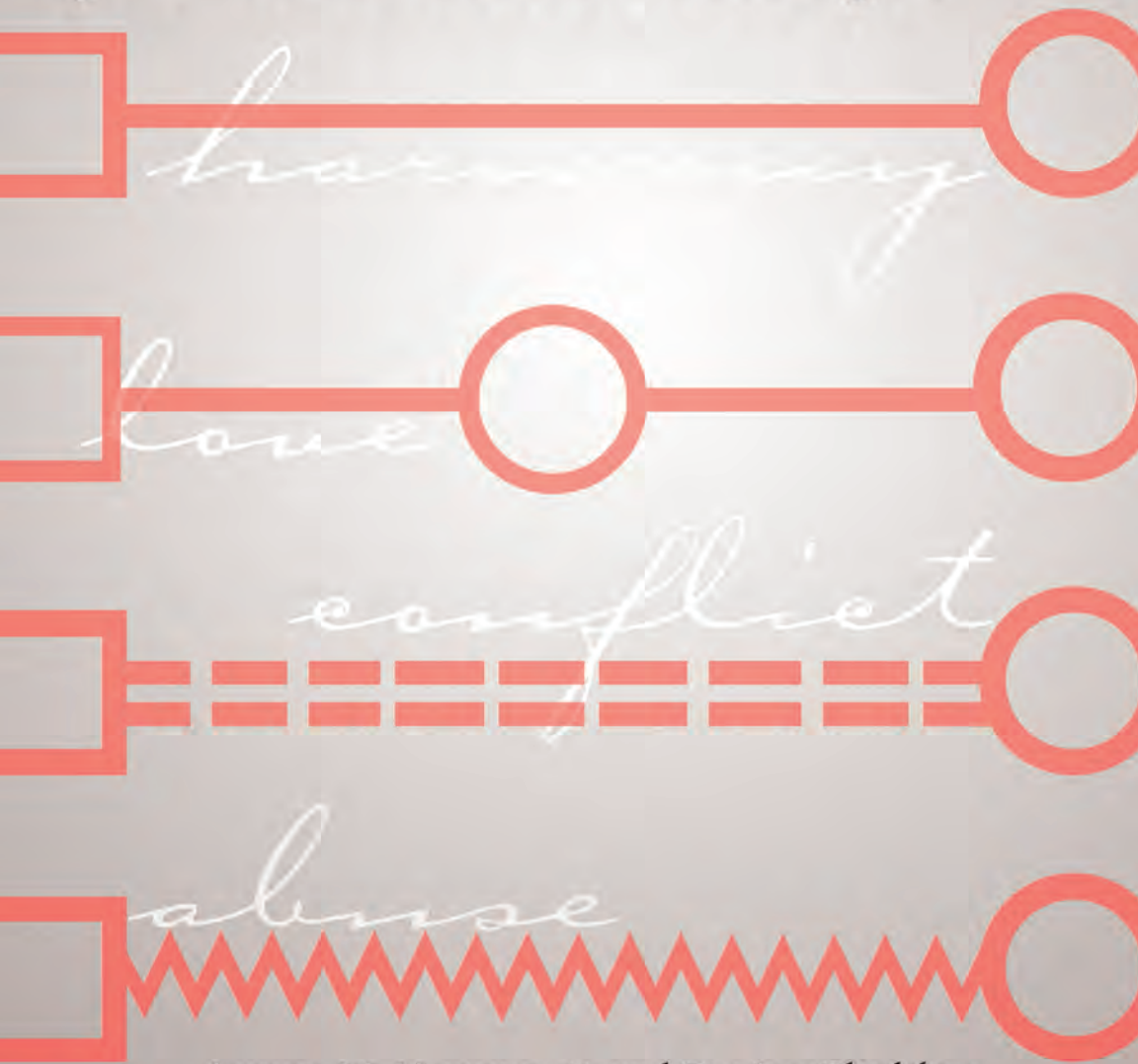


SECOND EDITION

# Scripts *and* Communication *for* Relationships



James M. Honeycutt *and* Pavica Sheldon

The book is divided into five parts: (1) Emotions, Imagination, and Physiology of Relationships, (2) Bases of Relational Scripts, (3) Relational Escalation and Deescalation, (4) Relationship Scripts in Context, and (5) Cautions and Recommendations. The authors discuss the basis of relationship scripts, emotions, imagery, and physiology of relationships including romance, friendship, work associates, mentors, and Facebook friends. They argue that people's expectations for relational development influence their communication, faith, and commitment in relationships. Misconstruing sexual or flirtatious intent, for example, is derived from having different scripts about attraction. They discuss abusive relationships including characteristics of abusers, stalking, and verbal and physical aggression.

Designed for classes in psychology, communication, sociology, family studies, and social work, this book provides a comprehensive overview of how scripts and communication are used in relationships. Guidelines based on developing and improving verbal and nonverbal communication competence are provided. A downloadable teacher's guide is also available.

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# Scripts and Communication for Relationships

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James M. Honeycutt and Pavica Sheldon

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This book is dedicated to the love of my life, my wife, Elizabeth and Abby. We have similar scripts for the development and maintenance of relationships including the soulmate and work-it-out theories which are not mutually exclusive. Communication, humor, and spirit in relationships are a wise investment; not taken for granted.

JMH

This book is dedicated to my husband and best friend, Luke. He has provided continued support and love throughout the writing of the book. Our marriage reflects the “matching hypothesis,” as we have similar values and interests.

PS





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# The Pursuit of Intimacy and Relational Scripts

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Relationship diversity is a popular term that captures the wide array of relationships that exist. Relationships can be characterized among multiple dimensions including intimacy which is a basic human need just as we have physiological needs (e.g., food). Indeed, feeling connected to others along with a sense of autonomy and competence has been identified as a basic human psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2012). A simple continuum of intimacy ranging from superficial to intense intimacy could be strangers, acquaintances, casual friendships, close friendships, best friends, and intimates. Other relationships that can fall anywhere on the intimacy continuum are online and social media liaisons, relations with pets (e.g., some people are afraid of certain pets due to their experiences), your relationships with characters in various forms of multiplayer online games (e.g., World of Warcraft, League of Legends), imaginary companions or parasocial relationships, supervisor–subordinate, mentor–mentee, coach–player, teacher–student, business provider–client, etc.

Classic pioneering research indicates that all human relationships can be classified among four bipolar dimensions: cooperative/friendly versus competitive/hostile, equal versus unequal, intense versus superficial, and socioemotional/informal versus task-oriented/formal (Wish, Deutsch, & Kaplan, 1976). Hence, your relationship with a given coworker may be formal, superficial, unequal (e.g., he or she

gives orders), and hostile; you can easily think of someone in your social network where the relationship is cooperative, equal, intense, and informal (e.g., a romantic romantic).

Over 200 years ago, Jane Austen, an astute observer of the rituals of late 18th-century courtship, wrote rather pragmatically that a happy marriage was the result of chance (Austen & Shapard, 2012). With due respect to Miss Austen, modern relationship researchers have revealed that scripts concerning pair bonding rituals are constituted in a manner so as to leave *little* to chance when romantic attachments are formed, intensify, and sometimes dissolve. According to Consumer Rankings, the five highest ranked web sites for meeting people were Zoosk, Match.com, Our Time, e-harmony, and Elite Single (consumer-rankings.com, 2016). Other popular sites are kindle and a host of specialized sites for various groups including seniors, gay, lesbian, and Christians.

This sorting process is exemplified by the classic stimulus-value-role (SVR) theory of Murstein (1987) who suggested that courtship begins as a simple exchange of information involving initial impressions of physical attributes followed by an interpretation of values, attitudes, and beliefs about a variety of topics that are of interest to each potential partner (*cf.*, Reis & Sprecher, 2009). Recall the cliché that you cannot judge a book by its cover. However, you can often tell if the book is an encyclopedia, comic, or novel. People tend to be right two-thirds of the time in judging personality impressions of strangers based on appearance.

Indeed, this is referred to as “thin slices” which refers to a brief observation that leads to accurate judgments about others (Lambert, Mulder, & Fincham, 2014). Indeed, people watching short clips of others who were simply giving instructions on how to draw an object were able to accurately judge which persons had engaged in infidelity in the past. The researcher asked each participant to describe their current romantic relationship and if they had been intimate with another person outside of that relationship. Voice pitch may have influenced infidelity perceptions since O'Connor, Re, and Feinberg (2011) found that voice pitch influences perceptions of infidelity.

Research reveals that the sound of a person's voice communicates a great deal of biologically and socially important information to potential mates (Hughes, Farley, & Rhodes, 2010). Voices of those with greater bilateral body symmetry which past Miss America contestants have had are rated as sounding more attractive than those with less symmetrical features and body symmetry has been shown to be a marker of developmental fitness (Baumeister, 2005; Hughes et al., 2010). More attractive voices are associated with positive personality traits including warmth, likability, honesty, and achievement while both sexes lower the pitch of their voices when communicating with more attractive people (Hughes et al., 2010).

Once a similarity is noted, the individuals are categorized and assigned to possible roles such as business acquaintance, tennis partner, best friend, potential lover. While this simple model has been criticized, it is noted that the typical sequence is SVR. However, a person could begin a relationship with another in the role stage such as mother–infant which is designated at birth or adoption. Further communication and ritualized behavior provide additional information about the partners' abilities to function in additional roles in preparation for potential roles as mates or parents. This chapter introduces the concepts of relational schemata and the scripts that evolve from them including the changes that have occurred in the manner in which relationships are perceived and enacted.

The concept of interpersonal intimacy in its current form began evolving in 19th-century America and Europe, with the development of industrial society. More recently, in the computerized information society, the emphasis has shifted more to the individual as a reaction to the impersonalization of factory and business life. This trend continued and accelerated as the world approached the 21st century because of the migration to urban environments: in 1905 the percentage of the world's population living in cities was 15%; a hundred years later, almost 50% of the citizens of our planet live in urban environments (Acedevio, 2005). In urban society, individuals often gain their primary identity and psychosocial support from personal relationships rather than from their roles in the community since these roles may be unknown or more fluid. The change in scripts for relationships has extended beyond the United States and western society. For example, research in India reveals that while arranged marriages are still relatively common, the prospective bride's preferences guide the process in a much more definitive manner than her mother or grandmothers did when partners were selected for them with idea of marrying up in terms of status and economic resources (Banerjee, Duflo, Ghatak, & Lafortune, 2013). Interestingly, marital satisfaction expressed by partners in arranged marriages appears to be very similar to the level of satisfaction expressed in western cultures where individuals select their own partners. However, couples from India in arranged marriages scored higher on spirituality, nutrition, and cultural identity while Americans scored higher on realistic beliefs and work, sense of humor, and self-care (Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005). In terms of the last factor on self-care, the American cultural script stresses individuality, competition, and self-reliance.

Individuals now develop relationships in cyberspace through the use of dating web sites for singles and divorcees, and correspondence with others through social networking sites. Individuals increasingly work at home due to satellite technology on their smartphones, tablets, and computers which actually parallels working out of the home in the 19th century before the Industrial Revolution, which preceded

the information revolution in the late 20th and this century. Indeed, the Industrial Revolution, which took place from the 18th to 19th centuries, was a period during which predominantly agrarian, rural societies in Europe and America became industrial and moved from isolated rural areas to metropolitan cities. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain in the late 1700s, manufacturing was often done in people's homes, using hand tools or basic machines.

Working out of the home is a return to the pattern in colonial times when the business was the home, in the form of farms and shops attached to living quarters. Yet, the proliferation of computers decreases face-to-face interaction as web sites are accessed to find and track individuals with similar interests so they can be harnessed as consumers of goods. For example, have you noticed how Facebook tracks where you visit and then transmits advertisements to you when you log on. Relatedly, online dating services such as Tinder and match.com report a thriving business and suggest that couples matched through their services enjoy better quality relationships than individuals who select their own partners in more conventional ways. Facebook and Instagram exist as virtual networking sites allowing users to "friend" someone with whom they have never had any face-to-face interaction while easily allowing the use of ghosting and unfriending people with no explanation required. Yet as Bruno (2007) described a number of years ago, "Facebook might well be changing the nature of relationships, making them both more intrusive and yet somehow less intimate at the same time" (p. 9).

Only time will tell if courtships will develop through computer contact, as they have evolved in face-to-face communication. According to evolutionary psychologists, these rituals of courtship are learned, defined, and expressed in the context of society and culture because of biological drives for procreation. For example, Fisher (1994) discussed how biochemical processes contribute to the development of romance. Human brain chemistry creates a heightened sense of excitement that people often describe as falling in love or infatuation. Fisher further suggested that the brain physiology and chemistry associated with bonding evolved as part of the human primordial mating system.

According to the self-expansion model, people have a fundamental motive to expand their sense of self that is primarily achieved through the formation of close relationships. Hence, research has revealed that romantic love remains steady and that obsessive love shows a steady decrease as a function of aging rather than time spent in the relationship (Sheets, 2014). Additionally, Fisher's cross-cultural research reveals that in societies allowing divorce the most common length of marriage is 4 years. This length of time conforms to the traditional period between successive human births. Fisher proposed that this 4-year cycle is a pattern that evolved as a reproductive strategy to successfully raise a helpless infant. That is, she believes that couples remain partners for the length of time it took for an infant to

become somewhat able to fend for himself. When our distant ancestors began to walk upright, infants had to be carried, thus precluding the caretaker from effectively foraging or defending herself. In order for the infant to survive and the genetic material inherited from its parents to be transmitted to future generations, it had to be protected, a task that took two individuals; however, when the infant became able to forage and walk herself (approximately four years), the necessity of having a pair bond dissolved.

In addition to human brain physiology, part of the reason for failed relationships is that the stability of contemporary relationships is contingent on positive emotions as the glue for relationship bonding and the reason for a relationship to continue. Commitment to a relationship depends on the ebb and flow of levels of intimacy. However, such has not always been the case in most of the western world. In earlier agrarian societies, a large family was essential to provide farm labor. Infant mortality was high, so women were encouraged to have many children with the hope that some offspring would survive past infancy. Consequently, mates were chosen with great care for their potential as partners and parents, and were assessed and tested for their compatibility through the ritualized stages of courtship. During the colonial period in the 18th century, intimacy was, at best, the result of the formal relationship rather than the cause of the romantic bond or marriage (Gadlin, 1977). Individuals were admonished to be faithful partners even though physical assaults were common. Only later did affection become both the cause and cement of marriage.

For most of the 20th century, cultural scripts included the idea of women marrying up. That means marrying a man who was 2–3 years older and who had a higher income level in order to provide a secure base for offspring. Additionally, there is the earlier sexual maturation of females as well as male delay in achieving stable levels of emotional maturity. Yet, this has changed since 2007 with men marrying up. According to the Pew Research Center, economic gains from marriage have been greater for men than for women in recent years (Fry & Cohn, 2010). With more women attending college and entering the workforce, they are more likely to marry men who have less education and earn less money, showing a reversal from times when fewer women worked outside the home. Only 4% of husbands had wives who brought home more income than they did in 1970, a share that rose to 38% in 2015.

Marriage rates have declined for all adults since 1970 and gone down most sharply for the least educated men and women (Fry & Cohn, 2010). As a result, those with more education are far more likely than those with less education to be married, a gap that has widened since 1970. Because higher education tends to lead to higher earnings, these compositional changes have bolstered the economic gains from being married for both men and women.

In the 20th century, affection was eroticized, although seen as fleeting and unstable. Stephen (1994) discussed how people think of marriage as a status that symbolizes mutual affection. Affection is necessary for marriage, whereas its erosion is a sufficient reason for divorce. However, Lewis and Spanier (1982) explored temporary high-quality (i.e., high-affection), low-stability marriages that ended in divorce and cited examples of dual-career couples who, after having to relocate in different cities in order to pursue each partner's career, eventually terminated their relationships. Is something more than simple affection necessary here?

According to Stephen (1994), some other possible causes of divorce are living in a pluralistic society that is saturated with diverse information, lifestyle choices, political interests, and religious values. For example, Cameron and Quinn (2006) note that one week-day edition of any major newspaper contains more information than an individual in the 18th century was exposed to in his/her entire lifetime. This plethora of information extends to relationships as well, providing a variety of possible scripts for initiating, maintaining, and dissolving relationships. People *construct* their realities from diverse sets of resources.

## Fatal Attraction

Some people have a relationship script that involves being drawn to a quality or behavior that while initially attractive, ultimately proves dissatisfying. Fatal attraction occurs when two people drawn to each other romantically become involved in a relationship, but over time discover annoying or disturbing aspects of the other's behavior or personality (Felmlee, 1995). There is a link between the seemingly disparate processes of romantic attraction and disenchantment. Consider a moth attracted to a flame. This research indicates that the sequence begins with attraction to a quality exhibited by a partner and ends in disillusionment with that quality.

In previous work on fatal attraction, individuals recalled their most recent romantic relationships that had ended and described qualities that initially attracted them to their former partners and the characteristics they later disliked (Felmlee, 1995). Specifically, this research shows 33% of the participants themselves identify similarities between attracting and disliked partner characteristics. The three most common types of attractors were physicality, fun, and caring; qualities they didn't like were selfishness, insecurity, and undependability.

The qualities that attract two individuals sometimes become complaints if the relationship starts to sour (Felmlee, 1995). "At first, I thought he was carefree and laid-back. Now, he is indecisive and irresponsible." This process in which individuals change their evaluations of each other after a time, as opposed to persevering

in their initial impressions, is known as cognitive accommodation. Box 1.1 contains sample cognitive beliefs about the qualities that first attract couples to each other that could be restructured later into negative attributes.

**Box 1.1. Cognitive Reframing: Sample Attractions in Couples That Later Evolved into Relationship Complaints**

*Initial Attribute of Attraction*

*Evolved Complaint*

1. Direct; intelligent	Unfairly critical; given to outbursts
2. Easygoing; laid-back	Self-absorbed and indulgent
3. Independent; strong	Has to have own way; selfish
4. Self-confident	Doesn't respect my wishes and withholds
5. Prudent, wise, and practical	Calm demeanor drives me nuts
6. Masculine; strong	Abusive; we fight
7. Feminine; warm	Hysterical; we fight
8. Good listener	Doesn't have own opinion
9. Exciting and likes to talk	Restless and doesn't let me relax
10. I am the center of his world	Despicably insecure
11. Open-minded and accepting	Doesn't give without being asked; no initiation
12. There's a mystery about her/him	No true intimacy; not completely there
13. Very smart and capable	Makes me feel stupid and incompetent

Another study by Felmlee (2001) found that 44% of the participants who were surveyed reported a fatal attraction in a prior or current relationship. Felmlee (1998) also has found that individuals who stated that the quality that attracted them to their partner was "dissimilarity" were more likely than those with other types of attractions to really dismiss that particular attracting characteristic.

Three possible explanations accounting for fatal attraction are given. (1) People's virtues and vices are one and the same (Goldberg, 1993). (2) Some individuals are drawn to characteristics in another that exemplify one dimension of these opposing forces, but they find the relationship lacks the corresponding dimension. (3) The individuals need to sustain confidence in the belief that they are in the right relationship with the right person and that they will use various cognitive tactics to maintain satisfaction and commitment. However, presumably once a relationship has ended, the motivation of weakness is removed and the faults once transformed into virtues are now seen as vices.

Today, each individual's sense of uniqueness permeates his or her views of the characteristics of an ideal relationship. This is especially true in our individualistic Western society. Research by Wish et al. (1976) revealed that individuals distinguish communication behaviors (e. g., cooperative versus competitive)



among relatively few dimensions that are used to distinguish almost all types of relationships (e.g., personal enemies, husband/wife). In addition, people make different distinctions in their own relationships than in typical or other people's relationships. For example, cooperation is more important for evaluating typical relationships than for evaluating their own relationships. In evaluating their own relationships, individuals mention fewer hostile relations (e.g., one's relationship with a lover is mentioned more often than one's relationship with a bitter enemy). Hostile relations (e.g., business rivals, political opponents, guard/prisoner, supervisor/employee, and interviewer/applicant) are perceived as characterizing other people's relationships. In essence, people select highly positive relational attributes to construct seemingly ideal life spaces in which they live, learn, and love.

Another relatively recent evolution in romantic relationships is the tendency to distinguish between long-term and short-term relationships, each having a distinct set of scripts. While at one time, courting was considered a prelude to the formation of a relationship for life, at present, there appear to be criteria and scripts for two distinct types of relationships: those that may evolve into a long-term commitment and those considered short term only. Stewart, Stinnett, and Rosenfeld (2000) suggest that while there may be gender differences in heterosexual couple's expectations regarding partner selection, both men and women listed different attributes for long-term versus short-term romantic partners. In regard to short-term relational partners, women rated good earning capacity, dependability, sense of humor, and ambition most important; men rated physical attractiveness and good heredity most important. In long-term relationships, women rated kindness/understanding and ambition as important; men rated physical attractiveness and adaptability as more important for long-term relationships. Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhaur, and Kenrick (2002) reported that men valued intelligence in a longer term relationship and physical attractiveness in the short term, while women valued education more in long-term relationships.

Each individual's construction of reality is based on experiences which also affect beliefs about the development and decline of romantic relationships. Individuals vary in their expectations of how relationships should develop due to the variety of informational sources that form the foundation for their expectations. In this regard, Staines and Libby (1986) discussed predictive romantic expectations, which are beliefs about behaviors that are expected to occur in a romantic role regardless of one's desires. Thus, a person who has been spurned before may be more likely to expect this to happen in future relationships than is someone who has not been rejected.



Staines and Libby (1986) have investigated these idealistic romantic expectations or beliefs reflecting an individual's desires of what should ideally happen in the role of a lover or spouse. Perhaps not surprisingly, women report more discrepancies between prescriptive and predictive expectations than men do. A common complaint is that wives prefer their husbands to do more household cleaning even though they don't expect that it will happen. Consequently, women often report lower levels of marital happiness than their husbands (Gottman, 2011). Broughton and Van Acker (2007) discovered romantic expectations of marriage and motherhood can have deleterious consequences for low-income women whose early life choices preclude furthering their education. That is, the discourse of romance was a significant factor that influenced their early life choices. Expectations not met resulted in failed marriages requiring these women to reevaluate their aspirations.

Nonetheless, even in an age of too-often-failed expectations, women and men meet, fall in love, and some even live happily ever after. Why? Symbolic interdependence provides an answer to this question.

## Symbolic Interdependence in Relationships

Long-term relationships provide continuity and confirmation for idiosyncratic beliefs and protection from doubt, loneliness, and ambiguity. We tend to be attracted to those who reinforce our attitudes and beliefs. Hence, we are more attracted to those who agree with us rather than constantly challenging our views. Social homogeneity refers to "passive, indirect effects on spousal similarity" (Watson et al., 2004, p. 1034). The result showed that age and education level are crucial in affecting the mate preference. While there are exceptions expressed in slang language, that is, "cougar," or "gold-digger," many people are attracted to someone with similar ages who go to their school because of the frequency of face-to-face communication beyond text messaging and Facebook interactions.

Stephen (1994) discussed the idea of individuals sharing conceptions of relationships in terms of symbolic interdependence. This is a type of mental sharing in which individuals share similar beliefs about the world: relational partners react to events in similar ways and derive similar conclusions from information. Furthermore, Honeycutt (2009) has found that symbolic interdependence predicts a quality relationship. He tested this among randomly paired strangers, casual dating, engaged, and married couples. He correlated the scores on the Relationship Worldview Inventory from Stephen and Markman (1983), which is a survey asking individuals what they value in a relationship. Sample items include "Being in a relationship can provide purpose for one's own life. One has to make great

efforts to get the most from a relationship.” The higher the correlation, the more individuals agree on underlying relational values. The idea is that individuals may bring these values into the relationship or actively communicate about them as a joint couple’s identity is created. Engaged couples had the highest level of symbolic interdependence ( $r = .50$ ) followed by married and dating couples, with random couples demonstrating the least interdependence ( $r < .18$ ). There were significant differences between engaged couples and the others. Part of this explanation has to do with the fact that engaged couples are in a “honeymoon” phase (pun intended) where assumed agreement is higher and individual differences of opinion are ignored or glossed over. Married couples show slightly lower agreement.

Stephen (1994) found that it is not that the self has found another who can penetrate the self, but that both self and another have refashioned themselves (and indeed the rest of their world) through the dialogue of their relationship until they are possessed of a type of self consistent with the relationship worldview. The couple creates an interpretive framework and at the same time reinterprets themselves within it. Needless to say, persistently deviant interpretations will be regarded as problematic and effort is likely to be expended in smoothing discrepancies.

These discrepancies can be seen as relational conflicts about behaviors, attitudes, and appropriate performance of romantic roles. If the smoothing does not resolve the discrepancies, the relationship may dissolve. More importantly, the smoothing strategies go into memory and act as a repository of information that may be opened for subsequent relationships. Thus, happy long-term relationships are enhanced when individuals have a shared social reality and relationship worldview. The partners share similar expectations about what constitutes relationship development and those qualities that characterize a satisfying relationship. The sharing of expectations reflects evolving stories that individuals construct as they communicate with each other. Yet the mere sharing of expectations and predictions is not enough; the intimate conversations between romantic partners do not get lodged in memory in some pure form. Rather the discourse becomes embedded in some form of preexisting mental script that can allow prospective partners to separate out irrelevant data, mill the appropriate associations between actions and intents, and forge a stable, shared relational worldview. Thus, relational schemata serve as scripts that organize relevant information and, ultimately, test the tensile strength of any romance.

Symbolic interdependence is based on the idea that individuals share a similarity of beliefs and views. However, the initial stimulus resides in a classic concept of “birds of a feather flocking together” rather than “opposites attracting.” Indeed, research on the “matching hypothesis” is vast and reveals the power of individuals initially seeking out others that physically resemble themselves.

## Matching Hypothesis: Birds of a Feather Flock Together

The matching hypothesis claims that people are more likely to form long-standing relationships with those who are equally physically attractive. They also look for similarity in hobbies, interests, and values over time. People with dissimilar looks do form and sustain relationships, but it takes longer because the communication about personality traits and motivation takes longer (Lewandowski, Aron, & Gee, 2007). The notion of “birds of a feather flock together” points out that similarity is a crucial determinant of interpersonal attraction. Similarity seems to carry considerable weight in initial attraction, while complementarity assumes importance as the relationship develops over time (Vinacke, Shannon, Palazzo, Balsavage, & Cooney, 1988). Furthermore, the idea of “opposites attract” appears more plausible if the areas of dissimilarity are not critical underlying values that are important to the relational partners. Hence, Gottman and Silver (2015) report how conflict-engagers, or those who like to argue, paired with conflict-avoiders have more relational problems and long-term incompatibility than symmetrical pairings of avoiders with avoiders and engagers with engagers. Similarly, couples who reported the highest level of loving and harmonious relationship were more dissimilar in dominance than couples who scored lower in relationship quality (Markey & Markey, 2007).

## Interpersonal Attraction

Research on attraction has found that physical attractiveness and indicators of attachment anxiety and avoidance were related to the number of first dates, and the probability of entering into an exclusive relationship in an eight-month period (Poulsen, Holman, Busby, & Carroll, 2013). Moreover, people with similar levels of perceived attractiveness form relationships quicker while persons with dissimilar levels take longer to form sustained relationships. McCroskey and McCain (1974) initially conceptualized interpersonal attraction as a multidimensional construct. Prior research in this area suggested that interpersonal attraction was characterized by three distinct dimensions: (a) a liking or social dimension; (b) a task or respect dimension; and (c) a physical dimension. They concluded that perceptions of attraction were responsible for increased communication and interpersonal influence.

Each complete dimension offers unique characteristics that incorporate many other known types of attraction. Social attraction, or the liking dimension, is influenced by how much time we want to spend with another person. The second

dimension, or task attraction, is known for the desire to want to work toward objectives with the other person, which is quite common in workplaces since socializing is usually required in order to work with others toward a goal. Finally, the last type of attraction or dimension is physical attraction. This is attraction based on the physical characteristics of the other person. Overall, the three dimensions are also known as the “Big 3” due to the ability for other types of attraction to be subsumed within them, therefore making it unlikely for any other type of attraction to occur without these three having an influence. Heterosexual, cross-cultural research indicates that men are subliminally looking for fertility cues in women and have a desire for women with a low waist-to-hip ratio, while women prefer men with a similar waist and hip size (Donohoe, von Hippel, & Brooks, 2009; Swami & Furnham, 2008).

A study of online dating involved the matching hypothesis (Shaw, Fiore, Mendelsohn, & Cheshire, 2011). The attractiveness of 60 males and 60 females was measured and their communication was monitored. The people with whom they interacted were then monitored to see who they interacted with, and returned messages to. They found that people contacted others who were significantly more attractive than they were; however, it was found that the person was more likely to reply if they were closer to the same level of attractiveness.

Studies have revealed that very attractive people flock together, while individuals lacking the perfect face and body also stick together. According to Morry’s |attraction-similarity model (2007), there is a common belief that people with actual similarity produce initial attraction. People who lack looks place more stock in nonphysical features, such as sense of humor, than in physical beauty (Lee, Loewenstein, Ariely, Hong, & Young, 2007). However, the data also reveal that guys are less concerned with their own looks when deciding whom to date. So while a man might have no qualms about going after someone much better looking than he is, a woman will tend more to choose partners with compatible looks. Yet, for both men and women, physical attractiveness guides Cupid’s arrow.

Lee and his colleagues (2007) analyzed an online dating web site called HOTorNOT.com, which was an influence on the founding of Facebook and YouTube. This site allowed members to rate others on their physical attractiveness. They analyzed how an individual’s attractiveness rating affected how that person rated others’ physical attractiveness on a scale from 1 to the hottest value of 10. Then, the researchers compared the average hot-or-not ratings for each person with the number of dating requests. On average, participants paired up with others having compatible attractiveness. Compared with the women, men were most influenced by physical attractiveness when requesting dates, but their own appearance ratings had less effect on their date choices. The study concluded

that males were less affected by how attractive they themselves are compared to females. Men were more likely than women to request dates out of their league. Individuals who slid furthest down the hot-or-not scale seemed more desperate, as they were the most likely to respond “yes” to any date requests. For every unit decrease on the 10-point scale of the member’s own attractiveness the member was 25% more likely to say “yes” to a potential date. The hot-rated members tended to accept only dates from others in their attractiveness neighborhood.

To understand how the physically lacking individuals cope with the cards they were dealt, Lee et al. (2007) conducted a follow-up speed-dating study. At an event sponsored by a Boston-based online dating company, 24 participants indicated how high they rated the relative importance of six criteria—physical attractiveness, intelligence, sense of humor, kindness, confidence, and extroversion—for selecting dates. The participants then chatted for four minutes with each potential date, after which they rated each other on physical attractiveness and decided whether to meet up again with that person. The data revealed that more attractive people placed more importance on physical attractiveness than other qualities in selecting their dates. Less attractive people placed more weight on other qualities, including sense of humor. Hence, it appears that people who are less attractive change their scripts for initial attraction by caring less about beauty and more about sense of humor.

A “hot” or “not” type of study, involving men and women who were exposed to pictures, revealed that the human brain determines whether an image is erotic long before the viewer is even aware they are seeing the picture (Anokhin et al., 2006). Moreover, the brain quickly classifies images into a hot or not type categorization. The study’s researchers also discovered that sexy shots induce a uniquely powerful reaction in the brain, equal in effect for both men and women, and those erotic images produced a strong reaction in the hypothalamus.

Not only does the matching hypothesis explain desire in initial attraction, but it has been supported in studies of couples who have celebrated their silver anniversaries (25 years of marriage). Zajonc, Adelman, Murphy, and Niedenthal (1987) found that people who live with each other for a long period of time grow physically similar in their facial features. They had photographs of couples when they were first married and 25 years later. The photos were judged for physical similarity and for the likelihood that they were married. The results showed that there was indeed an increase in apparent similarity after 25 years of living together. In addition, an increase in resemblance was associated with greater reported marital happiness.

Possible explanations for this involve facial mimicry in which partners subliminally imitate the facial expressions of each other. Hence, if you live with a happy

person, you are more likely to smile compared to living with a gloomy person. Emotional processes produce vascular changes that are, in part, regulated by facial muscles. The facial muscles act as ligatures on veins and arteries, and are able to divert blood from, or direct blood to, the brain. An implication of this process is that habitual use of facial musculature may permanently affect the physical features of the face. The implication holds further that two people who live with each other for a longer period of time, by virtue of repeated empathic mimicry, would grow physically similar in their facial features. Kin resemblance, therefore, may not be simply a matter of common genes but also a matter of prolonged social contact. Finally, research among women has revealed that women who enjoy good childhood relationships with their fathers were more likely to select partners who resemble their fathers, while women who had negative or less positive relationships were not attracted to men who looked like their fathers (Wiszevska, Pawlowski, & Boothroyd, 2007).

### Ratings of Physical Attractiveness

Even as people age, they may hold positive illusions about a partner's physical attractiveness. Research reveals that the more newlyweds idealized each other, the less they reported decline of love over a thirteen-year period (Miller, Niehuis, & Huston, 2006). Individuals tend to rate their partner as more physically attractive than they rate themselves, which is referred to as "the love is blind bias" (Swami, Stieger, Haubner, Voracek, & Furnham, 2009). Other studies reveal that observer ratings of partners' physical attractiveness are associated with the couple's relational satisfaction (McNulty, Neff, & Karnerly, 2008) and dealing more constructively with relationship problems (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2009). However, it is interesting to note that both spouses behaved more positively if the wife was more attractive than the husband. Additionally, it has been reported that younger and older couples do not differ in the association between positive bodily attractiveness and relationship quality. There is the stereotype that physical attraction declines as the body ages. Barelds and Dijkstra (2009) found in a sample of Dutch married and cohabiting, heterosexual couples that with aging, positive facial attractiveness illusions were associated with self-reported relationship quality. They surmise that while young people may emphasize the beauty side of bodily attractiveness such as having a tight waist or large breasts, older people may define bodily attractiveness in terms of health or physical condition. As people age, facial attractiveness may be a more important characteristic in a mate because it reflects overall physical health.

In conclusion, the matching hypothesis studies have revealed that physical attraction is an initial filter cue by which undesirable people are quickly filtered.

Indeed, research reveals that initial impressions are formed within milliseconds of seeing someone, such that persons in speed dating or any social gathering quickly decide if they want to meet the person or continue talking. Hence, during social encounters, it is common for some people to quickly exit conversations while looking at other people across the way as they seek means of escape (Todorov, Fiske, & Prentice, 2008). Persons with similar levels of looks, attitudes, hobbies, values, and personality form relationships more quickly than persons with dissimilar qualities (Watson et al., 2004).

## A Brief Introduction to Relational Scripts

Duck (1986) suggested that relationships should be regarded as changing mental and behavioral creations of individuals. The time spent alone analyzing future encounters reflects an individual's use of relational schemata to understand and differentiate among different types of relationships, such as distinguishing a casual dating relationship from an exclusive romance. Baldwin (1992) reviewed studies indicating that people develop cognitive structures representing regular patterns of interaction, scripts for behaviors associated with the formation of relationships. A relational schema includes an image in which people imagine seeing themselves with someone else.

Individuals have scripts based on memory and experiences that create expectations about what is likely to occur during the course of their lives in different types of relationships. These scripts emanating from relationship scripts are hierarchically ordered on the basis of recall of particular scenes (e.g., meeting an individual for the first time at a specific place) and scripts for behavior embedded within various scenes. Even though relationships are in constant motion, these scripts provide a perceptual anchor with which individuals can determine where they are in a relationship. These scripts are similar to mental file folders into which information is placed, retrieved, and often revised.

Scripts about relationships may be functional or dysfunctional. For example, Swann (1987) reviewed research indicating that individuals chose relational partners who verified their self-concepts even if their self-concept at the time was negative. Individuals who had high self-esteem preferred their relational partners to view them favorably, whereas individuals with low self-esteem preferred their relational partners to view them in relatively unfavorable terms. An individual's preference for relational partners with either positive or negative views of the individual was associated with the actual appraisal of their friends. Hence, if an individual viewed him or herself somewhat negatively, a relational partner who perceived the individual similarly was liked more than a relational partner who did



not. Swann (1987) suggested “that people translate their desire for congruent relationship partners into actual selection of partners” (p. 1040). He further suggests (Swann, 2005) that if this initial strategy does not work (seeking self-verifying partners), individuals will act in certain ways to bring their partners’ view of themselves in line with their own self-perceptions.

Relationships are constantly moving entities rather than static events. People tell stories or give accounts about their relationships that help provide order to events. Understanding is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of the people in relationships. Problems in a relationship are understood as stories that individuals have agreed to tell.

Relationships represent the juxtaposition between individual needs and dyadic goals. A cognitive approach to the study of relationships examines how individuals mentally create their relationships. The behavioral study of relationships has a long, rich legacy. For example, communication patterns between happy and unhappy couples have been examined. However, an exclusive focus on the behavioral patterns of couples ignores the fusion between the individual and the relationship. The mental creation of a relationship may sustain or constrain individuals in everyday mundane living, depending on the content of relational expectations.

Relational expectations reflect past experiences in relationships. Cognitive researchers refer to expectations as knowledge structures. Various types of scripts emanating from knowledge structures are discussed in the next chapter. For example, if an individual has experienced a lot of deception in prior relationships, he or she may believe that his or her partner’s words may not be taken at face value and that caution is wise before venturing far into self-disclosure. The individual may even be wary of people who seem gregarious.

Cognitive researchers believe that people’s complex personal memories (scripts) create the bias they read into one another’s signals. Research indicates that the most influential scripts are those initially developed in early childhood through interaction with parents, particularly with the primary caregiver, which traditionally has been the mother (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982; Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Additional influences on people’s relationship scripts develop from other life experiences and the media. And the role and influence of scripts plays out in everyday interaction in a relationship. For example, when partners interact, they often think about what they are going to say in the form of imagined interactions (IIs), mentally processing what has been said, and sorting through memory to compare and contrast new information with earlier experience (Honeycutt, 1995, 2010). As relationships develop, people’s internal responses create not only their views of themselves, but their views of their partner and the ways in which they think about themselves in relation to the other person. In



short, relationships are the combined products and producers of both cognitive activity and behavior. They are both the input and outcome of one's perceptions and experiences.

## Summary

Individuals think about relationships based on experiences, observations, and cultural images. People experience relationships through personal experience, vicarious experience, or a combination of direct and indirect encounters, and includes virtual encounters via online networking sites. As a consequence of these experiences, many people feel that they are experts on relationships. Yet, it can be argued that many people are experts at failed relationships.

Memories of relational events create expectations for relationships that are hierarchically organized on the basis of scenes and recalled messages within those scenes emanating in scripts that are pervasive yet malleable. Thus, relationships exist in people's minds, as well as in the observable communication between any two individuals. The role of cognition in categorizing romantic relationships has been ignored in the scholarly literature, not receiving much empirical research attention, whereas behavioral studies for classifying relationships are more popular. The cognition of romance is examined in this book in terms of relational scripts derived from experience and the scripts formed from these memory structures.

## Discussion Questions

- 1.1. Discuss the idea of individuals as experts at failed relationships. Define what is meant by a failed relationship. Do people learn from failed relationships? One hears stories about individuals being in serial, unhealthy relationships. How many individuals do you know who have gone through a series of failed relationships? How many of these seem to have similar characteristics? Did their expectations change after each relationship ended? Why do individuals persist in utilizing scripts for relationship formation that generate unsuccessful partnering?
- 1.2. Discuss the proposition that successful relationships are more likely when individuals have a joint relationship worldview and shared conceptions of relationships. Do internet web sites foster the probability of selecting someone who is more similar in your values and temperament? How similar must the individuals' expectations for the development of relationships be in order to enhance the quality of the relationship?

## Applications

- 1.1. Think of couples you know who seem to be well matched and those who are not well matched at all. Interview the partners in these couples about how they met, what made the other person stand out, what hobbies or interests they share, the problems they deal with in the relationship, how they communicate, and what they expected from the relationship. Have them complete the survey individually. Ask them their views about what characterizes a romantic relationship. You may interview them individually and contrast the partners' reports. Write a brief report in which you contrast the couples in terms of relationship happiness, compatibility of beliefs about relationship values, and anything that is especially memorable about these couples.
- 1.2. With a close friend, try an experiment in which each of you individually thinks of two couples whom you both know. One couple should be very happy and compatible; the other couple should be the opposite. Decide which couple is in each category individually; do both of you agree on the classifications? What made you classify the couples in the way you did? How similar or different are your perceptions of these couples compared to your friend's?

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# Emotions, Imagination, and Physiology of Relationships

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Chapter 2	Emotion and Cognition About Relationships
Chapter 3	Generating and Maintaining Relationships Through Imagined Interactions
Chapter 4	Physiology and Relationships

What emotions are associated with relationships? What is the underlying physiology that drives these emotions and how does imagery, specifically imagined interactions, influence both our emotions and our assessment of these emotions? The secrets of happiness are revealed in Chapter 2. In addition, this chapter includes material that assists us in distinguishing our emotions, moods, and effect the differences and similarities among love, anger, hate, and jealousy. The interconnectedness of emotions, mental imagery, and actions is explored in Chapter 3, an examination of imagined interactions, the mental images that influence our emotions and our assessments of those emotions. You'll discover how it is possible to imagine yourself into an angry or joyful state. Relationships can prolong our lives or shorten them as our emotions soothe or stimulate our bodies in ways we are just beginning to understand; Chapter 4 reveals the physiological pathways that regulate social attachments.

