FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE

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Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (I, i, 234)

The penultimate port of call on our voyage of social psychological discovery is friendship and love. In this chapter we will discuss research on the thoughts, feelings and behaviours we experience in relation to close others. We will look at what makes us become friends with others, what makes other people want to be friends with us, how physical, physiological and psychological characteristics interact, what makes us fall in love, and what makes us fall out of love. William Shakespeare appears to have got it exactly right: social psychologists have discovered that there is far more to love than meets the eye … and what meets the eye is only a fraction of what determines whether we fall in love.

**FRIENDSHIP**

Having discussed in Chapter 12 the reasons why people seek affiliation, and the factors that determine why we select particular people as those we would like to get close to, in this chapter we look at what happens after initial attraction, when people move from superficial interactions with one another to close friendships. We will first talk about how friendships develop and how they sometimes break down. We will discuss the gender differences that exist in same-sex friendships, in terms of emotion and physical expression, and why these gender differences exist.

**Social Penetration Theory**

Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) offers an explanation for why and how friendships develop, focusing on the crucial role of self-disclosure, the imparting of personal information about oneself to another person. At the early stages of a relationship, two people may exchange superficial information. If they are comfortable with this level of interaction, they may then exchange a more personal and broad range of information. Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998) found that as the level of self-disclosure increases during the early stages of friendship, so too does the intimacy level in the relationship. A developing friendship is guided by a norm of self-disclosure reciprocity. Individuals match one another’s level of disclosure, only revealing information of greater intimacy when the other person does so. This allows a relationship to develop at a comfortable pace, avoiding rejection as a result of too small a disclosure, or personal invasion and threat as a result of too large or too sudden a disclosure. Once the relationship has reached a high level of intimacy, the level of self-disclosure levels off and is replaced by an exchange of support and understanding.

Self-disclosure is also central to the dissolution of a relationship. When a relationship is in trouble, depenetration occurs, a reverse of the escalating self-disclosure process.
that occurs in the development of friendship. People may emotionally withdraw from a relationship by reducing the quantity and intimacy of information they disclose. Alternatively, they may increase the intimacy of information disclosed, but direct negative and personally hurtful information at their former friend. In either case, self-disclosure can be instrumental in the destruction of a close relationship. The processes of penetration and depenetration are illustrated in Figure 13.1.

Although self-penetration theory is an adequate description of most relationships, it does not always hold true. Berg (1984) found that some friends or dating partners ‘click’ straight away and immediately begin disclosing highly intimate information to one another, without the need for a process of reciprocal escalation of self-disclosure. There are also cross-cultural differences. People from individualistic cultures (e.g. North America) disclose more about themselves in a wider variety of settings than people from collectivist cultures (e.g. China, Japan). This is thought to reflect differences in communication styles between the cultures rather than differences in intimacy levels. While social expressiveness is a sign of social competence in Western societies, not such great value is placed on it in Eastern societies. Instead, being socially non-expressive is interpreted as an indication of emotional strength and trustworthiness.

**Figure 13.1** An illustration of the processes proposed by social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973)
Gender Differences in Friendships

From the above discussion it is clear that a critical determinant of the development of interpersonal relationships is the speed, amount and level of self-disclosure. Below we discuss this aspect of relationships in more detail, specifically with respect to gender differences. Although both men and women engage in close friendships, their same-sex friendships differ considerably in terms of two important features: the emotional intimacy of the relationships and the degree of physical contact.

Intimacy

Women’s friendships tend to be more intimate and emotionally involved than men’s friendships. Wright (1982) argued that while men had side-by-side friendships involving shared work and leisure activities, women had face-to-face friendships that largely involved sharing personal issues. Later research has argued, however, that things are not quite as simple as this. Duck and Wright (1993) found that although women were more emotionally expressive, both men and women met their same-sex friends to talk to one

![Figure 13.2](image-url)  

**Figure 13.2**  Ratings of psychological adjustment as a function of disclosure and gender. Data from Derlega and Chaikin (1976)
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another. Moreover, women were just as likely as men to meet to engage in shared activities. Also looking at gender differences in intimacy, Dindia and Allen (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of 205 studies on self-disclosure and looked at gender differences in those studies. They found that women self-disclose more than men, especially in intimate relationships. Specifically, they showed that women disclose more than men to same-sex friends, but there was no gender difference in disclosure to male friends. This may be because men in Western societies are restricted by cultural norms which dictate that they should not act in a vulnerable or dependent manner. This was clearly illustrated in a study conducted by Derlega and Chaikin (1976). Male and female participants read a story about a man or woman who was upset while on a flight because their mother had just suffered an emotional breakdown. Noticing this emotional state, the person in the neighbouring seat asked the person whether they were afraid of flying. In one condition, the individual in the story concealed the problem, and said that they were indeed scared of flying, while in a second condition, the individual disclosed the problem. When asked to judge the character, men and women responded in the same way: a male character was seen as better psychologically adjusted if they did not disclose the problem, whereas a female character was seen as better adjusted if they did (see Figure 13.2). Men may therefore avoid self-disclosure to avoid negative evaluations from both men and women.

Physical Contact
Men engage in less physical contact with same-sex friends than do women. In North America and the UK, heterosexual men and women view hugging and other forms of physical intimacy among men as less appropriate than among mixed-sex friendships or same-sex female friendships, although this is not the cultural norm in many European, Latin, African and Middle Eastern cultures. Derlega, Lewis, Harrison, Winstead, and Costanza (1989) asked friends to act out an imaginary scene in which one person was greeting the other at the airport after returning from a trip. The greetings were photographed and evaluated by independent judges for the intimacy of physical contact. They found that male friends employed significantly less touching than did female friends or mixed-sex friends. Moreover, male participants were more likely than female participants to interpret touching as an indication of sexual desire.
Why Do These Gender Differences Exist?
Social scientists have argued that men are socialized to conform to a norm of heterosexual masculinity, valuing masculine traits related to power and control, while devaluing feminine traits of tenderness and vulnerability (Brendan, 2002). They are especially likely to conform to this norm while in the company of other men, where their identity as a man is particularly salient. Men who conform to heterosexual masculinity have a tendency to denigrate male homosexuality because they perceive it to be the antithesis of masculinity. Heterosexual men therefore avoid acting in ways that might indicate homosexuality by avoiding emotional expression, self-disclosure and physical contact in same-sex relationships.

SUMMARY
How do friendships develop? According to social penetration theory, at the early stages of a relationship people exchange superficial information. As the friendship advances, however, the depth and breadth of information disclosed to one another escalates, as does the level of intimacy in the relationship. According to the theory, the developing friendship is guided by a norm of self-disclosure reciprocity; individuals match one another's level of disclosure, allowing the relationship to develop at a comfortable pace. When a relationship is in trouble, depenetration occurs, a reverse of the escalating self-disclosure process as people emotionally withdraw from the relationship. The theory cannot, however, explain all relationships; some people ‘click’ and start disclosing at a high level of intimacy almost immediately. Moreover, the theory is more likely to apply to individualistic cultures, where people disclose more about themselves in a wider variety of settings than people from collectivist cultures.

There are significant gender differences in friendship: although both men and women have close friends, those relationships differ in two respects. First, women's same-sex relationships tend to be more intimate than men's, involving greater levels of self-disclosure. Research has shown that men disclose less, at least in Western societies, because cultural norms dictate that they should not appear to be vulnerable. British and American men also engage in less physical contact with same-sex friends than do women, although this is not the case in many other cultures. This is sometimes explained in terms of the norm of heterosexual masculinity in North America and the UK, whereby masculine traits like power are valued while feminine traits like vulnerability are devalued.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS
So far we have looked at how friendships develop from interpersonal attraction. But the most developed and intense type of interpersonal relationship is romantic love. Love is
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a popular focus of research on interpersonal processes, but we are only just beginning to understand it from a scientific standpoint. This is because it has typically been regarded as something mysterious and unfathomable. Psychologists generally argue that love is qualitatively different from liking. Lamm and Wiesmann (1997), for example, described ‘liking’ as the desire to interact with another person, but ‘love’ as also involving trust and being excited by another person.

Types of Love
Lee (1977) created a typology of love designed to capture the different ways in which love might manifest itself. He argued that there were three primary types of love: eros (passionate love), ludus (game-playing love) and storge (friendship love). These types of love can be combined to form three secondary types of love: pragma (pragmatic love), which combined friendship and game-playing elements; mania (possessive love), which combined passionate and game-playing love; and agape (altruistic love), which combined passion and friendship. Lee argued that the type of love experienced was not influenced by individual differences and could arise for any person. Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of love also argued that love could be classified in several different ways depending on the degree of passion, intimacy and commitment. These detailed classifications are very complex, but there is strong evidence for at least two clear types of love: passionate love and companionate love.

Passionate Love
Passionate love is a state of intense longing for another person that is experienced during the early stages of a romantic relationship. This is typically thought to involve very intense emotions, constantly thinking about the lover, and wanting to spend as much time as possible with them, even to the exclusion of other friends. Neuropsychologists have found that the subjective experience of passionate love is associated with changes in brain chemistry, in particular an increase in the powerful stimulant dopamine, which leads to a sense of physiological arousal. There is also evidence that people in love who are given brain scans show increased activity in the caudate nucleus area near the centre of the brain when they are shown photos of their partners, but not when they are shown pictures of their friends (Fisher, 2004). This primitive brain area directs bodily movements and is also associated with reward and pleasure. Aron, Paris, and Aron (1995) found that people in love report a range of positive experiences, including an increase in self-efficacy and self-esteem. Passionate love therefore is associated with some qualitatively distinct neurophysiological and psychological states. Can we then predict when we might be about to experience passionate love?

Hatfield and Walster (1981) argued that passionate love will arise when three conditions are met. First, it is necessary for an individual to understand what love is and
have the expectation that at some point they will fall in love. In other words, whether a person falls in love depends on whether they are from a culture that believes in the concept of love. This is the case in Western cultures, like the UK and USA, but love is considered to be less important in some Eastern cultures, where arranged marriages are the norm. Second, it is necessary to meet someone who fits expectations of what makes an appropriate partner, for example someone attractive and of the preferred sex. Third, when thinking about or in the presence of this potential partner, the individual must experience a state of physiological arousal, which they then attribute to the lover.

To understand why physiological arousal may lead to feelings of being in love, Hatfield and Walster draw from Schachter and Singer’s (1962) two-factor theory of emotions and suggest a three-factor theory of love. This theory argues that three conditions must be met to fall in love: (1) meeting a suitable potential lover; (2) attributing physiological arousal to the presence of the potential lover; and (3) understanding and accepting the concept of love. This extends Schachter and Singer’s theory by focusing specifically on the role of arousal in romantic love, and highlighting the need to recognize the concept of love. We experience physiological arousal in a variety of contexts, for example when having an argument with someone, when walking in an unsafe area of town, or when receiving the highest grade in an exam. The physiological reaction we have is similar in each of these situations, but we differentiate them by giving them different labels: anger during an argument, fear or anxiety when we feel unsafe, and elation when we achieve something important.

Schachter and Singer proposed that when events elicit internal physiological arousal, we look for external cues to determine the reason for this arousal. When arousal occurs during an interaction with an attractive member of the appropriate sex, this may be interpreted as romantic and sexual attraction. If this theory is correct, arousal from another source might be incorrectly interpreted as romantic attraction in the presence of an attractive person. Zillman (1984) described this psychological process by which arousal caused by one stimulus is transferred and added to arousal elicited by a second stimulus excitation transfer. In Text Box 13.1 you can read about an ingenious experiment that illustrates how excitation transfer works.
Mistaking Arousal for Attraction

According to the three-factor theory of love, when we experience physiological arousal we look for external cues to explain it. In the presence of an attractive member of the opposite sex, arousal might be interpreted as romantic attraction. If this theory is correct, arousal from another source, for example anxiety, might be incorrectly attributed to romantic attraction in the presence of an attractive person. To test this idea, Dutton and Aron (1974) conducted an ingenious study in a beauty spot in Vancouver, Canada.

Method

Male or female research assistants waited by two different bridges. One bridge was solidly built and only 10 feet (3.1 m) high, crossing a stream, while the other, the Capilano Canyon Suspension Bridge, was only 5 feet wide, 450 feet long and 230 feet high. This bridge wobbled when people walked across it and swayed in the wind. The authors predicted that people would feel relaxed crossing the former bridge, but anxious crossing the latter bridge. When unaccompanied males began to cross either bridge, they were asked if they would write a story in response to a picture while standing on the bridge. Research assistants also gave out their phone number so that the participant could request further information about the study.

Results

Men who were approached by a female research assistant on the suspension bridge told stories with the highest sexual imagery of all the experimental groups and were also more likely to call the assistant afterwards for ‘further details’ of the study.

Interpreting the Findings

It appeared that participants had misattributed arousal caused by the swaying bridge to the female assistant rather than to the correct source of arousal – anxiety. An alternative explanation for these results might be that the men who chose to walk across the suspension bridge were more adventurous than those who chose the safe bridge. In a further study, however, Dutton and Aron ruled out this possibility by repeating the experiment on the suspension bridge and having all participants either complete the study on the bridge or after they had crossed the bridge and calmed down. Men only used greater sexual imagery and called the assistant more when the study had been completed on the actual bridge. Thus, it was the excitation transfer, rather than adventurous personalities, that explained the behaviour of participants towards female assistants on the suspension bridge.
Despite the evidence for excitation transfer, the three-factor theory cannot fully explain why we fall in love. If all it took to fall in love was understanding the concept, being in the presence of an appropriate other, and arousal, true love could be ‘produced’ in laboratory settings, but this is not the case. It is clear from our early discussion of the conditions of attraction that many additional factors are necessary, for example being well matched in terms of beliefs and physical appearance, and the potential lover holding characteristics that complement one’s own characteristics (as discussed above in the section on the determinants of attraction).

**Companionate Love**

The early stages of a romantic relationship are defined by passionate love, when there is uncertainty, thrill, excitement, and a tendency to see one another through rose-tinted glasses as being ‘perfect’. This stage is, however, relatively short-lived. If a relationship lasts beyond the passionate love stage, it is replaced by a less passionate but more enduring love, defined by Hatfield (1988) as *companionate love*. This is the affection we feel for...
items, participants completed a task on the computer. The same 90 traits from the questionnaire were displayed one at a time on the computer screen in a random order, and participants were required to respond to each trait by pressing a ‘yes’ key if the trait was descriptive of their romantic partner or a ‘no’ key if the trait was not descriptive of their romantic partner.

Results
The patterns of results are presented above. Participants were significantly faster to make a judgement about whether their partner was characterized by a trait if it matched their perception of themselves. Put another way, if the trait on the screen characterized the participant and their partner, participants responded very quickly, but if the trait on the screen characterized the partner but not the participant, participants appeared to be confused and took longer to come up with the correct response. Smith and colleagues found that this pattern of results was stronger for participants who were in a close romantic relationship.

Interpreting the Findings
When we are in a close romantic relationship with another person, our mental representation overlaps with the mental representation of our partner. As a result, the traits we hold and those held by our partner may be confused, or interfere with one another. When there is a mismatch between participants and their partners on a trait, they are being asked to rate a trait as false for them, but true for someone who is part of them. These findings suggest that in close relationships partners actually begin to see themselves as a collected entity, with less individuated characteristics and more shared attributes.
someone with whom our lives are deeply entwined and can be applied to friends as well as romantic partners. The level of shared experiences that characterize long-term relationships and companionate love gives rise to some interesting psychological effects, described in Text Box 13.2.

This pathway from passionate to companionate love has been explained by evolutionary psychologists. In the early stages of a relationship, the sexual mating system, the goal of which is to reproduce sexually and pass on genes to the next generation, is dominant. In the later stages of a relationship, however, the attachment system, the goal of which is to establish and maintain a strong emotional bond between two people, is more important. Attachment to offspring increases their chances of survival, and attachment between parents in companionate love should have the same benefit. Parents who love each other are more likely to stay together to raise their children, and this will ensure the offspring are better provided for and more likely to survive childhood.

**Development of Cultural Knowledge about Love**

So we know that people understand and experience romantic love, initially as passionate love and later as companionate love, but how does cultural knowledge about romantic love develop, and what norms dictate romantic love among adolescents, who are just beginning to learn what love is all about? Simon, Eder, and Evans (1992) conducted in-depth interviews with adolescent females attending the sixth–eighth grade (aged 11 to 14 years) in a middle school in the USA, in order to investigate the social norms that exist underlying romantic love at this age. They found that romantic love was a highly frequent topic of conversation by the age of 13, with many female students beginning to form relationships with boys. They also identified four key norms:

1. *Moderation in love*: There was the general perception among girls that although boys were important, other concerns such as academic and athletic performance were also important, and that boys should not dominate everything. Girls were openly critical towards friends who were perceived as ‘boy crazy’, who did not have any interests other than attracting the opposite sex.

2. *Suppression of feelings towards attached others*: While it was acceptable for two or more girls to express feelings towards the same boy, and discuss those feelings, once a group member had acted openly on her feelings towards a particular boy, it was no longer deemed acceptable for other girls to express feelings for him. This norm was conveyed through negative gossip about those who violated the norm.

3. *Monogamy*: There were strong norms expressed against having romantic feelings for more than one person at a time. Girls who violated this norm, and expressed interest for more than one boy, were the subject of gossip and confrontation by other girls.
4. *Continuous love:* Finally, participants expected that they should be in a continuous state of being in love, after the onset of their first romantic relationship. Thus, as soon as one boyfriend was seen as losing interest, girls simply redirected their romantic interests elsewhere. At times it seemed that the target of love itself was not that important, but in order to maintain popularity and status, it was important to be in love at all times.

**BACK TO THE REAL WORLD…**
**THE STRUGGLES OF SINGLEHOOD**

Unsurprisingly, most work on romantic relationships focuses on people who are in such relationships. But what about people who — either through circumstance or choice — are not currently in a long-term relationship? Understanding the lives and experiences of single people is especially important in today’s society. Whereas, historically, it was considered the norm to be in a romantic relationship, it is now increasingly common to be single. In the USA, more than 40 per cent of the adult population is divorced, widowed, or has always been single (DePaulo, 2006). In the UK, 29 per cent of households consist of only one person, and 2 million households (around 7 per cent) are lone-parent families (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

One might expect that with so many people choosing to be single society would adapt to the changing demographics and accept the growing number of people falling into this category. Yet it seems that society is often not on the side of the single person. In her 2006 book *Singled Out*, Bella DePaulo, an expert on the single experience, argued that two things have happened that make life more difficult for the single person.

First, being in a couple has become glorified, a phenomenon DePaulo calls ‘matrimania.’ If we are to believe what we see in the media, married people are happier, healthier and live longer. Although DePaulo and Morris’s (2006) examination of meta-analytic and longitudinal evidence suggests that any differences in happiness are very small, marriage is still perceived as a normative developmental milestone, one that most people generally want and expect to achieve.

Second, because of this powerful societal norm advocating marriage, single people are perceived as violating these norms and are often stigmatized and marginalized, a phenomenon DePaulo (2011) refers to as *singlism*. In a study involving nearly 1000 undergraduate students, Morris, DePaulo, Hertel, and Ritter (2006) found that married people were more likely than singles to be described as mature, stable, honest, happy, kind and loving, while singles were more often described as immature, insecure, self-centred, unhappy, lonely and ugly. Moreover, singles are more likely to be discriminated against. Byrne and Carr (2005) found in a nationally representative sample that single people are more likely than married people to report
experiencing poorer service in restaurants and condescending attitudes in everyday life. Morris, Sinclair, and DePaulo (2007) also found discrimination in the domain of housing: they found that participants who imagined themselves as landlords evaluating a series of applications for tenancy overwhelmingly preferred applications from married couples, and rated them as significantly ‘less likely to be delinquent’ than single individuals. Moreover, participants rated discrimination against singles as more acceptable than other forms of discrimination.

Despite these findings, single people have cause for optimism. People who have always been single have similar levels of happiness to those who are married, despite the glorification of marriage and the stigmatization of being single (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). DePaulo and Morris argued that this may be in part because single people invest in multiple and diverse relationships rather than relying on just one person. Indeed, they tend not to be lonely in later life (despite what others might expect) because they have a network of supportive relationships (Zettel, 2005). They also have the opportunity to pursue their dreams because they are not tied down by the needs of others.

**SUMMARY**

Social psychologists have defined love in a number of different ways. According to Lee’s typology of love, there are three primary types of love (passionate, game-playing and friendship love) which can be combined in different ways to form three secondary types of love (pragmatic, possessive and altruistic love), which combined passionate and game-playing love, and agape (altruistic love), which combines passion and friendship. Lee argued that the type of love experienced was not influenced by individual differences and could arise for any person. Alternatively, Sternberg proposed the triangular theory of love, arguing that love could be classified differently depending on the degree of passion, intimacy and commitment. Research into this theory has found clear evidence for two types of love: passionate love and companionate love. Passionate love is a state of intense longing for another person experienced early in a romantic relationship and is associated with changes in brain chemistry and increased activity in the caudate nucleus area of the brain, an area also associated with reward and pleasure. According to the three-factor theory of love, passionate love will arise when an individual (1) believes in the concept of love, (2) meets someone who fits their expectations of an appropriate partner, and (3) experiences a state of physiological arousal when in the presence of that person, which is then attributed to the presence of that person and labelled romantic attraction. On occasion, physiological arousal from a different source can inadvertently be interpreted as romantic attraction in the presence of an attractive person, a process described as excitation transfer.
Passionate love is relatively short-lived. If a relationship lasts beyond this stage, the feelings are replaced by a less passionate but more enduring love, companionate love. According to evolutionary psychologists, the sexual mating system explains the early stages of a relationship, but in later stages, the attachment system is more important; parents who are attached to one another are more likely to stay together to raise their children, increasing the offspring’s chances of surviving until adulthood.

Finally, love can be defined by cultural norms. In Western societies four norms have been identified that develop around the ages of 11 to 14: moderation in love, suppression of feelings towards attached others, monogamy and continuous love.

**Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment**

We now know why and how different types of interpersonal relationships develop. In this final section we discuss the different theories about how relationships progress and change, and how and why they sometimes end. Once people are in an established romantic relationship, what determines whether the relationship will be happy and satisfying? Moreover, what factors determine whether a relationship will last over time or whether it will soon end? Finally, what emotional consequences are there when a relationship breaks down?

**Relationship Satisfaction**

Relationships are extremely complex. As a consequence, many factors contribute towards whether or not a relationship is satisfying. Important factors that influence relationship satisfaction include whether both partners make an equal contribution to the relationship, the degree of intimacy in a relationship, expression versus concealment of secrets, the interpretation of one another’s behaviour, the outcomes of social comparison, the extent to which there is an overlap in partners’ social network, and attachment style. Here, we outline some of the most important factors that contribute towards relationship satisfaction.

**Social Exchange and Equity**

One factor that may contribute towards satisfaction is what each partner contributes to the relationship and whether these contributions are perceived as equal. Some social psychologists argue that social relationships are like economic bargains in which people place a value on the material (e.g. money, food) or non-material (e.g. affection, information) ‘goods’ that they exchange with one another. According to social exchange theory, on some level people keep track of the goods they exchange and make a judgement about
whether what they receive is balanced with what they give. According to this premise, people participate in relationships that are personally rewarding, and where the rewards exceed the costs of the relationship. People therefore seek out relationships in which benefits outweigh the costs and where the relationship has overall positive outcomes, but end relationships in which costs outweigh the benefits, where the relationship has overall negative outcomes. According to Thibaut and Kelley (1959), when people are deciding whether to stay in a relationship, they conduct not only a cost–benefit analysis, but also compare their relationship with the possible rewards and costs in alternative relationships. If no more rewarding alternatives are available, they will remain in their current relationship. This may explain why people sometimes stay in destructive relationships.

**Equity theory** is based on social exchange theory, but is specifically concerned with an individual’s expectations of exchange in close relationships, and how they respond to equality and inequality in those exchanges. According to the theory, people in close relationships expect an equal exchange in terms of love, emotional and financial support, and household tasks. The degree of inequity, and the direction of that inequity, may have a profound influence on the relationship. A person in a relationship may feel guilty because they receive more from the relationship than they give, or they may feel resentful because they give more to the relationship than they get in return.

Both these situations of inequity have negative consequences for interpersonal relations. Buunk and VanYperen (1991) found that those who perceived equality in a relationship were most satisfied, followed by those who felt advantaged. Those who felt deprived relative to their partner were the least satisfied in their relationship. Inequity has severe negative implications for a relationship. Prins, Buunk, and VanYperen (1992) found that women in inequitable relationships had a stronger desire to engage in extramarital relationships and had been involved in more extramarital relationships than women in equitable relationships, although a similar relationship did not emerge for men. The role of inequity should, however, be accepted with caution; Cate, Lloyd, and Long (1988) found the receipt of love, information and sexual satisfaction to be more important in predicting relationship satisfaction than equality.

**Intimacy**

Reis and Patrick (1996) argued that intimate relations are those that are caring, understanding and involve validation. **Caring** is the feeling that our partner loves us and cares about us, and is mentioned by most people as a central component of intimacy. **Understanding** in a relationship is when the partner is perceived to have an accurate perception of how we see ourselves. Specifically, it is important that they understand our feelings, needs, beliefs and life circumstances. Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon (1994) found that married people were most satisfied with their relationship when their partner perceived them in line with their self-perceptions. **Validation** reflects whether our partner is able to communicate their acknowledgement and support for our point of view.
is evidence that the more partners let one another know that they empathize with one another, the happier they are. Unhappy couples, on the other hand, have a tendency to avoid problematic issues by glossing over them or changing the subject.

**Perceived Concealment**

Finkenauer, Kerkhof, Righetti, and Branje (2009) argued that the degree to which a couple keep secrets from one another is a major factor predicting relationship satisfaction and well-being. They asked 199 newly married couples to complete a questionnaire approximately one month after they got married, and again nine months later, in which they answered questions about how much they believed their partner was keeping secrets from them and several measures of relationship satisfaction. It emerged that participants who felt that their partner was concealing personal information from them early in the marriage reported poorer adjustment to married life, greater frequency of conflict with their partner, and less trust towards their partner nine months later. So why does concealment lead to relationship problems? As we discussed earlier, when someone discloses personal information to us, this conveys intimacy and closeness. Essentially, it shows us that the person likes and trusts us (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Conversely, the concealment of information conveys powerful signals of social distance and separation, leading people to believe that their partner does not like or trust them as much as they should. In line with this explanation, Finkenauer and colleagues showed that perceived exclusion mediated the negative association between concealment and relationship well-being.

**Interpretation**

People in happy and unhappy relationships interpret their partner’s characteristics and behaviour very differently. In a happy relationship, problems that arise are likely to be blamed on the self, and the partner is given credit for solving problems (Thompson & Kelley, 1981). In an unhappy relationship, however, people show maladaptive attribution patterns (Fincham & Bradbury, 1991). Specifically, they blame relationship problems on their partner, and see their own and their partner’s problematic behaviour as global, affecting other aspects of their relationship, and stable, unlikely to get better in the future. Rather than dealing with problems that arise one at a time, as independent issues, problems are seen as issues typical of the problems that exist in the relationship.

**Social Comparison**

When happy couples compare themselves with other couples, they tend to feel better about their own relationship (think back to our discussion of social comparison processes in Chapter 7). Buunk and Van den Eijnden (1997) showed that individuals who felt their own relationship was better than most others showed higher levels of relationship satisfaction, and Murray and Holmes (1997) found that romantic couples with high levels of satisfaction perceived their partner more positively than the typical partner and were
optimistic about the future of the relationship. Unhappy couples, on the other hand, focus on the negative implications of social comparison. Buunk, Collins, VanYperen, Taylor, and Dakoff (1990) found that those in unhappy marriages felt envious when they saw other couples in a better marriage and worried when they encountered couples with worse marital problems than themselves that their fate might be the same.

Social Networks
Cotton, Cunningham, and Antill (1993) found that husbands and wives both reported greater satisfaction in their relationship when members of their own and their spouse’s social networks were connected to one another and when they were friends with some of the people in their spouse’s social network. Satisfaction is higher when people’s support networks are highly integrated.

Attachment
Attachment describes the emotional bond that forms between a young child and their caregiver (usually the mother). Psychologists have been keenly interested in the idea that the type of attachment formed between a mother and child might explain psychological development. More recently, this research has been extended to consider the effects of attachment experienced as a child on attachment style in adulthood, and its subsequent impact on satisfaction in interpersonal relationships. Below, we describe attachment theory, show how attachment to one’s primary caregiver as a child can influence attachment style in later life, and illustrate the effects of adult attachment on how people deal with interpersonal relationships.

Bowlby (1969) proposed that human infants and their caregivers have a genetic disposition to form a close attachment with one another. In evolutionary terms, infants remain close to their caregivers to protect themselves from predators, while caregivers protect their infant to ensure the child survives to adulthood to pass on their genes to the next generation. Ainsworth (1982) later proposed a qualification to this basic idea: that the nature of the relationship with the caregiver can lead to the child holding one of three different attachment styles. According to Ainsworth, children will develop a secure attachment style if their caregiver was caring and responded sensitively to their needs. They are likely to believe they are worthy of love, and that other people can be trusted. In contrast, children who cannot rely on their parents to respond appropriately when they are needed will develop one of two insecure attachment styles. If the caregiver is insensitive to the needs of the child and does not respond consistently, children will develop an avoidant attachment style, finding it difficult to trust others. Finally, having a caregiver who shows a lack of interest in interacting with their infant can lead to an anxious/ambivalent attachment style. Such children are eager to form close relationships, but struggle to believe that they are worthy of love. In sum, children who are securely attached are more socially competent and have higher self-esteem than children who are insecurely attached.
While initial research on attachment focused on children and adolescents, recent research has considered the effect of the attachment style on the ability to form successful romantic relationships in adulthood. Although there is little direct evidence to show that attachment as a child predicts attachment style as an adult, research has shown that attachment styles held by adults are similar to those held by children. While classic attachment research considered there to be three categories of attachment, Bartholomew (1990) proposed that there are two dimensions of attachment, depending on (1) whether people believe others to be trustworthy or not and (2) whether people have high self-esteem, and believe they are worthy of love or not. The two dimensions are attachment-avoidance (discomfort with intimacy and dependency) and attachment-anxiety (fear of separation and abandonment).

People high in attachment-avoidance try to maintain distance from others to preserve their independence and self-esteem. They tend to be less involved, engaged and support-seeking in relationships, and are uncomfortable with self-disclosure. These individuals show discomfort with closeness and strive for self-dependence. People high in attachment-anxiety seek support, acceptance and closeness to others in response to their fear of rejection. Such individuals use intense efforts to ensure support and maintain proximity to others, showing excessive rumination about abandonment fears and threats to their relationship or self (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). People can be high or low on both attachment-avoidance and attachment-anxiety dimensions, resulting in four possible attachment styles in adulthood. In turn, these attachment styles predict how people behave in interpersonal relationships. Below we discuss each type of attachment and its consequences for relationship success.

People who are low on both dimensions have a secure attachment style. They have a high self-esteem and generally trust other people. As a result, they handle relationships with ease. Brennan and Shaver (1995) found that securely attached adults found it easy to get close to others and enjoyed more affectionate and long-lasting relationships than those who did not have a secure attachment style. Doherty, Hatfield, Thompson, and Choo (1994) also found that people with a secure attachment style were more likely to experience companionate love than people with avoidance or anxious attachments (see our discussion of companionate love earlier in this chapter). Securely attached people are, unsurprisingly, the most desired partners. Chappell and Davis (1998) found that regardless of their own attachment style, the majority of participants would rather date someone with a secure attachment style.

People who are low on attachment-avoidance but high on attachment-anxiety have a preoccupied attachment style. Although they have a positive view of others, they have low self-esteem and worry that people will not love them because they are not good enough. As a result, they tend to be preoccupied with their close interpersonal relationship partners and have a fear that the people they like or love will not return their feelings. They often consider their self-worth in terms of their physical appearance rather
than their personal character traits. Brennan and Shaver (1995) found that anxious adults fell in love easily, but their relationships were emotionally unstable, and they were more likely to be perceived as unhappy.

People who are high on attachment-avoidance but low on attachment-anxiety have a **dismissing-avoidant attachment** style. Although these people have a high self-esteem, they find it difficult to trust others and are uncomfortable with intimacy. They struggle to recognize when others are expressing warmth towards them, and have a tendency to withdraw from relationships when there are conflicts rather than try to deal with problems (Mikulincer, 1998; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999). In sum, although they tend to be confident, they are compulsively self-reliant. Finally, people who are high on both anxiety and avoidance have a **fearful-avoidant attachment** style. They have low self-esteem and do not trust others. They are also more likely to notice negativity in others, strengthening their belief that others cannot be trusted. Niedenthal, Brauer, Robin, and Innes-Ker (2002) found that fearful-avoidants were more attentive to angry and sad facial expressions. As a result, they are more likely to suffer from negative interpersonal experiences (McNally, Palfai, Levine, & Moore, 2003). Both high-avoidance attachment styles are associated with negative consequences for interpersonal relationships. Klohnen and Bera (1998) looked at female participants who were either avoidant or secure at the age of 27, and then at 43 and 52. They found that avoidant women experienced less interpersonal closeness, were less socially confident, were more emotionally distant, and less trusting than securely attached adults. Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, and Kashy (2005) conducted a diary study with dating partners over 14 days. They found that anxiously attached individuals perceived greater relationship conflict, less satisfaction and closeness in their relationships, and less optimistic views about the future of the relationship on days where they perceived there to be conflict than those who were not anxiously attached. Unsurprisingly, dismissing-avoidants and fearful-avoidants are generally seen as the least desirable partners (Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994).

**Interdependence Theory**

All of the theories we have discussed in this section provide explanations for relationship satisfaction. To understand fully how people act and react in close relationships it is likely that all of the factors discussed above will apply, to a greater or lesser extent. Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) argued just this; that to understand the nature of relationships, we need to consider the effect of situational factors on both individual factors (e.g. attachment style) and interpersonal processes (how partners interact with one another). They provide a broad, overarching framework that explains how people interact with one another in relationships, and the outcomes of these interactions, based on the collected contributions of the theories we have outlined above.
SUMMARY

Many factors contribute towards whether or not a relationship is satisfying. First, what each partner contributes to the relationship and whether these contributions are perceived as equal play a part in determining relationship satisfaction. According to social exchange theory, people keep track of what they have contributed (materially and psychologically) and received in a relationship and conduct a cost–benefit analysis. People only stay in a relationship if the rewards outweigh the cost, and if there are no better alternatives available. According to equity theory, a person in an unequal relationship may feel guilty because they receive more from the relationship than they give, or they may feel resentful because they give more to the relationship than they get in return. Both these situations of inequity have negative consequences for interpersonal relations.

Intimacy also contributes to relationship satisfaction. Reis and Patrick (1996) argued that intimate relationships are those in which we feel loved and cared for by our partner, where we feel our partner understands our feelings, needs and beliefs, and where we feel our partner supports and validates our point of view. People who are satisfied with their relationship interpret things very differently from people who are unsatisfied; satisfied people take personal responsibility for problems but unsatisfied individuals blame problems on their partner. People also decide whether they are happy in their relationship through a process of social comparison; individuals who feel their relationship is better than most others show the greatest levels of relationship satisfaction. Couples who have highly interconnected social networks also tend to be more satisfied with their relationship.

Attachment style in adulthood has a significant impact on the success of relationships. Avoidant people do not display enough intimacy because they do not trust relationship partners, whereas anxious people have a tendency to display too much intimacy because they trust relationship partners but do not believe they are worthy of affection in return. Securely attached people, however, display the appropriate level of intimacy, because they neither distrust their partners nor fear rejection. Finally, interdependence theory proposes that to understand the nature of relationships, we need to consider the effect of situational factors on both individual factors and interpersonal processes.

What Determines Whether a Relationship Will Last?

Commitment is the desire or intention to continue an interpersonal relationship. One might expect satisfaction in a relationship to strongly co-occur with relationship commitment but, counter-intuitive though it may seem, this is not always the case. Happy relationships are not always stable and long lasting. On the other hand, people frequently fail to end a relationship, even if they are unhappy. A number of social psychologists have tried to identify when people are likely to be committed to relationships.
The Investment Model
Rusbult’s (1983) investment model argued that commitment is dependent on three factors. First, high satisfaction in a relationship has an impact on commitment, but this cannot alone explain relationship satisfaction. Second, investment size also plays a role in relationship commitment. Two people in a relationship become increasingly intertwined. They invest time and effort in each other, make sacrifices, develop mutual friends and shared memories, and have shared activities and possessions. The greater the investment, the more committed people tend to be in a relationship. Third, the low perceived quality of alternatives predicts relationship commitment. This refers to the best alternative to the present relationship, be that the best imagined alternative relationship, the actual presence of an alternative partner, the appeal of living alone, having an enjoyable job and good friends, and so on. Clearly, the presence of an attractive alternative may seriously threaten the stability of an existing romantic relationship. Fortunately, when we are in a successful, committed relationship, we tend to engage in relationship maintenance strategies to ward off the lure of these alternatives. Lydon, Fitzsimons, and Naidoo (2003) found

![Bar graph showing the effect of relationship status on mimicry of an attractive interaction partner.](image)

*Figure 13.3* The effect of relationship status on mimicry of an attractive interaction partner. Data from Karremans and Verwijmeren (2008)
that people highly committed to a relationship derogated attractive individuals from the opposite sex as a means of closing themselves off from alternatives.

We also behave differently when interacting with a potential alternative partner, depending on whether we are in a relationship, and how satisfying our relationship is. Karremans and Verwijmeren (2008) experimentally demonstrated the effect of relationship status and satisfaction on behaviour. Male and female heterosexual participants, half of whom were in a romantic relationship, were asked to complete a task with an attractive confederate of the opposite sex. These interactions were videotaped, and were rated for how much the participant mimicked the behaviour of the confederate. Following this task, participants who were in a relationship were asked to indicate how close they felt to their partner at the moment, and how attractive they found their interaction partner. It emerged that participants who were in a relationship mimicked the behaviour of their interaction partner to a lesser extent than participants who were currently single (see Figure 13.3). Moreover, among participants who were in a relationship, the closer they were to their partner, the less they mimicked the behaviour of their interaction partner. Although mimicry seems to be unconscious, it serves an important social function, creating a smoother, more pleasant interaction, and induces liking from one’s interaction partner. By mimicking less, people who were happy in their relationship reduced their chance of a successful interaction, and thus protected their current relationship from the risk posed by an attractive alternative.

Other Models of Commitment

Adams and Jones (1997) proposed three factors that contribute to whether a relationship will last. These are: (1) personal dedication, a positive attraction to the relationship; (2) moral commitment, a sense of obligation, religious duty or social responsibility, based on a person’s values and principles; and (3) constraint commitment, factors that make it costly to leave, such as lack of attractive alternatives, and personal, social, financial or legal investments in the relationship. Johnson (1991) put this succinctly: whether a relationship will be maintained depends on whether a person wants to continue it, ought to continue it, or must continue it.

Consequences of Commitment

Commitment, like satisfaction, has important consequences for a relationship. Some of these consequences are positive: highly committed individuals are more willing to make sacrifices for their relationship, giving up valued aspects of their life to maintain their relationship. Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) found that commitment inspired accommodation and willingness to sacrifice, both of which were good predictors of someone’s pro-relationship motives. Commitment can, however, also have negative consequences. Rusbult and Martz (1995) found that women suffering from violence at the hands of their husband were more likely to return to their partner after departure from a refuge shelter if they had been highly committed to the relationship before entering the shelter.
The Breakdown of a Relationship

Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) argued that once deterioration has been identified, a partner’s response may be positive or negative, active or passive. If a partner wants to save the relationship, they may react with loyalty, passively waiting for the relationship to improve, or voice behaviour, by actively working at the relationship. If, on the other hand, a partner thinks the relationship is truly over, they may respond with neglect, passively letting the relationship deteriorate, or exit behaviour, choosing to end the relationship.

To explain the final stages of a relationship, Duck (1992) proposed the relationship dissolution model. According to this model, partners pass through four phases on the way to a break-up.

1. **The Intrapsychic Phase**: The partner thinks in detail about the sources of the relationship problems, conducting an internal cost–benefit analysis, and may either repress the problem or discuss it with friends.

2. **The Dyadic Phase**: The difficult decision is made that something must be done, so the couple actively discuss the situation. At this stage, there may be negotiation and attempts at reconciliation, or arguments that further highlight the problems faced.

3. **The Social Phase**: When it is accepted that the relationship is ending, both partners turn to friends as a means of social support and find ways of presenting themselves to save face.

4. **The Grave Dressing Phase**: This may involve the division of property and access to children, and a further working towards an assurance for one’s reputation. It is also a phase of accepting and getting over the end of the relationship and letting others know one’s version of events.

So what happens following the end of a relationship? And how long does it take to recover? Sbarra and Emery (2005) found that following a break-up, feelings of anger dissipate very quickly, typically within a week to 18 days of a break-up. In contrast, sadness declines relatively slowly, taking at least a month to dissipate.

There are three key factors that predict how badly someone is affected by a break-up. First, attachment style is a predictor. Sbarra and Emery (2005) found that participants who had a secure or fearful-avoidant attachment style showed the fastest rates of decline in sadness, whereas individuals with a dismissing-avoidant attachment style felt both sad and angry for the longest period of time. Second, a partner-initiated break-up causes more suffering. Individuals who are left by their partner tend to feel more depressed and anxious, report more emotional distress and greater preoccupation with their former partner, and are less well adjusted five years later, than those who initiated a break-up (e.g. Kitson & Holmes, 1992; Wang & Amato, 2000). This may be explained by a perceived
lack of control over the situation, and the unexpectedness of the break-up. Those who have been rejected are often left with a sense of emotional and cognitive disorganization, as they attempt to understand what went wrong (Sbarra, 2006). They may also suffer from feelings of unrequited love (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993). Third, rejection sensitivity, the degree to which people anxiously expect rejection, and overreact to rejection, can have an impact. Ayduk, Downey, and Kim (2001) conducted a six-month longitudinal study with female college students, and found that those high in rejection sensitivity were more likely to become depressed following a break-up, although only if the break-up was initiated by their partner.

Lucas (2005) examined data from an 18-year-long panel study of 30,000 Germans in order to examine how life satisfaction was affected in the years prior to, and following, a divorce. An illustration of the findings can be seen in Figure 13.4. He found that life satisfaction dropped considerably as people moved closer to the point at which they got divorced. However, on a positive note, their life satisfaction began to increase again following the divorce. People did not, however, return to as high a level of life satisfaction as they had pre-divorce. These findings suggest that people can recover from a painful break-up, but, following a divorce, they may never be quite as happy as they were before.

There is little clear evidence regarding the ‘best way’ to deal with a break-up. The pain will inevitably be worse for those who have invested a great deal in the relationship. Having a good level of social contact and support from friends and family should, however, be particularly beneficial. If loneliness can be avoided, pain will be minimized.

Figure 13.4 Life satisfaction following divorce. Data from Lucas (2005)
BREAKING UP IS (NOT SO) HARD TO DO

When we split up with a romantic partner, it often feels like the world is about to end. Newly separated couples experience sadness, anger and deep insecurity (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003; Sbarra, 2006). Often they struggle to imagine how they will ever feel happy again. But a recent study by Eastwick, Finkel, Krishnamurti, and Loewenstein (2008) suggests that these fears may be unfounded.

College students who were in a romantic relationship agreed to take part in a nine-month longitudinal study of dating behaviour. They completed a questionnaire every other week over the course of the study, in which they reported whether they were still in the relationship. If they reported that the relationship had ended, they were asked to indicate their current level of distress. Those who were still in the same relationship were asked to indicate how distressed they thought they would feel if their relationship was to end in the next fortnight, and then at 2 weeks, 4 weeks, 8 weeks and 12 weeks following the break-up. Among participants whose relationship ended during the first six months of the study, predicted distress (assessed two weeks before the break-up) was compared with the actual distress respondents felt. The findings are shown in the graph.

While participants were accurate at predicting how quickly their levels of distress would reduce (predicted and actual levels of distress reduced at about the same rate), they significantly overestimated how distressed they would feel. However, this overestimation was driven by people who were in love with their partner just prior to the break-up. Those who were not in

![](graph.png)
love were actually very accurate at predicting both the trajectory and intensity of their distress in the weeks following the break-up, perhaps because they could make judgements from a cooler, more rational and dispassionate state than those who were in love. In sum, when we feel terribly sad after a break-up with a loved one, we can take comfort in the fact that we may feel less distress over the coming weeks than we might expect.

**SUMMARY**

Social psychologists have tried to identify when people are likely to show commitment to a relationship. The investment model proposes that commitment depends upon *satisfaction*, the *perceived quality of alternatives*, and how much has been *invested* in the relationship. Commitment has important consequences for a relationship; committed individuals make greater sacrifices and are more accommodating. On the downside, however, commitment can stop people leaving a relationship even when it is in their best interests. People who are unhappy with a relationship may respond positively (with *loyalty*, or by *voicing* their concerns) or negatively (by *neglecting* or *exiting* the relationship). According to the *relationship dissolution model*, partners pass through four phases as they gradually move from initial identification of relationship problems, to attempts at *reconciliation* and discussion, to gaining *social support* from family and friends, and, finally, *extricating* themselves from the relationship and moving on. A number of factors, including *attachment style*, *rejection sensitivity* and *who initiated the break-up*, can affect how much pain a break-up causes.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, we have covered a wide range of topics essential to our understanding of friendship and love, from how our relationships with others develop, to what determines whether those relationships last. Where people are attracted to one another, and positive social interactions ensue, friendships may develop. According to *social penetration theory*, friendships develop as a result of a gradual increase in the intimacy and breadth of personal information disclosed to one another. The level of *disclosure* must be carefully monitored for a relationship to develop successfully, as too much or too little disclosure may disrupt the development of the friendship. Disclosure of negative, hurtful information can also lead to the breakdown of a relationship. There are also *gender differences* in the development of friendships; in Western cultures, women
tend to show greater levels of intimacy and self-disclosure and more physical contact than do men, in part as a consequence of societal expectations.

The most developed and intense type of interpersonal relationship is *romantic love*. A number of classifications of different types of love have been offered by social psychologists, but strong evidence exists for two types: *passionate love*, an intense state of longing for another person experienced in the early stages of a romance relationship; and *companionate love*, the deep bond of friendship we feel for someone in a long-term relationship. The *three-factor theory of love* proposes that passionate love arises when we understand what love is, are in the presence of a suitable potential lover, and feel emotional arousal which we attribute to that person. There is evidence that norms about romantic relationships develop during early adolescence. When we reach the companionate love stage, whether a relationship will last is determined by our *satisfaction*, *quality of alternatives* and *investment*. If we lack satisfaction and commitment, the relationship can break down. According to the *relationship dissolution model*, break-ups pass through four phases from *identification* of problems, attempts at *reconciliation*, gaining *social support* and, finally, *extrication*. How long it takes people to recover from break-ups is dependent upon *attachment style*, *rejection sensitivity* and *who initiated* the break-up.

![Figure 13.5 Memory map](image-url)
Friendship and Love

Taking it Further

Try This

Pick a close friend of yours, and think about how you met, and how that friendship developed. To what extent does the story of your friendship match up with the theories of friendship discussed in this chapter? Are there gaps in the theory that cannot explain how your friendship developed? And, if so, what do you think needs to be added to create an optimal theory of friendship development?

Debate This

Passionate love is an important aspect of social relationships in Western societies. There are, however, cultural differences in how love is experienced and expressed. In many cultures, arranged marriages are common, and less emphasis is put on passionate love. Is love real? Or is it something that we have invented to fulfil certain needs? And is the Western approach to love best, or would the perhaps more pragmatic approach favoured in other cultures be more realistic and sustainable?

Something for the Weekend

Imagine that you are a marriage guidance counsellor. Based on social psychology theory and research, what advice would you give to a couple who are experiencing problems in their relationship? Think about what advice you could give based on equity theory, or the investment model, and what insights the couple could be given with a greater understanding of different attachment styles.

Further Reading

The Essentials


Elaine Hatfield is a pioneer of research on love and sex. This article provides an interesting overview of research in this area. You could also check out Dr Hatfield’s website: www.elainehatfield.com
Next Steps


If you are interested in learning more about friendship, love and how they compare to one another, you will find this review article very useful.

Delving Deeper


If after reading this chapter you feel like getting deeper into love and friendship, together these two books will give you quite a detailed and inclusive account of theory and research.