Chapter 7 Love & Intimacy-

**7-1**What Is Love?

One of the great mysteries of humankind is the capacity to love, to make attachments with others that involve deep feeling, selflessness, and commitment. Throughout history, literature and art have portrayed the saving powers of love. How many songs have been written about its passion, and how many films have depicted its power to change people’s lives? Yet after centuries of writers discussing love, philosophers musing over its hold on people, and religious leaders teaching of the necessity to love one another, how much do we really know about love? Are there different, separate kinds of love, or are they all simply variations on one fundamental emotion? Does love really “grow”? Is love different at age 15 than at 50? What is the relationship between love and sexuality?

We go through life trying to come to terms with loving, trying to figure out why we are attracted to certain types or why we fall in love with the people we do. The mystery of love is part of its attraction. We are surrounded with images of love in the media and are taught from the time we first listen to fairy tales that love is the answer to most of life’s problems. The majority of songs played on popular radio stations are about love—wanting it, having it, and/or losing it. In fact, music, movies, and television inundate us with stories of what love is, and these stories have a powerful impact on us.

When people love each other, they experience less stress in their lives, stronger immune systems, and better overall health.

**7-1aLove in Other Times and Places**

The desire for love is as old as humanity. Each new generation somehow imagines that it is the first, the inventor of “true love,” but look at this poem from the late Egyptian empire, written more than 3,000 years ago:

I found my lover on his bed, and my heart was sweet to excess. I shall never be far away (from) you while my hand is in your hand, and I shall stroll with you in every favorite place. *(Quoted in Bergmann, 1987, p. 5)*

The Middle Ages glorified the modern idea of [**romantic love**](javascript://), including loving from afar, or loving those one could not have ([**unrequited [un-ree-KWI-ted] love**](javascript://)). Not until the 19th century did people begin to believe that romantic love was the most desirable form of loving relations. Through most of Western history, marriage was an economic union, arranged by the parents. Once wed, husbands and wives were encouraged to learn love for one another, to develop love. How different that is from the modern romantic ideal of love preceding marriage.

Forms and Measures of Love

We must admire those researchers who are willing to tackle a difficult subject such as the origins of love or the different forms of love. We all love, and one of the characteristics of love is that we often believe that the intensity of the emotion is unique to us, that no one else has ever loved as we have loved. We also feel many different kinds of love, such as love of a friend, love of a parent, love of a child, love of a celebrity, or love of a pet. Philosophers, historians, social scientists, and other scholars have made attempts to untangle these types of love.

**7-2aRomantic Versus Companionate Love**

Romantic love is the all-encompassing, passionate love of romantic songs and poetry, of tearjerker movies and romance novels, and has become the prevailing model of sexual relationships and marriage in the Western world. Romantic love is also sometimes called passionate love, infatuation, obsessive love, and even lovesickness, and with it comes a sense of ecstasy and anxiety, physical attraction, and sexual desire. We tend to idealize the partner, ignoring faults in the newfound joy of the attachment. Passionate love blooms in the initial euphoria of a new attachment to a sexual partner, and it often seems as if we’re swept away by it; that is why we say we “fall” in love or fall “head over heels” in love.

Companionate love involves deep affection, trust, loyalty, attachment, and intimacy; although passion is often present, companionate love lacks the high and low swings of romantic love.

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Few feelings are as joyous or exciting as romantic love. The explosion of emotion is often so intense that people talk about being unable to contain it; it feels as if it spills out of us onto everything we see. Some people joke that there is nothing quite as intolerable as those in love; they are just so annoyingly happy all the time! It is not surprising that such a powerful emotion is celebrated in poetry, story, and song. It is also not surprising that such a powerful emotion seems as though it will last forever. After all, isn’t that what we learn when the couples in fairy tales “live happily ever after” and when the couples in movies ride off into the sunset?

Unfortunately, perhaps, passion of that intensity fades after a time. If the relationship is to continue, romantic love usually develops into [**companionate love**](javascript://), or [**conjugal (CONN-jew-gull) love**](javascript://). Companionate love involves feelings of deep affection, attachment, intimacy, and ease with the partner, as well as the development of trust, loyalty, acceptance, and a willingness to sacrifice for the partner (Shaver & Hazan, 1987). Although companionate love does not have the passionate high and low swings of romantic love, passion is certainly present for many companionate lovers. Companionate love may even be a deeper, more intimate love than romantic love.

It can be difficult for couples to switch from passionate love to the deeper, more mature companionate love (Peck, 1978). Because the model of love we see on television and in movies is the highly sexual, swept-off-your-feet passion of romantic love, some may see the mellowing of that passion as a loss of love rather than a development of a different kind of love. Yet the mutual commitment to develop a new, more mature kind of love is, in fact, what we should mean by “true love.”

**7-2bThe Colors of Love: John Alan Lee**

Psychologist John Alan Lee (1974, 1988, 1998) suggests that in romantic relationships, there are more forms of love than just romantic and companionate love. Lee collected statements about love from hundreds of works of fiction and nonfiction, starting with the Bible and including both ancient and modern authors. He gathered a panel of professionals in literature, philosophy, and the social sciences and had them sort into categories the thousands of statements he found. Lee’s research identified six basic ways to love, which he calls “colors” of love, to which he gave Greek and Latin names. Lee’s categories are described in [Table 7.1](javascript://).

Table 7.1

**Lee’s Colors of Love**

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| **1.** | **Eros: The Romantic Lover** | Eros is like romantic love. Erotic lovers speak of their immediate attraction to their lover, to their eyes, skin, fragrance, or body. Most have the picture of an ideal partner in their mind, which a real partner cannot fulfill; that is why purely erotic love does not last. In childhood, erotic lovers often had a secure attachment style with their caregivers. |
| **2.** | **Ludus (LOO-diss): The Game-Playing Lover** | Ludic lovers play the “game” of love, enjoying the act of seduction. Commitment, dependency, and intimacy are not valued, and ludic lovers will often juggle several relationships at the same time. In childhood, ludic lovers often had an avoidant attachment style with their caregivers. |
| **3.** | **Storge (STOR-gay): The Quiet, Calm Lover** | Storgic love is a quiet, calm love that builds over time, similar to companionate love. Storgic lovers don’t suddenly “fall in love” and do not dream of some idealized, romantic lover; marriage, stability, and comfort within love are the goal. Should the relationship break up, the storgic partners would probably remain friends, a status unthinkable to erotic lovers who have split. |
| **4.** | **Mania: The Crazy Lover** | Manic lovers are possessive and dependent, consumed by thoughts of the beloved, and are often on a roller-coaster of highs and lows. Each encouraging sign from the lover brings joy; each little slight brings heartache, which makes their lives dramatic and painful. Manic lovers fear separation; they may sit by the phone waiting for the beloved to call, or they may call their beloved incessantly. They tend to wonder why all their relationships ultimately fail. In childhood, manic lovers often had an anxious/ambivalent attachment style with their caregivers. |
| **5.** | **Pragma: The Practical Lover** | Pragmatic lovers have a “shopping list” of qualities they are looking for in a relationship. They are very practical about their relationship and lovers. Pragmatic lovers want a deep, lasting love but believe the best way to get it is to assess their own qualities and make the best “deal” in the romantic marketplace. They tend to be planners—planning the best time to get married, have children, and even when to divorce (“Well, in two years the house will be paid for and Billy will be in high school, so that would be a good time to get divorced.”). |
| **6.** | **Agape (AH-ga-pay): The Selfless Lover** | Altruistic, selfless, never demanding, patient, and true is agapic love. Never jealous, not needing reciprocity, agapic love tends to happen in brief episodes. Lee found very few long-term agapic lovers. Lee gives the example of a man whose lover was faced with a distressing choice between him and another man, and so he gracefully bowed out. |
| As you read through these descriptions, where do you think your love style fits in? Are you a pragmatic lover, planning all the details of who you’ll fall in love with? Do you feel stir-crazy in a relationship and end up juggling lovers and playing games? Or do you have a romantic and sensitive love style? It is possible that more than one style will fit you, and also that your love style may change throughout your lifetime. What influences in your life do you think contributed to your love style today? | | |

Enlarge Table

SOURCE: Based on *John Alan Lee, “The Styles of Loving,”* Psychology Today, *8*, 43–51.

Lee’s colors of love have generated a substantial body of research, much of which shows that his love styles are independent from one another, and that each can be measured to some degree (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989). Lee points out that two lovers with compatible styles are probably going to be happier and more content with each other than two with incompatible styles. Couples who approach loving differently often cannot understand why their partners react the way they do or how they can hurt their partners unintentionally. Imagine how bored an erotic lover would be with a pragmatic lover, or how much a ludic lover would hurt a manic lover. Each would consider the other callous or even cruel, suggests Lee, when people simply tend to love differently. Higher levels of manic and ludic love styles are associated with poorer psychological health, whereas higher levels of storge and eros love styles are associated with higher levels of psychological health (Blair, 2000).

**7-2cTriangles: Robert Sternberg**

Robert Sternberg (1998, 1999), a researcher and academician, has suggested that different strategies of loving are really different ways of combining the basic building blocks of love. He proposed that love is made up of three elements—passion, intimacy, and commitment—that can be combined in different ways. Sternberg refers to a total absence of all three components as nonlove.

*Passion* is sparked by physical attraction and sexual desire, and it drives a person to pursue a romantic relationship. Passion instills a deep desire for union, and although it is often expressed sexually, self-esteem, nurturing, domination, submission, and self-actualization may also contribute to the experience. Passion is the element that identifies romantic forms of love; it is absent in the love of a parent for a child. Passion fires up quickly in a romantic relationship but is also the first element to fade (Ahmetoglu et al., 2010).

*Intimacy* involves feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in a loving relationship. It is the emotional investment one has in the relationship and includes such things as the desire to support and help the other, happiness, mutual understanding, emotional support, and communication. The intimacy component of love is experienced in many loving relationships, such as parent–child, sibling, and friendship relationships.

*Commitment*, in the short term, is the decision to love someone; in the long term, it is the determination to maintain that love. This element can sustain a relationship that is temporarily (or even permanently) going through a period without passion or intimacy. The marriage ceremony, for example, is a public display of a couple’s commitment to each other. Unlike passion, which is quick to fire up and die out, commitment builds slowly and is often related to relationship length (Ahmetoglu et al., 2010).

Sternberg combines these elements into seven forms of love, which are described in [Table 7.2](javascript://). A person may experience different forms of love at different times; romantic love may give way to companionate love, or the infatuated lover may find a person to whom he or she is willing to commit and settle down. In the emotionally healthy person, as we shall see, love evolves and changes as we mature (Sternberg, 1998).

Table 7.2

**Sternberg’s Triangular Theory of Love**

Robert Sternberg believes that love is made up of three elements: passion, intimacy, and commitment, each of which may be present or absent in a relationship. The presence or absence of these components produces eight triangles (seven of these involve at least one component; the eighth represents the absence of any components, referred to as nonlove). Problems can occur in a relationship if one person’s triangle differs significantly from their partner’s triangle. This can happen when one person has more or less of one of the three elements of love. Following are the various types of love proposed by Sternberg.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Nonlove** | In most of our casual daily relationships, there is no sense of intimacy, passion, or commitment. |
| **Liking** | When there is intimacy without (sexual) passion and without strong personal commitment, we are friends. Friends can separate for long periods of time and resume the relationship as if it had never ended. |
| **Infatuation** | Passion alone leads to infatuation. Infatuation refers to physiological arousal and a sexual desire for another person. Casual hookups and one-night stands would fall into this category. Typically, infatuation quickly fades, often to be replaced with infatuation for someone else! |
| **Empty love** | Empty love involves only commitment, as in a couple who stays together even though their relationship long ago lost its passion and intimacy. However, relationships can begin with commitment alone and develop intimacy and passion. |
| **Romantic love** | Passion and intimacy lead to romantic love, which is often the first phase of a relationship. Romantic love is often an intense, joyful experience. |
| **Companionate love** | Companionate love ranges from long-term, deeply committed friendships to married or long-term couples who have experienced a decrease in the passionate aspect of their love. |
| **Fatuous (FAT-you-us) love** | Love is fatuous (which means silly or foolish) when one does not really know the person to whom one is making a commitment. Hollywood often portrays two people who meet, become infatuated, and make a commitment by the end of the movie. However, a committed relationship continues even after passion fades, so it makes sense to know one’s partner before making a commitment. |
| **Consummate love** | Consummate, or complete, love has all three elements in balance. Even after achieving consummate love, we can lose it: passion can fade, intimacy can stagnate, and commitment can be undermined by attraction to another. But it is consummate love we all strive for. |

Enlarge Table

*SOURCE: Based On* *Sternberg, Robert J. (1986). “A Triangle Theory of Love,”* Psychological Review, *93*, 119–135.

**7-2dCan We Measure Love?**

Based on these types of theories, theorists have tried to come up with scales that measure love. However, you can’t just ask people, *“How deeply do you love [your partner]?”* Participants will interpret love in their own way. One strategy is to create a scale that measures love by measuring something strongly associated with love. Zick Rubin (1970, 1973) was one of the first to try to scientifically measure love. Rubin thought of love as a form of attachment to another person and created a “love scale” that measured what he believed to be the three components of attachment: degrees of needing *(“If I could never be with, I would feel miserable.”)*, caring *(“I would do almost anything for.”)*, and trusting *(“I feel very possessive about.”)*. Rubin’s scale proved to be an extraordinarily powerful tool to measure love. For example, how a couple scores on the “love scale” is correlated not only with their rating of the probability that they will get married, but their score even predicts how often they will gaze at each other!

**On Your Mind: What’s the difference between being in "love" or in "lust"?**

Volume 100%

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Others have since tried to create their own scales. Keith Davis and his colleagues (K. E. Davis & Latty-Mann, 1987) created the Relationship Rating Scale (RRS), which measures various aspects of relationships, such as intimacy, passion, and conflict. Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) created the Passionate Love Scale (PLS), which tries to measure the degree of intense passion or “longing for union.”

Will measures of love eventually tell us what love is made of? Well, as you can imagine, many problems are inherent in trying to measure love. Most love scales really focus on romantic love and are not as good at trying to measure the degree of companionate love (Sternberg, 1987). Also, measuring degrees of love, or types of love, is different from saying what love actually is. Finally, when you ask people questions about love, they can answer only with their conscious attitudes toward love. Many theorists suggest that we don’t consciously know why we love, how we love, or even how much we love. Other theorists argue that people do not realize to what degree love is physiological (see the section on [physiological arousal theories](javascript://) later in this chapter). So we may be measuring only how people *think* they love.

**7-3**Origins of Love

Why do we love in the first place? What purpose does love serve? After all, most animals mate successfully without experiencing “love.” Researchers’ theories on why we form emotional bonds in the first place can be grouped into five general categories: behavioral reinforcement, cognitive, evolutionary, physiological arousal, and biological.

**7-3aBehavioral Reinforcement Theories**

One group of theories suggests that we love because another person reinforces positive feelings in ourselves. Lott and Lott (1961) suggested that a rewarding or positive feeling in the presence of another person makes us like them, even when the reward has nothing to do with the other person. For example, they found that children who were rewarded continually by their teachers came to like their classmates more than children who were not equally rewarded. The opposite is also true. Griffitt and Veitch (1971) found that people tend to dislike people they meet in a hot, crowded room, no matter what those people’s personalities are like. Behavioral reinforcement theory suggests that we like people we associate with feeling good and love people if the association is very good. Love develops through a series of mutually reinforcing activities.

The behavioral reinforcement theory suggests that we love people we associate with feeling good. Our love for them grows out of doing things together that are mutually reinforcing.

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**Cognitive Theories**

Cognitive theories of liking and loving are based on an interesting paradox: The less people are paid for a task, the more they tend to like it. In other words, a person tends to think, “*Here I am washing this car, and I’m not even getting paid for it. Why am I doing this? I must like to wash cars!”* The same goes for relationships. If we are with a person often and find ourselves doing things for them, we ask, *“Why am I with them so often? Why am I doing their laundry? I must like them—I must even love them!”* This theory suggests the action comes first and the interpretation comes later (Tzeng, 1992). Studies have also found that when we think certain people like us, we’re more likely to be attracted to them (Ridge & Reber, 2002).

**7-3cEvolutionary Theory**

We introduced evolutionary theory in [Chapter 2](javascript://) and explained how this theory looks at the evolutionary advantages of human behaviors. Evolutionary theorists believe that love is a strategy that helps us form the bonds we need to reproduce and pass our genes on to the next generation (Gonzaga et al., 2008). We love to propagate the species.

To evolutionary theorists, that would explain why we tend to fall in love with people whom we think have positive traits; we want to pass those traits along to our children. Heterosexual men want a fit, healthy woman to carry their offspring, and heterosexual women want a man with the resources to protect them and help care for the infant in the long period they devote to reproduction. In support of this theory, evolutionary theorists point out that attractive men have been found to have higher quality sperm while attractive women have been found to be more fertile (Gallup & Frederick, 2010). Love creates the union that maximizes each partner’s chance of passing on their genes to the next generation.

While it’s true that evolutionary theory has primarily explored love between heterosexual couples, the theory has also been applied to same-sex couples. Although same-sex couples cannot pass all their genes on to their offspring, loving relationships between same-sex couples provide a solid foundation in which to raise a family (whether the children are adopted or conceived artificially). Other research has explored how mothers and maternal aunts of gay men have significantly more offspring than the maternal relatives of straight men, indicating evolutionary benefits to maternal reproduction (Iemmola & Camperio Ciani, 2009).

**7-3dPhysiological Arousal Theory**

How does love feel? Most people describe physiological sensations: “*I felt so excited I couldn’t breathe*”; “*My throat choked up*”; “*I felt tingling all over*.” If you look at those descriptions, couldn’t they also be descriptions of fear, anger, or excitement? Is there a difference between being in love and being on a roller-coaster?

Perhaps not. In a famous experiment, Schachter and Singer (1962) gave students a shot of epinephrine (adrenaline), which causes general arousal, including sweaty palms, increased heart rate, increased breathing, and so on. They split the students into four groups: one was told exactly what was happening and what to expect; another was told the wrong set of symptoms to expect (itching, numbness, a slight headache); a third group was told nothing; and a fourth group got an injection of saline solution (saltwater) rather than epinephrine.

Each group was put into a waiting room with a student who was actually part of the study. In half the cases, the confederate acted happy, and in half, angry. The interesting result was that the students in the informed group, when they felt aroused, assumed they were feeling the effects of the epinephrine. However, the uninformed groups tended to believe they were experiencing the same emotion as the other person in the room. They thought they were happy, or they thought they were angry. Schachter and Singer (2001) concluded that an emotion happens when there is general physiological arousal for whatever reason and a label is attached to it—and that label might be any emotion. In other words, people tend to be vulnerable to experiencing love (or another emotion) when they are physiologically aroused for whatever reason. More recent studies confirm the physiological arousal theory (Aron et al., 2005; H. Fisher, 2004). For example, couples who met during a crisis (such as during an emergency plane landing) were found to be more likely to feel strongly about one another (Aron et al., 2005; Kluger, 2008). They often incorrectly attributed their high levels of arousal to feelings for the other person.

So, is love just a label we give to a racing heart? The idea may explain why we tend to associate love and sex so closely; sexual excitement is a state of intense physiological arousal. Certainly arousal of some sort is a necessary component of love. Would you want to be in love with someone who wasn’t the least bit excited when you entered the room? Love, however, is almost certainly more than arousal alone. Perhaps arousal has a stronger connection to initial attraction than to love. Maybe that is why lust is so often confused with love.

**7-3eOther Biological Factors**

There are many other biological factors that can influence who we fall in love with. We register the “smells” of people through their [**pheromones**](javascript://) (FAIR-oh-moans)—odorless chemicals secreted by both humans and animals. These pheromones are processed in the hypothalamus, and they influence attraction, mating, and bonding (Crawford et al., 2011; Rodriguez, 2004; Savic et al., 2005; Thorne & Amrein, 2003; Wright, 1994). Research on pheromones and sexual orientation has found that gay and straight men respond differently to odors that are involved in sexual attraction, with gay men responding in similar ways as straight women (Savic et al., 2005). Other studies have found that pheromones released during women’s ovulation may contribute to increased loving and jealous behaviors in their male partners (Hasleton et al., 2007). Pheromones have also been found to promote the love bond between a mother and her infant (Kohl & Francoeur, 2002).

Our odor preferences are influenced by our major histocompatibility complex (MHC), a group of genes that helps the body recognize invaders such as bacteria and viruses (Herz, 2007; Santos et al., 2005). To pass a more complete MHC along to our offspring and protect them with the broadest array of disease resistance, heterosexual men and women may be programmed to mate with a partner whose MHC differs from their own (Crawford et al., 2011; Garver-Apgar et al., 2006; Roberts & Roiser, 2010). We are more likely to be attracted and fall in love with someone whose MHC is different from our own. Research has been exploring how the use of hormonal contraceptives, such as birth control pills, may alter MHC and odor preferences in women (Crawford et al., 2011; Larson, 2015; Roberts & Roiser, 2010).

Finally, researchers have also been looking for love in neurotransmitters and various areas of the brain. Using magnetic resonance imaging, researchers have found that certain areas of the brain are stimulated when couples are in love (Aron et al., 2005; Fisher et al., 2010; Ortigue et al., 2010; Seshadri, 2016). In addition, when these areas of the brain are stimulated, neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, create motivation and cravings to be with a particular partner (see “[Sex in Real Life: Love—It’s All in Your Head](javascript://),” later in the chapter). So it appears there may be more to love and attraction than we thought. Certainly more research is needed in these areas.

**Sex in Real Life**

**Love—It’s All in Your Head**

What does our brain have to do with our feelings of love and romance? It might be more involved than you think. Magnetic resonance imaging of brain functioning shows that certain areas of the brain experience increases in blood flow when a newly in love person looks at a photograph of their romantic partner (Aron et al., 2005; Ortigue et al., 2010; Sukel, 2012). More than 2,500 brain images from people who rated themselves as “intensely in love” were analyzed and showed strong activity in the motivation areas of the brain, where an overabundance of cells produces or receives the neurotransmitter dopamine. Other studies have found that when a person falls in love, multiple areas of the brain are stimulated to release neurotransmitters, including dopamine, oxytocin, adrenaline, and vasopressin. All of these neurotransmitters contribute to feelings of euphoria and happiness, but dopamine is critical for motivation. In fact, neuroscientists have found that people who gamble have increased dopamine when they are winning (Carey, 2005). The researchers concluded that romantic love serves as a motivation for a person to reach a goal. In this case, the goal is to spend time with the love interest.

The area of our brain responsible for sexual arousal is also activated in newly in love people, but the motivation area receives the most stimulation. Researchers hypothesize that when the motivation area is stimulated, a person is motivated to get rewards with their love interest above all else. Think about it for a minute. When we are hungry, thirsty, or tired, the motivation area of our brain is stimulated, motivating us to find food, water, or a place to sleep. When we are in love, this same area motivates us to make the connection and seek out the person we want to be with.

This may also explain why new love can feel so crazy. Feelings of euphoria, sleeplessness, a preoccupation of thoughts of the partner, and an inability to concentrate are all common when a person is newly in love. Some people describe new love as a “drug,” one that often leads them to do things they wouldn’t normally do. Perhaps it is a result of the increased blood flow to our motivation center—and the increases in dopamine—that motivate us to get more of what we desire.

Although more research is needed on neuroscience, brain activity, and emotions, it has been suggested that this research might help us understand why people with autism often are indifferent to romantic relationships (Strunz et al., 2017). It’s possible that atypical brain development in the motivational areas of the brain contribute to the difficulties with intimacy in those with autism. This research may also help us understand why love changes over the years. The strength of activity in the motivation section of the brain decreases as the length of the relationship increases. In the future, research into brain physiology will continue to teach us more about the biology of love.

**7-4**Love from Childhood to Maturity

Throughout our lives, we love others. First, we love our parents or caretakers, and then siblings, friends, and romantic partners. At each stage of life, we learn lessons about love that help us mature into the next stage. Love gets more complex as we get older. Let us walk through the different stages of individual development and look at the various ways love manifests itself as we grow.

**Childhood**

In infancy, the nature and quality of the bond with the caregiver can have profound effects on the ability of a person to form attachments throughout life. Our parents, or the adults who raised us, are our first teachers of love and intimacy. Children are keenly aware of parental love, and those who feel loved report feeling safe and protected (D’Cruz & Stagnitti, 2010; Rauer & Volling, 2007). Loving, attentive caregivers tend to produce secure, happy children.

Attachment theory grew out of the work of John Bowlby in the 1940s. Bowlby, a psychoanalyst, believed that children had an innate motivational system to attach to their primary caregiver, which helped ensure their safety and survival. This theory grew out of Bowlby’s work with teenage criminals who experienced difficulties forming relationships with others. He believed these difficulties were caused by their early, insufficient bonds with caregivers. Bowlby proposed that infants developed an attachment, or an emotional bond, with their mother. (Although Bowlby wrote about attachment as a mother–child bond, we know today that children can develop this bond with a mother, father, nanny, grandparent, or primary caregiver. However, it was the mother’s response to her child that Bowlby [1969] believed was most important.) Children whose mothers were attentive and responded in sensitive, patient, and kind manners were more likely to form secure attachments. These children were often playful, social, uninhibited, and confident in exploring the world around them. However, children whose mothers were unavailable or responded in inconsistent, angry, or dismissive manners were more likely to form insecure attachments. These children were more likely to feel threatened when alone and exhibited crying or clinging behaviors to reestablish contact with their caregivers. Consistent and sensitive caregiving makes children feel protected and safe, which sets the foundation for regulating emotions later in life (Wellisch, 2010).

A strong and secure bond with a caregiver can have profound effects on the ability of the person to form attachments throughout life.

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Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth et al., 1978) built on Bowlby’s research and suggested that infants form one of three types of attachment behaviors that follow them throughout life. Secure infants tolerate caregivers being out of their sight because they believe the caregiver will respond if they cry out or need care. Inconsistent caregiving results in anxious/ambivalent babies who cry more than secure babies and panic when the caregiver leaves them. Avoidant babies often have caregivers who are uncomfortable with hugging and holding them and tend to force separation on the child at an early age. A child’s attachment style is established by the age of 9 months (Prior & Glaser, 2006).

Adults who had a secure attachment in childhood report more positive childhood experiences, higher levels of self-esteem, better health, more advanced language development, as well as less anxiety, shame, guilt, and loneliness (Akbag & Imamoglu, 2010; Diamond & Fagundes, 2010; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Gentzler et al., 2010; Maunder & Hunter, 2008; Prior & Glaser, 2006). In addition, they also have a fairly easy time trusting and establishing intimate relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001).

In the 1980s, Cindy Hazen and Phillip Shaver applied attachment theory to adult intimate relationships. They suggested that relationships between adult romantic partners were similar to those between children and primary caregivers. Like children and their caregivers, adults like to be close to their romantic partners and are often comforted by their presence, especially during times of stress. Hazen and Shaver (1987a,b) suggested that childhood attachment styles may influence the type of intimate relationships we form as adults. They believe that we tend to relate to others in our love relationships much as we did with our primary caregiver when we were young.

Adults who had anxious/ambivalent attachments with their caregivers often have a negative view of others as adults and tend to have a difficult time with trust. They may worry that their partner doesn’t really love them or will leave them. Finally, those with an avoidant attachment often have a negative view of others and are uncomfortable with intimacy. If you grew up in a family in which your caregiver was inconsistent or distant, you learn that love is emotionally risky. In fact, those who do not experience intimacy growing up may have a harder time establishing intimate relationships as adults (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2010; Dorr, 2001). This doesn’t mean it’s not possible to love someone if you didn’t experience intimacy as a child, but it can be more challenging to allow yourself to love and be loved.

While many researchers believe that attachment styles are stable and unchanging throughout a person’s life, some “revisionist” theorists believe that our attachment styles are relatively flexible and can be revised and modified throughout our lives (Fraley, 2002; Kagan, 1996; Lewis, 1997, 1999). Certain negative experiences, such as the loss of a parent or abusive relationships, can modify one’s attachments with others. For example, children with divorced parents have decreased psychological, social, and physical well-being after their parents’ divorce, are less trusting of their partners in intimate relationships, and are more likely to experience a divorce in their own lives (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Schaan & Vögele, 2016). But keep in mind that having divorced parents does not put children at an overall disadvantage in the development of love relationships. The most important factor is the quality of the relationships with the parents after the divorce. If children have a good relationship with at least one of their parents, the negative effects from the divorce may be reduced (Ensign et al., 1998). Our initial expectations about relationships may or may not be confirmed as we grow, and it’s possible our thoughts and ideas about attachment may be modified to incorporate updated experiences and information.

Young love lays the groundwork for adult intimacy.

Kevin Dodge/Getty Images

**7-4bAdolescence**

There is something attractive about young love, which is why it is celebrated so prominently in novels and movies. The love relationship seems so important, so earnest, and so passionate at the time, and yet so innocent in retrospect. Why are the dips and rises of our loves so important to us in adolescence? Adolescent love teaches us how to react to love, to manage our emotions, and to handle the pain of love. It also lays the groundwork for adult intimacy. Adolescents must learn to establish a strong personal identity separate from their family. Experimentation with different approaches to others is natural, and during adolescence, we develop the [**role repertoire**](javascript://) that follows us into adulthood. Similarly, we experiment with different intimacy styles (J. Johnson & Alford, 1987) and develop an [**intimacy repertoire**](javascript://), a set of behaviors that we use to forge close relationships throughout our lives.

Establishing our repertoires can be a difficult task. This helps explain why adolescent relationships can be so intense and fraught with jealousy, and why adolescents often are unable to see beyond the relationship (J. Johnson & Alford, 1987). Our first relationships often take the form of a “crush” or infatuation and are often directed toward unattainable partners such as teachers or movie stars. In fact, studies have found that movie stars provide adolescents with safe outlets for developing romantic love before dating and sexual activity begin (Bui, 2017; Karniol, 2001).

Sometimes the first lessons of love are painful, as we learn that love may not be returned or that feelings of passion fade. Yet managing such feelings helps us develop a mature love style. Many factors have been found to be associated with the ability to find romantic love in adolescence, such as marital status of the parents, the quality of the parental relationship, and comfort with one’s body (Cecchetti, 2007; Coordt, 2005; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2001).

The emotions of adolescent love are so powerful that adolescents may think that they are the only ones to have gone through such joy, pain, and confusion. They may gain some comfort in knowing that almost everyone goes through the same process to some degree. Confusion about love certainly does not end with adolescence.

**7-5**Adult Love and Intimacy

Love relationships can last many years. As time goes by, love and relationships grow and change, and trying to maintain a sense of stability and continuity while still allowing for change and growth is probably the single greatest challenge of long-term love relationships.

Attaining intimacy is different from loving. We can love our cat, our favorite musician, or a great leader, but intimacy requires reciprocity—it takes two. Intimacy is a dance of two souls, each of whom must reveal a little, risk a little, and try a lot. In some ways, therefore, true intimacy is more difficult to achieve than true love because the emotion of love may be effortless, whereas the establishment of intimacy always requires effort.

Does fate determine whom you will fall in love with, or are there other factors at work? We now talk about some of the factors that contribute to adult love and intimacy.

**Attraction**

Why are we attracted to certain people but not others? We’ve already discussed the role of pheromones, and you’ll probably agree that smell is an important component of attraction. But researchers also talk about the [**field of eligibles**](javascript://) (Kerckhoff, 1964). Although we are surrounded by hundreds of people, we are only attracted to a handful of them. Our culture helps determine who is in our field of eligibles through social rules about acceptable and unacceptable partners. Because of these rules, we are more likely to be attracted to those who are similar to us in race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic group, and even age. Think about an older person who dates a much younger person. Many people might criticize them or dismiss the relationship. In this way, society teaches us to whom we should, and shouldn’t, be attracted.

One of the most reliable predictors of attraction is proximity. Although we might want to believe that we could meet a complete stranger at a bar and fall madly in love, the research tells us this scenario is rare. People are most likely to find lovers among the people they know or meet through the people they know. We are much more likely to meet our romantic partners at a party, religious institution, or friend’s house, where the people are likely to come from backgrounds very similar to our own.

We also tend to be attracted to partners who are similar to ourselves—in ethnicity, race, social class, religion, education, and even in attitudes and personality (Byrne & Murnen, 1988; Hitsch et al., 2010). Although folklore tells us both that “birds of a feather flock together” and that “opposites attract,” the research supports only the first saying. We are also more likely to be attracted to someone who has a similar family history and political views (Michael et al., 1994; Z. Rubin, 1973). The “matching hypothesis” claims that we are even drawn to others with similar levels of attractiveness.

Although we are typically first attracted to another person based on physical factors, such as their hair, eyes, or smile, physical appearance tends to fade in importance over the life of the relationship. Physically attractive people are assumed by others to have more socially desirable personalities and to be happier and more successful (Maestripieri et al., 2016). Interestingly, the correlation between levels of attractiveness is highest for couples who meet and start dating within a month or so. Couples who were friends before they started dating are more likely to have different levels of attractiveness (Hunt et al., 2015). This is due to the fact that the longer a couple knows each other, the more they get to know unique and interesting aspects about each other, and the less focused they are on looks.

We are attracted to people who are open, receptive, social, emotionally stable, and who have a good sense of humor. It also wouldn’t hurt if they are financially stable. In the past, research found that heterosexual women rated financial stability in a partner higher than heterosexual men did (Buss, 1989). This was consistent across cultures. However, over the years these gender differences have decreased, and more recently people report being attracted to partners with financial resources (Buss et al., 2001; Sheldon, 2007).

A Vietnamese ritual of “lacquering” involves blackening a young woman’s teeth when she is ready for marriage. Once stained, the teeth remain blackened for the rest of her life. Lacquered teeth are considered attractive in many parts of Vietnam.

Laurie Nassif

What is it, finally, that we really look for in a partner? Although physical attractiveness is important, people around the world also report that mutual attraction, kindness, and reciprocal love are important factors (Buss et al., 2001; Pearce et al., 2010). In addition to this, people are in surprising agreement on what factors they want in an ideal partner. A study of LGBTQ individuals showed that, no matter what their sexual orientation, gender, or cultural background, all really wanted the same thing: They wanted partners who had similar interests, values, and religious beliefs, who were physically attractive, honest, trustworthy, intelligent, affectionate, warm, kind, funny, financially independent, and dependable (Amador et al., 2005; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003). Now that doesn’t seem to be too much to ask, does it?

**7-5bAttraction in Different Cultures**

Do men and women in every culture look for the same traits? For example, are more males than females looking for physically attractive mates in Nigeria? Is earning potential more important in males than females in China? David Buss (1989) did an ambitious study comparing the importance of, among other things, physical attractiveness, earning potential, and age difference to men and women in 37 cultures. His results confirmed the nature of mate attraction (although Buss assumed all his respondents were heterosexual and, therefore, assumed they were all talking about the other sex). He found that across all 37 cultures, men valued “good looks” in a partner more than women did, whereas women valued “good financial prospect” in a partner more than men did. Also interesting is that men preferred mates who were younger than they were, whereas women preferred mates who were older. See the nearby “[Sexual Diversity in Our World](javascript://)” feature for more information about this study.

**Sexual Diversity in Our World**

**What Do You Want in a Partner?**

In a classic study on cultural differences in what heterosexual men and women look for in a mate, David Buss (1989) found that, almost universally, men value good looks more in a mate, and women value good financial prospects. More recent research has found that in the United States, good looks and financial stability are important partner qualities for both men and women (Amador et al., 2005; Lacey et al., 2004). Buss (1989) also found that men preferred women younger than themselves, while women preferred men older than themselves. These preferences have been found to be nearly universal (Gustafson & Fransson, 2015). A more recent study by Schwarz and Hassebrauck (2012) found that while men were willing to accept a partner who was anywhere from 4 years older to 10 year younger, the preference in women was reversed. Buss (1989) believed that these mate preferences were due to reproductive trends—men prefer younger women because they have a higher reproductive capacity, while women prefer older men because they offer more financial resources.

There is more social acceptance for older man/younger woman relationships than there is for older woman/younger man relationships. Here Jeff Goldblum and his wife, Emilie Livingston, who is 30 years younger.

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In the accompanying graph, participants rated the importance of age difference in potential mates. A negative number refers to a desire for a mate who is younger by a certain number of years, whereas a higher number refers to a desire for a mate who is older by a certain number of years.

In this graph, heterosexual respondents from different countries rated the importance of age difference in potential mates. A negative number refers to a desire for a mate who is younger by a certain number of years, whereas a positive number refers to a desire for a mate who is older by a certain number of years.

SOURCE: Based on David Buss, Sex Differences in Human Mate Preferences: Evolutionary Hypotheses Tested in 37 Cultures. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 12, 149, 1989.

**Intimate Relationships**

What exactly is intimacy? Think about the word; what does it imply to you? The word *intimacy* is derived from the Latin word *intimus*, meaning “inner” or “innermost” (Hatfield, 1988). Keeping our innermost selves hidden is easy; revealing our deepest desires, longings, and insecurities can be scary. As we discussed in [Chapter 3](javascript://), intimate partners reveal beliefs and ideas to each other, disclose personal facts, share opinions, and admit to their fears and hopes. In fact, self-disclosure is so important to intimacy that early researchers thought that willingness to self-disclose was itself the definition of intimacy (M. S. Clark & Reis, 1988). True self-disclosure is a two-way street, and it involves both partners sharing feelings, fears, and dreams, not just facts and opinions. As we discussed in [Chapter 3](javascript://), individuals who can self-disclose have higher levels of self-esteem and confidence in their relationships, and rate their relationships as more satisfying (Gordon & Chen, 2016; Hiew et al., 2016).

Intimacy involves a sense of closeness, bondedness, and connectedness. People who value intimacy tend to express greater trust in their friends; are more concerned for them; tend to disclose more emotional, personal, and relational content; and have more positive thoughts about others. They also tend to be seen as more likable and noncompetitive by peers and to smile, laugh, and make eye contact more often (M. S. Clark & Reis, 1988).

**Real Research**

Research has found that because of the difficulties involved in managing close relationships, individuals who begin a new romance are at risk for losing two close friends (Sample, 2010).

However, all types of disclosures are risky; the other person may not understand or accept the information offered or may not reciprocate. Thus, risk taking and trust are crucial to the development of intimacy. Because intimacy makes us vulnerable and because we invest so much in the other person, intimacy can also lead to betrayal and disappointment, anger, and jealousy. We explore the dark side of intimacy later in this chapter.

**Gender Differences in Styles of Intimacy**

If any area of research in love and intimacy has yielded conflicting findings, it is the question of gender differences. Overall, the research has found that heterosexual women tend to give more importance to the hope of having an intimate relationship in their future than heterosexual men do (Lassche & Martinez, 2010; Oner, 2001). However, M. S. Clark and Reis (1988) suggest that the subject remains murky because many other variables are at work, such as culturally determined gender roles.

For example, men and women report equally desiring and valuing intimacy, but many men grow up with behavioral inhibitions to expressing intimacy. Although this has been slowly changing, traditionally boys are discouraged from displaying vulnerability or doubt about intimacy. As one man’s experience reveals in the accompanying “[Sex in Real Life](javascript://),” it is acceptable for men to talk about sex, but talk of intimacy is often taboo. Although this man’s experience may have been extreme, exaggerated by the all-male atmosphere of the athletic team, such attitudes are often communicated in subtle ways to most men. Therefore, men may remain unexpressive about intimacy, however strongly they may desire it. It could also be that men simply express intimacy differently—perhaps more through action than words.

**Sex in Real Life**

**Gender Roles and Expressions of Love**

Following is a story written by a heterosexual man who was reflecting about his experiences growing up as a young boy. As you read through it, consider the impact of gender roles on our expressions of love and intimacy. Do you think today’s men are more comfortable expressing their emotions? Why or why not?

I played organized sports for 15 years, and they were as much a part of my growing up as Cheerios, television, and homework. My sexuality unfolded within this all-male social world of sport, where sex was always a major focus. I remember, for example, when we as prepubertal boys used the old “buying baseball cards” routine as a cover to sneak peeks at *Playboy* and *Swank* magazines at the newsstand. We would talk endlessly after practices about “boobs” and what it must feel like to kiss and neck. Later, in junior high, we teased one another in the locker room about “jerking off” or being virgins, and there were endless interrogations about “how far” everybody was getting with their girlfriends.

Eventually, boyish anticipation spilled into real sexual relationships with girls, which, to my delight and confusion, turned out to be a lot more complex than I ever imagined. While sex (kissing, necking, and petting) got more exciting, it also got more difficult to figure out and talk about. Inside, most of the boys, like myself, needed to love and be loved. We were awkwardly reaching out for intimacy. Yet publicly, the message that got imparted was to “catch feels,” be cool, and connect with girls but don’t allow yourself to depend on them. Once when I was a high school junior, the gang in the weight room accused me of being wrapped around my girlfriend’s finger. Nothing could be further from the truth, I assured them; to prove it, I broke up with her. I felt miserable about this at the time, and I still feel bad about it.

Within the college jock subculture, men’s public protests against intimacy sometimes became exaggerated and ugly. I remember two teammates, drunk and rowdy, ripping girls’ blouses off at a mixer and crawling on their bellies across the dance floor to look up skirts. Then there were the Sunday morning late breakfasts in the dorm. We jocks would usually all sit at one table and be forced to listen to one braggart or another describe his sexual exploits of the night before. Although a lot of us were turned off by such kiss-and-tell, ego-boosting tactics, we never openly criticized them. Real or fabricated, displays of raunchy sex were also assumed to “win points.”

When sexual relationships were “serious,” that is, tempered by love and commitment, the unspoken rule was silence. It was rare when we young men shared our feelings about women, misgivings about sexual performance, or disdain for the crudeness and insensitivity of some of our teammates. I now see the tragic irony in this: We could talk about superficial sex and anything that used, trivialized, or debased women, but frank discussions about sexuality that unfolded within a loving relationship were taboo. Within the locker room subculture, sex and love were seldom allowed to mix. There was a terrible split between inner needs and outer appearances, between our desire for the love of women and our feigned indifference toward them.

SOURCE: Adapted from Sabo and Runfola (1980).

However, some evidence indicates that the differences in attitudes between the genders may be changing. Although in the past women were more comfortable with intimate encounters and men were more comfortable taking independent action, now men and women are more comfortable in both roles (Choi, 2004). If so, maybe we can expect greater ease in intimacy between and among the sexes in the upcoming generations of men and women.

The importance of accepting traditional gender roles is also reflected in comparisons of gay and straight men. Although both agree on the ideal characteristics of love partners and express the same amounts and kinds of love, gay men are more likely to believe that “you should share your most intimate thoughts and feelings with the person you love” (Engel & Saracino, 1986, p. 242). This may be because gay men tend to adopt fewer stereotyped beliefs about gender roles than straight men.

**Intimacy in Different Cultures**

Love seems to be a basic human emotion. Aren’t “basic human emotions” the same everywhere? Isn’t anger the same in Chicago and Timbuktu, and sadness the same in Paris and Bombay? Although there is evidence that the majority of worldwide cultures experience romantic love (see this chapter’s “[Sexual Diversity in Our World](javascript://)” feature), we do know that one’s culture has been found to have a more powerful impact on love beliefs than one’s gender (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Culture affects how a person defines love, how easily they fall in love, whom they fall in love with, and how the relationship proceeds (Hatfield et al., 2015; Rohmann et al., 2016).

As we discussed in [Chapter 3](javascript://), cultural differences in individual versus group needs can affect communication patterns. It should come as no surprise that these cultural differences can also affect patterns of intimacy. Passionate love is typically emphasized in individualistic cultures, but in collectivist cultures, passionate relationships are often viewed negatively because they may disrupt family traditions (Cao et al., 2015; Hiew et al., 2015; Kim & Hatfield, 2004). For example, although Americans often equate love with happiness, the Chinese have equated love with sadness and jealousy (Shaver et al., 1992). This is because collectivist cultures, such as that of China or Japan, traditionally marry for reasons other than love. Passionate love dies and is not viewed as stable enough to base a marriage on. In a study of France, Japan, and the United States, intimacy style was directly related to whether the culture was individualistic, collectivistic, or mixed (France), and also to how much the culture had adopted stereotypical views of gender roles (that is, how much it tended to see men as assertive and women as nurturing; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). The Japanese, with a collectivistic culture and highly stereotypical gender roles, had lower scores in measures of attachment and commitment and were less likely to value self-disclosure than the French or Americans (Kito, 2005). Americans have traditionally had stereotypical gender roles, but because of the highly individualistic culture in the United States, Americans tend to have high levels of confusion and ambivalence about relationships. Interestingly, the French, who have a culture with high individual motivation yet with a strong group orientation, and who also have a more balanced view of masculine and feminine gender roles, had the lowest degree of conflict in intimate relationships.

Culture also affects one’s sense of self. For example, in China, people’s sense of self is entirely translated through their relationships with others. A Chinese man would consider his roles as a son, brother, husband, or a father before he would think of himself as an individual (Dion & Dion, 2010). In China, love is thought of in terms of how a mate would be received by family and community, not in terms of one’s sense of romance. Because of this, the Chinese have a more practical approach to love than do Americans (Cao et al., 2015; Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002).

Finally, a cross-cultural study of Brazil, Russia, and Central Africa found several differences in how love is conceptualized (Pilishvili & Koyanongo, 2016). While participants from all cultures agreed that love included friendship, patience, and passion, Brazilians were more likely to view love as sensual, interpersonal, and intimate while Africans were more likely to view it as God-given and divine. Russians, on the other hand, viewed love as an obstacle that must be overcome. Researchers have found that love is given highest importance in Westernized nations and the lowest importance in the less developed Asian nations (R. Levine et al., 1995). Thus, culture plays a role in how we experience and express both love and intimacy.

**7-5dLong-Term Love and Commitment**

The ability to maintain love over time is the hallmark of maturity. Many people regard love as something that happens to them, almost like catching the flu. In my chapter-opening Notebook feature, I discussed how it takes effort and commitment to maintain love—not only commitment to the other person but also commitment to continually build on and improve the quality of the relationship. Most long-term relationships that end do so not because the couple “fell out of love” but because, somewhere down the line, they stopped working together on their relationship. In this sense, the old saying is true: The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference.

R. J. Sternberg (1985), you may recall, claimed that passion, intimacy, and commitment are the three elements of love; in consummate love, he says, all three are present. Research has found that age and relationship length are both positively related to intimacy and commitment; that is, the older the couple and the longer the relationship, typically the stronger the intimacy and commitment in the relationship (Ahmetoglu et al., 2010). Nonetheless, one tends to hear very little talk of commitment in our culture, with its great emphasis on passionate love. Couples going through hard times can persevere and build even stronger and more intimate relationships when their commitment reflects such a deep sense of trust.

The ability to maintain love over time is the hallmark of maturity. Couples who have been together a long time often have a sense of ease with each other.

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Couples who continue to communicate with each other, remain committed to each other and the relationship, and remain interested in and intimate with each other build a lasting bond of trust. Those who don’t may feel isolated and lonely in relationships that nevertheless endure for many years. Although passionate love may fade over time, love itself does not necessarily diminish. The decline of passion can allow the other components of love to flourish in the relationship.

**7-5eLoss of Love**

Popular songs are often about the loss of love; the blues is a whole genre of music built on the experience of losing love, and country music is well known for its songs of lost love. Most of us will experience the loss of love at some point in our lifetimes. In fact, it’s not uncommon today to experience multiple relationship breakups (Morris et al., 2015).

The loss of love can cause deep sadness and a profound sense of loss for most people. Many are vulnerable to self-blame, loss of self-esteem, and distrust of others, and they may rush into another relationship to replace the lost partner (Luciano & Orth, 2017). Research on brain physiology has found that a relationship breakup stimulates areas of the brain that are related to motivation, reward, and addiction, which sheds some light on the excessive alcohol consumption or drug use in those who have been rejected (Fisher et al., 2010).

As difficult as a breakup can be, several factors may lower the level of distress. One of these is high self-esteem, which can help people continue to feel hopeful and think more positive thoughts about themselves after a breakup (Luciano & Orth, 2017). Those with low self-esteem tend to blame themselves and worry that no one will ever love them. Earlier, we discussed the importance of attachment styles, and it probably won’t surprise you to learn that those with secure attachment styles often have the easiest time with breakups, whereas those with anxious attachment styles have the most difficulties (Luciano & Orth, 2017). They may desperately try to get the relationship back or refuse to let go.

There is no easy way to decrease the pain of a breakup. Time helps, mostly because as time goes by there is less activity in the area of the brain related to attachment (Fisher et al., 2010). When this activity slows down, a person is better able to reappraise the breakup and assess what was learned in the relationship. The good news is that most people do bounce back after the loss of love and realize they learned important lessons that may be useful in future relationships (Luciano & Orth, 2017). We will discuss relationship breakups more in [Chapter 9](javascript://).

Love, Sex, and How We Build Intimate Relationships

One way to express deep love and intimacy is through sexual behavior, but sexual behavior itself is not necessarily an expression of love or intimacy. How do we make the decision to have sex? There are many levels of relationships that can lead to sex. Casual sex and “hooking up” can happen between people who barely know each other, generated by excitement, novelty, and/or pure physical pleasure.

**7-6aLove and Sex**

Sex can be an expression of affection and intimacy without including passionate love; sex can also be engaged in purely for sexual pleasure or for procreation; or sex can be an expression of love within a loving relationship. Problems can develop when one partner has one view of the developing sexual relationship and the other partner takes a different perspective.

Because the decision to engage in sexual behavior involves the feelings and desires of two people, examining your own motivations, as well as your partner’s, is important. When making the decision to initiate a sexual relationship with another person, consider the following:

1. Clarify your values. At some point, each of us needs to make value decisions regarding intimacy, sex, and love. What role does love play in your sexual decisions? How will you reconcile these values with those you have learned from your family, friends, and religion?
2. Be honest with yourself—which is often more difficult than being honest with others. Entering a relationship with another person takes close self-examination. What do you really want out of the experience? From this person? Are you hoping the sexual contact will lead to something deeper, or are you in it simply for the physical pleasure? What will you do if you find that you (or your partner) have a sexually transmitted infection? Are you in this because you want to be or because you feel some kind of pressure to be sexual—from yourself or from your partner? Could you say “no” comfortably? Are you ready for a sexual relationship with this person?
3. Be honest with your partner. Another person’s feelings and needs are always at issue in any relationship, and part of our responsibility as caring human beings is not to hurt or exploit others. Why is your partner interested in sex with you? Do their expectations differ from yours? Will they be hurt if your relationship does not develop further? Have you discussed your feelings?

The decision to engage in sex may or may not be related to feelings of love. Casual sex has become much more common and accepted than it was before the 1970s, when young people (especially women) were strongly advised to save their “greatest asset,” their virginity, for marriage. Overall, the importance of love as an essential condition for sexual relations has diminished.

Studies have found that when we do begin to feel attracted to someone, we act intimate; we gaze longer at each other, lean on each other, and touch more (Hatfield, 1988). People meeting each other for the first time tend to reveal their levels of attraction by their body language. Perper (1985) observed heterosexual strangers approaching each other in bars. The first stage he called the initial contact and conversation. If two people are mutually attracted, they will begin to turn their bodies more and more toward each other, until they are facing one another. The first tentative touches begin, a hand briefly on a hand or a forearm, for example, and an increase in duration and intimacy as the evening progresses. Finally, the couple shows “full body synchronization”; their facial expressions, posture, and even breathing begin to mirror their partner’s. As we discussed in [Chapter 3](javascript://), women smile, gaze, lean forward, and touch more often than men do in conversation. Women also “flirt” with their nonverbal cues (such as hair flipping and head nodding) to encourage their partner to reveal more about themselves, which would, in turn, allow the women to formulate an impression of the person (W. E. Martin, 2001).

**Developing Intimacy Skills**

There are many ways to improve our intimacy skills. Developing intimacy often begins with understanding and liking ourselves—self-love. Other important skills we can develop to enhance our ability to form relationships include receptivity, listening, showing affection, trust, and respect.

**On Your Mind: What is the difference between deeply liking someone and being in love with them?**

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**Self-Love**

[**Self-love**](javascript://) is different from conceit or [**narcissism**](javascript://); it is not a process of promoting ourselves but of being at ease with our positive qualities and forgiving ourselves for our faults. If you are not willing to get to know yourself and to accept your own faults, why would others think you are any more interested in them or that you would judge them any less harshly? Many people look to others for indications of their own self-worth. We must first take responsibility to know ourselves (self-intimacy) and then to accept ourselves as we are. Once we like ourselves, we can reach out to others.

**Receptivity**

Many of us think we are receptive to others when actually we are sending subtle signals that we do not want to be bothered. Receptivity can be communicated through eye contact and smiling. This allows the other person to feel comfortable and makes us approachable. Taking 5 minutes a day to sit and reconnect with your partner may improve your relationship and help preserve intimacy and passion.

**Listening**

We discussed in [Chapter 3](javascript://) how true communication begins with listening. Nothing shows you care about another person quite as much as your full attention. It can be very difficult to listen to people talk only of themselves or to people who see any comment made by another person primarily in terms of how it relates to them. Learning to truly listen enhances intimacy.

**Affection**

How do we show affection to another person? If you watch loving parents with their child, it is easy to see how affection is displayed. Parents attend to their children, smile at them, touch them in affectionate ways, look in their eyes, and hug and kiss them. Most people want the same things from their intimate friends and lovers. Affection shows that you feel a sense of warmth and security with your partner.

**Trust**

To trust another is an act of courage because it grants that person the power to hurt or disappoint you. However, intimacy requires trust. Usually trust develops slowly. You trust your partner a little bit at the beginning of your relationship and begin to trust them more and more as they prove to be dependable and predictable. Having trust in our partner leads to more confidence that the relationship will last. When a couple trusts each other, each expects the partner to care and respond to the other’s needs, now and in the future (Zak et al., 1998).

Remember earlier we talked about children from divorced families being less able to trust in intimate relationships? Perhaps it is because they have seen firsthand what happens in unsuccessful marriages, and they fear intimate relationships just don’t work. It can be tough to trust when one is ambivalent or scared. The important thing to remember is that often the longer a relationship lasts, the more trust builds between the partners (Jacquet & Surra, 2001).

Forgiveness is another important part of trust. It’s possible that a partner may do something to make us question our trust in them. Knowing how and when to forgive are important aspects of a healthy relationship (Kato, 2016).

**Forgive and Forget?**

A student discusses trust in intimate relationships and relates a recent experience she had with her boyfriend.

Volume 100%

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**Respect**

We enter into relationships with our own needs and desires, which sometimes cloud the fact that the other person is different from us and has their own special needs. Respect is the process of acknowledging and understanding that person’s needs, even if you don’t share them.

**7-6cThe Dark Side of Love**

Love evokes powerful emotions; this is both its strength and its weakness. Many of the emotions that can come from strong feelings about another person can also be destructive to a relationship and may require great maturity or a strong act of will to overcome. Let’s now examine three of the dark sides of love: jealousy, compulsiveness, and possessiveness.

**Jealousy: The Green-Eyed Monster**

Imagine you are at a party with a person with whom you are in an exclusive sexual relationship. You notice that person standing close to someone else, talking and laughing, and occasionally putting their hand on the other person’s arm. At one point, you notice your partner whispering in the other person’s ear, and they both laugh. How does that make you feel? Are you jealous? But wait, I forgot to tell you: The person your partner was talking to is their cousin. Are you still jealous?

Jealousy is an emotional reaction to a relationship that is being threatened (Knox et al., 1999, 2007; Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997). A threat is a matter of interpretation; people who deeply trust their partners may not be able to imagine a situation in which the relationship is really threatened. We are most jealous in a situation in which the person flirting with our partner has traits we ourselves want (or we fantasize that they do). Maybe we imagine our partner will find the other person more desirable than us, sexier, or funnier. We imagine that the partner sees in the other person all those traits we believe that we lack.

Men and women experience similar levels of jealousy in intimate relationships, yet there is controversy over what triggers jealousy. Some research supports the fact that men are more jealous when they believe that their partner had a sexual encounter with another person, whereas women are often more focused on the emotional or relationship aspects of infidelity (Zandbergen & Brown, 2015). However, it may have to do with whether the relationship is short or long term. In short-term relationships, both men and women are more threatened by sexual infidelity, whereas emotional infidelity is often more threatening in a long-term relationship (Mathes, 2005; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). Cheating, either emotional or sexual, can lead to jealousy in both men and women. Although the majority of research on infidelity has been done on heterosexual couples, limited studies on same-sex couples have found that reactions to infidelity in lesbian and gay couples are similar to those in heterosexual couples, with emotional pain and jealousy the most common responses (Harris, 2012; LaSala, 2004; Shernoff, 2007). We will discuss infidelity more in [Chapter 9](javascript://).

**Real Research**

Couples who post their relationship status on Facebook may be more jealous than those who do not post such statuses (Orosz et al., 2015). Researchers believe that becoming “Facebook Official” is akin to a “digital wedding ring,” letting others know about one’s unavailability.

We are often jealous when we think, fantasize, or imagine that another person has traits we ourselves want.

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Although many people think that jealousy shows that they really care for a person, in fact, it shows a lack of trust in the partner and low self-esteem (Redlick, 2016). One study on levels of distrust of men among women of different ethnicities found that heterosexual Hispanic women had more distrust of men with whom they had intimate relationships than either Black or White women (levels were highest in Dominican women, followed by Puerto Rican and Mexican; Estacion & Cherlin, 2010). Jealousy is also related to attachment styles, with anxious and avoidant attachment styles experiencing more jealousy (Lassri et al., 2016; Luo & Jiang, 2016). People who do not experience jealousy are often more secure, and this security in intimate relationships tends to increase as the couple’s relationship grows. That is, the longer we are in a relationship with someone, the more our vulnerability to jealousy decreases.

Jealousy can also be a self-fulfilling prophecy; jealous individuals can drive their mates away, which convinces them that they were right to be jealous in the first place. Jealousy can be contained by trying to improve one’s own self-image, by turning it around into a compliment (not “*she’s flirting with other guys*” but “*look at how lucky I am—other guys also find her attractive*”), and by trust of one’s partner. Communicating with your partner about your jealous feelings can often help to maintain your relationship. Opening up and talking about your uncertainty about the relationship or reassessing the relationship can help restore and strengthen the relationship.

Finally, in a nearby Real Research feature we discuss jealousy and the use of Facebook. Overall, couples who report higher levels of “love” report fewer Facebook maintenance behaviors (e.g., checking, revising, posting on partner’s page; Northrup & Smith, 2016).

**Compulsiveness: Addicted to Love**

Being in love can produce a sense of ecstasy, euphoria, and a feeling of well-being, much like a powerful drug (see “[Sex in Real Life: Love—It’s All in Your Head](javascript://),” earlier in the chapter). In fact, when a person is in love, their body releases the drug phenylethylamine, which produces these feelings (Sabelli et al., 1996; by the way, phenylethylamine is an ingredient in chocolate, which may be why it can make us feel better, especially during a breakup!). Some people do move from relationship to relationship as if they were love addicted, trying to continually re-create that feeling, or else they obsessively hang on to a love partner long after their interest has waned.

Love addiction is reinforced by the popular media’s portrayals (even as far back as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*) of passionate love as all-consuming. It fosters the belief that only one person is fated to be your “soul mate,” that love is always mutual, and that you’ll live “happily ever after.” Some people feel the need to be in love because society teaches that only then are they really whole, happy, and fulfilled in their role as a human being. Yet love based solely on need can never be truly fulfilling. In Peele and Brodsky’s (1991) book *Love and Addiction*, they argue that love addiction is more common than most believe, and that it is based on a continuation of an adolescent view of love that is never replaced as the person matures. Counseling or psychotherapy may help people come to terms with their addiction to love.

**Possessiveness: Every Move You Make, I’ll Be Watching You**

Because love also entails risk, dependency to some degree, and a strong connection between people, there is always the danger that the strength of the bond can be used by one partner to manipulate the other. Abusive love relationships exist when one partner tries to increase their own sense of self-worth or to control the other’s behavior by withdrawing or manipulating love.

For intimacy to grow, partners must nurture each other. Controlling behavior may have short-term benefits (you might get the person to do what you want for a while), but long term, it smothers the relationship. No one likes the feeling of being manipulated, whether it is subtle, through the use of guilt, or overt, through physical force. Part of love is the joy of seeing the partner free to pursue their desires and appreciating the differences between partners. Although every relationship has its boundaries, freedom within those agreed-on constraints is what encourages the growth and maturation of both partners.

Possessiveness indicates a problem of self-esteem and personal boundaries and can eventually lead to [**stalking**](javascript://). Stalking can involve intimidation, verbal, and/or physical abuse (Sinclair & Frieze, 2015). Federal laws prohibit stalking, and police can arrest a person who constantly shadows someone or makes threatening gestures or claims. Studies have found that stalking can have both psychological and physiological causes (Marazziti et al., 2015). We will discuss power and coercion more in [Chapter 17](javascript://).

We started this chapter talking about the importance of love in our lives. The ability to form loving, caring, and intimate relationships with others is important for our emotional health and also our physical health. Love and intimacy are two of the most powerful factors in well-being. Love might not always be easy to understand, but it is a powerful force in our lives, and intimacy is an important component of mature love in our culture.