

Chapter 12

Gender, Peer Relations, and Intimate Romantic Relationships

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It is popularly believed, by researchers and laypersons alike, that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. When it comes to relationships, however, men and women are more similar than they are different (Burn, 1996; Hyde, 2005). Both sexes develop attachments to close others throughout the life span (Bowlby, 1980; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), and both are largely dependent on relationships for their psychological well-being (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). Nonetheless, researchers and the media tend to focus on gender differences, however small, at the expense of similarities.

In this chapter, I explore the ways that social contexts influence the degree of gender difference and similarity in the experience of close relationships. A basic assumption herein is that gender is a social construction – enacted through interaction with peers and romantic partners and reinforced by the larger sociocultural context. As such, I examine gender influences in relationships by referring to socio-ecological theories or those that focus on the social contexts in which people develop and live, with particular emphasis on social role theory, social structural theory, script theory, and ecological developmental theory. These theories are contrasted with evolutionary accounts, which often widen the gulf between the sexes by emphasizing innate differences rather than the ways that such differences may be socially constructed and culturally transmitted. I first examine the influence of gender within same-sex and cross-sex friendships, then shift the focus to the different phases of a romantic relationship – coming together, relational maintenance, and coming apart. Finally, I discuss the relational and sexual consequences of gender-role traditionalism and end with avenues for future research.

Gender and Peer Relations

Same-Sex Friendships

There tend to be larger differences within than between the sexes in their friendships (Nardi, 1992; O'Connor, 1992), yet it is commonly observed that male friends interact side-by-side and female friends face-to-face (Buss & Malamuth, 1996; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovis, 1999; Wellman & Frank, 2001). For one, men usually have a larger number of same-sex friends, but they tend to experience less emotional intimacy in their friendships than women do in theirs (Claes, 1992). This can be traced, at least in part, to the influence of the traditional masculine role, which encourages activity-based friendships (Pleck, 1976), disparages feminine traits (Thompson & Pleck, 1986), and

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enforces masculinity and heterosexuality through pervasive homophobia (Kimmel, 1997). In particular, the masculine gender role may inhibit two fundamental aspects of intimacy: self-disclosure and responsiveness.

Intimacy is conceptualized by Reis and Shaver (1988) as a reciprocal process of partners' self-disclosures and responsiveness that results in each individual feeling understood, validated, and cared for. Self-disclosure refers to the sharing of personal information (Parks & Floyd, 1996), whereas responsiveness refers to the support, warmth, interest, and attention displayed by others (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). As such, one reason why women may be more intimate with same-sex friends than men are is because women tend to be more self-disclosing (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985) and responsive (Hargie, Tourish, & Curtis, 2001). Female friends are more likely to share feelings and to talk about other people (Boneva, Kraut, & Frohlich, 2001), whereas male friends are more likely to engage in shared activities (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982) and to discuss relatively impersonal topics such as sports, politics, or business (Clark, 1998). Youniss and Smollar (1985) found that adolescent girls preferred "just talking" with same-sex friends more than did boys; in fact, 66% of girls reported having same-sex friendships that involved intimate self-disclosure, whereas 60% of boys reported that they did not have any friendships that involved intimate self-disclosure. Men also tend to be instrumental and goal-oriented in their friendships; women, on the other hand, tend to be expressive (Fox, Gibbs, & Auerbach, 1985) and to offer emotional support to friends in distress (Clark, 1998). Women's expressive and sensitive behavior is characteristic of the behavior of lower status individuals (Snodgrass, 1985). That women's friendships are more likely to exchange emotional support, and men's the exchange of goods and services (Perlman & Fehr, 1987), may thus reflect an accommodation to roles that differ in power and status (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Women's lesser access to power and resources may also constrain the contexts available for developing friendships (O'Connor, 1992). Traditionally, women's housework and childcare responsibilities meant that they had less time and money to pursue friendships through shared activities outside the home, and, as such, women's conversation with same-sex friends tended to focus on domestic issues, especially those involving personal relationships. Along these lines, Walker (1994) found that working class men, who also lack resources, tend to socialize at home and, in turn, often discuss people and relationships. Furthermore, women who work in white-collar, male-dominated professions report less emotional intimacy in their friendships, similar to middle-class men.

Social learning theories suggest that boys are rewarded for pursuing competitive relationships with other boys, whereas girls are rewarded for pursuing cooperative, intimate friendships. According to Maccoby (1990), for example, male peer groups in early development promote constricting interactive styles based on one-upmanship and establishing dominance hierarchies that inhibit emotional closeness. Female peer groups, on the other hand, promote enabling interactive styles based on cooperation and mutual support. Other perspectives that emphasize context suggest that boys may internalize the homophobic message, still prevalent at the sociocultural level, that excessive closeness with another boy threatens their masculinity (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1994; Wong & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

From an evolutionary perspective, men who successfully compete with other men increase their social dominance and, in turn, are more likely to be chosen by women as sexual partners (Fischer & Mosquera, 2001). Through this process of sexual selection over the course of human history, men have evolved to be competitive and non-intimate with other men. Furthermore, polygynous or extended family arrangements, which compelled women to work together while men procured goods for the family, meant that it was in women's best interests to develop cooperative and intimate relationships with each other.

Whether based on evolutionary or socio-ecological perspectives, research in this area has been criticized for trading on gender stereotypes – casting intimacy as feminine and action as masculine – and overlooking that some of the gender differences in friendships are actually quite small (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovis, 1999) or an artifact of research design. For example, Walker (1994) found that when people were asked global questions about their friendships, they tended to respond in a gender-stereotypical way, but when asked questions about specific friendships, gender differences were small. In fact, both men and women reported engaging in self-disclosure and shared activities with specific friends. Moreover, in Dindia and Allen's (1992) meta-analysis, gender differences in self-disclosure were small ($d = 0.18$). The effect size differed according to the gender composition of the interactants; it ranged from $d = 0.31$ for same-sex interactions to $d = 0.08$ for mixed-sex interactions. That the magnitude of the gender difference varied according to context lends support to social constructivist accounts of the role of gender in close relationships. A final criticism of research in this area is that some studies might be considered "gynocentric," that is, conceptualizations of same-sex intimacy may be based on feminine norms, such that intimacy is conflated with self-disclosure. Men's activity-based friendships arguably may be as intimate in their own way as women's (Wood & Inman, 1993).

Cross-Sex Friendships

This type of relationship is often ignored by researchers, perhaps because cross-sex friendship scripts tend to be less defined than those for heterosexual romantic relationships and are often complicated by sexual tension (O'Meara, 1989). In one study, 58% of participants reported feeling at least some degree of attraction to a cross-sex friend (Kaplan & Keys, 1997). Although some people report feeling uncomfortable with this sexual tension (Bell, 1981; Sapadin, 1988), others think that it adds excitement to the friendship (Rubin, 1985). Cross-sex friends often engage in flirtatious behavior (Egland, Spitzberg, & Zormeier, 1996; Fuiman, Yarab, & Sensibaugh, 1997), but some may also strive to keep the relationship platonic to safeguard it against complications from sexual involvement (Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000). Nonetheless, Afifi and Faulkner (2000) found that 51% of heterosexual college students reported having engaged in sexual activity with an otherwise platonic cross-sex friend. More than one-half of these participants reported that the friendship did not develop into a romantic relationship, and 67% indicated that sexual activity actually increased the quality of the cross-sex friendship. These results, then, do not support the commonly held belief that sexual activity is injurious for cross-sex friendships; if anything, they point to one of the advantages of cross-sex friends. In a study of undergraduates involved in "friends with benefits" relationships, Puentes, Knox, and Zusman (2008) showed that men were more likely to emphasize the sexual benefits and women were more likely to emphasize the friendship. Future researchers should clarify whether these findings generalize to the same-sex friendships of lesbians and gay men.

One of the reasons why sexual tension may figure prominently in cross-sex friendships is because people tend to misperceive sexual interest in cross-sex interactions. Abbey (1982) found that when women and men surreptitiously observed the interactions of a cross-sex pair in a laboratory, men tended to overestimate the sexual interest of the female actor, whereas women underestimated the sexual interest of the male actor. These findings have been replicated by others (Edmondson & Conger, 1995; Harnish, Abbey, & DeBono, 1990). Note that when a cross-sex friend arouses a strong degree of sexual interest, men and women are equally prone to overestimating the friend's sexual (but not romantic) interest (Koenig, Kirkpatrick, & Ketelaar, 2007). Thus, women and men may both project their own level of interest onto a highly desirable cross-sex friend, which suggests that women may only underperceive the sexual interest of men whom they do not find sexually attractive.

Koenig et al. (2007) argued from an evolutionary perspective that it is functional for both men and women to overperceive interest in an attractive target so as to maximize valuable mating opportunities. Yet misperception of sexual interest may damage a cross-sex friendship, or worse: 15% of sexual assaults take place within cross-sex friendships (Abbey, McAuslan, & Ross, 1998), and misperception is a contributing factor to sexual harassment (Johnson, Stockdale, & Saal, 1991). Furthermore, men who are higher in hostile masculinity, are more likely to engage in impersonal sex, and drink more heavily in dating and sexual situations are more prone to misinterpreting a woman's friendliness as sexual interest (Jacques-Tiura, Abbey, Parkhill, & Zawacki, 2007). Clearly, then, misperception may have negative consequences.

Finally, sexual tension tends to be less present in cross-sex friendships in later life (Rawlins, 1992), and cross-sex friendships are less common in older adults than in younger adults (Fox et al., 1985). Young adults report having, on average, three close friends of the other sex (Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987), whereas older adults have fewer or none. Cross-sex friendships were not encouraged in older generations; moreover, marriage may make it more difficult to pursue and maintain these friendships (Monsour, 2002). From an evolutionary perspective, interest in cross-sex friendships may decline once women and men are past their peak reproductive years. In sum, cross-sex friendships offer many of the expressive and instrumental benefits of same-sex friendships, but are also often overlaid with sexual tension.

Gender and Intimate Romantic Relationships

Despite social movements in the 20th century that led to increased gender equality, gender roles continue to be strongly differentiated in intimate romantic relationships. In patriarchal systems, heterosexual roles tend to be complementary: Men are expected to be agentic, lustful, and sexually active, whereas women are expected to be passive, low in desire, and sexually restricted (Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). These roles, usually viewed as normative and often justified by biological imperatives, tend to reinforce the gender imbalance in sexual power. In the following sections, I examine these issues in light of Knapp's (1984) three phases of a romantic relationship (i.e., coming together, maintenance, and coming apart) and interpret the body of findings in terms of evolutionary and socio-ecological perspectives.

Phase I: Coming Together

Mate Preferences

Small but reliable gender differences in mate preferences emerge across studies and samples. In one of the most well-known studies in this area, Buss (1989) found that, across 37 cultures, men were more likely to value physical attractiveness in female partners, whereas women were more likely to value status and earning capacity in male partners. Other studies have revealed similar findings: American men across ethnic groups tend to be less flexible than women are in their desire for an attractive mate (South, 1991), whereas women tend to be less flexible than men are when it comes to a partner's status, resources, warmth, and trustworthiness (Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004). Women tend to marry up to gain social status, whereas men tend to marry down in terms of a partner's education or income, but not their attractiveness (South, 1991). In polygynous societies, women usually prefer to be the co-wife of a man with resources and status rather than

the only wife of a lower status man (Mulder, 1990). Even in societies where polygyny is prohibited, women prefer to engage in sexual activity with higher status men (Kanazawa, 2003; Lalumiere, Seto, & Quinsey, 1995). Women place more emphasis than both gay and straight men do on a partner's age, education, and income (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987) and less emphasis on physical appearance. A study of personal ads placed by gay and straight women and men showed that gay men emphasized a mate's physical attractiveness the most and lesbians emphasized it the least (Gonzales & Meyers, 1993). The neuroscience of men's preference for attractive mates was investigated in a recent fMRI study (Cloutier, Heatherton, Whalen, & Kelley, 2008), which revealed that men, but not women, showed greater activation in the orbitofrontal cortex (a brain area involved in processing the reward value of a stimulus) when viewing attractive rather than unattractive faces of the other sex. Another study showed that men expended more effort to view beautiful female than male faces, whereas women spent an equal amount of effort to view beautiful male and female faces (Levy et al., 2008), findings that suggest that the female faces are particularly rewarding for men. Men's preference for physically attractive women and women's preference for high-status men have been explained by both evolutionary and socio-ecological theories.

Mate Preferences: Evolutionary Theory

From an evolutionary perspective, gender differences in mate preferences evolved to maximize reproduction and the survival of humanity. Pivotal to this perspective is the concept of parental investment – the amount of time and energy that parents invest in reproduction and child care (Trivers, 1972). Although many men do invest heavily in their offspring, their minimum level of parental investment is much lower than that of women (Symons, 1979). Men need only contribute sperm, whereas women must invest 9 months of pregnancy and usually a period of lactation. During this time, men may potentially produce children with other partners, whereas women can typically produce only one child. Because women invest so heavily in the few infants they are capable of bearing, making a mistake in mate choice is costly; thus, it is adaptive for women to be particularly discriminating about the quality of their partners. For men, on the other hand, it is adaptive to be less choosy when selecting a short-term partner so that they may reproduce with as many women as possible (Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990).

Mate preferences not only vary between the sexes but also within each sex. Sexual strategies theory (SST) was introduced by Buss and Schmitt (1993) to account for men's and women's repertoire of short- and long-term mating strategies. Short-term mating tends to be brief and non-exclusive (e.g., a one-night stand or an extramarital fling), whereas long-term mating involves pairbonding and the investment of emotion and resources over an extended period of time (Schmitt, 2005). Short-term strategies can have evolutionary advantages for both sexes under certain conditions (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). It is adaptive for women to pursue short-term strategies insofar as they seek high genetic fitness in men (as indexed by such markers as physical attractiveness and masculinity) that they may not be able to obtain from a long-term partner. Women with short-term strategies are mostly concerned with the quality rather than with the quantity of men with whom they mate (Gangestad & Thornhill, 1997). Conversely, women with long-term strategies are more likely to look for markers of earning capacity (e.g., high income) and emotional commitment because these signify that a man will be able and willing to provide for her and her offspring over the long term (Kruger, Fisher, & Jobling, 2003).

Men pursuing short-term mating, on the other hand, tend to seek greater sexual variety (Schmitt, Shackelford, Duntley, Tooke, & Buss, 2001) and prefer mates who will quickly engage in sexual activity (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) to ensure maximal reproduction. Because of men's lower parental investment, they tend to be, on average, more disposed than women toward short-term mating

(Schmitt, 2005). Indeed, Schmitt et al. (2001) found that men indicated a greater preference than women did for briefer relationships, sexual variety, a larger number of partners, and less time to elapse before sexual activity. As for men's long-term strategies, they tend to emphasize a partner's appearance, age, and fidelity more so than do women's long-term strategies (Buss, 1989). Overall, mating strategies and choices tend to reflect a trade-off between two types of evolutionary benefits: a partner with genetic fitness or a partner with high parental investment (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000).

The predictions of SST have been supported across diverse cultural samples (Schmitt et al., 2003) and with different research methodologies. For example, some studies have presented women with descriptions of "nice guys" and "jerks" and observed which type of man they prefer. "Nice guys" are described as men whose stereotypic feminine or androgynous traits (e.g., agreeable, attentive, gentle, altruistic) suggest that they would be good long-term partners, and "jerks" are described as men whose stereotypic masculine traits (e.g., strong, confident, outgoing, sexual, dominant) suggest that they would be effective short-term partners (Herold & Milhausen, 1999; McDaniel, 2005). In support of SST, Herold and Milhausen (1999) found that more than one-half of women said that they would rather date a nice guy than a jerk. This was particularly true for women who placed less emphasis on sex, had fewer sexual partners, and were less tolerant of men who had had many partners – women who, presumably, were more oriented toward long-term mating. Similarly, McDaniel (2005) found that women only preferred jerks for low-commitment, short-term dating; women who wanted a committed relationship preferred "nice guys." In line with these findings, Kruger (2006) found that, when women were presented with male faces that had been masculinized or feminized, 66% indicated that they preferred the masculinized face for short-term, extra-pair copulations and 63% chose the feminized face for marriage.

Sexual strategies theory has also received support from research on changes in women's mate preferences across the ovulatory cycle. When women with natural menstrual cycles are most fertile (in the late follicular phase, just before ovulation; Regan, 1996) they tend to report greater sexual desire (Pawlowski, 1999; Wood, 1994), sexual activity (Gangestad, Thornhill, & Carve, 2002), and short-term mating behavior, such as extra-pair flirtation (Haselton & Gangestad, 2006). They also prefer men who possess more masculine traits, which may be considered proxies for higher levels of circulating testosterone (Penton-Voak & Chen, 2004). For example, women at peak fertility tend to prefer men with more masculine faces and bodies (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002; Gangestad, Garver-Apgar, Simpson, & Cousins, 2007; Little, Jones, & Burriss, 2007), men with deeper voices (Feinberg et al., 2006), and the smell of men with more symmetrical faces (Thornhill et al., 2003). Collectively, these findings suggest that women are more short-term-oriented when conception risk is highest and are most attracted to men whose physical characteristics signal virility and good genetic quality to pass on to offspring (Thornhill & Gangestad, 2006). Although it would seem more adaptive for women to seek long-term partners during peak fertility (i.e., men who would invest in the child should pregnancy occur), women are more likely to favor a long-term strategy during menstruation. At this time, when pregnancy is least likely to occur, women tend to prefer more feminine-looking men (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002) who are perceived to possess traits associated with fidelity, trustworthiness, and willingness to invest in partners and children. That women may seek masculine men to maximize the genetic fitness of their offspring and feminine men for parental investment may mean that cuckoldry is more common than many people would like to believe. Indeed, some researchers argue that women have engaged in extra-pair copulation throughout evolutionary history and, in response, men's sperm evolved to compete effectively with other men's sperm to fertilize a woman's ova (Shackelford & Goetz, 2007).

Not all of the findings that link mate preferences to ovulatory shifts support sexual strategies theory, however. Although regularly ovulating heterosexual women are indeed faster at categorizing

male than female faces at ovulation than at menstruation, women on the birth control pill, who are not fertile, perform similarly to the regularly ovulating women (Johnston, Arden, Macrae, & Grace, 2003). That sexual desire tends to be highest at ovulation (Burlison, Trevathan, & Gregory, 2002; Regan, 1996) suggests that sexual relevance, rather than conception risk alone, may orient women at mid-cycle to indicators of masculinity. To examine this possibility, Brinsmead-Stockham, Johnston, Miles, and Macrae (2008) examined sensitivity to faces in ovulating lesbians, who report the same increase in sexual desire at this point in the menstrual cycle as do heterosexual women. Consistent with a sexual desire rather than conception risk explanation, lesbians were faster to identify female faces than male faces at high fertility than at low fertility. In fact, their identification of male faces did not fluctuate across the menstrual cycle. Contrary to evolutionary arguments, then, women at peak fertility were more sensitive to information that was sexually relevant but not reproductively relevant.

The methods and results of conventional mate preference research were recently challenged by Eastwick and Finkel (2008). They argued that gender differences in mate preferences tend to be found in controlled studies where people explicitly state their mate preferences on questionnaires or look at photos, but not in real-life settings. Indeed, they found that when participants engaged in a speed dating paradigm, ideal mate preferences, stated before the speed dating event, did not predict real-life partner preferences after the event. Thus, even though men stressed physical attractiveness in their ideal preferences, and women stressed earning capacity, they did not report heightened interest in partners who fulfilled these ideals in their post-speed dating evaluations. The authors argued that this disconnect between explicit and implicit mate preferences raises a serious limitation of conventional mate preference research, which tends to focus on explicit mate preferences. Along these lines, the real-life paradigm used in the classic study by Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, and Rottman (1966) – in which female and male college students were randomly paired in the laboratory and then rated how much they liked each other – did not show any gender differences in mate preferences post-event. For women and men alike, the only thing that predicted how much participants liked each other was physical attractiveness.

As a final caveat, in many studies that test hypotheses derived from evolutionary theory, biological sex is conflated with gender. For example, Schmitt et al. (2001) did not include any measures of gender traits in their studies, such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), so it is not possible to establish whether simply being male or possessing stereotypically masculine gender traits was most responsible for men's increased desire for sexual variety. It cannot be ruled out that women who possess stereotypically masculine gender traits also desire greater sexual variety. These limitations suggest the importance of considering alternative accounts of gender differences in mate preferences.

Mate Preferences: Socio-ecological Theories

In contrast to evolutionary perspectives, socio-ecological theories maintain that mate preferences are not innate, but are learned at early ages through influences from the media, family, peers, school, or other important figures (Downs & Harrison, 1985; Trepanier & Romatowski, 1985) and may change in response to contextual stimuli. One way to conceptualize these influential contexts is with ecological developmental theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which places the individual at the center of several concentric circles that represent increasingly distal social influences. Following the basic framework of Tolman et al. (2003), who examined the development of girls' healthy sexuality from this ecological viewpoint, the first, inner circle represents the individual's own self, the second circle represents influences from romantic relationships, the third circle refers to social relationships (peers and family), and the fourth, outermost circle represents the sociocultural–sociopolitical context. In

the following sections I examine mate preferences in light of the sociocultural context, and in a later section I discuss the dyadic and social context of relationship initiation.

From a sociocultural perspective, the robust gender differences in mate preferences that have emerged across studies and cultures better reflect the internalization of sociocultural ideals than the expression of evolved, innate preferences. It is particularly noteworthy that, in Buss's study (1989), gender differences in mate preferences – though statistically significant in almost all cultures – were still smaller than were the cultural differences. This variability in the magnitude of the gender differences (larger in traditional cultures and smaller in modern/egalitarian cultures) suggests that mate preferences must be at least somewhat shaped by the sociocultural context.

Accordingly, Eagly and Wood (1999) reinterpreted Buss's (1989) findings in terms of social structural theory. This theory claims that gender differences derive not from evolved dispositions but rather from the division of labor by sex, which creates different role expectations for men and women. Psychological differences between the sexes, then, simply reflect accommodations to the different opportunities and restrictions afforded by traditional gender roles. Thus, men may prefer younger women as mates because having a (presumably) less experienced partner allows men to maintain the more powerful role to which they have accommodated. Women, on the other hand, may prefer men with economic resources because women's less powerful roles mean that they are dependent on a wealthier mate to provide for themselves and their children. In support of this theory, Eagly and Wood (1999) found that, as gender equality increased in a society, the tendency for women to emphasize a mate's earning capacity decreased, as did men's emphasis on a mate's youth and domestic skills.

Cultural variability in mate preferences itself speaks to the influence of the sociocultural context. For example, in cultures where arranged marriage is normative, an individual's mate preferences may be overridden by the wishes of one's parents and family – a point that is often overlooked by evolutionary approaches (Buunk, Park, & Dubbs, 2008). In fact, free choice in mate selection is historically recent and uncommon in most cultures. Even when marriages are not strictly arranged, family approval continues to exert influence in mate selection and relationship termination in many cultures (Chang & Chan, 2007; MacDonald & Jessica, 2006). In south Asian cultures, where arranged marriage is commonly practiced, parents and kin try to choose a mate for their offspring who fulfills traditional criteria, such as good family reputation, dowry, and chastity (Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2004). Approximately 25% of second-generation south Asians living in North America expect to have an arranged marriage (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). South Asian Canadians who strongly identify with their heritage culture are more traditional in their mate preferences than are those who identify less strongly (Hynie, Lalonde, & Lee, 2006; Lalonde et al., 2004). That cultural identification and acculturation are able to influence mate preferences provides further evidence for the importance of sociocultural contexts.

From a socio-ecological perspective, then, individuals implicitly internalize expectations about what sort of mate they should desire within particular sociocultural milieus (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). These expectations develop at least in part as a function of family pressure and of social structural affordances and constraints that determine the gendered division of labor and gender equality (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Relationship Initiation and Dating

In Western societies, heterosexual partners tend to initiate relationships through dating (later I discuss relationship initiation in non-Western societies and same-sex couples). Courtship, a broader but more traditional term than dating, typically refers to the period before marriage when one partner

(usually a man) publicly woos a potential spouse with the approval of both families. Dating is also considered an opportunity for two people to spend time together to explore their relationship potential (Rose & Zand, 2002), but, unlike courtship, in which intimacy usually comes after commitment, it is common for dating couples to be intimate with little commitment. Because Western-style dating tends to be limited in many parts of the world, courtship is the more inclusive term. Nonetheless, the bulk of research has examined relationship initiation in terms of dating and, therefore, this chapter reflects that focus.

Contrary to stereotypes of romantic women, some research suggests that it is actually men who tend to fall in love more quickly during the initial stages of a relationship (Huston & Ashmore, 1986). Men also tend to report being in love more often than women do, even though women are more likely to report being currently in love and more deeply in love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995). In Western cultures, men tend to be more ludic (game-playing) than women in their love styles, whereas women tend to be more pragmatic, manic (infatuated), and friendship oriented (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995). One study showed that American and Chinese men's love styles were more agapic (altruistic) than women's, but Chinese men placed more emphasis than did Chinese women on romantic love and sex as important for marriage (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Evolutionary psychologists might argue that men are more susceptible to romantic love because of their emphasis on the external attractiveness of mates and men's putatively higher sex drive (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). Conversely, women's preference for mates with high earning potential, along with women's putatively lower sex drive, might explain why women are more susceptible to pragmatic and companionate love (Hong & Bartley, 1986).

From a social structural perspective, on the other hand, men's greater access to power and resources affords the luxury of emphasizing romantic love and sexual attraction during courtship, whereas women's less powerful social and economic position necessitates pragmatism. It is no coincidence that women who live in economically developing societies – where gender inequality is ubiquitous – tend to be particularly pragmatic during courtship. They tend to show a greater willingness to marry someone who has all the qualities they look for in a mate, but whom they do not love (Levine, Suguru, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995). Social structural theory, with its emphasis on socio-cultural barriers and affordances that shape gendered behavior, is also compatible with ecological developmental theory. As the following sections show, the circles of social influence – sociocultural, social, and dyadic – encourage the learning of traditional roles and behaviors for each sex during courtship and dating.

Sociocultural Contexts: Dating Scripts

According to sexual script theory, culturally derived rules and norms guide courtship and sexual behavior (Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). These scripts, familiar to individuals socialized within the sociocultural setting from which they derive – most North Americans, for example, are aware of narratives for first dates or one-night stands – operate at cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic levels (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Cultural-level scripts, learned from schools, religious institutions, sex educators, and the mass media, address shared expectations about the who, what, when, where, and how of sexual behavior (Gagnon, 1990; Greene & Faulkner, 2005). In the ambiguous world of dating, adherence to these scripts can help to reduce uncertainty, anxiety, and awkwardness (Laner & Ventrone, 1998). Often, however, these scripts reinforce traditional gender-role behavior, such that men are encouraged to be dominant and women to be submissive. Even people who endorse egalitarian gender-role ideologies tend to follow traditional scripts at the beginning of a relationship (Ganong, Coleman, Thompson, & Goodwin-Watkins, 1996).

Children learn romantic scripts early in life, and rehearsal of these scripts in the media, in social relationships, and eventually in dating relationships may explain their persistence into adulthood. Indeed, these scripts may be so well rehearsed that they operate implicitly (Serewicz & Gale, 2008). For example, children are regularly exposed to movies, television, and fairy tales that suggest that women are beautiful but helpless, whereas men are strong, agentic rescuers of “damsels in distress” (Davis, 1984; Mayes & Valentine, 1979). Such cultural messages of benevolent sexism – the expectation that men should provide for and protect women (Glick & Fiske, 1996) – may be internalized throughout development and influence adult gender-role behavior. For instance, Rudman and Heppen (2003) found that women with implicit romantic beliefs (e.g., automatic association of men with heroism and chivalry) reported less interest in education, work achievement, and power. Along these lines, Tolman (1999) argued that adolescent girls who ascribe to ideologies of traditional femininity are more likely to adhere to romantic ideals that weaken their sense of agency and authenticity in relationships.

In adulthood, a similar message tends to be transmitted by the sociocultural context – that it is acceptable for men to be sexually active, whereas women should be passive and sexually restricted in relationships (MacCorquodale, 1989). These messages are conveyed by popular dating guides such as *He’s Just Not That Into You* (Behrendt & Tuccillo, 2004), *The Rules* (Fein & Schneider, 2005), or *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray, 1992), which claim that, because of purportedly fundamental differences between the sexes, men and women should behave in gender-traditional ways to ensure success in attracting and retaining mates (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). In *He’s Just Not That Into You*, for example, it is presented as a fact that men evolved to pursue women, and not vice versa. Because of this supposedly innate difference, then, women are exhorted to let men take the control and initiative in dating situations – a script that reinforces and perpetuates men’s agency and women’s passivity. This theme is particularly ubiquitous in first-date scripts.

The consensus across studies on the actions that comprise a first date, and the actions that are more commonly performed by each sex, suggest that these scripts are well-known cultural products (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). In Western cultures, first dates are often considered a rite of courtship that may fundamentally influence the course of a relationship (McDaniel, 2005). To clarify these scripts, Rose and Frieze (1989) asked heterosexual college students to list the sequential actions that typically take place on a first date and then examined whether actions were differentially assigned to men and women. If 25% of the participants mentioned a particular action, it was included in the “script.” They found that the participants’ scripts reflected patriarchal constructions that emphasized men’s agency and control in the public sphere (such as planning, paying, and orchestrating the date) and women’s passivity and self-regulation in the private sphere (such as concern with appearance, maintaining conversation, and restraining sexuality). Other studies have confirmed that first-date scripts tend to emphasize men’s active, dominant role and women’s reactive, passive role (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). For example, it is considered normative for men to initiate first dates (Pryor & Merluzzi, 1985), and, although it is becoming increasingly common for women to initiate dates, especially first ones (Mongeau, Hale, Johnson, & Hillis, 1993), men tend to have greater expectations of sexual involvement for female-initiated dates than for male-initiated dates (Mongeau & Carey, 1996). Similarly, Serewicz and Gale (2008) found that men’s first-date scripts were more likely than women’s to include sexual involvement, especially if the date was female-initiated, whereas women’s scripts involved more romantic elements (e.g., a good-night kiss, without further physical intimacy). They also found, like others, that men tend to be assigned more agentic behaviors than women, which reflects the tendency toward gender-role traditionalism in American college students’ first-date scripts. Whether or not these scripts have resonance in other cultural groups remains to be seen, not least because dating tends to be a Western cultural construction (Goodwin, 1999).

Social and Dyadic Contexts: Role of Peers and Romantic Partners

People may initially learn gendered dating behavior by internalizing cultural scripts for first dates. Once set in motion by the first date, traditional role behavior may crystallize throughout dating if it is sustained by the expectations of peers and romantic partners (two circles of influence in the ecological developmental model). Holland (1992) examined the role of the peer group in mediating between the sociocultural milieu and college women's individual attitudes toward heterosexual romance. She found that women who identified as a "romantic" type of personality, for whom romance was more salient to their lives, tended to have greater expertise in negotiating heterosexual relationships. Social interaction with other women tended to enhance identification, salience, and, in turn, expertise, which suggests that women socialized each other into the world of dating at least in part by encouraging greater internalization of cultural models of romance. In this connection, it is noteworthy that Serewicz and Gale (2008) found that women's first-date scripts contained less redundant information than men's did, in line with evidence that women have greater cognitive complexity in their knowledge and memory structures for first dates and relationship escalation (Honeycutt, Cantrill, & Greene, 1989). This may be because women, whose role prescribes that they be "relationship experts," also tend to talk more with friends about the date before and after the date, rehearsing details that become more deeply encoded in their memories.

Dating partners also socialize each other into the world of romance. In Rose and Frieze's (1989) study, for example, experienced daters endorsed greater traditionalism in first-date scripts than did inexperienced daters, which suggests that one's romantic partner may reinforce gendered roles that continue to resonate in adulthood. Through dating experience, people learn that compliance with these scripts may be rewarded and deviations punished. Indeed, Rose and Frieze (1993) found that relationships were less likely to continue in the face of deviations from the traditional first-date script. Morgan and Zurbriggen (2007) also argued that dating scripts may function to inaugurate young adults into the world of dating and, in so doing, reinforce the traditional status quo that mandates men's agency and women's passivity. In their study, heterosexual college students were interviewed about their first significant dating relationship. An emergent theme was the negotiation of sexual activity with one's partner: Women recounted more pressure to engage in sexual activity, whereas men often described their partner as the sexual "gatekeeper" and responded with frustration and acceptance. Along these lines, Kimmel (1997) argued that the predominant script for young men emphasizes hyper-heterosexuality, both as a means of reinforcing masculine identity and of denying homosexuality. Through initial dating experiences, then, young adults may learn that the masculine role is active and sexual, whereas the feminine role is reactive and chaste.

It seems, then, that, despite the growing popularity of egalitarian ideals over the last half-century (Schwartz, 1994), traditional dating scripts continue to be influential. Faced with competing ideologies, young adults may adopt a combination of liberal and traditional attitudes toward relationships and expectations for the future. For instance, Ganong et al. (1996) found that, even though college students generally held egalitarian expectations for their future relationships, women still expected male partners to attain greater commercial success than they themselves would, and men still expected female partners to perform a greater proportion of parenting. It may be the case that individuals endorse egalitarianism on an explicit level, but their behavior continues to be influenced by deeply rehearsed traditional scripts that are automatically activated on an implicit level. Ganong et al. (1996) surmised that the gap between students' egalitarian expectations and their actual, traditional behavior may grow larger as relationships develop throughout adulthood – a disparity that may lead to disappointment and eventual decrease in relationship satisfaction. Sociocultural, social, and dyadic influences that together socialize men's sexual agency and women's passivity, then, may be detrimental to both partners in the long run (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007).

Relationship Initiation in Gay Men and Lesbians

The gradual progression in conventional heterosexual dating scripts from casual dating between relatively unacquainted partners to more intense physical intimacy and commitment may have less relevance for gay men and lesbians. For example, gay men often include sexual activity in their first-date scripts (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994), and a number of gay men who pursue new partners are already involved in an open relationship with a regular partner (Hickson et al., 1992). The casual dating phase for many lesbians tends to be shorter or skipped entirely, with rapid escalation to more serious commitment (Cini & Malafi, 1991; Rose, Zand, & Cini, 1993). Lesbians commonly follow a friendship script during their relationship initiation, in which emotional intimacy between friends grows into a committed romantic relationship (Rose & Zand, 2002).

Gay and lesbian relationship initiation scripts are also less likely to be characterized by differentiated gender roles: There is unlikely to be a sexual “gatekeeper” role in men’s scripts or a sexual initiator role in women’s (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994). Lesbians tend to reject traditional gender roles that mandate that one partner is active and the other passive; instead, they tend to share roles and to treat their partner as equally as they would a best friend (Rose & Roades, 1987; Rose & Zand, 2002). However, freedom from gender roles that endorse men’s initiative may also mean that lesbians are sometimes indirect or cautious in initiating romantic involvement with other women (DeLaria, 1995). As suggested by Huston and Schwartz (2002), similar gender-role socialization for both partners in gay and lesbian couples may mean that they lack some of the traits and behaviors that are usually displayed by the other sex (i.e., expressiveness in women, instrumentality in men). Yet the rejection of gender roles may also result in greater egalitarianism during relationship initiation, such as in initiating physical contact or paying for dates. Some lesbians have indicated that they tend to wait to be asked out on a date, in keeping with women’s traditionally passive role, but they are often not shy about indicating sexual interest in nonverbal ways (Rose & Zand, 2002). More experienced lesbians are especially likely to initiate physical intimacy with a new partner, whereas the opposite tends to be true for heterosexual women: With more experience, they are less likely to be sexually assertive and more likely to limit their sexuality (Rose & Frieze, 1989). Gay men report roughly equal frequency in the likelihood that they or their partner initiate sexual activity (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983).

Relationship Initiation Across Cultures

The experience of romantic love is a cultural universal (Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992), yet dating behavior is culture-specific. Dating, although prominent in the West, tends to be proscribed in cultures where arranged marriage is the norm, such as in south Asian cultures (Goodwin, 1999). It follows that immigrants to the West may experience intergenerational clashes over dating, which are often undergirded by different attitudes toward the changing role of women. Insofar as some immigrant south Asian parents conflate dating with premarital sex, they may oppose dating in an attempt to maintain their children’s chastity before marriage (Dasgupta, 1998). This may be especially true for second-generation daughters; the dating activities and sexuality of sons are not nearly as constrained (Mani, 1992). Traditionally, a “good Indian girl” is shy, chaste, and willing to allow her parents to choose a man for her to marry (Agarwal, 1991). Second-generation south Asian women often report that their parents transport their traditional gender ideology to the new host culture, even as the prevailing ideology continues to evolve in the home country (Dasgupta, 1998). The gender difference in parental treatment of sons and daughters stems not only from traditional attitudes toward women but also from the responsibility parents give to second-generation daughters rather than to sons for maintaining Indian culture and traditions in the new host country (Dion & Dion,

2004). As a result, parents may monitor a daughter's behavior more closely, especially her dating behavior. For example, a daughter's exogamy (marriage outside the group) may particularly increase the likelihood that cultural traditions will be neglected in the next generation. One study showed that second-generation south Asian sons were more accepting of dating than were second-generation daughters, which suggests that the latter may have internalized parental strictures against dating (Dasgupta, 1998). This study also found that second-generation women were more egalitarian than were the second-generation men, which hints at the potential for conflicts in heterosexual relationships.

In east Asia, couples commonly date before marriage, but often with more restraint than in the West. In the People's Republic of China, for instance, young adults tend to be very interested in romantic affairs, but conduct themselves with caution and privacy (Moore, 1998). Similar to gender roles elsewhere, men are expected to take the initiative in courtship, and women tend to be subtle in showing interest. Dating partners also tend to be pragmatic and long-term oriented; those who date multiple partners, are flirtatious, or are indiscreet may receive the pejorative label *qingfu*, or "frivolous." Women are more vulnerable to this label than men are and, therefore, risk greater damage to their reputations. In Taiwan, men tend to be more optimistic about the eventual probability of marriage in the early stages of relationship development, similar to the initial romanticism of Western men, whereas women tend to be more sensitive to changes that signal a downturn during courtship (Chang & Chan, 2007). This brief review provides only a glimpse of the wide-ranging cultural variation in dating and courtship and highlights the need for research devoted to understanding the ways that this variation may be explained by cultural differences in gender-role attitudes and behavior.

Phase II: Relational Maintenance

Once a dating relationship is established, partners tend to display relational maintenance behaviors that help to sustain the key components of relationship quality—commitment, intimacy, satisfaction, trust, passion, and love (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). In general, maintenance behaviors are more likely to be performed by women than by men in conventional heterosexual relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Huston & Ashmore, 1986; Ragsdale, 1996). This gender difference has remained stable over the last few decades, even as gender differences have decreased in other domains, such as employment, housework, and parenting (Walzer, 2008). Relational maintenance can be behavioral (such as routine or strategic behaviors) or cognitive (such as having positive illusions about one's partner). Routine maintenance refers to the everyday behaviors that unintentionally reinforce relationships, such as making dinner or listening attentively as a partner describes his or her workday; strategic maintenance behaviors, on the other hand, refer to deliberate attempts to maintain relationship quality, such as complimenting one's partner or trying to improve a problem area in the relationship (Aylor & Dainton, 2004). Some studies suggest that gender differences only emerge for routine maintenance behaviors (Dainton & Aylor, 2002); women, for example, are more likely than men to show routine openness (Aylor & Dainton, 2004). Research has also shown that psychological femininity is a better predictor of routine maintenance behaviors, and masculinity of strategic maintenance behaviors, than is biological sex (Aylor & Dainton, 2004), which suggests that it is simplistic to reduce relational maintenance into "women's work" and "men's work." Relational maintenance affects, and is affected by, three components of relationship quality: commitment, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction.

Commitment

Relationships that are strongly committed, interdependent, and intimate are particularly high in relational maintenance (Rusbult, Arriaga, & Agnew, 2001). Commitment affects the way that men and women differentially perform a cognitive type of routine maintenance – holding positive illusions about one's partner, such that partners are viewed more positively than the self (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Women's relational self-construal tends to encourage greater identification with the relationship (Cross & Madson, 1997), which, in turn, encourages positive illusions that motivate routine relationship maintenance behavior. Thus, women tend to report positive illusions regardless of their level of commitment, but only men who are more committed to their partner, and therefore identify more strongly with the relationship, report positive illusions (Gagné & Lydon, 2003).

Another way of maintaining commitment is to shield a relationship from attractive alternative partners (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994). Women and men who are involved in satisfying close relationships tend to downplay the attractiveness of alternative partners (Lydon, Fitzsimmons, & Naidoo, 2003), pay less attention to them (Miller, 1997), and refrain from behaviors that may signal interest or increase attraction. For example, unconscious mimicry of an interaction partner tends to increase liking between partners. Karremans and Verwijmeren (2008) showed that people involved in a close romantic relationship unconsciously inhibited mimicry of an attractive stranger in the laboratory. This was true for men and women alike; men were not any more prone to mimicry, which suggests that they did not unconsciously behave in such a way that might encourage short-term mating behaviors, such as extra-pair copulation. Unconscious inhibition of mimicry, then, is a cognitive mechanism that serves to protect a relationship and maintain commitment.

Intimacy

The maintenance of intimacy in a romantic relationship, conceptualized here as a process of reciprocal self-disclosure and responsiveness between partners (Reis & Shaver, 1988), further illustrates the role of gendered traits and attitudes in pro-relationship behavior. To the extent that psychological gender affects the maintenance of self-disclosure and responsiveness, intimacy may likewise be experienced differently by women and men.

Self-disclosure

Adherence to traditional gender roles may reduce intimacy in relationships by inhibiting self-disclosure (Marshall, 2008; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Rubin, Hill, Peplau, & Dunkel-Schetter, 1980). More specifically, the traditional masculine role does not encourage self-disclosure (Thompson & Pleck, 1986), and stereotypically masculine traits such as dominance and independence (Bem, 1974) may inhibit rather than facilitate open communication. Although men tend to disclose factual information (Davidson & Duberman, 1982; Wood & Inman, 1993), it is the disclosure of feelings that facilitates intimacy in relationships (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Morton, 1978). Gender-typed men may fear that expressing feelings might make them appear stereotypically feminine; indeed, Derlega and Chaikin (1976) found that high self-disclosers, especially men, were perceived as more feminine than were low self-disclosers. Even though men who have difficulty self-disclosing are more prone to depression, low disclosure in men and high disclosure in women are commonly perceived as normative and psychologically healthy (Derlega & Chaikin, 1975).

Women, free from such masculinity concerns, tend to be more self-disclosing on average (Dindia & Allen, 1992), but it also depends on the target of disclosure: Women tend to disclose

more to a close same-sex friend than men do, whereas the opposite is true when disclosing to a stranger of the other sex (Colwill & Perlman, 1977; Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Hunter, 1985). Stereotypically feminine traits, such as kindness, selflessness, and sensitivity to others (Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975), are positively associated with self-disclosure within women's social interactions (Schaffer, Pegalis, & Cornell, 1991), and, accordingly, both women and men who are higher in stereotypical femininity are more likely to voice concerns within a relationship (Rusbult, 1987) and to broach emotional topics (Clark & Taraban, 1991). Moreover, stereotypic feminine traits are positively associated with dispositional empathy (Thomas & Reznikoff, 1984), which, in turn, predicts open communication and relationship satisfaction (Davis & Oathout, 1987). Finally, gay men's self-disclosures tend to be more intimate than heterosexual men's are (Bliss, 2000).

On the other hand, extreme stereotypic femininity, known as unmitigated communion (Helgeson, 1993), may actually inhibit, rather than promote, women's self-disclosure. Because traditional women's self-construals are heavily contingent on important relationships (Cross & Madsen, 1997), women may self-silence rather than self-disclose private thoughts or concerns in order to maintain relational harmony and a coherent sense of self (Jack, 1991). A traditional woman partnered with a traditional man may therefore experience particularly inhibited communication; indeed, observational research has shown that traditional women and men talked, laughed, and smiled less when interacting in a laboratory than did non-traditional couples (Ickes & Barnes, 1978). Similarly, Rubin et al. (1980) found that self-disclosure was higher in couples when both members possessed egalitarian gender-role attitudes. The authors reasoned that greater egalitarianism should encourage an "ethic of openness" in romantic relationships, hence more intimacy. Thus, self-disclosure may be low if both partners are traditional, or even if only one partner is traditional. Because self-disclosure is reciprocal (Cozby, 1972), one partner's reluctance to self-disclose may mean that the other partner may be less disclosing. On the other hand, this also suggests that a non-traditional partner's self-disclosure may encourage a traditional partner's disclosure and bring the mean level of intimacy up rather than down.

Responsiveness

Some evidence suggests that women tend to be more responsive and emotionally supportive to partners than men are, a difference that can be attributed to women's greater communion (Fritz, Nagurny, & Helgeson, 2003). In social interactions, women are more likely to provide backchannel support by making minimal verbal utterances (e.g., "mm-hmm") (McLaughlin, Cody, Kane, & Robey, 1981), by asking more questions (Fishman, 1978), and by agreeing with or asking for a partner's opinion (Eakins & Eakins, 1978). All of these verbal devices help to draw out one's conversational partner. It is not surprising, then, that people tend to self-disclose more to women than to men (Dailey & Claus, 2001; Garcia & Geisler, 1988; Hargie et al., 2001). In fact, disclosure tends to be highest in female-female pairings, lowest in male-male pairings, and in between for cross-sex pairings (Hill & Stull, 1987). Whereas interruptions are relatively infrequent in same-sex conversations, men commonly interrupt women in mixed-sex interactions (Zimmerman & West, 1975), which inhibits women's self-disclosure. Fishman (1978) found that, because women are more likely to use a supportive conversational style, topics introduced by men in cross-sex interactions "succeeded" (were further discussed) 96% of the time, whereas women's topics succeeded only 36% of the time.

Gender differences in responsiveness may reflect a learned adaptation to contextual demands. For example, men who work in occupations that require the display of sensitivity and emotional support tend to be just as good as women at decoding emotions (Rosenthal, Archer, DiMatteo, Kowumaki,

& Rogers, 1974). Like self-disclosure, responsiveness may be more a function of psychological femininity than of biological sex, as others are more likely to disclose to more stereotypically feminine men. Similar to associations with self-disclosure, dispositional empathy may mediate between stereotypic femininity and responsiveness (Thomas & Reznikoff, 1984). As such, individuals who are high in stereotypic femininity tend to feel more empathy for a friend with a problem and, in turn, show greater responsiveness, whereas individuals who are high in stereotypic masculinity are more likely to change the topic (Basow & Rubinfeld, 2003). To sum up, a stereotypically feminine communication style, in terms of both self-disclosure and responsiveness, appears to maintain intimacy in relationships.

Relationship Satisfaction

More generally, the finding across studies that psychological femininity tends to promote relational quality has led some to suggest a “femininity effect” in relationships (Steiner-Pappalardo & Gurung, 2002; Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000). For instance, perceiving one’s partner as possessing stereotypically feminine traits is related to the relationship satisfaction of both men and women (Lamke, Sollie, Durbin, & Fitzpatrick, 1994). Some evidence suggests that relationship satisfaction is most enhanced when partners are high in stereotypic femininity *and* masculinity (i.e., psychological androgyny). For example, to the extent that stereotypic femininity promotes routine maintenance behaviors, and stereotypic masculinity promotes strategic maintenance behaviors, then androgynous individuals may be effective at both expressive and instrumental communication (Aylor & Dainton, 2004). Furthermore, gender-typing may be particularly toxic for satisfaction in heterosexual relationships. One study showed that the combination of gender-typed wives with extremely gender-typed husbands predicted the poorest marital quality of any type of coupling across a 3-year time span (Helms, Proulx, Klute, McHale, & Crouter, 2006). This combination produces the largest discrepancy in expressivity by pairing expressive wives with extremely non-expressive husbands, and it may be this gap, rather than absolute levels of expressivity per se, that is responsible for poorer relationship quality.

Overall, these findings and others suggest that gender differences in relational maintenance and communication may owe less to biological sex and more to differences that arise through gender-role socialization (Aylor & Dainton, 2004; Stafford et al., 2000). In fact, a meta-analysis of 1,200 studies showed that biological sex only accounted for 1% of the variance in communication behavior (Canary & Hause, 1993). Unless a distinction is made between variance owing to biological sex and psychological gender, research on differences in communication behavior may exaggerate and reinforce gender stereotypes. Even more, to the extent that lay people are led to believe the stereotype that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, they are more likely to internalize and enact these stereotypes in their relationships (Deaux & Major, 1987), which could lead to even greater misunderstanding between the sexes.

Phase III: Coming Apart

Similar to the establishment and maintenance of relationships, gender also contributes to the ways that people cope with the end of a relationship. Several studies suggest that men experience poorer psychological health following the death of a spouse than do women (Carr, 2004; Sonnenberg,

Beekman, Deeg, & van Tilberg, 2000; Williams, 2003). Moreover, research suggests that, after a break-up, men are more likely than women to be upset (Helgeson, 1994; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994), to have greater sexual arousal for their ex-partner (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003), and to suffer more from break-up-related mental and physical health problems (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978).

There are several reasons why men might experience greater distress after the loss of a relationship. First, men are less likely than women to initiate break-ups (Helgeson, 1994; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976), and noninitiators of a break-up are more likely than initiators to experience distress (Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, & Vanni, 1998). Men's greater distress may, therefore, stem from feelings of rejection or from a decrease in feelings of power and control that are emphasized by the masculine gender role (Thompson & Pleck, 1986). Second, because men's self-construal tends to be less relational than women's (Cross & Madsen, 1997), they may be less aware of their partner's thoughts, feelings, and perspective and feel blindsided if their partner ends the relationship (Rubin, Peplau, & Hill, 1981). Finally, that men tend to be particularly dependent on their romantic partner for emotional support (Helgeson, 1994; Pleck, 1976) because they have smaller social support networks than women do (Fischer & Phillips, 1982) may mean that they have fewer people to turn to for solace after the break-up. Whereas women tend to mitigate post-break-up distress by relying on friends and family for support, men are more likely to cope by turning to alcohol and drugs (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003).

How do women cope with break-ups that are initiated by men? Davis et al. (2003) found that women who did not initiate the break-up reported more anger, hostility, and violence directed at their partner than did men. On the other hand, women also tend to report more positive growth as a result of the break-up than men do (Helgeson, 1994). Regardless of who initiated the break-up, women tend to experience more positive emotions, such as joy and relief (Choo, Levine, & Hatfield, 1996; Sprecher, 1994), and more stress-related growth (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). The reasons for this difference are not yet clear, but women tend to report more stress-related growth than men do across different domains (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), and, because women are better able to predict break-ups than men are (Hill et al., 1976), their stress-related growth may begin earlier and facilitate preparation for the break-up (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003).

Some findings suggest that gender-role differentiation in relationships may hasten their termination. In contrast to companionate marriages, where husbands and wives are each other's closest companions, there is greater gender differentiation in non-companionate marriages, where men are responsible for instrumental tasks and women for expressive tasks (Riessman, 1990). Such role differentiation may put these couples at higher risk for divorce insofar as each partner's fundamental needs for autonomy and relatedness are not fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Along these lines, Walzer (2008) proposed that, if marriage represents the "doing" of gender (i.e., enacting traditional roles), then divorce represents the "redoing" of gender (i.e., reassessing masculine and feminine gender roles). Interviews with divorced women and men revealed that gender differentiation in breadwinning, housework, parenting, and emotional expression was often reassessed post-divorce. For example, some women indicated that, after the divorce, their primary role shifted from housekeeping to economic provision, whereas some men shifted their emphasis from being a provider to being more emotionally expressive. Overall, many people reported that they did not even notice until after their divorce the extent to which gender played a role in their marriage or the ways in which the gendered division of work and love in marriages tends to generate conflict. Indeed, marriages in which women partake in paid work and men in more unpaid work are less likely to end in divorce than are those in which men play a more traditional role (Sigle-Rushton, 2007).

Costs of Gender-Role Traditionalism for Intimate Romantic Relationships

As we have seen, constructions of gender exert considerable influence on the initiation, maintenance, and termination of relationships. Although it has been suggested throughout this chapter that this influence often undermines relationship functioning, the specific relational and sexual costs of gender-role-related behavior are more fully illustrated in this section.

Relational Costs

Do people harm their relationships when they adhere to gendered scripts? Tolman and her colleagues (2003) contend that constructions of masculinity and femininity detract from the human potential to have satisfying romantic and sexual relationships. Indeed, the research reviewed thus far suggested that gender-role-related behavior tends to exert a negative influence on relationship initiation, maintenance, and termination. For example, to the extent that traditionally feminine or masculine first-date behaviors are aimed at “capturing” a partner for a long-term relationship, such behavior may persist as the relationship progresses. This gender-typed behavior may ultimately result in reduced gender equality, openness, and authenticity (Laner & Ventrone, 2000) – qualities that contribute to self-disclosure, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction (Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Rubin et al., 1980). In a recent study (Marshall, 2008), gender-role traditionalism was negatively related to intimacy at least in part because of reduced self-disclosure.

In addition to the effects of gender-typed behavior, relational quality is also influenced by partners’ attitudes toward gender equality. Several studies have shown that anti-feminist attitudes, in both women and men, are linked to lower relational and sexual satisfaction. For instance, Rudman and Fairchild (2007) found that, among heterosexuals, feminism and romance were still largely believed to be incompatible. In particular, individuals who endorsed the stereotype of feminist women as lesbian and sexually unattractive were more likely to see feminism as conflictual for heterosexual romance and sexuality and were less likely to support a feminist orientation or women’s rights. Women may distance themselves from these feminist stereotypes in an attempt to increase their attractiveness in the eyes of men, which suggests that one consequence of heterosexual romance is that it may undermine feminism and thus reinforce women’s subordinate positions in society.

Ironically, there is little truth to the stereotype that feminism is incompatible with heterosexual romance. Rudman and Phelan (2007) showed that heterosexuals who identified as feminist did not report poorer relationship health, as the stereotype implies. In fact, women paired with feminist men reported greater relationship quality, and men paired with feminist women reported greater relationship stability and sexual satisfaction – findings that suggest that both women and men benefit from having a feminist partner. Feminism, then, appears to enhance rather than detract from heterosexual relationships.

Constructions of gender also have consequences for long-term heterosexual relationships and marriage. Despite advances toward gender equality in the past few decades, the division of labor by gender continues to be reflected in these relationships. By and large, women are still more likely to inhabit the private, domestic sphere and men the public sphere. This may at least partially explain why gender differences tend to be found in marital satisfaction. That men tend to report greater marital satisfaction than women (Rhyne, 1981) may be at least partly related to societal devaluation of domestic work, women’s boredom with domestic work, or women’s stress from juggling work and family concerns. Many partners strive toward egalitarian marriages (Schwartz, 1994), even though they may be more challenging to achieve after a traditional courtship. There is also much variability both across and within cultures in the extent to which partners actually achieve this egalitarian end;

for example, African Americans tend to have more egalitarian heterosexual relationships than other ethnic groups in the USA (Ganong et al., 1996). Deutsch, Kokot, and Binder (2007) found that many college women largely rejected traditional family models, ones in which women sacrifice paid work to tend to the needs of their family. They also rejected “Supermom” models in which women work full time and assume greater domestic responsibility than their husbands do. Instead, college women preferred egalitarian family models that prescribed equal sharing of domestic responsibilities for both parents, particularly when both parents cut back on paid work to spend more time with the family, or when both parents try to balance home/work life. Across studies, then, findings suggest that traditional couple interactions and family structures are not optimal for relationship functioning, and yet people often implicitly enact traditional scripts.

Sexual Costs

Gendered scripts are also consequential for sexual satisfaction. Healthy sexuality consists of self-knowledge, empowerment, and access to birth control and condoms – all of which are circumscribed for women in conventional heterosexual scripts (Tolman et al., 2003). Typically, heterosexual sexual scripts involve an aggressive, lustful, initiating man, and a coy, passive, sexually limiting woman (Byers, 1996). The well-documented double standard refers to the expectation that men can be sexual in various types of relationships, whereas women should restrict sexual behavior to committed relationships (Greene & Faulkner, 2005). Explicitly and/or implicitly, heterosexual men and women have internalized this standard; indeed, women report a preference for sex within committed relationships, whereas men report more permissive attitudes toward casual sex (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995; Oliver & Hyde, 1993). Men also report a greater number of sexual partners and a more game-playing love style than women do (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1995). Although the double standard has become less overt in recent years (Sprecher & McKinney, 1993) – one study showed that relative to past generations, college students today are less likely to endorse the double standard and report fewer gender differences in sexual behavior, such as age at first intercourse (Greene & Faulkner, 2005) – it may still take subtle forms. For example, women are expected to have fewer partners in their lifetime than men are (Sprecher, 1989), and so they often underreport their sexual behavior (Rubin, 1990). Gender differences in sexual behavior, then, may represent learned accommodations to social structures such as the sexual double standard.

Because the double standard only encourages men’s initiative, it is often difficult for women to express agency and desire in sexual relationships (O’Sullivan & Byers, 1995). Cultural messages about women’s sexual passivity are so ubiquitous that many women have internalized these messages on an unconscious level and implicitly associate sex with submission (Kiefer, Sanchez, Kalinka, & Ybarra, 2006). Indeed, women’s endorsement of traditional gender roles has been linked with greater sexual passivity and, in turn, decreased sexual satisfaction, whereas men’s traditionalism has been linked with *less* sexual passivity and, in turn, greater sexual satisfaction (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007). Furthermore, contraceptive use, which requires a certain amount of sexual agency to implement, is poorer among people with more traditional gender-role attitudes (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993).

Conversely, men and women who perceive their partners as endorsing feminist beliefs tend to report *greater* sexual satisfaction (Rudman & Phelan, 2007). For men, being paired with a feminist partner may have benefits: Feminist women tend to reject traditional sexual scripts that mandate their passivity, and are thus more likely to express their sexual agency. Furthermore, gender-role non-conformity has been linked to sexual agency for women and men alike and, in turn, greater sexual arousability, facility in achieving orgasm, and overall sexual satisfaction (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007).

Along these lines, Greene and Faulkner (2005) found that heterosexual dating partners who were less traditional in their gender-role attitudes (i.e., they were less likely to endorse a sexual double standard) reported greater dyadic sexual communication, which, in turn, was related to more satisfying relationships. Collectively, these studies suggest that women and men who reject traditional roles may experience greater sexual and relational satisfaction.

Summary and Future Directions

Despite popular claims that men and women are fundamentally different, meta-analyses reveal that, for most psychological variables, these differences tend to be small or non-existent (Hyde, 2005). In this chapter, I examined gender differences and similarities in friendships and in the initiation, maintenance, and end of intimate romantic relationships. A recurring theme throughout has been the power of context – dyadic, social, and sociocultural – in reproducing, attenuating, or eliminating traditional gendered behavior. That the magnitude of gender difference tends to fluctuate across the life span means that gender differences are not stable or inevitable (Hyde, 2005). Numerous examples from the close relationships literature further underscore that women and men are more similar than popularly believed: Both sexes focus on relational rather than recreational aspects of sexuality when recounting the story of their relationship development (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995); gender differences in communication behavior tend to be small (Canary & Hause, 1993; Dindia & Allen, 1992); and gender differences are often smaller than cultural differences in terms of mate preferences, love styles, and relationship attitudes (Buss, 1989; Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Nonetheless, it cannot be disputed that gender roles continue to influence close relationships.

Future researchers could harness new methods and technology to advance our understanding of the role of gender in relationships. Speed dating paradigms, for example, could shed light on how stereotypic gender traits and traditional ideologies might affect impressions and attraction during relationship initiation. One would expect more traditional people to follow conventional scripts (e.g., a man may be more aggressive in pursuing a woman than vice versa) and show less tolerance for gender-role violations. Even people who generally reject gender-role prescriptions might be more likely to fall back on traditional scripts in this potentially anxiety-provoking situation. Collecting data on further contact between partners after the speed dating event could help to determine whether participants who adhered to traditional dating scripts were more or less “successful” than participants who were more egalitarian.

Online dating web sites, too, may provide new research opportunities. A sample of online dating profiles could be content-analyzed for the presence of stereotypic gender traits in self-descriptions and in the description of what people desire in a mate. To the extent that the daters in this sample provide data on their online dating experiences over a period of time (e.g., the number of messages, dates, sexual experiences, or relationships experienced, after researchers control for other factors such as physical attractiveness, wealth, and education), researchers may learn more about the prevalence of traditional role behavior and attitudes in modern dating situations and whether they help or hinder relationship development. Along these lines, daily diary methods can be utilized to examine adherence to traditional scripts at different stages of relationship development and the potential costs and benefits of gender-role-related behavior. Researchers might also investigate how women and men utilize new technologies in their relationships (such as text messaging, instant messaging, and online social networking) and how these technologies influence relationship outcomes.

Much future research needs to be devoted to the role of gender in the relationships of gay men and lesbians, especially during relationship initiation and termination. Likewise, the relationship scripts of people from diverse cultural backgrounds require further exploration. In particular, how does the content of scripts vary in cultures where arranged marriage is normative? And what cultural factors influence the likelihood that people adhere to normative scripts? In cultures where the prevailing gender ideology tends to be traditional, individuals will be particularly likely to follow scripts. This may be especially true for women, who tend to face harsher sanctions than men do if they violate from the script. Other cultural factors may influence compliance with relationship scripts, particularly individualism-collectivism and cultural tightness-looseness (i.e., the strength of social norms and the extent to which they are sanctioned within societies; Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006).

In light of the shifting migration patterns around the globe, research should also be directed at the ways that acculturation processes influence gender traits and attitudes among immigrants, sojourners, and bicultural individuals. Much as debate about dating, relationships, and the changing role of women can lead to intergenerational conflict in immigrant families, it can also lead to conflict between romantic partners (Flores, Tschann, Marin, & Pantoja, 2004). Women transitioning to Western, industrialized societies tend to embrace the norm of egalitarianism to a greater extent than do their male partners (Tang & Dion, 1999). Researchers could also profitably explore same-sex relationships within acculturative contexts – how changing constructions of gender and sexuality influence same-sex partners' self-perceptions and relational quality.

In sum, much work remains to be done to further our understanding of the influence of gender in close relationships. Although gender continues to play an important role in friendships and intimate romantic relationships, women and men are not as different as we are often led to believe. Locating the source of gender difference and similarity within our dyadic, social, and sociocultural contexts instead of within our genetic codes may do much to debunk the myth that men are from Mars and women are from Venus.

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