indeed, in these cultures, breaking up is hard to do.

When relationships end, most couples—unmarried or married, straight or gay—show substantial similarities in how they break up (Kurdek, 1993). Some variables one would think are associated with relational breakups, such as attachment style, self-esteem, and amount of conflict, do not predict breakups very well (Cate, Levin, & Richmond, 2002; Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010).

So what causes breakups then? National data from a 17-year study of married people give us some clues (Amato & Previti, 2003). Individuals who divorced during this study told researchers why their marriage ended. Figure 15.1 shows the top 10 reasons they gave for divorcing. Women were more likely than men to report their divorces were due to infidelity, alcohol or drug abuse, physical or psychological abuse, or their partner not meeting their family obligations. Men were more likely to report divorcing due to personality problems, lack of communication, or loss of love.

Infidelity and Interest in a Third Party

The top reason for divorce is infidelity or interest in a third party. This is also a primary reason why dating partners break up. As discussed in Chapter 13, sexual infidelity is one
of, if not the most, hurtful and unforgivable acts that can occur in a relationship. Thus, it is not surprising that sexual infidelity is often detrimental to a relationship and may lead to termination. The reverse is often true as well: Unhappy relationships lead people to seek out other partners. Research suggests that sexual betrayal is common in all type of relationships but particularly during dating (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). For every type of couple, gay or straight, the relationship is less likely to survive when one partner is having sex outside the relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Lampard, 2014). Research shows that infidelity is a factor in between 21% to 55% of breakups (Amato & Previti, 2003; Bradford, 1980; B. L. Parker & Drummond-Reeves, 1993).

**Incompatibility**

Despite the oft-repeated folk wisdom that “opposites attract,” a more valid cliché is “birds of a feather flock together” (see Chapter 3). Dozens of studies show that the more two people have in common, the more likely they are to stay together. Think of your close friends. You probably have many things in common, including interests, political opinions, and religious values. Similarities are equally important in romantic relationships, especially in core areas. Several studies have found that incompatibility in attitudes and values is one of the most important factors leading to relational dissatisfaction and breakups (Baxter, 1986; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Metts & Cupach, 1986).

Differences in health, emotional involvement, and sexual preferences can pose problems for relationships. Even among otherwise satisfied couples, differences in partners’ health status greatly increase the chance of divorce (Karraker & Latham, 2015; Wilson & Waddoups, 2002). Relationships also benefit from similar levels of emotional involvement. In over half of dating relationships, one person is more emotionally involved than the other. Breakups are easier for the least involved person. Thus, asymmetrical levels of emotional involvement are a risk factor for relational breakups (Sprecher et al., 2006). Conflicting sexual attitudes are also a key contributor to breakups in dating relationships and marriages, for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples (e.g., Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Kurdek, 1993). Partners may differ over the desired frequency of sexual relations, types of sexual behaviors, and the initiation of sex. There is little association between how much sex a couple has and how long the partners stay together. Frequency is less important than compatibility.

**Alcohol and Drugs**

Alcohol and drugs have been cited as one of the top 10 reasons for marital breakup in several studies (e.g., Amato & Previti, 2003; Lampard, 2014; B. L. Parker & Drummond-Reeves, 1993). Problems with alcohol and drug abuse may lead to violence, addiction, problems with the law, the squandering of money, and problems at work—any of which can greatly strain a relationship. Alcohol and drug abuse can also lead to codependency in relationships, with one partner becoming overly preoccupied with controlling their partner’s negative behaviors and nurturing the partner (Le Poire, Hallett, & Giles, 1998). Sometimes, they try to get their partner to stop using drugs or alcohol through punishment (e.g., verbal confrontation, threats to leave). Other times, however, they reinforce the partner’s behavior by doing things such as keeping the children out of the way.
and taking care of the partner when the partner is ill. Although codependency may keep people in relationships for a while, in the long run, codependent behavioral patterns may put considerable strain on relationships.

**Growing Apart**

Some relationships wither away over time (Lampard, 2014; Metts & Cupach, 1986). Waning of relationships is often due to different interests, such as the dissimilarities between Kaley and Noah discussed at the start of this chapter. Relationships also wither from reduced quality and quantity of communication, distance, reduced efforts to maintain the relationship, or competition from hundreds of relationships in today’s fast-paced world. Dating relationships will deteriorate and terminate as commitment wanes (Le et al., 2010). In marriages, people often cannot pinpoint when they started growing apart. Atrophy is a gradual process. Spouses get absorbed in their everyday lives—working and raising children—and forget to give each other the attention they need and deserve. Owen (1993) found that many relationship breakups were characterized by atrophy. Typical metaphors for relationship endings were “I could see the relationship rot each day,” and “The relationship faded into the sunset” (pp. 271–272).

**Loss of Love or “Losing Feelings”**

Many factors cause relationship breakups, but one thing is clear: Love prevents breakups. A recent meta-analysis of psychological research found lack of love is a strong predictor of relationship breakups (Le et al., 2010). Love is lost in many ways. Some people experience **chronic dissatisfaction** in their relationships. Temporary dissatisfaction may cause couples to repair and maintain their relationship (see Chapters 10 and 14), but couples with a history of dissatisfaction are at risk for divorce (Kurdek, 1993). Love is linked with feelings of joy, warmth, contentment, and passion. Being with people we love promotes good feelings. Chronic dissatisfaction eats away at good feelings, so we seek happiness elsewhere. Longitudinal research shows most daters with steady levels of satisfaction remain in their relationships; in contrast, daters with fluctuating levels of satisfaction tend to leave their relationships (Arriaga, 2001).

Losing feelings is also related to disillusionment. **Relationship disillusionment** occurs when a person’s positive illusions about their partner and relationships fade (Huston, 2009; S. Lee, Rogee, & Reis, 2010; Niehuis & Bartell, 2006). When people are falling in love, they often see their partners and relationships through “rose-colored glasses.” These positive illusions during courtship and early marriage are hard to maintain once the honeymoon stage is over (Murray et al., 1996; Swann et al., 1994). A recent statistical summary suggests that loss of positive illusions is a leading reason for dating relationship breakups (Le et al., 2010). Disillusionment predicts divorce and dating breakups better than personality variables do (Huston, 2009; Niehuis & Bartell, 2006; Niehuis & Huston, 2002). Disillusionment causes decreases in love and affection, loss of emotional attachment, and disappointment in the relationship and partner. Disillusionment is strongest when people have unrealistic expectations about their relationship during courtship or early marriage (Le et al., 2010; Niehuis & Huston, 2002). To see if your relationship is characterized by disillusionment, take the Put Yourself to the Test quiz.
**PUT YOURSELF TO THE TEST**

**RELATIONSHIP DISILLUSIONMENT SCALE**

Circle the number that best represents how much you agree or disagree with each statement, using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am very disappointed in my relationship.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am very disappointed in my partner.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My partner used to be my best friend, but now I sometimes don't like her or him as a person.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. This relationship is not at all what I expected it to be; I feel very disappointed.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I used to think I was lucky to be with someone like my partner; now I'm not so sure that I am so lucky.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I used to love spending time with my partner, but now it is starting to feel like a chore.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I feel tricked, cheated, or deceived by love.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The relationship is not as enjoyable as I had expected it to be.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If I could go back in time, I would not have gotten involved with my partner.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My partner used to be on her or his best behavior when with me, but now he or she doesn’t bother trying to impress me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My partner seems to be an entirely different person now.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Add up your responses. A score of 11 represents a lack of disillusionment, whereas a score of 77 represents the highest possible level of disillusionment.

*Source: Niehuis & Bartell (2006).*

---

**Equity Issues Related to Family Obligations**

Issues related to equity or fairness in family responsibilities is a common reason for marital breakups. In Amato and Previti’s (2003) study, women cited having a partner who does not meet family obligations as a reason for divorce about three and a half times more
than men did. This is likely because women still do more of the household work, including child care, than men do, even if they are working outside the home just as much. A study by the Council of Contemporary Families of 1,780 couples found that how household responsibilities were shared was a major predictor of satisfaction, with couples happier when they worked together to do dishes and shop (Dubé, 2018). A longitudinal study of marital breakups found that women’s perception of inequality and a sense of having to do more in the relationship increased the risk of divorce significantly (DeMaris, 2007). Equity is also important in dating relationships (see Chapter 14). In Baxter’s (1986) study of heterosexual dating relational breakups, equity was a primary factor in the breakup for 17% of the women and 5% of the men.

### Additional Predictors of Breakups

Other predictors of divorce not shown in Figure 15.1 emerged in Amato and Previti’s (2003) study. These include unhappiness in one’s marriage, wishing to pursue better alternatives, undergoing personal change (e.g., therapy, a midlife crisis) that leads one to want to do new things, financial problems, interference from family or one’s social network, physical or mental illness, and immaturity (e.g., getting married too young). Other researchers have identified money or financial problems as a cause of both divorce (Bradford, 1980; Lampard, 2014; B. L. Parker & Drummond-Reeves, 1993) and gay and lesbian separations (Kurdek, 1993). Few relational problems revolve around how much money a couple makes. Instead, problems seem to stem from money management—with the values surrounding spending and saving producing considerable turmoil for couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983).

Two other factors that are not always mentioned as a primary reason for breakups, but are nonetheless sometimes important contributing factors, are social network disapproval and stressful events. Dating partners are more likely to break up if their social networks or parents disapprove of their relationship (Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992). Having separate friendship networks or problems getting along with in-laws can also signal that a relationship is in trouble (Metts & Cupach, 1986; Vaughn, 1986). Relational stressors and traumas are associated with relational breakups in both dating and marital relationships. One study showed that couples experiencing a miscarriage had a 22% greater chance of divorcing and couples experiencing stillbirth have a 40% greater chance of divorcing in the subsequent 10 years (Gold, Sen, & Hayward, 2010).

Although not usually a primary reason for divorce, boredom or lack of excitement is one of the top reasons for breakups in dating relationships and can contribute to losing feelings (Honeycutt, Cantrill, & Allen, 1992). Boredom is associated with dissatisfaction in relationships, which is why planning novel, exciting activities and being spontaneous once in a while are keys to a happy relationship (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2010, 2013). Nearly 10% of the participants in one study noted the absence of magic and romance as a primary cause for relational termination (Baxter, 1986). Interestingly, this was a factor for 19% of the men but only 5% of the women, suggesting that men are less practical partners. Considering that our interpersonal relationships are one of our greatest sources of joy and excitement, when they begin to bore us, the end could be near.

Another set of issues that can be problematic revolve around needing independence. People often complain that a relationship is “smothering” or “suffocating” them and they
need their space, freedom, or autonomy. In studies of dating relationships, the need for autonomy and independence is often one of the top three predictors of breakups (Baxter, 1985). In Baxter’s study, this was the primary reason given by around 24% of men and 44% of women. In another study, “feeling trapped” was a leading predictor or relational termination (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Similarly, one of the five most common general issues leading to relational breakups in gay and lesbian couples was excessive fusion, which is a loss of individuality because of the relationship (Kurdek, 1993). Independence, self-improvement, or self-expansion is a central need in relationships and that, if unfulfilled, leads to relational termination (VanderDrift & Agnew, 2012)

COMMUNICATION AS A CAUSE OF BREAKUPS

Poor communication is also a common culprit predicting relational breakups; several studies report it as the number one cause of divorce (Bradford, 1980; Cleek & Pearson, 1985; B. L. Parker & Drummond-Reeves, 1993). This includes too much communication, too little communication, low-quality communication, negative communication, and communication that is not mutually constructive. In Amato and Previti’s (2003) study, lack of communication and psychological abuse (which involves engaging in hurtful communication) were among the top predictors of divorce.

The type of communication that predicts divorce depends in part on the length of one’s marriage (Gottman & Levenson, 2000, 2002). Specifically, couples who divorce within 5 to 7 years of marriage tend to blame high levels of destructive marital conflict, whereas those who divorce within 10 to 12 years report a loss of intimacy and connection. Dysfunctional conflict during the first year of marriage is related to relational breakups 3, 7, and 16 years later (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2010). (See Chapter 11 for a more detailed discussion of destructive communication patterns used during conflict.)

Withdrawal

Withdrawal is a common reason for relationship breakups that can reflect a lack of intimacy and connection. Baxter (1986) found that low levels of supportiveness—and particularly a lack of listening—was a major factor in over one fourth of the relational breakups she studied. As discussed in Chapter 11, stonewalling occurs when individuals fail to discuss important issues with their partners (Gottman, 1993; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Men use this type of dysfunctional communication more often than women (Clements, Cordova, Markman, & Laurenceau, 1997).

Many studies have examined the demand-withdrawal pattern (also discussed in Chapter 11), which is associated with separation (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). This pattern occurs when one person makes a demand and the partner responds by withdrawing from communication. People in the demanding position are dissatisfied and want to change something in their relationship. Children of divorced parents more frequently report that their mother and father engaged in demand-withdrawal patterns than do children of nondivorced parents (W. A. Afifi & Schrodt, 2003). Furthermore, Honeycutt and colleagues (1992) had disengaged couples recall behaviors that contributed to relational disengagement. These behaviors included spending less time together, avoiding each other in public settings, and making excuses for not going out together.
Negative Communication

All couples have conflicts and disagreements. In fact, as dating partners become more loving and committed, conflict increases, presumably because of increased interdependence (Lloyd & Cate, 1985). Research shows that it is not the presence or absence of conflict that determines whether a couple will be satisfied and stay together; it is how partners deal with conflict that is more important (see Chapter 11). In a series of studies spanning 15 years, Clements and colleagues (1997) reported that in their earliest interactions, partners who eventually broke up dealt with their disagreements in a destructive fashion with common fights, name-calling, criticisms, and accusations. In a major statistical summary of the research on divorce, Karney and Bradbury (1995) reported that one of the most prevalent factors leading to divorce was negative behavior. One study found that a common path to disengagement was rules violation, where one partner engages in inappropriate behavior (Metts & Cupach, 1986). For example, if relational partners had agreed to call if they are going to be late or not to swear at each other during disagreements, violations of these rules can lead to dissatisfaction and, perhaps, disengagement. When asked to recall behavior that led to the breakup of their relationships, couples recalled various forms of aversive communication—such as arguing about little things, disagreeing, verbally fighting, criticizing the partner, and making sarcastic comments.

However, anger is not the main culprit when it comes to predicting divorce. The Gottman Institute reports that divorce is most likely when a husband becomes defensive, shows contempt, and stonewalls, and a wife criticizes, becomes defensive, and shows contempt (Gottman, 1993; see also Chapter 11). This institute focuses on helping couples by offering communication strategies that prevent divorce (Gottman, Gottman, & DeClaire, 2006); some of their advice for preventing divorce is presented in the Highlights.

HIGHLIGHTS
COMMUNICATION THAT HELPS PREVENT DIVORCE: THE MARRIAGE MASTERS

Based on research conducted in his “love lab” at the University of Washington, John Gottman, along with coauthors Julie Schwartz Gottman and Joan DeClaire, explained that some people are “marriage masters” while others are “marriage disasters.” The difference between being a master versus a disaster rests, in large part, on how people communicate. If you are a marriage master, you are more likely to do the following:

- **Soften the startup.** Gottman and colleagues noted that it would be ludicrous to expect two people to live together without complaining but that complaints can be communicated in a respectful manner that expresses your needs without criticizing your partner. When complaints are posed gently and without insults, the partner is more likely to listen and compromise.

- **Tell your partner what you want, rather than what you don’t want.** It is easy to tell your partner, “I hate when you leave your dirty socks everywhere” or “You are so rude when you roll your eyes at me.” But it is more constructive to tell your partner that you would like some help keeping the house clean and want to be taken seriously when you are talking.

- **Listen for statements of need and respond with open-ended questions.** Active listening

(Continued)
Close Encounters

can be a challenge during arguments, but try to look beyond the complaints and criticisms and focus on what your partner needs. Ask your partner questions such as, “What’s bothering you?” or “How can I help?” when appropriate. This can get productive discussion rolling.

- **Accept your partner’s emotional bids.** Your partner reaches out for emotional connection in various ways, including giving compliments, smiling, and sitting next to you while watching TV. Marriage masters turn toward their partners and reciprocate positivity, rather than turning away (ignoring) or turning against (reacting with hostility) them, even when they aren’t in the best of moods.

- **Express appreciation.** We all have a natural tendency to retaliate or get angry when we are criticized or attacked, but we don’t always reward our partner’s positive behavior. If your partner is being attentive or putting effort into your relationship, take the time to thank your partner or offer a compliment.

- **Repair conversations.** If a conversation is getting difficult, marriage masters know how to diffuse the negativity by engaging in behaviors such as apologizing, smiling, or making a funny comment. Marriage masters also know how to cool down when they are flooded with negative emotions, sometimes by taking a break from the conversation.

- **Establish rituals for connection.** Some of the most common complaints that couples have are that they do not have enough time for one another because they are busy with work, children, household chores, and other responsibilities. Therefore, it is important to set aside time to be together alone as a couple—just to talk or to get away on a romantic date or getaway.

- **Accept influence.** Marriage masters are also open to accepting advice and being persuaded by their partners. Stubbornly holding on to one’s own positions can be harmful, especially if it prevents partners from growing at both a personal and a relational level. Gottman’s research suggests marriages are happier when husbands are willing to listen to and be influenced by their wives.

Source: Information compiled from Gottman et al. (2006).

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**Lack of Openness and Affection**

Even though couples need autonomy and privacy (see Chapter 5), open disclosure is still imperative for relationships. Partners who stay together, rather than break up, report much higher levels of self-disclosure early in their relationships (Berg & McQuinn, 1986). One study demonstrated that dating couples who engaged in more self-disclosure were more likely to be together 4 years later (Sprecher, 1987). Similarly, a summary of psychological research found that lack of self-disclosure was associated with breaking up in dating relationships (Le et al., 2010). Openness is particularly important to women’s evaluation of their partners. In Baxter’s (1986) study, 31% of the women, compared to only 8% of the men, mentioned lack of openness as a major factor in relational termination. In a study on memories of relationship breakups, many people remembered decreases in verbal and nonverbal intimacy as the starting point for relational decline (Honeycutt et al., 1992). Couples at risk for eventual disengagement may stop expressing affection nonverbally by decreasing acts of physical intimacy such as hugs, kisses, and touches.
Abusive Communication

Researchers have tested the “common sense” hypothesis that people are likely to break up with partners who are physically or psychologically abusive (Rhatigan & Street, 2005).

**Physical abuse** is violent behavior, such as grabbing, pushing, kicking, biting, slapping, and punching, whereas **psychological abuse** is hurtful communication, such as insults, name-calling, and personal criticism. Not surprisingly, research shows that physical and psychological abuse are related to less relational satisfaction, less commitment, and more likelihood of relationship termination (Lampard, 2014; Rhatigan & Street, 2005).

Physically battered women are more likely to report that they intend to leave their violent partners when they are also psychologically abused (Arias & Pape, 2001), suggesting that both physical and psychological abuse are important determinants of breakups. People are also likely to break up with partners who abuse their children (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Unfortunately, some people stay in abusive relationships. One study found that battered women stay with their husbands for three reasons: (1) financial dependency, (2) a family history of violence, and (3) psychological factors such as low self-esteem or blaming oneself for their partner’s violence (Kim & Gray, 2008). Another study found similar reasons—with women more likely to stay in violent relationships if they were financially dependent, needed their spouse to help with child care, were afraid of being lonely or of being harmed if they left, thought a breakup would be socially embarrassing, had poor support from their social network, or hoped the relationship would change for the better (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng, 2003).

Sometimes, people use abuse to try to control their partner and prevent a breakup. Such is the case with intimate terrorism, the intentional use of violence as a means of intimidating and controlling one’s partner (M. P. Johnson, 1995). This is chronic violence that tends to be more severe than more common forms of violence that occur occasionally when people lose control during the heat of an argument (see Chapter 13). Intimate terrorism is asymmetrical—one partner is the perpetrator and the other is the victim—whereas other forms of violence in relationships are often reciprocal. Although intimate terrorism is used by both men and women, studies suggest that women are most likely to be victims (M. P. Johnson, 1995). This type of violence tends to be more severe and enduring than violence that arises spontaneously during conflict (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003). Although victims of intimate terrorism often fear their partner’s reaction, they are more likely to end their relationship than are victims of more common forms of violence (M. P. Johnson & Leone, 2005).

THE DISENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Researchers have created several models of how relationships come apart. Most thinking in this area suggests that relationships pass through several phases as people disengage from one another—as if descending a staircase from close relationships to breakups. For example, Knapp and Vangelisti’s (2008) staircase model predicts that relationships are characterized by more avoidance and less intimate communication as they fall apart (see Chapter 5). Other researchers have suggested that instead of slowly disintegrating, relationships sometimes go through sudden changes more akin to falling off a balcony.
than descending stairs. This perspective is embodied by catastrophe theory approaches to disengagement. Next, we discuss two theories of the disengagement process that reflect both of these general approaches—Duck’s (1982, 1988; Rollie & Duck, 2006) process of relational dissolution and catastrophe theory.

**A Process Model of Relational Dissolution**

A leading model of relational breakups was developed by Duck (1982, 1988), who viewed relational dissolution as a set of distinct but connected phases. Recently, this model was revised to focus more on the communication processes occurring during relationship breakups (Duck, 2005). According to Duck’s model, five processes are likely to occur as people disengage from relationships: (1) intrapsychic, (2) dyadic, (3) social, (4) grave-dressing, and (5) resurrection. Moreover, couples can go through several of these processes (particularly the first two) without breaking up. In fact, many couples recognize and resolve relational problems during the intrapsychic and dyadic processes that help them reevaluate their relationships. When partners find themselves embroiled in social processes, however, the relationship might be likely to detail.

**Intrapsychic Processes**

Relational dissatisfaction triggers the **intrapsychic processes phase**, which involves reflecting on the negative aspects of the relationship and comparing these flaws with costs of leaving the relationship. Beyond reflection, the intrapsychic process involves preparing to talk to the partner about problems. These processes “not only provide a psychological engine for rumination but also affect communicative activity; in particular, they promote a social withdrawal, so that the person can nurse perceived wounds and take stock of the partner and the relationship” (Duck, 2005, p. 211). At that point, people sometimes realize that their problems are not as bad as they once thought. However, mulling or ruminating about relational problems often make them worse rather than better (Cloven & Roloff, 1993; Saffrey & Ehrenburg, 2007); thinking about dissolving a relationship is an independent predictor of an eventual breakup (VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009). Vaughn (1986) claimed that “uncoupling begins with a secret. One of the partners starts to feel uncomfortable with the relationship” (p. 11). This is what happened to Noah, whom we introduced at the start of this chapter. The relationship was changing him in ways that made him feel uncomfortable.

Dissatisfied partners face a dilemma of whether to discuss such feelings and thoughts with their relational partner or to withdraw. Often they withdraw initially while they are mulling and deciding what to do. A breakup is not inevitable at this stage; the partner is often seeking to resolve problems and maintain the relationship. But when people begin to think that withdrawing from the relationship would be justified, they are likely to engage in dyadic processes that could either repair the relationship or propel it toward dissolution.

**Dyadic Processes**

The **dyadic processes phase** occurs when dissatisfied partners communicate negative thoughts and feelings. Partners attempt to negotiate and reconcile the differences to avert a relationship breakup. Fights, arguments, and long discussions characterize this phase.
Sometimes people experience shock and surprise when a partner airs concerns. Partners can also experience a dramatic reconciliation as a result of dyadic processes (Rollie & Duck, 2006). Research on breakups and on-again off-again relationships shows that transitions are initiated and facilitated by “state of the relationship” talk (Dailey, Rossetto, McCracken, Jin, & Green, 2012). Specific topics about conflict and expectations for future behavior are often discussed as individuals continue to weigh the costs and rewards associated with being in the relationship. Partners may also renegotiate rules, promise to change, or improve their behavior. In other cases, they may decide the relationship is not worth saving. This is what happened for Noah. He tried to talk to Kaley about their differences, but he concluded that they were just too different to be able to make their relationship work.

**Social Processes**

“Going public” about the distress and problems within one’s relationship marks the **social processes phase** (Rollie & Duck, 2006). Couples talk to their social networks and investigate alternatives to the current relationship. Even when couples do not have a need to “label” a relationship, the social network may seek clarity through the use of a label (Dailey, Brody, & Knapp, 2015), such as wanting to know if they are still “officially dating.” Partners attempt to save face and receive support by telling their side of the story to friends and family, as Kaley did when she turned to Aaliyah for comfort. They are also likely to develop a story to convince their network, and themselves, that they are doing the right thing (Duck, 1982). Often nonverbal behaviors such as looking depressed or sounding upset reveal to others that something is wrong in the relationship (Vaughn, 1986).

Initially the individual’s network may try to prevent a breakup, but when the outcome seems inevitable, they help facilitate the breakup by providing interpersonal and emotional support and taking the initiating partner’s side in any disputes. When members of the person’s social network take their friend’s side, it helps convince the person who is considering ending the relationship that breaking up is the right decision. A word of caution is in order here, though. If people complain too loudly about their partners to others, the social network may have a hard time accepting them back into the fold if the partners change their minds and get back together. As Rollie and Duck (2006) explained, it is difficult to backtrack and repair the relationship once people have engaged in these types of social processes.

**Grave-Dressing Processes**

The communication that occurs during the **grave-dressing processes phase** focuses on coping with a breakup in a socially acceptable manner. Think about the stories you tell about a relationship breakup. If you are the breakup initiator, you might emphasize that you handled the breakup in a sensitive and caring manner. If you are the person who was dumped, you might assure people that you are strong, will be okay, and have other options. In other cases, you might note that the breakup was inevitable or mutual.

People create and tell plausible stories about the breakup to let other people know they are still desirable partners (Rollie & Duck, 2006). Rather than telling only one breakup story, people alter their stories based on the audience. So although Kaley confesses to Aaliyah that she is crushed Noah broke up with her, her story may change when she communicates...
with a group that includes an attractive man. Now she might downplay her hurt feelings saying something like, “Yeah, I was surprised and hurt, but I’ll get over it. I guess it just wasn’t meant to be. Something better must be out there waiting for me.” These types of accounts are vital for obtaining closure and engaging in resurrection processes.

**Resurrection Processes**

The end of a relationship often marks the beginning of something new during the resurrection processes phase (Rollie & Duck, 2006). After a breakup, people often visualize what their future will be like without their old relationship. To prepare for that future, they construct and communicate a new image of themselves as wiser as a result of their experiences. For example, Kaley may eventually realize that she would be better off finding a partner who shares her values. Noah may have learned that he should not have strung Kaley on for as long as he did. Both may emerge with a sense that they are now better equipped to find a compatible partner and to communicate their needs more clearly.

Resurrection processes also include revising stories about the former relationship and the breakup. Right after the breakup there are often bitter feelings, but as time passes, people reframe their partner and the relationship in more positive terms. So, although Noah might still acknowledge that he and Kaley had grown apart, he might also note that she is one of the sweetest and most genuine women he has ever known. Such an account paints both Kaley and Noah in a positive light, because it shows that Noah does not hold a grudge and can appreciate Kaley’s good qualities despite their differences.

**Catastrophe Theory**

Catastrophe theory provides an alternative way to describe and explain breakups by suggesting that relationships do not always de-escalate gradually but instead sometimes experience sudden death (Davis, 1973). Like earthquakes building along a silent fault line or a violent storm near the quiet eye of a hurricane, relationship stability can be shattered by rapid cataclysmic events. Of course, fault lines are rarely silent, and subtle signs such as falling air pressure and increased humidity accompany looming hurricanes. Likewise, signs of an impending relational catastrophe exist, but people often fail to see them or people deny them, as did Kaley in the opening vignette of the chapter. As Vaughn (1986) stated, “Partners often report that they are unaware, or only remotely aware, even at the point of separation, that the relationship is deteriorating. Only after the other person is gone are they able to look back and recognize the signals” (p. 62).

In line with catastrophe theory, breakups are often precipitated by a critical incident leading to rapid disengagement (Baxter, 1984; Bullis et al., 1993; Cupach & Metts, 1986; Lampard, 2014). These incidents range from discovering infidelity, to big arguments or physical violence, to finding differences in values, such as the realization that one partner hates pets and the other person loves them. In about 25% of the relationships in Baxter’s (1984) study, partners reported that a single critical incident led to a breakup.

Even when no critical incident can be singled out, relationships sometimes dissolve rapidly. Wilmot (1995) discussed the “point of no return” in every relationship, where one or both of the partners know for sure it’s over. In these cases “sometimes people just disappear, without any warning or indication of their discomfort with the relationship.”
Similarly, Davis (1973) talked about sudden relational death, which occurs when a person abruptly decides the relationship is over, falls in love with someone else, or suffers a trauma such as partner abuse. According to Wilmot (1995), sudden death can be likened to an execution rather than a slow death of the relationship. The breakup often occurs without face-to-face communication, but the initiator may enlist the help of a friend to tell the partner the relationship is over or terminate the relationship via a letter, phone call, or text message. As you will learn in the next section, there are many different ways to break up with someone, and they vary in terms of their kindness and effectiveness.

THE MANY WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR PARTNER

Although there are not 50 ways to leave your lover, as the classic Paul Simon song suggests, people have many options for ending their relationships. In addition to varying in terms of how kind and effective they are, breakup strategies differ based on whether they are direct or indirect and if they are unilateral or bilateral (Baxter, 1982, 1984). Direct strategies involve clear verbal messages—usually delivered face-to-face or through written words—that the relationship is over. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, employ more subtle, indirect, and sometimes ambiguous messages, including nonverbal communication. Unilateral strategies involve one person deciding to break up, whereas bilateral strategies are a joint decision to terminate the relationship. The majority of breakups are unilateral, not bilateral. Most dating and casual relationships are ended using indirect strategies; direct strategies are more likely in serious relationships, especially when people are married or cohabiting.

Individuals can terminate their relationships using a single strategy or a complex array of both direct and indirect strategies. For people like Noah, who are concerned about hurting their partner, finding a strategy that is both effective and sensitive is challenging. As you read about the strategies in Figure 15.2, you will likely recognize some of them.

**FIGURE 15.2 ■ Ways of Breaking Up**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unilateral</th>
<th>Bilateral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>The Mutual Fade Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghosting</td>
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<tr>
<td>The One-Way Fade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost Escalation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Party Manipulation</td>
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<td>Pseudo De-Escalation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>The Blame Game</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Direct Dump</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Relationship Talk Trick</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Tone Strategy</td>
<td>The Negotiated Farewell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genuine De-Escalation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from your own breakups. We do not intend for this section to be a “how-to” guide for breaking up. As the research presented in this chapter shows, breakups can be emotionally distressing and the strategies you use to end a relationship can contribute to distress. We hope, however, that by learning about the ways that people break off relationships you will better understand the disengagement process and perhaps will be a little more sensitive the next time you find yourself initiating a breakup.

**Unilateral and Indirect Strategies**

**Ghosting**

The most common of the indirect breakup strategies is avoidance or ghosting, where people literally “just slip out the back, Jack.” In the 1980s and 1990s, avoidance was a primary disengagement strategy that ranged from complete evasion to decreased contact (Baxter, 1982; Cody, 1982; Emmer & Hart, 1996; Perfas & Lustig, 1982). In one study of disengagement accounts, 66% of couples who used indirect strategies engaged in avoidance (Baxter, 1984). Today avoidance is still common and is achieved more easily because of technology, leading to the phenomenon of *ghosting* that has received attention in the media and popular press.

Ghosting occurs when a person simply disappears from someone’s life as if they were never a part of it (LeFebvre, 2017; Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019; Vihauer, 2015). A typical scenario is that two people are Snapchatting, texting, and perhaps hang out a few times, and then one person stops contact. Snapchats are not opened and texts go unanswered. There is a lack of closure; the person who was ghosted often wonders what went wrong. Vihauer (2015) explains how ghosting is connected to uncertainty:

> Ghosting gives you no clue for how to react. It creates the ultimate scenario of ambiguity. Should you be worried? What if they are hurt and lying in a hospital bed somewhere? Should you be upset? Maybe they are just a little busy and will be calling you at any moment. You don’t know how to react because you don’t really know what has happened. (n.p.)

Although ghosting is mainly communicated through decreasing communication on cell phones and social media (Starks, 2007), it can take several forms. In a focus group study involving college students, three particularly common ways to ghost emerged (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). The first involved a sudden sharp decrease or end of cell phone communication, including ignoring messages, breaking Snapchat streaks, and leaving someone on read all the time. The second, which was labeled social media cleansing, revolved around removing the person and any traces of the former relationship from one’s social media. Unfollowing or blocking someone, as well as removing pictures and comments from social media, were common ways of doing this. (For more on how social media is used to end relationships, see the Tech Talk box.) Finally, ghosting also involved stopping all face-to-face communication, which might involve actively avoiding coming into contact with someone and staying away from places that person might be.
Although most people believe ghosting is a disrespectful way to break things off with someone, a study by Freedman, Powell, and Williams (2018) found that around 28% of their respondents had been ghosted and about 20% had ghosted someone. In another study, around half of college students said they had either been ghosted or ghosted someone, and nearly everyone knew of a relationship in which ghosting had occurred (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). People ghost for many different reasons (LeFebvre et al., 2019). The most common reason people ghost is that it is easier: It takes less time and is less emotionally

### TECH TALK
**UNFRIENDLY DEFRIENDING AND PROFILE PITFALLS**

Actions such as defriending someone on Facebook, unfollowing someone on Instagram or Twitter, or deleting someone from Snapchat are decisions that can have huge relational consequences. The consequences of blocking someone are even greater. When people get defriended or unfollowed, they are likely to believe the relationship is over (Bevan, Pfyl, & Barclay, 2012). Defriending sends a strong message that you want someone completely out of your life, especially since we often have acquaintances as followers.

People are defriended (or worse yet blocked) for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons have to do with their online behavior, such as what or how much they post (Sibona & Walczak, 2011). You may be flooded with too many posts and want to slim down what you are receiving. In these cases, defriending someone may start the process of relational disengagement even though your intention was to manage the communication you were receiving rather than to end the relationship in large part. Twitter introduced the “muting” function to help solve this problem. Muting allows you to continue to appear on a person’s list of followers without receiving their tweets or retweets.

Other reasons have to do with the relationship outside of social media. For example, you might defriend or block someone to get away from or get back at that person after a conflict or breakup (Sibona & Walczak, 2011). Sometimes people do this hoping the person will contact them and ask to be followed again. Other times they want to move on. In some cases, this is a good idea because seeing an ex on social media sites can cause more hurt and sometimes even keep partners cycling in and out of relationships. One study showed that around 7% of people take this a step further by making their previously public social media accounts private (Garimella & Weber, 2014). This can be done to block the ex and also to keep unfollowers out of a person’s breakup business.

People can also use social networking sites to break up with romantic partners. Changing your Facebook relationship status from “in a relationship” or “engaged” to “single” is a clear (although not very brave) way to end a relationship. Research in this chapter shows that the most successful and sensitive way to end a relationship is with a direct, supportive, face-to-face interaction. Other actions on social media can also disrupt and even terminate close relationships. Facebook users experience numerous relationship status disputes over profile choices that can be very consequential, leading to arguments and even relationship terminations (Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012). For example, changing your profile picture so that it features you with your friends instead of you with your romantic partner can communicate an intentional or unintentional message.

And worse, research shows Internet terminations can lead to cyberstalking (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015), and even interpersonal violence on rare occasions. So the next time you defriend someone or change your relationship status on a social networking site, think about the consequences. In many cases, it is advisable to talk with people face-to-face before defriending them or breaking up with them in such a public way. In other cases, no contact may be the best way forward.
stressful for the person doing the ghosting. If people fear an especially negative reaction from the person they are breaking up with, ghosting is often considered an option. Ghosting can also reflect the lost feelings in a relationship: People simply stop investing in the relationship or potential relationship when they no longer see it as working out.

Using ghosting is also much more likely if the relationship was not that serious. Indeed, ghosting occurs the most often in situations where there are low levels of commitment, such as being in the talking phase or just hooking up, and the least in “official” relationships (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). Similarly, ghosting is perceived as more unacceptable in both committed and short-term relationships than after a first date and is seen as especially unacceptable in long-term relationships (Freedman et al., 2018). The more intense and committed the involvement is between two people, the less likely ghosting will occur. When ghosting does occur in these more intense involvements, it is especially hurtful and confusing. So, although ghosting might in many ways be easier for the person doing the breaking up, it is seldom easier for the person being broken up with.

The One-Way Fade

Another common indirect strategy is the **one-way fade**, which has also been referred to as the “slow fade.” The two main features of the one-way fade are that (1) one person is doing the fading out, and the other person is responding to it; and (2) it involves a gradual rather than abrupt decrease in communication. Researchers have described the one-way fade as a weak form of ghosting that is less harsh but still attempts to avoid having to break up with someone directly (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019).

In focus groups, college students readily distinguish between fading out and ghosting based on how gradually the process plays out. This was reflected in some of the strategies they mentioned, such as decreasing the number of Snapchats they send someone but maintaining a Snapchat streak, checking in briefly on text but avoiding long or in-depth conversations, and gradually increasing the time before responding to messages or leaving someone on read more often over time (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). The person doing the fading usually hopes the partner will get the hint and decrease communication as well. This saves them from formally having to break up and makes ending things seem more mutual than it actually is. National survey data suggest that fading out is here to stay. About 15% of teens reported that they had experienced a breakup that involved fading out or “just drifting away” rather than being broken up with via a specific communication channel, such as in person or by text (Lenhart, Anderson, & Smith, 2015).

In some cases, people believe fading out leaves the relationship open for reconnecting in the future (Daniels, 2017). People can change their minds and resume more frequent communication or later say they regret losing touch and want to try things again. Because the breakup was accomplished without ever having to directly discuss the reasons why the relationship ended, reasons for breaking up are never given and harsh words are likely unspoken, which can help leave trying things again on the table. However, the person on the receiving end of the one-way fade may be confused and frustrated, feeling unsure about how to read the decrease in communication, at least at first. Initially they might just think the other person is busy or just needs a little space, but eventually most people get the hint and either reciprocate the fade out or push to have a more direct discussion about what went wrong.
As with ghosting, fading away is least likely to occur in long-term committed relationships and more likely to occur when people are talking, hooking up, or in the early stages of dating (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019). When people have invested considerable time and effort into developing and maintaining a relationship with someone, they usually believe they deserve a more direct breakup than strategies like the one-way fade or ghosting. Avoidant strategies such as the one-way fade out and ghosting are generally seen as less than ideal and leave people with more questions than closure (T. J. Collins & Gillath, 2012). They can also be confusing for the recipient. Indeed, Noah’s initial use of this strategy may have unwittingly extended the breakup process because Kaley failed to recognize his indirect attempts to end their relationship.

Cost Escalation

Cost escalation is an attempt to make the relationship unattractive to one’s partner (Baxter, 1984; Emmers & Hart, 1996; Thieme & Rouse, 1991). People who want to break up may be excessively or deliberately messy, obnoxious, rude, argumentative, demeaning, or disloyal so that the partner comes to dislike her or him and becomes more amenable to a breakup. In one account of a breakup, the person initiating the break explained, “I thought I would be an ‘asshole’ for a while to make her like me less” (Baxter, 1985, p. 249).

A great example of cost escalation is shown in the movie How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days. In this movie, a writer named Andie is assigned to write an article about how women can get a man to break things off with them quickly. For the article, she picks a man to use cost escalation strategies on so he will break up with her. Although she has only known her target a few days, she does things like call his mom, embarrass him in front of his friends, buy him a love fern, move her feminine products into his bathroom, put stuffed animals on his bed, and, perhaps the biggest cost escalation move of all, make a photo album with fake pictures of what their married life and children will look like. Of course, since it is a movie, there is a twist. The guy bet his friends he could get her to fall in love with him, so they are at cross-purposes and Andie is shocked when he doesn’t break up with her.

In real life, cost escalations sometimes work and they often make the partner upset. Across studies, cost escalation is employed by between 12% and 31% of people reporting on breakups (Baxter, 1984; Thieme & Rouse, 1991). People who have Machiavellian personalities—which means they tend to have low emotional involvement in their relationships and are willing to exploit others—are more likely to use cost escalation (Brewer & Abell, 2017; Perras & Lustig, 1982). Cost escalation is also seen as a less-than-ideal way of breaking up with someone that shows low concern for the partner’s feelings (T. J. Collins & Gilath, 2012). Ironically, however, cost escalation can be beneficial in some breakups if the person on the receiving end of this strategy ends up being happy to break up. This can happen when people do not realize their partner is using cost escalation, start to perceive them negatively, and break off the relationship. In this case, they see themselves as the breakup initiators and are glad to be out of such a costly relationship.

Third Party Manipulation

Another way people break up through indirect means involves the manipulation of third parties. Third party manipulation can be done in two general ways. First, sometimes people use third parties to communicate the impending breakup to the other person through strategies such as leaking news of the breakup or talking about dating other people.
partner (Baxter, 1982; T. J. Collins & Gillath, 2012). They might tell mutual friends they are considering breaking up, knowing they will tell the partner, or they might ask a third party to talk to the partner for them. A second way of manipulating third parties is to engage in activity that lets the partner know that either you are interested in dating others or that it is okay if they date others (Baxter, 1982; T. J. Collins & Gillath, 2012). If Noah had used this strategy, he might have hung out with another woman and made sure Kaley found out about it, or he might have told Kaley she could go out with one of his friends who has a crush on her. Obviously, such tactics can cause conflict and even be insulting.

As with many of the other indirect strategies discussed in this chapter, third party manipulation is less likely to be used as a disengagement strategy in long-term committed relationships than in casual or short-term relationships (Baxter, 1982). It is much more acceptable to go on a date with someone else if you haven’t made your relationship official than if you have. Also, like the other indirect strategies, third party manipulation is used to avoid having to directly confront the partner and explain the reasons for the breakup. Research also has shown that relationships that are ended through manipulation are unlikely to evolve into cordial postromantic relationships such as a friendship (Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovich, 1989). This perception that third party manipulation is an undesirable means of breaking up is likely to persist. Figure 15.3 shows that teens rate breaking up with someone this way as highly unacceptable, whereas breaking up in person is seen as the most acceptable and kind way of ending a relationship.

**Pseudo De-Escalation**

This strategy is a false declaration to the other party that the relationship would profit from some distance that masquerades as de-escalation with the possibility of staying or getting back together but is usually a disguised relational breakup (Baxter, 1985). A person might say, “Let’s just put a little space into the relationship” or “Let’s just be friends for a

**FIGURE 15.3 Teen Perceptions of Acceptability of Breakup Channel**

![Graph showing the acceptability of different breakup channels](image)

*Note: The graph shows how acceptable teens found each channel for breaking up, with 1.0 = very unacceptable and 7 = very acceptable.

*Source: Lenhart, Anderson, and Smith (2015).*
while” when the person really means, “This relationship is over.” The intent is often to let the other party down easily.

Although this strategy may be more humane than third party manipulation, which was previously described, pseudo de-escalation is also manipulative and can be confusing. Sometimes people using pseudo de-escalation are sure they want to break up and are trying to let the other person down easily. The problem with this is that using pseudo de-escalation can give the other person false hope. Indeed, one study showed that only 9% of the receivers of such a message got the clue that the relationship was actually over (Baxter, 1984). The rest of the participants harbored false hope that the relationship would eventually be revitalized. If you are sure that you do not want to stay in a relationship, in the long run making your intentions clear is usually kinder.

Other times people use pseudo de-escalation for selfish reasons. They might want to break up, but they’re unsure. Pseudo de-escalation gives people who are uncertain about whether they want to break up time to think the decision through. This is in many ways a selfish motive that benefits the person doing the breaking up much more than the person who wants to stay together. If the person who initiated the breakup follows through and never tries to be friends or reestablish the relationship, the other person is likely to feel deceived or, as Usera (2018) said, “turn sour” (p. 13). Moreover, if they see each other again, it is likely to be awkward because the relationship ended in such a dishonest fashion (Usera, 2018).

**Unilateral and Direct Strategies**

**The Direct Dump**

The most common direct communication strategy is the simple statement that the relationship is over (Baxter, 1984; Dailey, Pfiester, et al., 2009; Thieme & Rouse, 1991). This strategy is sometimes called the open-and-honest approach, where people forthrightly communicate their desire to end the relationship (Baxter, 1982; Perras & Lustig, 1982). It has also been called the fait accompli approach (Baxter, 1979, 1984) since this tactic gives the partner no choice or chance for a response.

The way people deliver the news of an imminent breakup is important. Texting a direct dump to a partner is considered one of the least compassionate and fortunately one of the least common ways for adults to break off a relationship directly (Sprecher, Zimmerman, & Abrahams, 2010). However, the frequency of using texting to break up appears to be on the rise, as Figure 15.4 on channels teens use to break up shows; almost one third of teens report that someone broke up with them via text messages. Worse yet, 11% of teens reported that their ex broke up with them publicly on social media by doing things like changing their relationship status or posting a status update. Another 7% received a direct message on their social media, which is less personal than a text. Breaking up with someone via computer-mediated communication—such as texting that you want to break up, changing your relationship status on your profile, or blocking your partner on social media or Snapchat—is usually particularly hurtful. Communicating face-to-face shows more respect, gives both people more closure, and keeps the door open for staying friends or even reconciling in the future.

If the direct dump is delivered face-to-face, it can be an effective and ethical way of breaking up. In one study, 81% of the receivers of such messages accepted the breakup.
and offered no resistance, probably because of the perceived futility of countering such a direct message (Baxter, 1984). It is very disconcerting to receive the direct dump—
to suddenly be told that the relationship is over. This is what Kaley perceived to have
happened, when actually Noah had been trying to signal that he wanted to break up.
As the scenario between Kaley and Noah illustrates, people sometimes use the direct
dump after other, subtler strategies have failed. They can also use the direct dump in the
context of a broader discussion about the relationship, such as the negotiated farewell or
the relationship talk trick.

The Relationship Talk Trick

Some of us have felt our hearts race and our temperatures rise when we hear the
dreaded phrase “We need to talk.” Most people know that in some case these words are
a harbinger of relationship doom. There are indeed some times when people actually do
want to talk and try to fix problems, but there are other times when saying you want
to talk about the relationship is a pretext for breaking up with someone. In these cases,
people go in with their minds made up; they want to break up, but they also want it to
seem like they are giving the relationship a fair shot before doing so. They intentionally
structure the relationship talk to show that that they are better off going their separate
ways. One study demonstrated that this relationship talk trick was used in 27% of direct
breakups (Baxter, 1984). One positive aspect of this strategy is that it typically involves
more communication than avoidant strategies or the direct dump alone, so using this
strategy could give exes more closure.

Another aspect of the relationship talk trick is that it typically includes justifications for
the breakup. If you are going into “the talk” planning to end things, you are also probably
going into the talk armed with reasons for breaking up. If justifications are delivered in a
straightforward way without criticism, they can enable people to accept the relationship’s
end and achieve some level of closure. In fact, there is a relationship between the number of

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**FIGURE 15.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Channel</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Message</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fade Out</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicly on Social Media</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privately on Social Media</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages represent the percentage of teens who reported that someone broke up with them using each of the communication channels listed.

*Source: Data in this graph are from Lenhart, Anderson, and Smith (2015).*

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_Relationship talk trick:_ A breakup strategy that involves saying you want to talk about the relationship when your intention is to break up.
reasons given for a breakup and the rebuffed person’s acceptance that the relationship is over (Thieme & Rouse, 1991). Of course, if the justification focuses on the rejected individual’s faults, then hurt feelings and lowered self-esteem will follow. In contrast, when justifications focus on the initiator of the breakup and general relationship issues, more positive outcomes are likely. This does not, however, mean that people should give cliché reasons for breaking up, like saying “It’s not you, it’s me.” The best justifications are rooted in issues specific to a particular couple and how they function together.

**Positive Tone**

Sometimes unilateral breakups are accomplished using a positive tone strategy that is designed to lessen the “dumped” person’s hurt feelings and make him or her feel better about the breakup (Banks et al., 1987; Baxter, 1982; Cody, 1982; Perras & Lustig, 1982). For instance, Noah could have told Kaley that even though their relationship is over, he has no regrets about the time he spent with her. He might also have appealed to fatalism by saying things such as “It’s nobody’s fault. The timing was just wrong,” or “As much as I hoped it would work out, it just wasn’t meant to be.” These statements are somewhat cliché, so they need to be backed up by details that help explain why you think it is the case. Maybe it is nobody’s fault because you both tried but were on the rebound or were moving to different cities soon. Other times, the fairness approach is adopted. Noah might have said something like the following: “If I stayed in this relationship, it wouldn’t be fair to you. You deserve someone who loves you the way you deserve to be loved.”

Apologies and compliments can also be part of a positive tone strategy. Noah might tell Kaley that he is sorry and doesn’t want to hurt her, but his heart isn’t in the relationship anymore. He might also tell her that he still thinks she is a beautiful and intelligent woman and wishes that it could have worked out. Like some of the indirect strategies discussed earlier, one danger of using the positive tone strategy is that the person being dumped may hold on to hope that the relationship might somehow survive—or at least rebound. Thus, it is important to emphasize that the breakup is impending for this strategy to be both effective and sensitive. The positive tone strategy is evaluated as showing a high level of concern for the other person’s feeling and as providing a higher level of closure than most other strategies (T. J. Collins & Gillath, 2012). Engaging in this strategy in person rather than through technology is probably crucial since taking the time to deliver a breakup message face-to-face is also rated as the most acceptable and caring approach.

**Genuine De-Escalation**

Genuine de-escalation strategies avoid a complete breakup, at least initially, by scaling back a relationship or taking a break to figure things out. Thus, this strategy can result in “a break” rather than a breakup and is fairly common in on-again off-again relationships (Dailey, Pfiester, et al., 2009). Unlike pseudo de-escalation, these strategies are an honest attempt to improve the relationship by de-escalating it (Banks et al., 1987; Cody, 1982). Usually the de-escalator recommends relational separation temporarily or suggests that “we just be friends” (Cody, 1982)—a strategy most people, especially men, hate to hear if they are still in love. Other options include trial separation, moving out of the same living space, or spending less time together. People with an anxious attachment style are also likely to use
a strategy that keeps open the option of getting back together (T. J. Collins & Gilath, 2012). Sometimes people think if they spend time apart, they will appreciate each other more. Other times, they think they might get along if they didn’t live together.

De-escalation provides a new beginning for some relationships as couples transition from romantic partners to friends or from cohabitating to dating, but research suggests de-escalation is usually a giant step along the path of complete disengagement. Indeed, research suggests most married couples who legally separate end up getting divorced.

**Bilateral Strategies**

**The Mutual Fade Out**

Earlier we discussed the one-way fade, which involves one person intentionally distancing herself or himself from a partner to break things off. Sometimes, however, the fade out is unintentional and jointly constructed. This is typically the case for the mutual fade out. Of all the breakup strategies discussed in this chapter, the mutual fade out is the only one that is both bilateral and direct. In fact, the mutual fade isn’t usually a strategy at all; it just happens over time as people lose touch or gradually realize that they have grown apart. It is common in friendships as well as in casual relationships where two people start to lose interest and do not put effort in to keep the relationship going. In long-distance relationships, people sometimes come to feel like strangers due to the limited contact they have with one another. Words may not be necessary to end the relationship; instead, the couple may simply sense that it is over. For example, one of our students told a story of her relational breakup that went something like this:

We only saw each other a couple times since moving away from our hometown to attend different colleges. At first, we texted and FaceTimed each other all the time, but over time it all slowed down, and we seemed to have less and less to say to each other. After spending some awkward time together during Thanksgiving weekend, he drove me to the airport. When I left to board the plane, we hugged briefly, and it was clear that the relationship was not the same—it was over.

In some ways, the mutual fade out is the antithesis of catastrophic breakups. Fading away has no dramatic incident preceding the breakup but rather is a slow and gradual descent. Such breakups are often less hurtful because both people have time to process their feelings and create space before ending the relationship.

**The Blame Game**

The blame game is one of two direct bilateral strategies, both of which involve direct communication between two people who agree it is time to break up. The difference between these two ways of breaking up is that the blame game involves negative communication, whereas the negotiated farewell involves positive communication.

The blame game occurs when breaking up becomes a competitive struggle between two people. Both people typically know the relationship is not going to work, but neither wants to completely end things until they see themselves as the “winner” in the breakup. Cycles of negativity become a prevalent pattern; both partners become increasingly
dissatisfied, and the relationship is charged with negative emotion. When partners talk about their problems, they end up complaining and blaming each other rather than taking responsibility. Eventually, when they agree to break up, they argue over the reasons and blame each other for the relationship’s demise (Cody, 1982; Dailey, Rossetto, et al., 2009). Both partners may claim that the impending breakup is the other’s fault, and both may feel justified in ending the relationship.

In fact, partners use blaming so that leaving the relationship is an option that helps them both save face and gain support from people. This strategy can be beneficial in that it provides both partners with a reason to exit the relationship. However, breakups of this kind are messy, since conflict and disagreement are likely to prevail to the bitter end. These breakups can be marked by threats, blocking each other on social media, trying to get other people on your side, and making up and breaking up once or more before finally breaking up.

The Negotiated Farewell

The breakup strategy that is positive and direct is the negotiated farewell. This is a common method of relational disengagement, especially for long-term couples. The negotiated farewell involves problem solving and negotiation in an attempt to end things on a positive note (Dailey, Rossetto, et al., 2009; Emmer & Hart, 1996; Metts, 1997; Sprecher et al., 2010). Some couples may need to divide up possessions, negotiate child custody and financial issues, and determine how they can both live within a joint social network. The key to the negotiated farewell is that both parties are willing to be fair to each other during the disengagement process (in direct contrast to the attitude of those playing the blame game). The goal of the negotiated farewell is to leave the relationship on good rather than bad terms.

Relational partners report that talking through a breakup is the most commonly used strategy (Sprecher et al., 2010). This strategy is most often used when there are high levels of relational intimacy and commitment, and the partners’ interpersonal networks are overlapping (Baxter, 1982; Cody, 1982). When negotiating the breakup, couples using this strategy may also use the positive tone strategy discussed earlier. Not surprisingly, this is one of the least distressing ways to end a relationship.

THE BAD AND THE GOOD OF RELATIONSHIP ENDINGS

Losing a relational partner can be devastating. During the breakup, the world can look bleak and hopeless—especially if you did not want to end the relationship. Although the experience is often negative, most people move on with their lives and eventually find some positive outcomes associated with the loss.

Negative Outcomes of Relational Breakups

Most relational breakups are characterized by distress, and immediate reactions to breakups are negative. Partners often feel that the world is about to end, and long-term negative consequences may persist. It is not surprising then that a common reaction to
a breakup is the experience of intense negative emotion. Breakups are one of the most distressing, traumatic events we experience, particularly for the unwilling partner in the breakup. As Duck (1988) stated, “There is very little pain on earth like the pain of a long-term personal relationship that is falling apart” (p. 102). Studies have shown that depression, anger, hurt, guilt, confusion, and frustration are common feelings during a relational breakup.

In unilateral breakups, most partners experience negative emotions, regardless of whether they initiated the breakup or whether they are female or male (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009; Hebert & Popadiuk, 2008; Kurdek, 1993; L. E. Park, Sanchez, & Brynildsen, 2011; Simpson, 1987; L. Wang et al., 2015; Wilmot et al., 1985). Women who are rejected experience more sadness, confusion, and fear than men who are rejected, but men experience more overall distress (Perilloux & Buss, 2008; Wrape, Jenkins, Callahan, & Nowlin, 2016). While distress typically is greater for the victim of an unwanted breakup (Perilloux & Buss, 2008; Yildirim & Dimir, 2015), the emotional distress experienced by the initiator of the breakup should not be underestimated. Like Noah, many people feel badly about having to initiate a breakup. Initiators may feel guilt, shame, embarrassment, stress, loss of positive reputation, and ambivalence about the breakup.

Several factors predict how much distress people experience after a relational breakup. Social support from friends and economic resources can cushion the distress (Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, & Hatch, 2003; Vangelisti, 2002; Yildirim & Dimir, 2015). But continued connection and attachment to one’s ex-partner is associated with less emotional adjustment and more distress (Fagundes, 2012). People are more depressed by a breakup when their love for their partner was deep, when they were highly committed to the relationship, when their partner was physically attractive, when they didn’t want the relationship to end, when their partner did want the relationship to end, and when they brood or ruminate excessively about what went wrong in the relationship (Fagundes, 2012; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007; Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, & Vanni, 1998). Negative thoughts about the breakup, particularly self-blame, are highly associated with grief, depression, and anxiety following a breakup (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009).

Thinking about the partner also makes it difficult to get over a breakup. In fact, both positive and negative thoughts about one’s ex-partner may increase distress (Brenner & Vogel, 2015) since positive thoughts may make people long for and hang onto the past relationship. Before the advent of cell phones and social media, people did not see one another much after breaking up, which facilitated the healing process. Now many people have the opportunity (or perhaps the misfortune) to see their exes on their social media all the time. They might see pictures of them with new partners or having fun without them, or they might feel compelled to stalk their social media to see what they have been doing. Seeing these images can bring back memories and even trigger the hormones you felt when you were in love with your ex, making it more difficult to get over someone.
People who felt emotionally close to their ex, had high relational satisfaction, were in the relationship for a long time, and had little control over the breakup tend to experience high levels of distress (Frazier & Cook, 1993; Simpson, 1987; Sprecher et al., 1998). Following a breakup people find it much more difficult to pursue their personal goals (Gomillion, Murray, & Lamarche, 2015). Chapter 2 illustrated how relationships create self-expansion; during breakups, individuals who experienced the greatest self-expansion as a result of being in their relationship suffer the greatest contraction, loss of possibilities, and reduced self-esteem during a breakup (Lewandowski et al., 2006). People who define their self-worth in terms of their relationship also suffer high levels of emotional distress and are most likely to engage in obsessive pursuit of their former partner (L. E. Park et al., 2011; see Chapter 13 for a discussion of obsessive relational behavior).

The loss of a relationship often produces intense feelings of loneliness. In gay and lesbian relationships, Kurdek (1993) found loneliness was the second most common emotional reaction to a breakup. Moreover, a breakup is a double whammy: Not only have the partners lost the most significant person in their lives but they lost the person they would usually turn to for comfort following such a loss. This makes it natural for people to feel lonely after a breakup.

Interestingly, loneliness can also be a motivation for breaking off a relationship. As discussed previously, people sometimes initiate breakups because they are dissatisfied or bored with their relationships. They long for the connection they felt early in their relationships when they were first getting to know each other and everything was exciting and new. Breaking away from an old relationship and wanting to be free to search for a new one that better fulfills one’s needs is often an impetus for breakup. Indeed, one reason for divorce is the hope of finding a happier relationship, and most divorced people do remarry.

Breakups and divorces can also threaten people’s health. Divorced people have a higher incidence of heart problems, cancer, liver disease, pneumonia, and a host of other diseases (Argyle & Henderson, 1988). Divorce has also been linked to a variety of emotional and physical disorders, psychiatric illness, suicide, excessive drinking, weight gain, and interpersonal violence (S. S. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992; L. Wang et al., 2015). The breakup of dating relationships can also lead to psychological stress. Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, and Lewinsohn (1999) found that relational breakups were predictive of the onset of a major depressive disorder during adolescence. Najib, Lorberbaum, Kose, Bohning, and George (2004) documented changes in brain activity after a romantic relationship breakup consistent with the pattern associated with chronic depression. Similarly, the death of a partner can affect the grieving person’s physical health. When people are depressed, stressed, or grieving, their bodies may be more susceptible to physical ailments, such as ulcers, heart problems, and even the common cold.

**Positive Outcomes of Relational Breakups**

Despite the trauma associated with breakups, it is not unusual for one or both partners to actually have positive feelings about a separation (Wilmot et al., 1985). One of the most common outcomes in Kurdek’s (1993) study of gay and lesbian relationships was increased happiness following the breakup. Indeed, it is often a relief to be out of a toxic, dangerous, or boring relationship. Sometimes a breakup can provide relief from relational ambiguity.
or conflict. Not infrequently, a person moves on to a more satisfying relationship following a breakup. Kurdek (1993) found that relief from conflict was one of the most common outcomes of separation in gay and lesbian relationships, with personal growth mentioned most commonly. Of course, some relationships continue to be problematic after the breakup, especially if one person cannot let go. For example, in our opening scenario, Kaley leaves pleading messages on Noah’s answering machine. Such messages are highly unlikely to change the situation. Instead, they make Noah feel guiltier and Kaley feel even worse about herself.

One positive outcome of breakups is the personal growth that can occur in the relationship’s aftermath (Hebert & Popadiuk, 2008; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Several kinds of post-breakup growth have been identified, including personal positives, such as increased self-confidence and being able to handle life on one’s own; relational positives, such as having learned how to communicate in a relationship and the importance of not jumping into a relationship too quickly; environmental positives, such as concentrating more on school or work or relying on friendship networks more; and future positives, such as knowing what you want in your next long-term relational partner (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Eventually, Kaley may experience some of these benefits following her breakup. She may learn that she can cope temporarily without a romantic partner, and perhaps she’ll devote more time to other activities that she finds personally rewarding.

Ending any relationship—especially a bad relationship—also represents an opportunity to form a new relationship. In contrast to conventional wisdom suggesting that rebound relationships are always doomed to failure, some studies have found that people who rebounded into a new relationship after a romantic breakup had greater personal adjustment, more confidence in their desirability, and more resolution over their relationship with their ex-partner; moreover, the quicker they began new relationships the greater their psychological and relational health (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2015; Yildirim & Dimir, 2015). The key is probably to stay open to new relationships but not rush into one to try and get over your ex.

Perhaps the biggest key to recovering from a breakup is to make it a learning experience. One reason indirect strategies such as ghosting, the one-way fade, third party manipulation, and pseudo de-escalation are problematic is that they leave the partner feeling uncertain about what happened. Being sure of the reason for the breakup eases the breakup adjustment (Yildirim & Dimir, 2015). When people have trouble making sense of a breakup, they are also less likely to learn from it. Those who understand the reasons for the breakup have stronger relationships in the future, as judged by both themselves and their friends (Kansky & Allen, 2018; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). However, even if you cannot figure out what went wrong, there are still lessons to be learned from a breakup. For example, even if Kayla never fully understands what went wrong with Noah, by moving forward and concentrating on self-improvement and her relationships with friends and family, Kayla will learn that she is a strong woman who can handle difficult life experiences. This realization can help her emerge from the aftermath of the breakup as a better and even more confident person.

It is important for Kayla and other individuals going through breakups to remember that the deep positive and negative feelings we experience in our relationships are connected: There are no highs without lows. The fact that relationships end, often painfully, prevents some people from wanting to develop new close relationships. But by denying yourself the opportunity to feel both the joys and the sorrows of relationships, you miss an important secret of life: Not feeling anything at all is worse than feeling bad.
SUMMARY AND APPLICATION

Relationships end for many reasons. Sometimes people consciously choose to take their lives in a new direction. Other times relationships wither away, partners physically separate due to school or careers, or death occurs. In each case, coping with the loss of a significant relationship is difficult. Both Kaley and Noah feel badly that their relationship has ended. Noah is likely to feel guilty since he initiated the breakup, but he may also feel relief because Kaley finally got the message that the relationship is over. Kaley will likely have a more difficult time, partly because the breakup seemed sudden to her. Seeking social support from friends like Aaliyah is a first step toward understanding the breakup and moving forward.

Understanding why a breakup occurred can also be helpful. Researchers have identified specific reasons for relationship breakups. Often, communication is the culprit. Avoidance, negative communication, and lack of openness are common communication problems that cause breakups. Gottman’s research shows that stonewalling (or avoidance) is a strong harbinger of divorce. Kaley or Noah may have noticed some of these communication patterns in their relationship. If they had worked on their communication, it is possible (although not certain) that their relationship could have improved.

The way people communicate, or do not communicate, during breakups can have a big impact on whether people can move on and feel good about themselves. Direct strategies are usually preferred, especially if they include positive communication and occur in a face-to-face setting. Strategies such as ghosting, the one-way fade, and pseudo de-escalation can leave people feeling uncertain about what went wrong. Ending relationships through social media or texting are usually seen as disrespectful, especially for people who have a history together either as friends or romantic partners. Engaging in the blame game, by trying to one-up each other, take control of the breakup, and feel blameless, can also have lasting negative effects.

Thus, the best way for Noah to break up may have been to use the positive tone strategy. He could have told Kaley their relationship meant a lot to him, complimented her, and told her how sorry he was that it wasn’t going to work out. Of course, for this strategy to be effective, Noah would need to communicate his desire to break off the relationship—despite his positive regard for her—very clearly. He should also avoid using clichés and focus instead on the specific aspects of their unique relationship that he valued, as well as the aspects that made him conclude that it was not going to work out. Direct, definitive statements delivered with a positive tone may be the best strategy when breakups are unilateral. The negotiated farewell is the optimal strategy when breakups are bilateral. Such strategies allow a person to get over the breakup more quickly, which opens up the possibility of finding new partners and exploring uncharted relational territory.

KEY TERMS

blame game (p. 478)  in intrapsychic processes phase (p. 466)  relationship disillusionment (p. 459)
catastrophe theory (p. 466)  chronic dissatisfaction (p. 459)  relationship talk trick (p. 476)
cost escalation (p. 473)  dyadic processes phase (p. 466)  resurrection processes phase (p. 468)
genuine de-escalation (p. 477)  ghosting (p. 470)  social processes phase (p. 467)
grave-dressing processes phase (p. 467)  mutual fade out (p. 478)  third party manipulation (p. 473)
mutual fade out (p. 478)  negotiated farewell (p. 479)  one-way fade (p. 472)
physical abuse (p. 465)  positive tone strategy (p. 477)  psychological abuse (p. 465)
pseudo de-escalation (p. 475)
DISCUSSION BOARD QUESTIONS

1. How does cell phone communication—such as texting, Snapchat, and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—influence the process of breaking up with someone? Based on your experiences and those of your friends, what do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of (a) breaking up with someone using these kinds of communication, and (b) deleting or blocking someone from your social media after a breakup?

2. Of the specific breakup strategies mentioned in this chapter, which do you think are the least pleasant or ethical, and why? Describe the most positive way that you think someone can initiate a unilateral breakup. Be specific in terms of what you might say or do.

3. How might you help a friend get over a relationship breakup?

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Accidental communication: Occurs when a message is unintentionally sent but the receiver nonetheless observes the behavior and interprets it correctly.

Accommodation principle: Occurs when people are able to overcome the initial tendency to retaliate in response to negative behavior and instead engage in cooperative communication to maintain their relationship.

Acquiescent responses: Responses that involve giving in and acknowledging that the partner hurt you.

Active verbal responses: Responses that focus on confronting the partner about her or his hurtful remarks; they can be positive or negative.

Aesthetic moment: A concept in relational dialectic theory that refers to transformative moments that profoundly change the meanings associated with discourses by showing how those meanings combine in a new and seamless way.

Affection exchange theory: A theory that is based on the idea that affectionate communication is a biologically adaptive behavior that evolved because it helps people provide and obtain valuable resources necessary for survival.

Affectionate communication: Behavior that portrays feelings of fondness and positive regard for another.

Agape: One of Lee’s secondary love styles. Based on a combination of eros and storge, it involves having a compassionate style of love that revolves around caring, concern, and tenderness and is more focused on giving than receiving.

Agency: An empowering aspect of experience where a person is able to freely control the surrounding environment, including social interactions and relationships.

Agentic friendships: Friendships that focus mostly on companionship and shared activities (especially applicable to male friendships).

Androgynous: Displaying a mix of feminine and masculine behaviors and beliefs.

Antagonistic strategies: Communication that attempts to blame, hurt, insult, or berate a partner in an effort to gain compliance (also called distributive communication).

Antisocial acts, as a sexual initiation strategy: Tactics such as intentionally trying to make the partner jealous, pouting, holding a grudge, and/or sexually harassing someone.

Antisocial communication: Communication that is hostile or disruptive to a relationship.

Anxious-ambivalent attachment style: A social interaction style where someone tends to be overinvolved, demanding, and dependent on their partner; someone who uses this style tends to value relational closeness over autonomy.

Argumentativeness: A communication style that focuses on logical argument and reasoning. People with argumentative styles confront conflict directly by recognizing issues of disagreement, taking positions on controversial issues, backing up claims with evidence and reasoning, and refuting views contrary to their own.

Assurances: A maintenance behavior that involves making statements that show commitment to the relationship, such as talking about the partners’ future together.

Attachment styles: Social interaction styles that reflect the kind of bond an individual has with someone, based on how positively or negatively individuals view themselves and others.

Attachment theory: A social-developmental approach that helps account for how interactions between children and their caregivers initially shape people’s attachment styles and, as a result, how they communicate in relationships across the life span.

Attempted communication: When someone sends an intentional message that the intended receiver fails to receive.

Attention stage: The first stage of the courtship process. Involves getting someone’s attention, often by using shy and ambiguous behavior, such as fleeting eye contact and tentative smiling.

Attraction: A motivated state in which an individual is predisposed to think, feel, and usually behave in a positive manner toward another person.
Attractiveness deception: A form of online identity enhancement where people lie about their physical characteristics to seem more attractive.

Attribution: A perceptual process of assigning reasons or causes to one’s own behavior or that of others.

Authorized co-owners: Confidants with responsibility to keep shared information to themselves unless given permission to do otherwise (also known as “boundary insiders”).

Aversive stimulation: Also called negative affect strategy, involves whining, pouting, sulking, complaining, crying, or acting angry to get one’s way.

Avoidance: A strategy intended to distance oneself from someone or not engage in a particular topic. Examples include intentionally choosing not to bring up a particular topic, physically withdrawing from someone, giving someone the silent treatment, ignoring someone, or limiting communication with someone.

Avoidant attachment style: A social interaction style where the person is uncomfortable getting close to or depending on others. Children with avoidant attachment styles engage in limited social interaction. Adults with avoidant attachment styles value autonomy over relational closeness.

Avoiding: An indirect conflict style that is neither inherently cooperative nor inherently uncooperative, and involves tactics such as avoiding a topic, changing the subject, or agreeing to disagree.


Bald on-record strategy: Communication strategy that involves primary attention to task through direct communication, with little or no attention to helping the partner save face.

Bargaining strategy: Agreeing to do something for someone if the person does something in return.

Behavioral familiarity: Having knowledge of the partner’s typical communication style.

Behavioral interdependence: One person’s behavior affects another person’s behavior, beliefs, or emotions, and vice versa. The basic requirement for all relationships.

Blame game: A breakup strategy that involves blaming the partner for the problems in the relationship.

Body synchrony: High levels of coordinated movement between close friends or intimate couples.

Boomerang effects: When persuasion attempts backfire, resulting in receivers changing their attitude or behavior in the opposite direction from what the persuader intended.

Boundary structures: Rules that guide who has access to and can share private information.

Boundary turbulence: Occurs when information that was intended to be private goes public so that old boundary structures need to be fortified or renegotiated.

Breadth: The number of topics about which people feel free to disclose.

Broadcasters: When referring to how people communicate via social networking sites, this term refers to people who primarily use sites such as Facebook and Twitter to send one-to-many messages (or announcements) rather than using these sites to interact with others in a back-and-forth fashion.

Bullying: Blaming, hurting, insulting, ridiculing, or berating another person.

Button pushing: Purposely saying or doing something you know will be especially hurtful or upsetting to a friend or partner.

Capitalized on transition, as a type of on-again off-again relationship: Couples in on-again off-again relationships who get back together after doing things to improve their relationship, such as reflecting about problems, sorting out feelings, improving themselves, or getting the partner to change.

Catastrophe theory: An alternative to the stage models of relational disengagement that suggests that some relationships occur suddenly after a catastrophic event such as infidelity or deception.

Centripetal-centrifugal struggle: In relational dialectics theory, the tension between commonly accepted (centripetal) and less commonly accepted (centrifugal) discourses.

Chemical attraction: Attraction that is fueled by chemical changes in the brain, such as changes in levels of oxytocin.

Chilling effect: Occurs when a less powerful person stays silent on an issue or avoids engaging someone in conflict because of the possible negative consequences associated with speaking up, such as having the more powerful person become aggressive or leave the relationship.

Chronemics: The nonverbal use of time, such as showing up for a date early or late or waiting a long or short time for someone.
Chronic dissatisfaction: Partners being continuously dissatisfied with their relationship, making them more likely to seek happiness elsewhere.

Close relationship: Two people in an interpersonal relationship characterized by enduring bonds, emotional attachment, and personal need fulfilment.

Cognitive schemata: Templates or knowledge structures that people use to help them evaluate behavior as appropriate or inappropriate, and welcome or unwelcome.

Cognitive valence theory (CVT): A theory that predicts how and why people respond to increases in immediacy.

Collaborating: A direct and cooperative conflict style that involves creative problem solving and finding new solutions that meet both parties’ needs.

Communication inefficacy: When people believe that they don’t have the communication skills to bring up a topic or maintain discussion in a competent and effective manner.

Communication privacy management: A theory that helps explain how and why individuals maintain privacy boundaries. The theory focuses on control over information as a central aspect of disclosure decisions.

Communication theory of identity: A theory that focuses on how identities are managed. Identity construction can be viewed through four frames of identity (personal, enactment, relationship, and communal).

Communicative infidelity: Engaging in sexual activity with a third party to communicate a message to one’s partner (e.g., to make them jealous, to get revenge).

Companionate love: Also called friendship love, it is based on high levels of intimacy and commitment but comparatively low levels of passion.

Comparison level: How one’s relationship compares to expectations about the kinds of outcomes a person thinks he or she should receive in a relationship.

Compensatory restoration: A constructive communicative response to jealousy aimed at improving the primary relationship or oneself in an effort to show one’s partner how the relationship is compared to the rival relationship.

Competence face: A type of positive face that refers to presenting oneself as having positive characteristics such as intelligence, sensitivity, and honesty.

Competitive fighting: A direct and uncooperative conflict style that often involves using verbally aggressive behaviors such as name-calling.

Competitive symmetry: When two people repeatedly use one-up power moves in conversation.

Complaints: Communication about a specific behavior or behaviors that a person finds annoying or problematic.

Complementarity: Differences or opposite qualities in behavior, attitudes, or values between two people in a relationship.

Compelling: When discussed in relation to attraction, this is when two people possess different or opposite traits that work together well.

Compliance-gaining strategies: Strategies that are intended to influence others to comply with a request.

Compromising: A direct and moderately cooperative conflict style that involves giving up some things you want to get other things you want.

Concealment: A form of deception that involves omitting information one knows is important or relevant to a given context.

Conflict: A disagreement between two interdependent people who perceive that they have incompatible goals.

Connection-autonomy: Dialectical tension that focuses on how people struggle between their need for closeness and their need for distance (or independence) in their relationship.

Consummate love: The most complete form of love based on intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Contempt: Communication that conveys an air of superiority and often conveys a lack of respect. One of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Content level: This part of a message conveys information at a literal level. “What are we doing tonight?” is a question about tonight’s activities at the content level.

Controlling, as a type of on-again off-again relationship: Relationship where one partner consistently wants the relationship and the other partner (who controls the trajectory of the relationship) goes back and forth between wanting and not wanting the relationship.

Conventionality-uniqueness: This dialectical tension focuses on how people communicate in ways that show consistency or inconsistency with the larger social group.

Conversational control: An individual’s ability to manage a conversation by doing things such as regulating who talks and how long the interaction will last.
Corrective facework: Efforts to repair an identity damaged by something that was said or done.

Cost escalation: A breakup strategy that involves attempting to make the relationship unattractive to one’s partner so the partner will initiate a breakup.

Costs: Exchanged resources that result in a loss or punishment.

Counter-jealousy induction: A communicative response to jealousy that involves taking action to make the partner feel jealous too, such as flirting with someone else.

Courtship readiness stage: Also called the recognition stage, this is the second stage in the courtship process where one person typically approaches the other. Both parties often use timid or ambiguous behaviors as they try to gauge the other person’s interest level.

Criticisms: Personal attacks that blame someone else for a problem.

Cultural scripts: Communication routines that arise from cultural practices and are typically done automatically without thought.

Cyber-emigrant relationships: Partners who first meet in person but then communicate primarily online.

Cycle: In relational dialectics theory, a way of managing dialectical tensions that involves moving from one side of a dialectic to the other alternately.

Deception: Intentionally managing verbal and/or nonverbal messages so that a receiver will believe or understand something in a way that the sender knows is false.

Decide not to engage in the face-threatening act: Avoiding the topic so that a potential receiver’s face is not threatened.

Defensiveness: Communication designed to defend oneself against attacks by deflecting blame to someone or something else; one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Demand-withdraw interaction pattern: See demand-withdrawal pattern.

Demand-withdrawal pattern: Also called a demand-withdraw interaction pattern. Occurs when one person wants to engage in conflict or demands change, whereas the other partner wants to avoid the topic and/or the demanding person and maintain the status quo.

Denial, as a communicative response to jealousy: Pretending not to be jealous or falsely denying feeling jealous.

Dependence power: Reliance on a relationship or partner for power, with people who are dependent on their relationship for power having lower status than people who are not.

Depth: The extent to which self-disclosure is highly intimate or personal.

Derogating competitors: A communicative response to jealousy designed to cast the rival in a bad light, such as making mean comments about a rival.

Destiny beliefs: People’s belief that they and their romantic partner are meant for each other and that first impressions about that destiny are fixed and enduring (in contrast to growth beliefs).

Devaluation: Feelings of being unappreciated and unimportant, leading to hurt feelings.

Dialectical oppositions: In relational dialectics theory, discourses that have seemingly opposing or contradictory meanings.

Dialectics theory: A theory that examines how people interpret and respond to competing discourses in their relationships.

Digital natives: Individuals who grew up with smartphones; a term often associated with Generation Z.

Direct emotional expressions: Directly and unambiguously expressing feelings by using phrases such as “I love you” and “You make me happy” when expressing affection.

Direct request: Simply asking for something.

Disclosure-liking hypothesis: The more we disclose to someone, the more we start to like that person.

Discourse: In relational dialectics theory, a system of meaning.

Discursive mixture: In relational dialectics theory, when two discourses are combined to create new meaning.

Discursive struggle: In relational dialectics theory, the struggle between two competing discourses (or systems of meaning).

Dismissive attachment style: An attachment style based on positive models of self and negative models of others. With this style, autonomy is valued over closeness in relationships.

Display rules: Manipulation and control of emotional expressions such as pretending you understood someone, hiding your anger or sorrow from others, and putting on a happy face when you are sad.
Disqualification: A strategy for managing dialectical tensions that involves being ambiguous so that neither side of the dialectic is engaged. This strategy is a form of neutralization.

Distance decay: The farther you live from someone, the less likely you are to develop a relationship.

Distress-maintaining attributions: Negative behavior is attributed to causes that are internal, stable, and global.

Distributive strategies: People attempt to blame, hurt, insult, or berate their partner in an effort to gain compliance or win an argument.

Dominance: The display or expression of power through behavior.

Double-shot hypothesis: An alternative explanation (to the evolutionary hypothesis) for why men get more upset in response to sexual infidelity and women get more upset in response to emotional infidelity. Based on the idea that men assume that women are emotionally connected to men with whom they have sex and women assume that men would like to have (or are having) sex with women to whom they are emotionally attached.

Drama: In the context of social media, drama is interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience.

Dramaturgical perspective: A perspective suggesting that the world is a stage, people are actors, and we enact performances geared for particular audiences, with performances enacted to advance beneficial images of ourselves.

Duration: How long people engage in self-disclosure or personal conversation with someone.

Dyadic effect: A reciprocal pattern of self-disclosure that occurs when a person reveals information and his or her partner responds by offering information that is at a similar level of intimacy.

Dyadic power theory: The idea that most dominance is displayed by people in equal power positions as they deal with conflict and struggle for control.

Dyadic processes phase: The third phase in the relational dissolution process. These processes focus on how a couple deals with issues that are causing dissatisfaction in their relationship, and can include conflict, avoidance, and/or problem solving.

Egalitarian marriage: A relationship where both spouses are employed, both are actively involved in parenting, and both share in the responsibilities and duties of the household.

Emotional attachment: The feeling in close relationships of being emotionally connected to someone, where the relationship is a primary source of one’s emotions.

Emotional closeness: Having a sense of shared feelings, experiences, trust, enjoyment, concern, and caring in a relationship.

Emotional flooding: Occurs when people become surprised, overwhelmed, and disorganized by their partner’s expressions of negative emotion during a conflict situation, causing them to feel high levels of arousal that can inhibit effective conflict management.

Emotional infidelity: Emotional involvement with another person to the extent that emotional resources such as romantic love, time, and attention are diverted to that person rather than to one’s primary partner.

Emotional insensitivity: When a person fails to tune in to the emotions or feelings of other people.

Emotional labor: A term that describes the effort it takes to show a different emotion than the one being felt. It is generally used to describe that effort in the context of jobs that require manipulation of emotion expression (e.g., servers, first responders).

Emotional support: Helping someone feel better without necessarily trying to solve the problem.

Empty love: Love based on commitment alone rather than on intimacy and passion.

Empty threats: Threatening to do something (like break up with your partner) that you do not really intend to do.

Envy: Wanting something you value that someone else has.

Equality: The belief that resources should be distributed equally among people regardless of their contributions.

Equity: When two people are getting a fair deal in terms of the benefits and costs they are getting as a result of being in a relationship with each other.

Equity theory: A relational perspective for determining whether the distribution of resources is fair to both relational partners.

Equivocation: A deceptive form of communication that involves making an indirect ambiguous statement, such as saying that your friend’s new hairstyle (that
you hate) is the “latest fashion” when you are asked if you like it.

**Eros**: One of Lee’s primary love styles. Also called romantic love or passionate love, it is rooted in feelings of affection, attraction, and sexual desire.

**Esteem support**: Used to bolster someone’s self-worth by making the person feel valued, admired, and capable.

**Evolutionary hypothesis for infidelity**: Men should get more upset over sexual infidelity than emotional infidelity, whereas women should get more upset over emotional infidelity than sexual infidelity, because men and women have different priorities related to mating and parenting (men are concerned with paternal certainty; women are concerned with keeping valued resources).

**Exaggeration**: A form of deception that involves stretching the truth, often to make oneself look better or to spice up a story.

**Excitation transfer**: Occurs when emotions caused by one event spill over onto and influence the evaluation of a second event that occurs very soon thereafter.

**Excuses**: Minimizing responsibility for negative behavior by focusing on the inability to control one’s own actions or by shifting the blame to others.

**Exit, as a coping strategy**: Active, destructive behaviors that are used to decrease closeness or end a relationship.

**Expectancy violation**: Behavior that differs from what was expected.

**Expectancy violations theory**: A theory that predicts how people will react to unexpected interpersonal behavior based on social norms, expectations, and the reward value of other communicators.

**Expressions of emotional and physical closeness, as a sexual initiation strategy**: Displaying love, affection, and emotional closeness as a way to initiate sexual activity with someone.

**Expressive friendships**: Close relationships that involve using emotional nonverbal and verbal communication during conversations, showing nonverbal affection, and having deep conversations (especially applicable to female friendships).

**Extrinsic investments**: Resources or benefits that are developed over time as a result of being in a relationship, such as material possessions, enmeshment within a common social system, and an identity that is attached to being in a relationship.

**Face-threatening acts**: Behaviors that detract from an individual’s identity by threatening either that person’s positive or negative face desires.

**Face-validating acts**: Behavior that supports an individual’s desired image.

**Facework**: The attempt to maintain our identity and support the identity of other people.

**Failed transition**: Friends-with-benefits relationship where one or both partners enter the arrangement with the intention of eventually becoming a couple; instead they do not move beyond being friends with benefits.

**Fatal attraction**: When the very qualities that draw us to someone eventually contribute to relational breakup.

**Fatuous love**: A type of love characterized by commitment and passion without intimacy.

**Fearful attachment style**: An attachment style based on negative models of self and negative models of others. People with this style want to have close relationships, but they are afraid that if they get too close to someone they will get hurt.

**Fellowship face**: A type of positive face that involves wanting to be included and accepted by others.

**Fever model of self-disclosure**: When people are distressed about a problem or think about a problem a lot, they are especially likely to reveal their thoughts and feelings or to tell a secret.

**Flaming**: Hostile expression of emotions online through means such as swearing, insulting, and name-calling.

**Forgiveness**: A relational process that has four characteristics: (1) acknowledgment of harmful conduct, (2) an extension of undeserved mercy, (3) an emotional transformation, and (4) relationship renegotiation.

**Four horsemen of the apocalypse**: A destructive conflict pattern that includes the following four behaviors: (1) complaints/criticisms, (2) contempt/disgust, (3) defensiveness, and (4) stonewalling.

**Frequency**: As a dimension of self-disclosure, this refers to how often people self-disclose.

**Friends with benefits**: Friends or acquaintances who decide to have a sexual relationship but not be a romantic couple.

**Friendship love**: Love based on intimacy and commitment that has little passion.
**Friends-with-benefits relationship:** A sexual but non-romantic relationship between friends or acquaintances.

**Fundamental relational themes:** Messages that reflect the nature of a relationship, such as dominance/submission, intimacy, degree of similarity, task/social orientation, formality/formality, social composure, and emotional activation.

**Futility of discussion:** A motive for topic avoidance that involves believing it is pointless to talk about something.

**General equity:** An overall assessment that two people’s benefits and contributions are balanced.

**Generation X:** The generation born in the United States between 1965 and 1980.

**Generation Z:** The generation born in the United States between 1997 and 2016, who grew up immersed in communication technologies powered by smartphones.

**Generational identity:** A type of identity that reflects common ways that cohorts of people growing up at certain times in history see themselves.

**Genuine de-escalation:** A breakup strategy that involves decreasing relational closeness while avoiding a complete breakup by engaging in strategies such as taking a break but not breaking up.

**Ghosting:** A term that refers to stopping all contact (e.g., texting, snapping, seeing each other) as a way to break up or signal that one is no longer interested in someone.

**Goal-linking:** Being with a particular person is linked to more general life goals, such as happiness; makes a relationship more desirable.

**Going off-record strategy:** A strategy that involves giving primary attention to face and little attention to task.

**Gradual separators, as a type of on-again off-again relationship:** Couples that grow farther apart from one another during their “off” phases so that the relationship fades out over time as the “on” periods get shorter.

**Grave-dressing processes phase:** The fourth stage of the relational dissolution process. Involves the public presentation of the breakup; often includes communication that helps people save face.

**Greatest Generation:** Generation of people born in the United States between 1910 and 1928.

**Growth beliefs:** Beliefs that impressions of others and attractions to others evolve over time and that people and relationships grow when faced with challenges (in contrast to destiny beliefs).

**Gunnysacking:** Occurs when people store up old grievances and then dump them on their partner during a conflict.

**Habitual, as a type of on-again off-again relationship:** Couples who break up and get back together without thinking much about what happened during transitions. Instead, they fall into old habits because the relationship is comfortable, easy, and convenient.

**Haptics:** The study of the use of touch, ranging from affectionate to violent touch.

**High outcome value:** A judgment that someone is highly rewarding and a relationship with that person would be a positive experience.

**Hinting:** An influence strategy, also called an indirect request, that involves implying a request without ever coming out and stating it [see also Hinting and indirect strategies, as a sexual initiation strategy].

**Hinting and indirect strategies, as a sexual initiation strategy:** Indirect communication such as compliments, sexual innuendo, hints, and nonverbal communication that shows interest in engaging in sexual activity.

**Homophily:** The technical term for being very similar to someone.

**Hookups:** Sexual activity, ranging from making out to having sex, without commitment.

**Hurtful messages:** Words that elicit psychological pain.

**Hybrid:** In relational dialectics theory, a type of discursive mixture where two discourses are put together to create something that is new but can still be separated out.

**Hyperaccessibility:** When particular memories are especially accessible to us, or when they are at the tip of our thoughts. This typically occurs in the context of secrets when, in certain contexts, the information in those secrets becomes hyperaccessible.

**Hyperintimacy:** Sending repeated and unwanted messages of interest and affection.

**Hypercotonal model:** A theory that people develop stronger impressions of one another in mediated contexts compared to face-to-face contexts because they
overly on the limited, mostly verbal, information that they exchange.

**Idealization:** A distorted perception that involves describing one’s relationship and partner in glowing and overly positive terms that sometimes reflect unrealistic expectations.

**Idealization effect:** According to this hypothesis, people who communicate exclusively online for an extended period of time tend to idealize one another and have high expectations about what their relationship would be like if they were to interact in person, which can lead to disappointment when they communicate face-to-face and are able to make more realistic assessments.

**Identity:** The person we think we are and the self we communicate to others.

**Identity management:** The process people use to project and maintain a positive image to others.

**Ideologies:** Collections of beliefs, values, and expectations about life, including love.

**Idiomatic behaviors:** Behaviors that have a specific meaning only to people within a particular relationship.

**Illicit ingratiations:** When a person acts nice merely to gain compliance.

**Immediacy behaviors:** Actions that signal warmth, communicate availability, decrease psychological or physical distance, and promote involvement between people.

**Implicit egotism:** The concept that we are attracted to others based on similarity on arbitrary things, such as names and birthdates.

**Inclusion-seclusion:** A dialectical tension that is expressed when dyads communicate in ways that stress the importance of spending time with other people but also spending time alone with each other.

**Indirect fighting:** An indirect and uncooperative conflict style that involves using passive-aggressive behaviors such as rolling one’s eyes or pulling away from one’s partner.

**Indirect requests:** An implied influence attempt that involves suggesting or hinting without ever making a direct request.

**Individual secrets:** Confidences where information is held by a single individual and kept secret from others.

**Inequity:** An imbalanced relationship in terms of the benefits each person is getting and costs each person is paying, such that one person is getting a better deal than the other (i.e., more benefits, lower costs, or both).

**Infatuation:** A form of incomplete love based on passion only.

**Influence:** The ability to persuade others to think and act in certain ways.

**Influence strategies:** Specific behaviors that people use to try to get others to think and/or act in certain ways.

**Informational familiarity:** Knowing certain information about your relational partner, such as your partner’s age or educational background, preventing your partner from being able to lie to you about those things.

**Informational support:** Giving specific advice, including facts and information that might help someone solve a problem.

**Ingratiation:** Using excessive kindness or doing favors for someone to gain popularity or get one’s way.

**Instrumental goals:** Goals related to tasks, such as making money, getting good grades, buying a car, getting a ride to school, and completing a homework assignment.

**Integrative communication:** A style of communication that is direct and nonaggressive and typically involves problem solving; has been used to describe a communicative response to jealousy as well as a conflict strategy and a way of responding to dissatisfying events in a relationship.

**Intensification effect:** The idea that personal self-disclosure produces more powerful feelings of closeness and liking in computer-mediated contexts than in face-to-face interaction.

**Intentional transition in, as a type of friends-with-benefits relationship:** Relationship where partners who start out in a friends-with-benefits relationship intend to become a couple and then actually do.

**Interaction appearance theory:** The perspective that explains why people perceive others as more physically attractive if they have warm, positive interactions with them.

**Interactors:** When used to describe a type of user of a social networking site, this term refers to people who use sites such as Twitter and Facebook primarily to interact and connect with friends and acquaintances on a reciprocal basis and to establish close relationships.
**Internal working models**: Cognitive representations of oneself and potential partners that reflect an individual’s past experiences in close relationships and that help that individual understand the world.

**Interpersonal communication**: The exchange of nonverbal and/or verbal messages between two people, regardless of the relationship they share (a broader term than *relational communication*).

**Interpersonal relationship**: A connection between two people who share repeated interactions over time, can influence one another, and who have unique interaction patterns.

**Interpersonal valence**: The degree to which someone is considered attractive and rewarding.

**Intimacy**: The part of relationships based on feelings of emotional connection and closeness and has been called the warm part of love.

**Intimate terrorism**: A strategic, enduring pattern that involves using violence to control a partner.

**Intrafamily secrets**: Confidences where some family members have information they keep from other family members.

**Intrapsychic processes phase**: The first phase of the dissolution model. Involves thinking about the positive and negative aspects of a relationship to evaluate whether you want to stay in it or possibly break up.

**Intrinsic investments**: Resources that are put directly into the relationship, including time, effort, affection, and disclosure.

**Investment model of relationship-maintaining behavior**: The perspective that commitment leads people to use behaviors that help them maintain their relationships even when problems or dissatisfaction occur. This model is an extension of the original investment model, which focuses on how satisfaction, investments, and alternatives predict commitment.

**Investments**: Resources tied to a relationship that would decline in value or be lost if the relationship were to end.

**Invisible support phenomenon**: The idea that attempts at support that go unnoticed by recipients are the most effective in reducing distress and promoting good health.

**Invitations and sexual arousal stage**: The fourth stage in the courtship process. In this stage partners focus on showing sexual attraction to one another, often by subtle touch and sexual contact.

**Invulnerable responses**: Responses that involve acting unaffected by something, such as acting like a hurtful remark did not bother you.

**Irreplaceability**: The perception that a person has a special place in your thoughts and emotions, as well as in your social network, such that no one else can take that person’s place. Irreplaceability helps distinguish close relationships from other types of relationships.

**Isolated common couple violence**: Inappropriate physical aggression that occurs on rare occasions in a relationship when conflicts become especially heated.

**Jealousy**: Thoughts and feelings about losing something you value, such as a good relationship, due to interference from a rival.

**Jealousy induction**: Intentionally trying to make your partner jealous.

**Just sex, as a type of friends-with-benefits relationship**: Sexual partners whose interaction revolves almost exclusively around planning and having sex without any real emotional connection.

**Justifications**: When used as a remedial strategy, this involves trying to minimize the negative implications of your actions by denying your behavior was wrong or saying that what you did isn’t that bad.

**Kinesics**: Body movement including facial expressions and eye behavior, such as posture, gestures, walking style, smiling, and pupil dilation, among other related cues.

**Kitchen sinking**: When people rehash old arguments when they get into a new argument so that there are too many issues to deal with at once.

**Language of acts of service**: This love language involves helping with necessary tasks by doing things such as helping with housework and running errands for one’s partner.

**Language of affirmation and support**: This love language involves being encouraging, supportive, and complimentary.

**Language of gifts and tokens of affection**: This love language involves giving gifts and doing special things for one’s partner.

**Language of physical touch**: This love language involves communicating love mainly through physical contact.

**Language of time together**: This love language involves spending time together talking and participating in shared activities.
**Latent intimacy:** Internal feelings of closeness and interpersonal warmth that are not directly observable by others.

**Lies:** Made-up information or information that is the opposite of (or at least very different from) the truth. Lies are also called *falsifications* or *fabrications*.

**Liking:** A feeling or connection characterized by affection and respect. According to the triangular theory of love, liking occurs when people experience high levels of intimacy and low levels of commitment and passion.

**Logic and reasoning, as a sexual initiation strategy:** Persuading someone that it is advantageous and/or safe to become sexually involved.

**Logistical talk:** Superficial talk revolving around the logistics of things, such as who will pick up dinner or pay the electric bill.

**Love languages:** Five languages that represent preferred ways of communicating and receiving love.

**Love ways:** The seven categories of physiological and behavioral responses to love, created by Marston and colleagues, which represents the experiences of over 90% of lovers.

**Low outcome value:** A judgment that someone is more costly than rewarding and a relationship with that person would be a negative experience.

**Loyalty, as a coping strategy:** Passive, constructive behaviors that involve waiting for positive change by hoping that things will improve, standing by the partner during difficult times, and supporting the partner in the face of criticism.

**Ludus:** One of Lee's primary love styles, also called *game-playing love*. Ludus is based on having low levels of commitment and seeing relationships as fun, playful, and casual.

**Magic ratio:** The 5-to-1 ratio that John Gottman found happy couples to have in terms of positive to negative behaviors.

**Mania:** One of Lee's secondary love styles, based on a combination of eros and ludus. Mania involves having a possessive style of loving.

**Manifest intimacy:** External manifestations of closeness and affection that involve communication, such as hugging or kissing.

**Manipulation:** A set of strategies used to get one's way by doing things such as making the partner feel guilty, ashamed, or jealous.

**Matching hypothesis:** Our tendency to be attracted to people who are similar to us in terms of level of attractiveness.

**Mental maps:** Thinking about how your partner is feeling and trying to understand his or her perspective.

**Metatalk:** Talking about the way you communicate.

**Millennials:** The generation that was born in the United States between 1981 and 1996.

**Mind reading:** Occurs when people assume (often mistakenly) that they know their partner's feelings, motives, and behaviors.

**Miscommunication:** The result of someone sending an intentional message that is misinterpreted by the receiver.

**Misinterpretation:** The result of someone unintentionally sending a message that is misinterpreted by the receiver.

**Mismatches, as a type of on-again off-again relationship:** These relationships are characterized by incompatibility and unequal involvement in terms of how motivated and committed partners are at different times during the course of the relationship; some of the characteristics of their relationship pull them together, but other characteristics pull them apart.

**Modality:** The channel of communication.

**Model of accommodation:** A model that describes how people respond to problems or dissatisfying events in their relationships using neglect, exit, voice, or loyalty.

**Moderation:** A strategy for managing dialectical tensions that involves striving to reach a midpoint such that couples engage both sides of the dialectic but only to a certain extent. Moderation is a form of neutralization.

**Moral violations:** Behavior that deviates from what is considered right or moral.

**Mutual fade out:** When two people, often unintentionally, gradually distance themselves from each other until they break up.

**Mutual influence:** Two people affect one another in meaningful ways. Mutual influence increases as relationships move beyond role relationships to become interpersonal or close.

**Narcissism:** A personality trait that involves a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, self-focus, and self-importance.

**Need fulfillment:** When a partner fulfills critical interpersonal needs, such as the need to belong to a social group, feel safe, and feel loved.
group, to feel loved and appreciated, or to care for and nurture someone.

**Negative affect strategy**: Also called aversive stimulation, involves whining, pouting, sulking, complaining, crying, or acting angry to get one’s way.

**Negative altercasting**: Negative compliance-gaining strategies where one person’s positive motivations are questioned.

**Negative communication, as a communicative response to jealousy**: Aggressive and passive-aggressive communication that reflects negativity, such as arguing, being sarcastic, acting rude, ignoring the partner, giving cold or dirty looks, and withdrawing affection.

**Negative face**: The part of us that wants to be free from imposition and restraint and to have control over our own resources.

**Negative model of others**: In attachment theory, a perception that reflects expectations that people will be unsupportive and unaccepting or will cause problems.

**Negative moral appeals**: The suggestion that only bad or immoral people would fail to comply.

**Negative politeness strategy**: A set of tactics intended to save the receiver’s negative face while still accomplishing the task.

**Negative self-model**: In attachment theory, an internalized sense of self-doubt that leads one to seek the approval of others.

**Neglect, as a coping strategy**: Passive, destructive behaviors that involve standing by and letting conditions in the relationship get worse.

**Negotiated farewell**: A breakup strategy that involves discussing the process of breaking up in an amicable way.

**Network opportunism, as a type of friends-with-benefits relationship**: Partners within the same social network who are not particularly close but who serve as a sexual backup if neither of them is with someone else.

**Network support**: Directing someone to a person or group who can help them, often because they have had similar experiences.

**Neutral symmetry**: When both partners exchange one-across messages in conversation.

**Neutralization**: A way of managing dialectical tension that involves avoiding full engagement of either side of the dialectical tension through moderation (striving to reach a midpoint) or disqualification (being ambiguous so that neither side of the dialectic is engaged).

**Nondirected disclosure**: Disclosure that is sent to large groups of people rather than to individuals and is therefore considered less personal.

**Objectification**: The process that occurs when people value someone based on their appearance rather than their internal qualities.

**Objective power**: The authority associated with tangible factors such as position, strength, weaponry, and wealth.

**Obsessive relational intrusion (ORI)**: Unwanted behaviors that invade someone’s privacy and that are used for the purpose of trying to get close to someone.

**Oculesics**: Eye behavior; helps establish emotional closeness.

**On-again off-again relationship**: Also called cycling relationships, these relationships are defined by breaking up and then getting back together at least once.

**One-across messages**: Neutral messages that are neither dominant nor submissive.

**One-down messages**: Deferent, submissive, or accepting messages.

**One-up messages**: Dominant or controlling messages.

**One-way fade**: A breakup strategy where one person gradually but purposefully decreases communication until communication stops; also called the “slow fade.”

**Online infidelity**: Romantic or sexual contact facilitated by Internet use that is considered to violate relationship rules regarding faithfulness.

**Openness-closedness**: Dialectical tension that focuses on how people struggle between their need to be open with relational partners while also wanting to keep some information to themselves.

**Outcome**: A person’s calculation of the rewards in a current relationship minus the costs for being in that same relationship.

**Outcome expectancy**: Predictions about the outcome of an information search as positive or negative.

**Outcome values**: Predictions about how rewarding or unrewarding future interactions with a particular person would be.

**Overbenefited**: The state of getting a better deal than your partner in terms of receiving more benefits,
making fewer contributions, or both, so that the ratio of benefits to contributions favors you more than your partner.

Panache: An elusive quality that some people have that commands attention, draws others in, and makes them memorable.

Paradox of affection: Although affection is often intended and usually perceived by others to be a positive communicative move, it can backfire and produce negative outcomes such as distress and relationship dissolution.

Paralinguistics: The study of the voice, including voice qualities like pitch, volume, rate, and accent.

Partner uncertainty: Occurs when a person is uncertain about a partner’s feelings and intentions, including whether the partner reciprocates the individual’s feelings.

Partner unresponsiveness: When a person perceives that a partner will be unhelpful or insensitive to the individual’s needs.

Passion: Interpersonal excitation that is often, but not always, sexual. The hot component in Sternberg’s triangular theory of love, involving motivation and arousal.

Passionate love: Also called eros or romantic love, it is based on intimacy, passion, and low commitment.

Passive aggression: Indirect ways of communicating hostility, such as giving a partner the silent treatment, withholding affection, or rolling one’s eyes.

Peer marriage: Both spouses are employed, both are actively involved in parenting, and both share in the responsibilities and duties of the household.

Personalistic disclosure: Disclosure that people think is directed at them because they are trustworthy and have a close relationship with the sender.

Person-centered messages: Communication that acknowledges, elaborates on, and validates the feelings and concerns of a distressed person.

Physical abuse: Violent behaviors such as grabbing, kicking, biting, slapping, and punching.

Physical attraction: Being drawn to a person’s looks, including someone’s body, eyes, hair, attire, or other aspects of a person’s appearance.

Physical closeness: The amount of spatial proximity and physical contact people have.

Physical flirting style: Focuses on communicating sexual and romantic interest through behavior such as touch and sexual innuendo.

Physiological self-soothing: The antidote to stonewalling, this involves taking a break from the conflict to calm down and regain one’s thoughts.

Pillow talk: Intimate conversation that takes place immediately following sex.

Pinocchio relationships: Partners first meet online but then start meeting in person (i.e., they become “real”).

Playful flirting style: Flirting that is fun rather than serious; not usually intended to start a relationship with someone.

Polite flirting style: Flirting where touch and other types of behavior that could be interpreted as inappropriate are avoided.

Politeness theory: Brown and Levinson’s extension of Goffman’s work, which focuses on the specific ways that people manage and save face using communication.

Polyamory: A sexual orientation that revolves around being open to having multiple romantic relationships with the consent of all involved.

Positioning stage: The third stage in the courtship process. It involves signaling availability for interaction while indicating to others that two people are, at least temporarily, a couple that should be left alone by using behaviors such as close distancing, touch, and face-to-face body orientation.

Positive altercasting: Compliance-gaining strategies that suggest a good person would behave in a particular way.

Positive face: The favorable image that people hope to portray to others and to have validated by others. The best face we put forward so that others will like us.

Positive involvement behaviors: Also called immediacy behaviors, these behaviors show both positive affect and high levels of involvement in an interaction.

Positive model of others: In attachment theory, a perception that reflects expectations that people will be supportive, receptive, and accepting, and that relationships will be rewarding.

Positive moral appeals: Telling someone that a good or moral person would comply with a certain request.
**Positive politeness strategy:** A strategy addressing the receiver’s positive face while still accomplishing the task.

**Positive reciprocity:** A pattern where both partners engage in cooperative or immediate behavior.

**Positive self-model:** In attachment theory, an internalized sense of self-worth that is not dependent on ongoing validation from others.

**Positive tone strategy:** When used to break up, this strategy is designed to lessen the dumped person’s hurt feelings and make her or him feel better about the breakup.

**Power:** An individual’s perceived ability to control or influence as well as to resist the influence attempts of others.

**Powerful speech:** Speakers using this style “own” what they are saying, dominate conversations, redirect the conversation away from topics others are discussing, and interrupt others.

**Powerless speech:** A weak form of speech in which people use tag questions and hedges to qualify what they are saying.

**Pragma:** One of Lee’s secondary love styles, based on a combination of storge and ludus, pragma involves having a practical style of love that focuses on finding a person who has specific desired characteristics.

**Predictability-novelty:** Dialectical tension that focuses on how people struggle between their needs for stability and change in their relationships.

**Predicted outcome value theory:** A theory based on the idea that people only seek to reduce uncertainty about someone if they see that person as rewarding.

**Predictive expectancies:** What type of behavior people think will occur in a situation based on personal knowledge about someone (vs. prescriptive expectancies).

**Pregiving:** When used as a persuasive strategy, this involves someone doing a favor for another person prior to asking for a return favor.

**Preoccupied attachment style:** An attachment style based on negative models of self and positive models of others. People with this style desire excessive closeness and need relationships to validate their self-worth.

**Prerogative principle:** Powerful people can violate norms, break relational rules, and manage interactions without as much penalty as powerless people.

**Prescriptive expectancies:** What type of behavior people think should occur in a situation based on social and cultural norms (vs. predictive expectancies).

**Pressure and manipulation, as a sexual initiation strategy:** Using coercive tactics such as repeated requests for sex, threats to break off or de-escalate the relationship, the use of drugs or alcohol to reduce resistance to sex, and/or deception to initiate sexual activity with someone.

**Primary appraisals:** Initial evaluations about whether feelings are good or bad, warranted or not warranted, and so on. When applied to jealousy, primary appraisals evaluate the existence and quality of a rival relationship, including how much of a threat the third party is.

**Principle of elevation:** This principle states that height or vertical position is associated with power.

**Principle of least interest:** The idea that when a difference exists in the intensity of positive feelings between partners, the partner who feels more positive feelings is at a power disadvantage.

**Principle of negative reciprocity:** This principle states that aggression or negative expressions beget more of the same.

**Privacy control:** The idea that people want control over their personal information, including who knows personal information, and both whether and how those people share the information with others.

**Privacy maintenance:** People may avoid specific topics as a way to maintain privacy.

**Privacy ownership:** This states that people own their personal information and if they share that information with others, those people have a responsibility to keep it private unless granted permission to do otherwise.

**Privacy turbulence:** Occurs when new events force renewed boundary management; in other words, events force people to think about how their private information is being managed and whether they need to change who has access to it.

**Procreational orientation:** The belief that producing offspring is the primary purpose of sexual intercourse.

**Prosocial communication:** Positive behaviors that promote relational closeness, trust, and liking.

**Proxemics:** The way people use space, including conversational distances and territory.

**Pseudo de-escalation:** A deceptive breakup strategy where a person says she or he wants to decrease
closeness, usually by taking a break or asking to be friends for a while, but actually wants to end the relationship altogether.

**Psychological abuse:** Hurtful communication such as insults, name-calling, and personal criticisms.

**Psychological reactance:** A theory that maintains that influence attempts may backfire or boomerang, thereby causing resistance to the request.

**Punctuation:** When both partners think that their negative communication is caused by the other person’s behavior (e.g., I think I act demanding because you withdraw, and you think that you withdraw because I act demanding).

**Punishment:** Trying to balance the relationship by engaging in negative behavior (such as withdrawing affection) that might lead the partner to act to restore closeness.

**Quality of alternatives:** How one’s relationship compares to the kinds of outcomes a person thinks he or she could have by exploring other options (such as starting a new relationship or being alone).

**Rebound effect:** When discussed as part of thought suppression, this is the idea that people can temporarily suppress thoughts about a negative event if they are away from the event (or the person who caused it), but those thoughts will come flooding back as soon as something triggers their memory.

**Recreational orientation:** As a sexual attitude, the belief that sexual intercourse is primarily a source of fun, escape, excitement, or pleasure.

**Reframing:** A sophisticated way of managing dialectical tension that involves talking about tensions so that they seem complementary rather than contradictory.

**Reinforcement effect:** When discussed in attachment theory, this means that people communicate in cycles that reinforce their positive or negative models of self and others, leading one’s attachment style to stay fairly consistent over time.

**Reinforcement model:** A perspective used to explain that people are attracted to similar others in part because similarity reinforces and validates our beliefs and values.

**Relational closeness:** Being interdependent in terms of exchanging resources and intimacy; meeting each other’s needs; and influencing one another’s thoughts, behaviors, and emotions.

**Relational communication:** A subset of interpersonal communication that focuses on the expression and interpretation of messages within close relationships. Relational communication includes the gamut of interactions from vital relational messages to mundane everyday interactions.

**Relational dialectics theory:** A perspective that indicates people have opposing interpersonal needs that exist in dynamic tension, that these tensions are evident in discourse, and that the success of relationships depends on how we manage these tensions.

**Relational goal pursuit theory:** A theory built on the idea that people expend energy to develop or reinitiate relationships to the extent that they perceive a relationship is desirable and attainable.

**Relational goals:** Relational objectives or states that we pursue and that often motivate our communication choices.

**Relational level:** The relational level of a message provides a context for interpreting communication within the broader context of a relationship. Nonverbal cues are a primary part of the relational level of a message.

**Relational maintenance:** Efforts to keep a relationship at a specified state or at a desired level of closeness.

**Relational orientation:** As a sexual attitude, the belief that sexual intercourse is a way of expressing love and affection and developing greater relational intimacy.

**Relational satisfaction:** Pleasure or enjoyment that people derive from their relationships. In interdependence theory, relational satisfaction is defined as having a relationship where rewards exceed costs at a level that meets or exceeds expectations.

**Relational transgressions:** Actions that violate implicit or explicit relational rules (e.g., infidelity, deception).

**Relational turbulence theory:** A theory that explains how cognition, emotion, and communication impact one another to shape experiences of relationship as either chaotic or smooth.

**Relationship de-escalation:** The process of decreasing closeness in a relationship.

**Relationship disillusionment:** People’s positive perceptions about their partners and their relationships start to fade.

**Relationship invocation:** Expressing attitudes or beliefs about the relationship or using the qualities of
the relationship as a backdrop for interpreting a relational transgression.

**Relationship protection**: As a motivation for topic avoidance, when people avoid talking about things because they think talking about them will harm their relationship.

**Relationship talk trick**: A breakup strategy that involves saying you want to talk about the relationship when your intention is to break up.

**Relationship uncertainty**: A lack of confidence in the ability to predict the current or future state of the relationship.

**Relationship-enhancing attributions**: Negative behavior is attributed to causes that are external, unstable, and specific.

**Relationships**: Ongoing interactions between people that result in interpersonal, affective, and behavioral connections.

**Relative power**: One person’s level of power in comparison to someone else’s level of power.

**Remedial strategies**: Attempts to correct problems, restore one’s positive face, and/or repair a relationship.

**Repeated common couple violence**: Physical aggression that occurs intermittently in a relationship when conflicts get especially heated.

**Resolution stage**: The fifth and final stage in the courtship process, defined by having sex.

**Responsiveness**: A communication style that shows care, concern, and liking.

**Resurrection processes phase**: The fifth and final stage of the relational dissolution process, wherein people move on by visualizing their future without their old relationship and learning from their past experiences.

**Revelation-concealment**: A dialectical tension that involves the push and pull between wanting to reveal aspects of your relationship to others but also wanting to keep parts of your relationship private.

**Rewards**: Exchanged resources that are pleasurable and gratifying.

**Rival contacts**: A communicative response to jealousy that involves direct communication with a potential rival by a jealous person.

**Role relationship**: Two people who share some degree of behavioral interdependence, although people in such relationships are usually interchangeable and are not psychologically or behaviorally unique.

**Romantic intent**: Desire to move the friendship toward a romantic relationship.

**Romantic jealousy**: When people believe that a third party threatens the existence or quality of their primary love relationship.

**Romantic love**: Also called *eros* or *passionate love*. It is based on intimacy and passion, and low commitment.

**Romeo and Juliet effect**: The notion that parental interference or disapproval of their children’s romantic relationship can strengthen the attraction between those two people.

**Routine maintenance behaviors**: Everyday behaviors that help people preserve their bonds with one another.

**Rumination**: Repeated mulling over certain information or behavior.

**Scarcity hypothesis**: The notion that hard-to-get resources are especially desirable. People have the most power when the resources they possess are hard to come by or in high demand.

**Scripts**: Social information about how one should act in a particular situation.

**Secondary appraisals**: Evaluations about the causes and consequences of one’s feelings. When applied to jealousy, secondary appraisals include comparing oneself to the rival, thinking about what would happen if the relationship were to end, and so on.

**Secret tests**: Strategies people use to secretly reduce uncertainty about their partner’s level of commitment.

**Secure attachment style**: A social interaction style based on positive models of self and positive models of others. People with this style are comfortable getting close to and depending on others, seldom worry about being abandoned, and strive for a balance of autonomy and closeness in relationships.

**Secure base**: In attachment theory, this is the idea that children feel secure about exploring their environment when a preferred caregiver is present to go back to if they need help or are uncomfortable. (The preferred caregiver is the secure base.)

**Selection**: A way of managing dialectic tension that involves talking about the tension in a way that values one side of the dialectic over the other (e.g., openness over closedness).
Selection effect: People who choose to cohabit rather than marry have certain preexisting personal characteristics and attitudes that make it less likely that their relationships will last.

Self-assurance: Confidence that emanates from a person's focus, drive, and leadership qualities.

Self-disclosure: Revealing personal information about oneself to others.

Self-expansion theory: A theory that maintains that people have relationships to grow and extend their own selves.

Self-fulfilling prophecy: A prophecy that occurs when an expectation exists that an event will happen and a person behaves in a way (often unconsciously) that actually makes it more likely that the anticipated event will occur.

Self-presentation: The things we do to portray a particular image of self.

Self-presentational goals: Motivations that relate to the image we want to convey.

Self-uncertainty: When people question their own feelings about how involved they want to be with another person.

Separation: A way of managing dialectical tensions that involves favoring each side of the dialectic at different times using either cyclic alternation (moving from one side of the dialectic to the other in a cyclical fashion) or topical segmentation (emphasizing different sides of the dialectic depending on the topic or context).

Serial arguing: A pattern that occurs when people repeatedly have conflict about the same issue over time.

Serial monogamy: A practice where people stay with one sexual partner before moving to the next, with no overlap between partners.

Sexual attraction: The desire to engage in sexual activity with someone, typically accompanied by feelings of sexual arousal in the presence of the person.

Sexual coercion: Being pressured, threatened, or manipulated into having unwanted sex.

Sexual infidelity: Engaging in sexual activity with someone other than one's long-term partner.

Sexual scripts: Social information about how to initiate, accept, or refuse sexual advances.

Shift in motivation: In relational pursuit theory, the shift that occurs when someone's motives change from wanting a relationship with someone who does not want them, to getting revenge on that person.

Signs of possession, as a communicative response to jealousy: Public displays designed to show people that one's partner is taken, such as holding the partner's hand.

Silence, as a communicative response to jealousy: Decreasing communication, often by getting quiet and not talking as much as usual, when feeling jealous.

Silent Generation: The generation of people born in the United States between 1928 and 1945.

Simple request: Directly asking for something.

Sincere flirting style: The flirting style aimed at creating an emotional bond and making a real connection with someone.

Sociability: The ability to communicate easily among a group of people.

Social attraction: The feeling that we would like to spend time with someone and that the person would fit well into our circle of friends.

Social identity theory: A perspective focusing on the way in which people's identification with groups shapes their behavior, toward both members of that group and members of other groups.

Social meaning model of nonverbal communication: Some nonverbal behaviors have strong consensual meanings across different contexts.

Social network effect: The positive influence that approval from friends and family has on relationships.

Social penetration theory: A theory that describes how self-disclosure changes as people develop their relationships. It is sometimes referred to as the onion theory.

Social processes phase: The fourth phase in the relational dissolution process. In this phase people talk to people in their social network about problems in their relationship, including a possible breakup.

Social violations: People fail to act in relationally appropriate ways and instead engage in rude, cold, critical, or condescending behavior.

Socialization effect: When related to divorce, this effect suggests that children who have parents who frequently engage in aggressive conflict do worse in
school and have trouble interacting with their peers in part because children adopt conflict styles similar to their parents’ conflict styles.

**Spatial homogamy**: A phenomenon showing that given the choice between similarly attractive partners, people will be more attracted to the person who lives closer to them.

**Specific equity**: The balance between people’s benefits and contributions in a specific area, such as physical attractiveness, financial resources, social status, ability to influence each other, and supportiveness.

**Spies**: In the context of social media, people who primarily use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to learn things about others.

**Spillover effect**: The notion that the emotional state of one member of a dyad or group influences (or spills over into) the emotional states, cognitive states, and behaviors of other members of the dyad/group.

**Split loyalty pattern**: Those who keep secrets are often put in a bind of having to choose between being loyal to other secret holders or being loyal to friends or family members who may be hurt by not knowing the secret.

**Stalking**: Repeated and unwanted contact that is threatening and/or fear-provoking.

**Standards for openness hypothesis**: The idea that people differ in their expectations for how open their partner should be. That difference often falls along sex categories (i.e., women have higher expectations for openness than men).

**Stonewalling**: When a person builds a metaphorical wall around herself or himself, shuts down, and withdraws from interaction with another person; one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

**Storge**: One of Lee’s primary love styles, also called *friendship of companionate love*, it is based on high levels of intimacy and commitment but comparatively low levels of passion.

**Strategic maintenance behaviors**: Behaviors intentionally designed to maintain a relationship.

**Submissive symmetry**: During dyadic communication, when both people repeatedly use one-down moves in conversation.

**Successful communication**: A sender’s message is interpreted correctly by a receiver. (This is the most effective form of communication.)

**Suggesting**: Implying something without ever coming out and stating it. It is also called *indirect requests* or *hinting*.

**Support behaviors**: Giving someone emotional or instrumental support.

**Surveillance**: Information-seeking behaviors designed to find out about a potential rival relationship, including behaviors such as stalking social media or checking up on the partner; also a type of communicative response to jealousy.

**Symmetrical behavior**: During dyadic interaction, when both people in a relationship use the same verbal or nonverbal behavior.

**Tangible aid**: People provide physical assistance, goods, or services, such as babysitting someone’s children or helping someone complete a task.

**Task attraction**: A person’s attraction to another person is based on the perception that it would be good to work with that person.

**Theory of motivated information management (TMIM)**: A theory that examines how people respond to uncertainty. Tries to understand when people will seek information and when they will avoid seeking information based on the difference between desired and actual levels of uncertainty, expected outcomes, the ability to gather information, and the ability to cope with the information that might be discovered.

**Theory of self**: The idea that our identities help us understand ourselves in relation to the world in which we live, and that the self is made up of self-esteem and identity.

**Third party manipulation**: A breakup strategy that involves using a third party to indirectly break up with someone through strategies such as leaking news of the breakup to mutual friends or talking about dating other people.

**Topic avoidance**: Intentionally averting the discussion of a particular topic.

**Topical segmentation**: A way of managing dialectical tensions that emphasizes different sides of the dialectic depending on the topic or context.

**Traditional flirting style**: Flirting based on the traditional belief that men chase whereas women respond to men’s advances, and that men communicate their interest more verbally whereas women communicate their interest more nonverbally.
Traditional marriages: Men and women have clearly specialized roles based on gender stereotypes.

Transact: A pair of utterances.

Transgender: A term used to describe people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth and cross over cultural boundaries regarding what traditionally constitutes gender.

Transgression-maximizing messages: Messages that highlight the negative aspects of the transgression as well as the partner’s role in causing that negativity. An example would be blaming the partner or talking about how hurt one is.

Transgression-minimizing messages: Messages that focus on downplaying the severity of the transgression by using strategies such as saying that the partner’s behavior was unintentional, explaining or justifying the partner’s behavior, or saying that it is not a big deal.

Transition: When a one-up or one-down message is paired with a one-across message.

Transition out, as a type of friends-with-benefits relationship: Also referred to as ex-sex. Former romantic partners who are no longer an official couple but continue or resume their sex relationship sometime after they break up.

True friends, as a type of friends-with-benefits relationship: Close friends who add sex to their friendship but don’t consider themselves a couple even though they care about each other as friends.

Trust violations: When a person behaves in a way that is deceptive or violates relational rules.

Truth bias: The expectation that others will be honest.

Turning point analysis: A method for plotting turning points on a graph to see how various events are related to changes in a relationship.

Unattended behavior: A behavior (such as a blink) that goes unnoticed by either the sender or the receiver. (This is considered behavior but not communication.)

Uncertainty: The level of confidence a person has in her or his ability to predict particular attitudes, behaviors, or outcomes. High uncertainty equates to being unconfident in one’s ability to make those predictions whereas low uncertainty equates to being confident in one’s ability to make those predictions.

Uncertainty management theory: A theory based on the idea that uncertainty is generally negative and that the driving force in initial encounters is obtaining information about the other person in order to reduce uncertainty about her or him (vs. uncertainty reduction theory).

Underbenefited: The state of getting a worse deal than your partner in terms of receiving fewer benefits, making more contributions, or both, so that the ratio of benefits to contributions favors your partner instead of you.

Understatement: A form of deception that involves downplaying aspects of the truth.

Unintentional transition in, as a type of friends-with-benefits relationship: When partners intend to keep the relationship as friends with benefits but end up getting emotionally attached and become a couple.

Unique interaction patterns: Communicating in ways that reflect a relationship’s special history, including shared experiences, inside jokes, and knowledge of private information. Unique interaction patterns help differentiate interpersonal (and close) relationships from role relationships.

Unrequited love: A situation involving a would-be lover who wants to initiate or intensify a romantic relationship and a rejecter who does not.

Valence: Positive or negative feelings or attitudes about messages, people, or relationships.

Veracity: As a dimension of disclosure, this refers to how truthful the information is that someone is disclosing.

Verbal aggressiveness: A style that focuses on attacking the other person’s self-concept, often with the intention of hurting the other person. Verbally aggressive people engage in such tactics as teasing, attacking the other person’s self-concept, often with threatening, and criticizing the partner’s character or appearance.

Verbal immediacy: Features of language that reflect the closeness of a relationship, including word choice, forms of address, depth of disclosure, and relationship indicators.

Verbal self-handicapping: People will sometimes offer an excuse that serves to minimize the face threat of a potentially poor performance.

Viability: Evolutionary needs related to the motivation to survive.

Violent communication, as a communicative response to jealousy: Threats and actual violence, such as hitting, shoving, or threatening harm that occur in response to jealousy.
**Virtual relationships:** Partners who have communicated and connected only online.

**Vision of self:** A person’s theory of self, made up of self-esteem and identity.

**Visual centrality:** People who are perceived as powerful are also looked at more by others due to their interpersonal or physical position.

**Visual dominance ratio:** A function of the time spent looking while speaking divided by the time spent looking while listening.

**Vocalics:** Also called *vocalic behavior*, nonverbal paralinguistic communication including silence and the way we say words, including vocal pitch, loudness, accent, tone, and speed, as well as vocalizations such as crying and sighing.

**Voice, as a coping strategy:** Behaviors that are direct and constructive, such as talking about problems.

**What-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype:** Bias that leads people to believe physically attractive individuals are more likely to succeed, and are more sociable, popular, intelligent, and competent than their less-attractive counterparts, sometimes also called the *halo effect*.

**Whole-family secrets:** Confidences held by the entire family and kept from outsiders.

**Withdrawal:** People avoid and give partners the silent treatment, ignore them, or limit communication with them. This is also known as avoidance or distancing.

**Yielding:** An indirect and cooperative conflict style that involves one partner giving into and accommodating the other partner.