Interaction and Daily Life in Long-term Relationships

'People are actors in giving communicative life to the contradictions that organize their social life, but these contradictions in turn affect their communicative action . . . Praxis focuses on the concrete practices by which social actors produce the future out of the past in their everyday lives.' (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996: 13–14)

Chapter 2 looked at some Big Emotions, and connected 'feelings' to language, culture and 'praxis' or the doing of relating and the conduct of daily life. I wrote about 'love' as an emotion, though I wrote less about how people enact it in daily life, for example. Yet we do not experience emotions on some abstract plane: they hit us in the face as a part of daily life or in response to relational experience. As Duck and Wood (1995) suggested, relational emotions are basically to do with management of behaviour or the organization of daily life and the routines and expectations that ordinarily make them up. True, we think of relationships as based in emotions and abstractions but we do them all the same. Also if we think of relationships only as being based on emotions we miss perhaps the most important point about relationships: they happen in daily life where lots of other things happen too besides emotions – things like gossip, hassles, decisions about our calendars and time organization, manipulation of impressions by others, trivial organization of leisure time, sharing of experiences, reading about other people's relationships in magazines . . .

It is true that when we are asked about what matters to us most in life and gives it its fullest purpose, the majority of people give one simple answer: relationships (Klinger, 1977), meaning most probably the positive ones. However, I doubt if people are really talking about emotions in relationships when they answer that way; I'd bet they are talking about the experience of relationships in all its complexity. What is more I'd bet that enemyships also matter in practical conduct of life and in some cases are more powerful forces on our thinking and behaviour than are the loves and friendships that surround us (Wiseman and Duck, 1995). Also important is the handling of little details: it is OK to like someone but where do you find the time to talk to them if you have pressing work to do, or other people competing for your attention and time or other relationships you are in? What is sacrificed if you spend time with them and what does it mean if you don't choose to make that sacrifice?
Relationships are obvious sources of joy and happiness: we like being with friends; we enjoy the company of others; being in love is wonderful when we think of it in the abstract and forget the non-idealized parts. On the other hand, good relationships can be hell when they go wrong or get into trouble and cause us pain, or when a partner calls on us to fulfill a relational obligation (like providing support and help) when we don’t care to do it. Chapter 2 showed us that specific emotions about, or experiences in, relationships have very powerful effects on people yet the chapter often decontextualized relationships by stripping them out of daily life because much research work also does that. The present chapter shows the important role of relationships as a whole, particularly change in relationships, not only in social life but also their effect on our ‘sense of being’ or sense of self-esteem. One thing you need to notice is that although we think of relationships as stable places where we live, most of our daily experience is in fact varied and unstable. For example, we and our partners have moods; some days things keep going wrong; people can be a hassle when at other times they are not, and so forth. Somehow or other we manage to create a sense of unity and character from this ebb and flow of variety (Duck, 1994a). We also talk about relationships in emotional terms yet we probably spend most of our time dealing with them in practical terms.

We can make sweeping statements about the value of relationships but there is, of course, also a negative side to relationships. Poor relationship skills are associated with criminality, violence and aggression, neurosis and depression, illness, shyness, drug and alcohol problems, marital difficulties, divorce, spouse beating and child abuse (J. West, 1995; Wood, 1997). They also create demands on us to provide help, comfort and resources to others or oblige us to be available to others when they are in difficulties, especially in times of illness and stress (Stein, 1993). The phenomenon of ‘care-giver burnout’ has been widely researched (Miller et al., 1988) whether in respect of mental health service professionals and counsellors who experience exhaustion from all their caring for others (La Gaipa, 1990) or merely untrained folk who care for sick relatives (Lyons and Meade, 1995). People also give us daily hassles (Bolger and Kelleher, 1993) and present us with binds and dilemmas (Wiseman, 1986) or stretch our loyalties (Baxter et al., 1997). In living practical relational lives, these are variations with which we must be prepared to contend, and considering what we may be letting ourselves in for, there might be a case for never getting into relationships at all!

Starting relationships

Just as we tend to think of relationships in the abstract so we have a number of relatively simplistic ideas about the ways in which they start and finish. The whole notion of a clear start to a relationship is at odds with some of our other experiences of life. When did you start the relationship with the assistant at your supermarket check-out? Does the way you started you ever to remain frequent started it terms? Do ask one a relationship the real start, but little more.

In every application by the first about people alone either, not may hear him to meet the much about impression sudden last. So we instantly make decisions which makes sense relationships; I thought to point. Even date someone to) embark indicates the (with a rest or otherwise be in as short a date is going.

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‘started’ the relationship with your mother really matter that much? Have you ever had a relationship where you really had to think back quite hard to remember how it started because it just grew out of some relatively frequent contact? Did you and your partner ever disagree about how it started or have you always seen the start of the relationship in identical terms? Doesn’t that strike you as remarkable (either way)? Of course people ask one another out on dates and can pinpoint that time as the start of the relationship, but it may be that the planning to ask someone out on a date is the real start, not the date itself. Or perhaps the date itself is not really the start, but the relationship grows out of the date. Let’s think this one out a little more . . .

In everyday life we are enormously influenced by first impressions. Job applications, interviews, and the whole course of a relationship can be ‘set’ by the first few moments. In everyday life, we make many snap judgements about people and form instant likes and dislikes. Of course we don’t do this alone either. We often get to hear about someone first from our acquaintances, not by direct experience ourselves (Berger and Bradac, 1982), or we may hear gossipy or ‘reputational’ things about someone before we ever get to meet them – hence the line ‘Good to meet you at last, I have heard so much about you.’ We also know that from information received or impressions we make ourselves we can create ‘irrational’ first impressions, sudden lusts and likings, and intense hatreds for people we really do not know. We can like the manner of a person we do not know and can form instant dislikes of someone who has not even uttered a word to us.

So it is actually paradoxical that the study of initial responses to strangers makes sense as a starting point for understanding long-term human relationships; it is an identifiable point when relationships are most often thought to start or fail to start, but very often plenty precedes that ‘starting point’. Even so, things can be derailed by trivialities: we may decide (not) to date someone whose appearance does (not) appeal to us, and so we may (fail to) embark on a relationship that could have changed our lives. Rodin (1982) indicates that if we reach the early decision that ‘this is a non-relationship’ (with a restaurant waiter, for example) then we close down certain kinds of cognitive processing and do not bother to search for indications that might otherwise become the basis for a relationship. Indeed, there is evidence that in as short a space of time as 30 seconds partners usually decide whether a date is going to be a success or failure (Cortez et al., 1988).

Aside from appearance, what makes us initially attracted (and attractive) to other people? Common sense will answer ‘You were attracted because you have similar attitudes and personalities.’ That is a reasonable proposition, but how does it stand up to investigation?

**Laboratory investigation of attraction**

If we find that friends have similar attitudes, we may congratulate ourselves that we have found an answer to the question until we realize that we have
Box 3.1 Exercises on relationships

- Think for a moment about the people with whom you are particularly friendly. What do you like about them and how did the relationship get started? How does the relationship with each person differ from those that you have with other people?

- Write out two short lists (say 10 items each) giving (a) the features of a friend that you like (seven items) and those that you dislike (three items) (b) the sort of activities that you perform or topics you talk about almost exclusively with friends (seven items) and those that you do with other people too, but that are ‘better’ with friends (three items).

- Think for a moment about an attractive person you have seen but not really met — one you would like to start a relationship with if you were completely free to do so. Write two short lists (10 items each) giving: (a) what you find attractive about them (seven items) and what you find unattractive about them (three items) (b) seven things you would do or talk about with them if you got to know them and three items you would definitely not talk about or do.

- Compare your various lists and try to work out the important differences among them, if any. Consider the differences involved in ‘relating’ to strangers and friends, and think what it is that changes when strangers gradually turn into acquaintances and friends.

- Take a look at the chapter by Rodin (1982) that outlines the bases for comparisons between such lists.

not shown whether similarity causes liking or liking causes similarity. (After all, we do try to discuss things with friends and persuade our friends to adopt our ideas and become more like us, don’t we?) For a social scientist, the challenge is to find a way to alter similarity levels between people so that you can see what it does to their attraction for one another.

The problem was cleverly solved by Tony Smith (1957), a solution that was also independently developed by Donn Byrne (1961, 1971), though Byrne’s own approach became the focus of a certain amount of criticism over the years (Byrne, 1997). The essence of the solution involves experiments on attraction to strangers where subjects filled out an attitude questionnaire and then were given another scale (allegedly) completed by a stranger. Byrne then assessed subjects’ responses to the stranger (who was actually non-existent, i.e. was bogus or hypothetical, in honour of whom the method was called ‘the bogus stranger method’, although the experimental subjects did not know that the stranger was fictitious). The subjects would be presented with the information allegedly provided by this stranger, and they would then be asked what they thought of him or her. Byrne carefully arranged the information so that the stranger’s attitude scale matched up with the subject’s own to a precise degree (say 80 per cent or 65 per cent or 20 per cent), according to the needs of the experimental design.

Byrne’s work, also known as ‘the attraction paradigm’ (or ‘the paradigm that would not die’, Bochner, 1991), assumed that attitude similarity is an example of ‘reinforcement’ or reward — something attractive, desirable, and positive to Byrne, is a high similarity attitude similarity attitude similarity boring to me. But usually, I usually find it then please re by other school in the way this 1992).

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and positive that we like to experience. The important point, according to Byrne, is that it is reinforcement that we like and it happens that attitude similarity is usually reinforcing. Note that Byrne does not say that attitude similarity is always reinforcing or attractive (sometimes it may be boring to meet someone whose attitudes are absolutely the same as ours). But usually, Byrne says, attitude similarity will be reinforcing, and so we usually find it attractive. If you are asked to write a critique of Byrne's work then please remember that point, because you will certainly read papers by other scholars who do not take account of it and are quite simply wrong in the way that they represent his work (Byrne, 1997; Duck and Barnes, 1992).

When all we know about someone is his or her sex and a sample of his or her attitudes, then we will like that person in proportion to the amount of reinforcing similarity between us; the more similar, the more we like him or her. If we know a little more about the person then the picture becomes more complicated: for instance, it matters whether we have a positive view of him or her (e.g. that we have not found out that the person is a thief or a homicidal maniac or mentally ill—unless we are, also). It also matters whether the similar attitudes are important to us, whether the reasons given for holding them are similar to ours, and whether we believe the strangers are stating their true opinions. In brief, as the picture becomes more complicated, so the plain and simple commonsense rule that 'similarity is attractive' turns out to be more and more inadequate and in need of refinement. In investigating this area Byrne and colleagues established an enormous amount of detail about this particular phenomenon, assessing the truth of the basic assumptions (Byrne, 1997).

In sum, we usually like people whose attitudes are similar to our own, so long as we like ourselves and the other people are normal, sensible people stating their true opinion. This fact is also obviously the basis of the method used by dating agencies who match partners up by selecting people with similar attitudes and beliefs – though the strangers there are real, not bogus. Byrne often tested the validity of his work outside the 'laboratory'. He found that bank managers give bigger loans to people with similar attitudes, for instance; that jurors are more likely to be lenient to defendants with attitudes like their own; and that similarity of attitudes can overcome the prejudices of racial bigots so that prejudiced whites actually express liking for blacks who have similar attitudes (Byrne, 1992, 1997).

Laboratory-based, experimental, manipulated studies of liking may not penetrate real liking. In life we rarely gain such unambiguous access to someone else's attitudes. When was the last time a stranger came up to you and gave you a written list of his or her attitudes? Sometimes, we have to be 'detectives'; we know that people often conceal their true attitudes and we have to uncover them through communication. For instance, they may conceal their true attitudes from us in order to get something from us or to ingratiate themselves. Also, sometimes, people withhold their 'true' attitudes for other reasons, such as desire to create a positive impression or fear of
how their ‘true confession’ might be received by us. We all also know that we have behaved in these concealing ways ourselves.

Social processes operate to ensure that initial encounters (and even later ones) are not always the open, frank exchanges of unambiguous information that we sometimes think about in ideal circumstances. For example, social conventions occasionally encourage us to be polite (which is an interesting form of dishonesty in some sense), present images, or manage impressions, or conceal embarrassing facts (Miller, 1996). For these reasons, we correspondingly have to work at uncovering the true picture behind other people’s words; and some of us will be more proficient than others. Thus my argument here (also adopted by Bochner, 1991) is that the business of initial attraction is not just one of matching our attitudes or characteristics with someone else’s but of communicating about them and assessing the manner in which they make sense from our point of view (Duck, 1994a; Duck and Barnes, 1992). I’d also invite you to think whether attitudes are communicated only by attitude statements uttered seriously, probably with an expectant and dramatic roll on the drums heard in the background to indicate significance. In everyday life, Big Time Important Things are not what we hear: we hear much more about trivia, and we see attitudes enacted in small behaviours (or else we deduce attitudes from the style of someone’s behaviour rather than from bald and strong direct statements). Thus in real life the task of working out someone’s attitudes is really quite complex and indirect or inferential.

This opens up the possibility that individual differences in the detecting skills of ‘normal adults’ are likely to be influential in relationship beginnings. It is also likely that young children will be less good at interpreting people’s attitudes, as will be some psychologically disturbed patients. These extreme examples merely make the point that differences in detecting skills can exist. Perhaps the shy and lonely ‘normal adults’ are at the poor end of the scale when it comes to determining whether someone has similar attitudes, and so they get off to a bad start with strangers.

When strangers are introduced – even in the laboratory – to have a conversation, the effects of attitude similarity ‘wash out’ (Sunafrank and Miller, 1981). Similar subjects do not like one another any more than do dissimilar ones after they have had a brief interaction. Also, dissimilar partners who are able to interact also like their partner more than do dissimilar ones who do not interact. Interaction has a positive effect on liking, and it modifies the effect of dissimilarity on its own. When communication exceeds a ‘one-off conversation’ and is extended over time and to explicit discussion of attitudinal issues, then again it is the dissimilar stranger who gets a better rating (Sunafrank, 1991).

Attitudes, attraction and relationships

Researchers of initial attraction are usually well aware that they are studying a small part of a broader set of issues (e.g. Byrne, 1997). Often, they are both startlec is silly becat us little aboi life example concern. Wl attractions li

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both startled and hurt by critics who effectively say ‘This work on strangers is silly because it tells us nothing about marriage.’ Work on obstetrics tells us little about senility, but that is not a reason for not doing it. Many real-life examples make initial attraction an obvious and important area of concern. What we must bear in mind, however, is that of course not all attractions lead to relationships (Byrne, 1992).

‘Attraction does not mean relationship’ There are myriad reasons why we do not set up relationships with every attractive person we meet, the most significant being a lack of a wish to do so (e.g. already married or engaged, going steady, not enough time, too many commitments); inappropriateness (e.g. differences in status, circumstances not conducive); or, perhaps more poignant, incompetence. Many people who report being lonely or shy feel unable to carry out their wishes to set up desired relationships. Occasionally, I get letters about this, saying things like ‘I am a 25-year-old male and have this inability to converse, communicate, or form any sort of relationship with the opposite sex. It is a long-standing problem. Women do seem attracted to me but as soon as it gets on to speaking, conversing, etc., it goes no further’ (actual letter). Obviously, we might begin by looking at the social skills of such persons (see Chapter 1), but the commonness of the problem is significant. It is the most frequent problem dealt with by the various counselling services on university campuses. If you can’t deal with strangers you won’t get friends without some help (perhaps from third parties, matchmakers, or the environmental forces that ‘make’ us get to know people willy-nilly, as the workplace environment does).

All the same, attraction to strangers is the starting point for all relationships that do eventually start. Researchers have sought to know why we select between strangers, why we prefer some to others, and what happens once we move on from our initial attraction. A problem with laboratory work on attraction is that it ‘freezes’ situations out of context: subjects go to a room for an experiment, meet a stranger (or don’t meet a bogus one), and then go home. This might lead us to think of all interactions as frozen and context-free – like separate snapshots rather than single still frames from a continuous movie. Life is not made up of such separate snapshots, but is continuous and much more like a movie film. In life, one meeting with a person often leads to another. When we know that fact, it probably affects what we do and how we treat those strangers whom we may see again and get to know better. So we must expect that our reasons for initial attraction are not necessarily those that influence long-term development of relationships or help us to stay in relationships. Why should they be? Perhaps as Bochner (1991: 487) argues, ‘Whether individuals actually have similar or dissimilar attitudes is not as important as the assumption shared by most individuals that they should have something important in common with the other (e.g. attitudes) if they are to form a relationship.’

Acquaintance is made up of several different elements, dimensions and stages, each with its own influences as things proceed (Van Lear and
Human relationships

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Figure 3.1 Four components of 'similarity' (Duck, S.W. Meaningful Relationships: Talking, Sense, and Relating, p. 118, copyright © 1994 by S.W. Duck. Reprinted by permission of Sage Inc.)

Note: The declaration dimension distinguishes the fact that two persons may have common events in their backgrounds (commonality) and either may or may not know it. The evaluative dimension distinguishes the fact that 'similarity' as normally construed involves both the common facts and the common evaluation of the facts.

Trujillo, 1986). Acquaintance is thus a process with long-term ramifications (Wood, 1997). Long-term acquaintance is probably not simply caused by, say, physical attraction even if that is what grabs our interest initially. The development of relationships is not simply caused by initial attractions. Relationships do not work like electric motors, which just start and run whenever we press the right switch. That sort of mechanical metaphor, surprisingly, is widely held ('we just clicked'), even though it is an inadequate idea. Of course we have to do something communicatively in the long term to make relationships work: we do not just 'sit there looking pretty' in the hope that the rest is automatic. Relationships do not develop only because two people start out with compatible personalities. But rather than dismissing the impact that attitudes and personality may have on relationships, we need to understand their role in our lives, and to understand the mechanisms by which such understanding is developed (Duck, 1994a: chapter 4). Figure 3.1 helps to guide us through the understanding of the process. As we work through the research on initial attraction, note that the similarity that has been talked about in research and the sorts of similarity that come to mind when we just sit and think about it actually have four layers when you strip things down in terms of social actions that take place in the practical world of everyday life (Acitelli et al., 1993; Duck, 1994a).

Attitudes and personality as elements of relationships

Sometimes, we act as if two people are similar and that’s that (this is 'commonality' in Figure 3.1). But in the praxis of real life, things are not so simple: even if two people are similar, they must communicate that similarity to one another before it can have an effect ('mutuality' in Figure 3.1). Bochner (1991: 487) claims that ‘One of the main functions of communication in early, and perhaps even in later, encounters is to foster perceptions of attitude and personality similarity and also to create the impressior we talk to Figure 3.1

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impression of being an interesting and stimulating person.' So obviously we talk to one another and in so doing we create the mutuality noted in Figure 3.1.

In line with the argument that I am developing here, Cappella (1988) argues that relationship formation is interactional; it is predictable not from the way in which two persons happen to 'click together' but from how they make the pieces click together. We never see the internal states or attitudes of other persons directly so we can only infer them from the sorts of nonverbal and verbal behaviour discussed in Chapter 1. Because of this, the two people's reading of each other's nonverbal behaviour will be crucial to this inference process and highly significant in acquaintance. Also important will be the ways in which they 'mesh' that behaviour to make the interaction smooth and enjoyable (Burleson et al., 1996). The microstructure of interactions does change as relationships develop, so nonverbal behaviour also changes to reflect and illustrate growth of relationships (Cappella, 1988).

**Revealing (and detecting) information in the acquaintance process**

Precisely how and why do we go about choosing information about ourselves so that we can communicate it to other people who can use it? To answer this, let us look at the work of negotiating and creating a relationship out of all the information that partners work with in interactions.

We become acquainted by an extended process of uncertainty reduction that continually shifts its focus and moves on to new, unknown areas (Berger, 1993). However, the development of relationships is not simplistically equivalent to the revelation of information nor to the decrease of uncertainty. The process of relationship development is created by the *interpretation* of such things by the partners, not by the acts themselves (Duck, 1994a), and it involves the evaluation phase noted in Figure 3.1. When we understand a person at a superficial level, we look more deeply and broadly into other parts of his or her make-up. When we know someone's attitudes to romance, for example, we may want to know more about his or her deep personal feelings about parenthood, for instance, but this is not simply because we desire more facts – it is to give us a better framework for understanding what we already know. The process of getting to know someone is the process of framing and understanding the other at as many levels as we can. But it is also a process that continues forever – unfinished business that proceeds right through our lives and the life of the relationship (Duck, 1994a), since each new day, every new interaction, and all meetings with the partner are fresh and informative and could change our understanding as time goes by. Therefore, we are continually exploring our partner as we see him or her in the unfolding practical circumstances of life.

Historically the focus on different matters as acquaintance progresses has been called 'filtering' (Kerckhoff and Davis, 1962). We can see why: it is as if we have a sequence or series of filters or sieves and when a person passes
through one they go on to the next. Our first 'filter' may be physical appearance. If we like the other person's looks then we will want to go on and see what his or her attitudes are like and whether we can relate to them (Duck, 1976). 'Attitudes' could then be the second filter, and so on. We assess our acquaintances within a progressive series of 'tests': those who pass one test go through to a deeper level of friendship – and on to the next test. At each point we learn more about the person's thinking.

In my own adaptation of this old approach (Duck, 1994a; Duck and Condra, 1989), such tests are subtler and subtler comparisons of one's own attitudes, beliefs and personality compatibility with the partner, as partners seek to enmesh their respective meaning systems. In pursuing this process we start by latching onto the indicators that are available. For instance, we may begin with 'ball park' indications of someone's pattern of thought ('Are they extroverts – or introvert like me?'), and become more and more fine in our 'tuning' as the relationship goes on. What specific values do they hold most dear and are they the same as mine? What little things upset them when they are in a bad mood? What are their deep, deep, deep fears about themselves and what does that tell me about the way they 'tick'? We work through such filters because we wish to understand and create a thorough picture of the partner's mind and personality in as much detail as possible. The tests, or filters, help us to reduce uncertainty and draw our partner's personality in finer and finer detail as the relationship deepens and develops. Indeed, Duck and Craig (1975) found that, in the long-term development of relationships, such processes are precisely what occurs.

Filtering theories are more sophisticated than the 'switch on' models that suggest that relationships are caused by one simple feature, like attitude similarity or physical attractiveness. However, I now realize that filtering theories overemphasize thought and cognition, and they really only propose a more sophisticated sequence of motors to be switched on. Honeycutt (1993) proposed an interesting variation on this theme and suggested that when people describe their relationships as moving through stages they are in fact responding to a cultural script that depicts 'stages' as the way to think about relationship development. The apparent 'movement' in relationships is in fact a perceptual or memory device established by individuals and societies. In other words, rather than being something 'real' in relationships, relationship development is perceived as if it followed predigested patterns that are recognized by cultural beliefs or by the processes of cultural contextualization indicated in Chapter 1.

One result of such beliefs is that people feel they should reveal personal information about themselves as appropriate to the script for stages. These revelations serve as a sign of growing intimacy and trust of our partner. 'Self-disclosure' occurs usually by words but occasionally by nonverbal means, as when we let someone sit closer or touch us more than before. We self-disclose when we tell someone how we have been upset by something recently or 'what I am most ashamed of about myself' or 'what I dislike most about my parents'. We self-disclose when we tell secrets or give other
people access to private attitudes that we share with very few others. We can also self-disclose nonverbally by ‘giving ourselves away’, for instance, bursting into tears unexpectedly or suddenly blushing.

In most social psychological work, self-disclosure refers to verbal intimacy, particularly the content of messages that are so disclosed. This work assumes two things: (1) that we can tell how intimate others are merely by examining the words they use, the topics they talk about and the subjects they introduce to a conversation; (2) that intimacy proceeds by the successive revelation of layers of information about oneself, like peeling the layers off an onion (Altman and Taylor, 1973). Such topics have occasionally been listed and rated for intimacy level. For example, Davis and Sloan (1974) put ‘How I react to others’ praise and criticism of me’ at the bottom of their list and ‘My feelings about my sexual inadequacy’ at the top of their list for very intimate topics.

Remembering the discussion in Chapter 1, you may find this a bit dis-satisfying. In life, there are more indicators of intimacy than just words; nonverbal cues as well as the relationship between the partners help to define and communicate intimacy. For this reason, Montgomery (1981a) talks of ‘open communication’ rather than just self-disclosure. She describes it as composed of five elements, some of which occur more often in some types of relationships whilst others appear more frequently in others. Negative openness covers openness in showing disagreement or negative feelings about a partner or situation. Nonverbal openness relates to a communicator’s facial expressions, vocal tone, and bodily postures or movements (see Chapter 1). Emotional openness describes the ease with which someone’s feelings or moods are expressed and his or her concealment of emotional states. Receptive openness is a person’s indication of his or her willingness to listen to other people’s personal information. General-style openness refers to the overall impression that someone creates.

Even if we look at just the content of speech then we can split openness into different elements, of which topic intimacy is one (Montgomery, 1981a). However, intimacy of a topic is not the same as ‘intimacy of topic in a relationship’. For instance, the context for what is said about a topic can make it intimate or non-intimate and the target of the disclosure likewise. Thus, the question ‘How is your sex life?’ looks like a promisingly personal and intimate topic unless we reply ‘pretty average’ or if it is our doctor who asks us about it. In short, even intimate-sounding topics can be discussed non-intimately, or in non-intimate contexts, and there really is no such thing as an absolutely intimate or absolutely non-intimate topic (Spencer, 1994). Other factors that make for intimacy in conversation are, as we have learned before, verbal immediacy, nonverbal accompaniments and relational context. Openness, then, includes both verbal and nonverbal aspects of behaviour and deals as much with the function of a message as with its medium (Montgomery, 1984). When we look at open communication in context, it is apparent that content and topic intimacy alone do not discriminate between high and low open communicators.
However, Dindia (1994) indicates that relational self-disclosure is a more complex and contextualized occurrence than this. It involves a complicated mixing of intra-personal processes (for example, decisions about one's readiness to discuss a particular topic, beliefs about a partner's likely reaction to the topic itself rather than to one's disclosures about it - i.e., a judgement about the other person not just about the topic itself). As noted by Duck (1980), many of the processes of relating are conducted only in the mind and are influenced by expectations about another person's likely reactions. Thus work on self-disclosure that treats it as driven only by the 'pure intimacy' of a topic misses the important practical consequences of the fact that we live everyday lives where topics assume intimacy (or not) in context and in relationship, not in any unattached or pure way.

Spencer (1994) also notes that self-disclosure is not simply a device for revealing information about self but is also a mechanism for giving and receiving advice. If I self-disclose to you that I have a problem about shyness then you can implicitly advise about how to deal with it by self-disclosing one of your most embarrassing experiences and how you overcame it, for instance. You can self-disclose that you have had the same problem and then start to self-disclose some examples of situations where it happened and how you dealt with it, thus subtly presenting me with advice about how to deal with it. In that case, self-disclosure serves a relationship purpose (helping me out) and shows intimacy and loyalty (because you help me) and is not simplistically about the successive revelation of layers of yourself.

How strategic are we in making acquaintances?

Has it struck you how passive much of the work on self-disclosure has assumed that we are, if it implies that we successively and inevitably reveal information about self in layers, more or less routinely? Do we actually try to make other people like us sometimes or do we just sit back, smile, flash a few attitudes around and hope that people will react positively to our successive revelations? I believe that we actually spend quite a lot of time trying to get other people to like and appreciate us and also to check out how we are doing. We become upset when we fail to create positive feelings in other people; it is a great source of personal distress and dissatisfaction. We must have strategies for making others appreciate us and an awareness of 'how we are doing'. Douglas (1987) explored the strategies that people use to discover whether another person is interested in developing a relationship ('affinity testing'). These are listed in Box 3.2. In essence, people rarely ask directly whether someone is interested in a relationship or not (well, the person might say 'no' and that would be that). Because it puts us on the line if we ask directly, there is a preference for indirect strategies that get us the information without us having to ask directly. Or we may ask ambiguously so that if the other person turns us down we can deflect the negative implication of rejection: for example, instead of saying 'Will
Box 3.2 Douglas on affinity testing

Confronting
Actions that required a partner to provide immediate and generally public evidence of his or her liking.
1. I asked her if she liked me.
2. I asked her if I appealed to her.
3. I put my arm around her. It made her say yes or no.

Withdrawing
Actions that required a partner to sustain the interaction.
4. I just turned myself off and just sat there real sedate. I knew that if he started jabbering (which he did) then he was interested.
5. I would be silent sometimes to see if he would start the conversation again.
6. We were at a disco and I asked, 'Well, I'm leaving.' I wanted him to stop me. You know, to say, 'Are you leaving already?'

Sustaining
Actions designed to maintain the interaction without affecting its apparent intimacy.
7. I kept asking questions. You know, like, 'Where was she from?' 'What music did she like?'
8. I met this girl. I liked her. I asked all these questions. 'What do you do for a living?' 'Where do you live?'
9. I tried to keep him talking. I asked him questions. I told him about me.

Hazing
Actions that required a partner to provide a commodity or service to the actor at some cost to himself or herself.
10. I told him I lived 16 miles away. Sixteen miles from the church I mean. I wanted to see if he would try and back out.
11. I told her I didn't have a ride. She said that was OK. She said she would take me. I told her where I lived; it took about an hour to get there. I told her she couldn't come into my house even if she gave me a ride. I knew that she liked me because she accepted the situation I put her in.
12. I met this guy at a party. He asked me if I wanted to go see a movie. I said OK. When we got there, I told him I didn't want to see it. I wanted to go home. I didn't really. I wanted to see how much he would take.

Diminishing self
Actions that lowered the value of self; either directly by self-deprecation or indirectly by identifying alternative reward sources for a partner.
13. I asked her if she wanted to talk to somebody else. You know, 'Was I keeping her from something?'
14. I told him I wasn't very interesting. Waiting for him to say, 'Oh, no.'
15. There were these other guys there. I kept pointing them out to her.

continued overleaf
you go out with me to this movie?”, you may say “This movie is on at the Cineplex, do you like that kind of movie?”, which gives the person the chance to treat the question as an invitation (and to reply ‘Yes, shall we go together?’) or as a straightforward request for information but not as an invitation to go and see it together (‘Yes, those films are interesting and I also like the ones by the director’s son’). To choose to answer the question alone is also in effect to reject the invitation but to do so without causing offence.

Have a look at Box 3.2 to find out some of the indirect strategies that we use to test out our chances of developing a relationship. At the start of a relationship we might need to assess the partner’s interest in further meetings, such as may be discovered by use of the strategies in Box 3.2. Alternatively we might be in an established relationship and wish to test out

the partner conduct ‘se and Wilmc uncertain a about ‘the Baxter and to apply di how things whether ye Alternativel – and so gi form of inc For exampl to visit pare day. The r partner reac commitmen the self-put-deprecating jealousy test a possessive

If we are deepen the mental heal of intimate that we ger psychologist closing and expected to do so volunt open out (V

Reciprocit of relational confirms a d to reveal the could hold something p Duck, 1986; tionships (D: into one for intimate, too topics; Baxte noting, howe mature. As V less formal et to one anoth
the partner's level of commitment. The ways which partners in relationships conduct 'secret tests' of the state of the relationship were studied by Baxter and Wilmot (1984). Baxter and Wilmot argued that partners are often uncertain about the strength of their relationship yet are reluctant to talk about 'the state of the relationship'; they regard it as a taboo topic (as Baxter and Wilmot, 1985, found in a different paper). Our usual solution is to apply direct and indirect tests - secret tests - as means of discovering how things stand. Such methods involve, for instance, asking third parties whether your partner has ever talked about the relationship to them. Alternatively one might use trial intimacy moves to see how a partner reacts - and so gives away some indication of intimacy. Such moves can take the form of increased physical or emotional intimacy, but might be more subtle. For example, a person might use 'public presentation': inviting the partner to visit parents or talking about your own intentions to have children some day. The real but concealed questions in each case are: how does my partner react, and does he or she accept the increased intimacy or the open commitment? Other methods described by Baxter and Wilmot (1984) are the self-put-down (when you hope the partner will respond to your self-deprecating statement with a supportive, intimate statement) and the jealousy test (when you describe a potential competitor and hope to observe a possessive, committed response by your partner).

If we are successful in initially attracting someone to us, what happens to deepen the relationship? Recall that some self-disclosure is a sign of good mental health and influences the course of relationships. A certain amount of intimate disclosure is expected in our culture, whether as an indication that we genuinely trust another person or as an indication that we are psychologically normal and healthy. We are supposed to say a few disclosing and revealing things in order to open out. Women are particularly expected to self-disclose and are often pressed into doing so if they do not do so voluntarily; closed women are asked direct questions that make them open out (Miell, 1984).

Reciprocity of self-disclosure is also expected, at least in the early stages of relationships. If I self-disclose to you, you will self-disclose back. It confirms a desire to develop a relationship since you could have chosen not to reveal the information, especially if it is quite personal. Conversely, we could hold back a relationship, if we wanted, by just not revealing something personal to our partner even if our partner did so to us (Miell and Duck, 1986). Self-disclosure is used strategically both to develop relationships (Davis, 1978) and to hold them back or to shape the relationship into one form rather than another (e.g. to keep someone from getting too intimate, too fast, or to protect the relationship from straying on to taboo topics; Baxter and Wilmot, 1985; Miell, 1984; see Box 3.3). It is also worth noting, however, that reciprocity of self-disclosure wears off as relationships mature. As Wright (1978) puts it, 'Apparently, in the more comfortable and less formal context of deeper friendship, the partners do not feel they owe it to one another, out of politeness or decency, to exchange trust for trust: the
trust is already there.’ Furthermore, Miell (1984) showed that some people are subtle enough to be able to use self-disclosure to interrogate other people or to find out information. It works like this: I know that there is a norm of reciprocity about self-disclosure; I therefore know that if I self-disclose about some topic in the right kind of circumstances and do it appropriately, then you will feel normative pressure to self-disclose back also; therefore I know that if I self-disclose ‘well’, you will tell me something personal back again. Thus if I self-disclose appropriately, I can find out things about you because my self-disclosing will tend to open you up and evoke self-disclosure back from you in reciprocation of my own self-disclosing.

This latter approach, however, points out that in everyday life self-disclosure is not used in any simple way, but is used actively to do all sorts of things: to project oneself as normal and open; to obey social norms of reciprocity and civility; to reveal oneself as a sign of intimacy in the relationship; to shape up a relationship; to construct a level of comfort with self; to find out information about other people; to develop relationships (Dindia, 1994); to establish trust or give advice (Spencer, 1994) or to manage and present impressions (West and Duck, 1996) rather than simply to reveal layers of one’s personality. For example, people can reveal something personal about themselves in order to show the other person that he or she is trusted to keep things secret, or a person could tell a story about their personal experience or their feelings in a way that is intended not simply to reveal information but to help the other person (‘I was very shy myself too when I was your age and I felt so ashamed of the fact that I blushed a lot and was awkward, but I soon learned that I could feel better if . . .’). In such cases the comment is serving many goals and it would be wrong to see it as only a disclosure of private personal feelings or information about self (Spencer, 1994). Likewise a person could say ‘My friend is gay and he’s really cool’, which is both a disclosure of personal information (how I feel about my friend’s homosexuality) and an alignment with the friend, indicating support and admiration. Thus a disclosure of personal feelings can also be a statement of attitude or even a political statement or the management of the impression that one is open-minded (West and Duck, 1996). As I have been suggesting here, then, any statement has to be seen in rhetorical context as something that achieves different purposes and not as an activity with a single purpose or only one possible meaning. Meanings are developed between people in interaction in context and are not absolute things that exist simplistically in the words: they happen when interaction happens, in a context, and between people.

Establishing, developing and maintaining relationships

What is the psychological relationship between initial attraction and long-term liking? What are the processes by which we convert ‘gut attraction’ into a working relationship? Note also, of course, that most meetings with
Box 3.3 Strategic self-disclosure

Partners use self-disclosure as a tool for the control of relationships. For instance, we will occasionally make a disclosure just so that we plunge our partner into a ‘norm of reciprocity’ requiring him or her to respond with something equally intimate and revealing (Miell, 1984; Miell and Duck, 1986).

Acquainting persons frequently use false disclosures to provoke an argument or debate (Miell, 1984). By doing this we find out what our partner really thinks (i.e. we induce our partner to self-disclose by a devious means rather than by a direct question asking for our partner’s views).

Self-disclosure serves an important role in creating relationships and helps partners to construct a story of the origin of a relationship (Duck and Miell, 1984). Partners begin to construct ‘relational disclosures’ to make to outsiders to indicate depth of involvement.

Sprecher (1987) compared the effects of self-disclosure given and received, rather than treating self-disclosure as one global concept, as many previous researchers had done. Amounts of disclosure the person received from the partner were more predictive of the feelings that a person had about the relationship than was amount of disclosure given to the partner. Overall, however, the amount of disclosure in the relationship predicted whether the couple was still together in a four-year follow-up!

There is a reverse side to this, however. There are ‘taboo topics’ that we recognize and respect (Baxter and Wilmot, 1985). Some themes are ‘dangerous’ ones to explore (e.g. partner’s past relationships; the present state of our relationship). Lack of self-disclosure can thus sometimes be strategic and can help to preserve the relationship because it keeps us away from topics that can be inherently threatening.

Duck et al. (1991) indicate that self-disclosure does not occur in everyday conversation to anything like the extent that is assumed by laboratory research and in everyday life there are important aspects of conversation other than self-disclosure that are influential on relationships (e.g. the mere occurrence of conversations even on trivial topics). Duck et al. (1994) also found that persons in a conversation tend to see the conversation as less significant than do outside observers. Researchers are likely to have simply both overestimated the impact of self-disclosure for a variety of reasons, and also misrepresented its social importance in relationships by focusing on its role as a revelation of one’s ‘self’. In fact, as the text here discusses, self-disclosure does lots of different things in relationships.

strangers do not develop into intimate relationships (Delia, 1980) and for that matter neither do lots of relationships with people we know, such as shop assistants, classmates, colleagues at work, or even some family members. Also interesting but so far unaddressed by mainstream research is the question of how we actively keep relationships at a distance and actively stop them developing.

In real life, my experience is that we plan to meet people and we share points of contact but also that predictable routines constantly force us together frequently with those we know well. If researchers study only meetings between interchangeable, anonymous strangers in contextually sanitized laboratory environments, we miss the point that our real-life
encounters are only occasionally unforeseen, unexpected, and accidental but can also be predictable, anticipated, and (most often) prearranged or unavoidable (e.g. with roommates). Because meetings are like this, they come from somewhere and we have coded memories about the persons and the relationship in which they arise: stories about where the relationship came from, what it means to us, and where it is going. Miell (1987) has shown that a person’s beliefs about the future of the relationship are very often influenced by the last three days of routine experience in the relationship more than by the whole history of its long-term idealized past. Duck et al. (1994) have shown that memory for past relational events is influenced very strongly by the present state of the relationship. This makes a lot of sense: when relationship problems occur, they occur in the present, the here-and-now, and all the fond memories of the distant past become degraded or idealized by the insistence of urgent present feelings. Such a view runs counter to that offered by theories that assume relationships are based on the exchange that has taken place in them in the past, however, or that commitment is an enduring thing based as much in the general past as in the immediate present.

Relationships are often buried in daily routines

Most of the time, daily life is remarkably humdrum, routine, predictable. We take our long-term relationships for granted most of the time and assume that the partner we slept next to will wake up still feeling like a partner tomorrow. We do not go through a ritual each breakfast time where we treat each other like strangers and run through a whole range of rewarding techniques to re-establish the relationship and take it to where it was the day before: we behave that mental way only with friends we have not seen for ages. The remarkable fact about daily life is that continuities exist in our minds and do not have to be worked for, once the relationship is defined and established (Duck, 1990). Friendships can feel as if they exist and continue over years and miles without any contact except the occasional ’phone call, Christmas card or letter (Rohlfing, 1995). Relationships have their permanence in the mind, on the basis of beliefs not just of rewards (Duck and Sants, 1983). Relationships survive distance, climate, revolt, pestilence and Act of God, as long as people think they do.

Relationships which have major effects on people are of this perpetual but dormant kind: parent–child relationships, marriages, friendships, collegial relationships at work. They are part of the unchallenged and comfortable predictability of lives made up of routine, regular conversation, expectation, and assumptions that most of tomorrow will be based on the mental foundations of today. However, relationships do not just pop out of strings of routines but from the way the partners think about those interactions and connect them mentally/communicatively, or reflect on them when they are not actually ‘in’ them (Duck, 1980) and talk to one another in and about them (Duck and Pond, 1989; Sprecher and Duck, 1993).
Box 3.4 Social participation and everyday talk

Wheeler and Nezlek (1977) devised a structured diary method (called the ‘Rochester Interaction Record’) that records, for instance, whom the subject met, where, for how long, what was talked about, and how the subject felt about the interaction. They found that 56 per cent of interactions that last more than 10 minutes are with persons of the same sex. The women subjects spend more time in interaction in the first part of their first university year than do men, but by the second part of the year this difference disappears. This may show that women adjust to the stress of their new arrival at university by seeking to involve themselves in social life.

Reis et al. (1980) show that physically attractive men have more social interaction than less attractive men. For women, there is no relationship between their physical attractiveness and their level of social participation. However, both attractive men and attractive women report greater satisfaction with their social interactions than do the less attractive persons.

Employing a new technique that adds assessment of communication to the other elements of social participation, Duck et al. (1991) have shown that the quality of women’s communication is judged higher than men’s in day-to-day interaction and that most regular day-to-day communications are low in self-disclosure and have low impact on the future of the relationship (except conversations of lovers). They also found that there is a tendency for conversation on Wednesdays to be more conflict-laden than conversation on other days of the week.

Using the above techniques (the Iowa Communication Record or ICR), Duck et al. (1994) explored the interactions of lonely people and found that they evaluated their own and other people’s everyday conversations more negatively than other people did.

Making sense of relationships

Sometimes people think about their relationships and sometimes they do not. We may think about a relationship when we are face to face with our partners, but we also do it frequently when they are not there – as when we daydream, fantasize, plan, plot, experience private disappointment, expectation and hope. We can plan the relationship; we can think back over encounters and try to work out what went wrong with them or what we can learn from them. We can learn about our partners by thinking things over in this way since we can easily pick up on some crucial point that may have escaped us before. This ‘out-of-interaction’ fantasy, or thought work, is a very important aspect of both the building and destroying of relationships (Duck, 1980). By thinking about and recalling interaction, we actually construct a context for its future and its past.

One essential feature of relating is the need to provide a ‘story’ about it, and, clearly, these stories could be readily made up in the course of such out-of-interaction thinking. Try keeping a diary of how you feel about your partner, then you’ll know what I mean. You will also see how much a relationship is characterized by variation in thinking about the other person,
not by the monotonous constancy of feelings that is often assumed by research based on ratings of commitment or liking (Duck, 1994a). This kind of musing also might help us to create a sense of continuity—a sense that the relationship is a lasting venture, not a temporary phase. This is functional in that it preserves us from the need for continually re-establishing new relationships or continually re-enacting our existing ones on each new day, and is based in the structure of language (Chapter 2).

Beliefs, routines and future projects are central to everyday life, but we are not always completely sensible, thoughtful people. I see myself making mistakes and wrong assumptions, being inconsistent, losing my temper, taking unreasonable dislikes to people, unfairly teasing people, feeling uncertain, embarrassed and ashamed occasionally. Yet it is all too easy to overlook these little foibles and assume that no-one else does these things. It often looks to me as if the rest of humanity is going around soberly and seriously processing information in the manner of true scientists, in rational, statistically defensible ways, reaching conclusions, being competent, liking people who are well dressed, attitudinally similar and who order their arguments properly. Yet, I know I am often persuaded by people not for these reasons but because I cannot be bothered to argue about some issues, do not think of the effective debating point till I am halfway down the street, am in a rush to do something more important to me, or I simply do not know enough about the topic to challenge them adequately.

As in the rest of life, so in relationships I think we can easily misunderstand what really goes on if we overlook the importance of ‘trivial’ behaviour. It does not feel to me as if the world is full of relationships where perfect strangers grasp one another’s collars in breathless attempts to shake out the other person’s attitudes in a search for reinforcement. Neither do I see people in long-term relationships going round giving grades to partners for their every action and calculating whether the cost-benefit arithmetic works out well enough for them to stay in the relationship for the next 10 minutes. Not every encounter is a surprise; not every person a blank slate upon which rapid calculations have to be performed. Not every member of the family has either just fallen in love with you or is about to file for divorce, or is either a young child with a tendency to initiate violent acts or an elderly incontinent who feels lonely. Neither is precisely the same level of feeling felt towards each partner all the time irrespective of mood or circumstances, but rather our feelings about people—even people we love—can vary not only over a long time but even in the course of an interaction.

Relationships are a part of life, and everyday life is a part of all relationships. As those lives change through our aging, so do the concerns we have and the things we do (Bedford and Bliesner, 1997; Dickson, 1995). As days go by, so our feelings and concerns are subject to change or variation. Our friendship needs vary through life as do our opportunities for getting them and our bases for seeking them (Dickens and Perlman, 1981). They also vary day by day in the face of circumstances (Bolger and Kelleher, 1993). In teenage years, the main search is for a group of friends and for sexual partners and if we marry affected by 1997). We are community years of life and new roles and down the statement summary, reflections can as any ‘ave specific case. A consist and we apply For example commonly c one another’s friends. People better predict structural and people talk them, as re and perhaps.

*Do partners*

Discrepancies are the part of such disagree everyone is what other often guess are they have a guessing. By processes through the down with our past 1993). So we use our related experiences. The problem and familiar
sexual partners (Berndt, 1996); later, most people become committed to one partner and their network of friends stabilizes for a while (Notarius, 1996). If we marry the partner and have children, then our friendship needs are affected by these circumstances and by career developments (Veroft et al., 1997). When the children leave home, parents often become involved in the community more extensively and start up new friendships in the middle years of life (Adams and Blieszner, 1996). As life develops new demands and new routines so we change friendship 'work'. Our feelings can go up and down as joys and resentments arise, recede and gain resolution. Thus the statements that we make about liking and loving are likely to be summary statements (see Chapter 2) that can be more or less accurate reflections of how we felt three days ago or two hours ago or last year, just as any 'average summary' is only a more or less accurate reflection of a specific case.

A consistent element of all life routines consists of such trivial variation, and we apparently waste a lot of time doing seemingly unimportant things. For example, we spend much of our time talking to other people about commonly experienced events (Duck, 1994a), gossiping, and giving views of one another (Bergmann, 1993). For that reason, regular behavioural measures of friendship (especially measures of talk in everyday relationships), are better predictors of relationship growth than are monolithic cognitive structural ones (Andersen, 1993). Acitelli (1988, 1993) shows that when people talk about relationships they are not only describing and celebrating them, as researchers have previously thought, but also formulating them and perhaps changing their attitudes towards the relationship.

Do partners always agree about their relationship?

Discrepancies of interpretation, even between close partners, are an inevitable part of everyday social life (McCarthy, 1983). When researchers find such disagreements, it should surprise them less than it does. Our own and everyone else's cognitive processes are inaccessible to us; if we do not know what other people are thinking, we can depend only on guesswork and we often guess wrongly. Yet Hewes et al. (1985) show that people have sophisticated knowledge about the likely sources of error in information that they have about other people and are able to correct for biases in 'second guessing'. By talking to others in routine ways, we can assess their cognitive processes more and more accurately, but to do so we may have to work through disagreements during conversation (Wood and Duck, 1995). Secondly, we seldom discuss our views of relationship openly and explicitly with our partners except when we think something is wrong (Acitelli, 1988, 1993). So we do not get much experience of seeing explicit agreement about our relationships (though they are nice when we get them), and the experiences we do get will emphasize the discord instead.

The problems with relationships are more likely to be visible, accessible and familiar than are the smooth parts. In particular, we misperceive other
people’s feelings in one important respect: we tend to be uncertain about partners’ commitment to relationships and assume that they might change their mind – as if we are their friend for only as long as they think we are (Duck, 1994a). More importantly, partners probably each see different events as crucial in the relationship, so there is no good reason to expect partners to be in total agreement about the nature or course of the relationship (McCarthy, 1983). What happens when disagreements are detected is that people talk them through (or at least talk about them), so once again in everyday life, conversation is an important tool for developing and sustaining relationships.

Does it matter what ‘outsiders’ think?

In real life, relationships take place in a context provided by talk with other people not just by the partners’ own thoughts and feelings. The presence of others (and what they know about the relationship) distinguishes between our behaviours in public and secret relationships, obviously, but can also affect the things we do in cooperative and competitive, open, trusting and closed, threatening relationships. Much research shows that we are aware of such outside influence on relationships both at the personal level and from such sources as media and social culture (Duran and Prusank, 1997; Fitch, forthcoming; Klein and Johnson, 1997; Milardo and Wellman, 1992). Outsiders can affect the course of a relationship by expressing general disapproval or encouragement (Parks and Eggert, 1991), but there are other effects, too. First, as we pull into one new relationship we correspondingly have a little less time for our old friendships (Milardo and Allan, 1997). New friendships disrupt old ones; marital relationships reduce opportunities for ‘hanging out’ with friends. Second, outsiders, in the shape of the ‘surrounding culture’, give us clues about the ways to conduct relationships. For instance, Klein and Milardo (1993) show how outsiders are often arbitrators of conflict between members of a couple or give them advice on how they ‘ought’ to handle it. Equally, motivated by concern over the reactions of other people, we may try to hide affairs and hope that the newspapers or our acquaintances do not find out about them, yet we are happy to publicize marriages in those self-same newspapers and to those acquaintances.

As partners become more involved in a courtship, so this adversely affects their relationships with friends (Milardo and Wellman, 1992). Respondents in the later stages of courtship interact with fewer people, relative to persons in the earlier stages of courtship, and see them less often and for shorter periods of time. However, the most noticeable changes in rates of participation occur with intermediate friends rather than close ones. Changes in frequency and duration of interactions subsequently lead to a decrease in the size of network (Milardo and Allan, 1997). In other words, as we see our date more, so we see our casual friends (but not our close friends) less until they finally drop out of our network altogether, if the courtship progresses satisfactorily (Allan, 1993; Milardo and Allan, 1997). Courting partners are acquaintances (Duck, 1994a). Some of these people have points of contact with others who are important to them. Outsiders can fulfill important roles in relationship formation (Tomm and Spitzberg, 1985). Some of these are more significant than others. The more important the person is to the couple, the greater the impact of that person on the couple’s relationship.

Handling trouble

So far I have mentioned many routines in relationships: work, play, and intimate situations. Relationships have a number of characteristics that contribute to their stability and success. Some of these characteristics are predictable, and some are not. The following are some of the characteristics that contribute to the stability of relationships:

1. Communication: Communication is the key to successful relationships. It helps partners understand each other and to resolve conflicts.

2. Trust: Trust is essential in any relationship. Without trust, partners will not feel safe or secure.

3. Commitment: Commitment is the willingness to stay in the relationship even when times are tough.

4. Respect: Respect is essential in any relationship. It helps partners feel valued and respected by each other.

5. Support: Support is crucial in any relationship. It helps partners feel secure and supported.

6. Affection: Affection is important in any relationship. It helps partners feel loved and cared for.

7. Honesty: Honesty is essential in any relationship. It helps partners feel secure and valued.

8. Forgiveness: Forgiveness is important in any relationship. It helps partners move past hurt and Mend relationships.

These characteristics are important in any relationship, and are especially important in long-term relationships.
partners are thus less of a ‘substitute’ for close friends than for casual acquaintances. However, emotional commitment to one romantic partner sends ripples through the larger network to which we belong.

Some of the preceding suggestions show that a developing relationship between two people not only has meaning for them but begins to have meaning for other people, too, and that affects the way it works. It becomes an ‘organization’ over and above the feelings that the partners have for one another and begins to carry social obligations, cultural constraints, normative significance and the shaping hand of expectation (Allan, 1993; McCall, 1988). Whilst social psychologists explore the ways in which feelings for one another pull partners together, and communication scholars explore the ways in which those feelings are expressed and communicated, sociologists are interested in relationships as social units over and above the two members in them (McCall, 1988). In a sociological analysis of friendships, Allan (1993, 1995) points to the ways in which social life in turn structures our choices of partners and creates patterns of activity that help us to express emotions, regulate our feelings in relationships and provide opportunities for relationships to take a particular form. Sex, class position, age, domestic relationships and pre-existing friendships all pattern and constrain an individual’s choices and limit freedom in everyday practical life in ways not considered by those who imagine that attraction and friendship choices are the simple result of emotion or of cognitive processes of information management. You will not be allowed to marry Madonna, even if you love her. Instead our analysis of relationships has to recognize the effects of context on such emotions and processes and hence we need to attend not only to what people think but to what they do in everyday life, not only in their development but also in their break-up (see also Chapter 4 and Box 5.1).

Handling the break-up of relationships

So far I have focused on the bright side of relationships but much talk and many routines are also directed towards the less appealing side of relationships: when they break up, need repair or have to be straightened out. By far the most common experience of negative things in relationships is the management of minor irritations and trivial hassles that arise day to day in relationships of all kinds (Duck and Wood, 1995). The rosy picture of relational progress drawn so far is thus only part of the truth (and Cupach and Spitzberg, 1994, devote a whole book to the dark side). For instance, why have researchers just focused on love and overlooked needling, bitching, boredom, complaints, harassment and enemyships (Duck, 1994b)? Why do we know more about romantic relationships than we do about troublesome relationships (Levitt et al., 1996)? Things often go wrong in relationships in all sorts of ways and cause a lot of pain when they do, some of it intentionally hurtful (Vangelisti, 1994). Sometimes it is Big Stuff and
leads to break-up of the relationship, but most of the time it is relatively
trivial and leads to nothing except hurt feelings and the conflicts involved in
managing the occurrence. How does it happen?

When things go wrong

There are several parts to acquaintance, and so we should expect there to be
several parts to the undoing of acquaintance during relational dissolution.
This is partly because relationships exist in time and usually take time to fall
apart, so that at different times different processes are taking a role in the
dissolution. It is also because, like a motor car, a relationship can have
accidents for many reasons, whether the ‘driver’s’ fault, mechanical failure
or the actions of other road users. Thus, in a relationship, one or both
partners might be hopeless at relating; or the structure and mechanics of the
relationship may be wrong, even though both partners are socially competent
in other settings; or outside influences can upset it. All of these
possibilities have been explored (Baxter, 1984; Duck, 1982a; Orbuch, 1992).
However, I am going to focus on my own approach to these issues and refer
you elsewhere for details of the other work. One reason for doing this is that
my own theory of relationship dissolution is closely tied to my approach to
relational repair (Duck, 1984a) as well as to my approach to the develop-
ment of acquaintance (Duck, 1988) and so provides links between what has
gone before here and what follows.

The essence of my approach to relational dissolution is that there are
several different phases, each with a characteristic style and concern (Duck,
1982a). Thus, as shown in Figure 3.2, the first phase is a breakdown phase
where partners (or one partner only) become(s) distressed at the way the
relationship is conducted. This generates an intrapsychic phase characterized
by a brooding focus on the relationship and on the partner. Nothing is said
to the partner at this point: the agony is either private or shared only with a
diary or with relatively anonymous other persons (bar servers, hairdressers,
passengers on the bus) who will not tell the partner about the complaint.
Just before exit from this phase, people move up the scale of confidants so
that they start to complain to their close friends, but do not yet present their
partner with the full extent of their distress or doubts about the future of the
relationship.

Once we decide to do something about a relational problem we have to
deal with the difficulties of facing up to the partner. Implicit – and probably
wrongly implicit – in my 1982 model was the belief that partners would tell
one another about their feelings and try to do something about them. Both
Lee (1984) and Baxter (1984) show that people often leave relationships
without telling their partner, or else by fudging their exits. For instance,
they may say: ‘I’ll call you’ and then not do it; or ‘Let’s keep in touch’ and
never contact the partner; or ‘Let’s not be lovers but stay as friends’ and
then have hardly any contact in future (Metts et al., 1989). Given that my
assumption is partly wrong, it nevertheless assumes that partners in formal
BREAKDOWN: Dissatisfaction with relationship

\[\text{Threshold: I can't stand this any more}\]

\[\text{INTRA-PSYCHIC PHASE}\]

- Personal focus on partner's behaviour
- Assess adequacy of partner's role performance
- Depict and evaluate negative aspects of being in the relationship
- Consider costs of withdrawal
- Assess positive aspects of alternative relationships
- Face 'express/repress dilemma'

\[\text{Threshold: I'd be justified in withdrawing}\]

\[\text{DYADIC PHASE}\]

- Face 'confrontation/avoidance dilemma'
- Confront partner
- Negotiate in 'Our Relationship' talks
- Attempt repair and reconciliation?
- Assess joint costs of withdrawal or reduced intimacy

\[\text{Threshold: I mean it}\]

\[\text{SOCIAL PHASE}\]

- Negotiate post-dissolution state with partner
- Initiate gossip/discussion in social network
- Create publicly negotiable face-saving/blame-placing stories and accounts
- Consider and face up to implied social network effects, if any
- Call in intervention teams?

\[\text{Threshold: It's now inevitable}\]

\[\text{GRAVE DRESSING PHASE}\]

- 'Getting over' activity
- Retrospection, reformulative post-mortem attribution
- Public distribution of own version of break-up story

Figure 3.2 A sketch of the main phases of dissolving personal relationships (Reprinted from Duck (1982a: 16) 'A topography of relationship disengagement and dissolution', in S. W. Duck (ed.), Personal Relationships: 4, Dissolving Personal Relationships London: Academic Press. Reproduced by permission.)
relationships like marriage will have to face up to their partner, whilst
partners in other relationships may or may not do so. The dyadic phase is
the phase when partners try to confront and talk through their feelings
about the relationship and decide how to sort out the future. Assuming that
they decide to break up (and even my 1982 model was quite clear that they
can decide not to do that), they then move rapidly to a social phase when
they have to tell other people about their decision and enlist some social
support for their side of the debate. It is no good just leaving a relationship:
we seek other people to agree with our decision or to prop us up and support
what we have done. Other people can support us in ways such as being
sympathetic and generally understanding. More important, they can side
with our version of events and our version of the partner’s and the rela-
tionship’s faults (‘I always thought he/she was no good’, ‘I could never
understand how you two could get along – you never seemed right for each
other’). This is the grave-dressing phase: once the relationship is dead we
have to bury it ‘good and proper’ – with a tombstone saying how it was
born, what it was like and why it died. We have to create an account of the
relationship’s history and, as it were, put that somewhere so that other
people can see it and, we hope, accept it. In this phase, people may
strategically reinterpret their view of their partner, for example by shifting
from the view of the person as ‘exciting’ to being ‘dangerously unpre-
dictable’ or from being ‘attractively reliable’ to being ‘boring’ – exactly the
same features of the person are observed, but they are given different labels more
suited to one’s present feelings about the person (Felmlee, 1995).

In breakdown of relationships as elsewhere in life, gossip plays a key role.
Here it works in the social and grave-dressing phases and in a dissolving
relationship we actively seek the support of members of our social networks
and do so by gossiping about our partners (La Gaipa, 1982). In some
instances, we look for ‘arbitrators’ who will help to bring us back together
with our partner. In other cases, we just want someone to back up and
spread around our own version of the break-up and its causes. A crucial
point made by La Gaipa (1982) is that everyone who leaves a
relationship has to leave with ‘social credit’ intact for future use: that is, we
cannot just get out of a relationship but we have to leave in such a way that
we are not disgraced and debarred from future relationships. We must leave
with a reputation for having been let down or faced with unreasonable odds
or an unreasonable partner. It is socially acceptable to say ‘I left because we
tried hard to make it work but it wouldn’t.’ It is not socially acceptable to
leave a relationship with the cheery but unpalatable admission: ‘Well
basically I’m a jilt and I got bored dangling my partner on a string so I just
broke the whole thing off when it suited me.’ That statement could destroy
one’s future credit for new relationships.

Accounts often serve the purpose of beginning the ‘getting over’ activity
that is essential to complete the dissolution (Weber, 1983). A large part of
this involves selecting an account of dissolution that refers to a fault in the
partner or relationship that pre-existed the split or was even present all
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Putting it r

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along (Weber, 1983). This is the ‘I always thought she/he was a bit of a risk to get involved with, but I did it anyway, more fool me’ story that we have all used from time to time.

However, accounts also serve another purpose: the creation of a publicly acceptable story is essential to getting over the loss of a relationship (McCall, 1982). It is insufficient having a story that we alone accept: others must also endorse it. As McCall (1982) astutely observed, part of the success of good counsellors consists in their ability to construct such stories for persons in distress about relational loss.

**Putting it right**

If two people wanted to put a relationship right, then they could decide to try and make it ‘redevelop’; that is, they could assume that repairing a relationship is just like acquaintance, and go through the same processes in order to regain the previous level of intimacy. This means that we have to assume that break-up of relationships is the reverse of acquaintance, and that to repair it, all we have to do is ‘rewind’ it. This makes some sense: developing relationships grow in intimacy whereas breaking ones decline in intimacy so perhaps we should just try to rewind the intimacy level.

However, in other ways this idea does not work. For instance, in acquaintance we get to know more about a person but in breakdown we cannot get to know less, we must just reinterpret what we already know and put it into a different framework, model, or interpretation (‘Yes, he’s always been kind, but then he was always after something’).

I think that we need to base our ideas about repair not on our model of acquaintance but on a broader model of breakdown of relationships that takes account of principles governing formation of relationships in general. Research on relationships has begun to help us understand what precisely happens when things go wrong. By emphasizing processes of breakdown of relationships and processes of acquaintance, we have the chance now to see that there are also processes of repair. These processes do, however, address different aspects of relationships in trouble. This, I believe, also gives us the chance to be more helpful in putting things right. Bear in mind the model just covered, as you look at Figure 3.3, and you will see that it is based on proposals made earlier. There are phases to repair of relationships, and some styles work at some times and not at others (Duck, 1984a).

If the relationship is at the intrapsychic phase of dissolution, for instance, then repair should aim to re-establish liking for the partner rather than to correct behavioural faults in ourselves or our nonverbal behaviour, for instance. These latter may be more suitable if persons are in the breakdown phase instead. Liking for the partner can be re-established or aided by means such as keeping a record, mental or physical, of the positive or pleasing behaviour of our partner rather than listing the negatives and dwelling on them in isolation (Bandura, 1977). Other methods involve redirection of attributions, that is, attempting to use more varied, and perhaps more
### Human relationships

**Dissolution States and Thresholds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Person’s Concerns</th>
<th>Repair Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Breakdown:</strong></td>
<td>Relationship process; emotional and/or physical satisfaction in relationship</td>
<td>Concerns over one’s value as a partner; Relational process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td><strong>Threshold:</strong> I can’t stand this any more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Intrapsychic Phase:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with</td>
<td>Partner’s ‘faults and inadequacies’; alternative forms of relationship;</td>
<td>Person’s view of partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partner</td>
<td>relationships with alternative partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threshold:</strong> I’d be justified in withdrawing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Dyadic Phase:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontation with</td>
<td>Reformulation of relationship; expression of conflict; clearing the air</td>
<td>Beliefs about optimal form of future relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threshold:</strong> I mean it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Social Phase:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication of relationship</td>
<td>Gaining support and assistance from others; having own view of the problem</td>
<td>Either:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distress</td>
<td>ratified; obtaining intervention to rectify matters or end the</td>
<td>Hold partners together (Phase 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>Or.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Save face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threshold:</strong> It’s now inevitable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Grave-dressing Phase:</strong></td>
<td>Self-justification; marketing of one’s own version of the break-up and its</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting over it all and</td>
<td>causes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tidying up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3 *A sketch of the main concerns at different phases of dissolution*  

Favourable explanations for the partner’s behaviour — in brief, to make greater efforts to understand the reasons that our partner may give for what is happening in the relationship.

At other phases of dissolution, different strategies of repair are appropriate, according to this model. For instance, at the social phase, persons outside the relationship have to decide whether it is better to try to patch everything up partners to... choice of st helping then break-up. At to both of th nobody’s fa...

Essentially up on of many the relations variety of w when it addrs dissolution o...

The ways psychologica outsiders have need to be at kind of inter Probably not of different it ‘scripts’ for h questions sur...

Summary

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everything up or whether it may serve everyone's best interests to help the partners to get out of the relationship. Figure 3.3 thus indicates that the choice of strategies is between pressing the partners to stay together or helping them to save face by backing up their separate versions of the break-up. An extra possibility would be to create a story that is acceptable to both of them, such as 'It was an unworkable relationship . . . and that is nobody's fault.'

Essentially, this model proposes only three things: relationships are made up of many parts and processes, some of which 'clock in' at some points in the relationship's life and some at others; relationships can go wrong in a variety of ways; repairing of disrupted relationships will be most effective when it addresses the concerns that are most important to us at the phase of dissolution of relationships which we have reached.

The ways we change our 'stories' about a relationship provide important psychological data, and they indicate the dynamic nature of the help that outsiders have to give to relationships in trouble. Different parts of the story need to be addressed at different phases of breakdown. Is one and the same kind of intervention appropriate at all stages of a relationship's decline? Probably not. It makes more sense to look for the relative appropriateness of different intervention techniques as those dynamics unfold. There are few 'scripts' for handling break-up of relationships and many intriguing research questions surround the actual processes by which people extricate themselves (or can be helped to extricate themselves) from unwanted relationships. For example, Miller and Parks (1982) look at relationship dissolution as an influence process and show that different strategies for changing attitudes can help in dissolution. It is now a major aim in the personal relationships field to explain dissolution and repair of relationships.

Summary

This chapter has looked at personal relationships by exploring the ways in which they are practical, rather than emotional, matters that start between strangers. It has elaborated the processes (attitude similarity, self-disclosing, uncertainty reduction and organization of routine behaviours) that are needed to develop relationships. It has stressed that this process is not a simple one of merely comparing attitudes and personality characteristics with those of other people, but is a social, dyadic and communicative process of discovery and bonding, embedded in influential social contexts. It has emphasized the view that relationships are continually developing processes and are not static states begun and defined only by partners' initial psychological make-up or reward levels. The chapter has also stressed the ways in which outsiders influence the shape and development of partners' feelings and organization of their relationships. The chapter emphasized the creation of relationships; the effects of time and process; the interaction of beliefs with social skills and behaviour; and the role of outsiders' perspectives and
influences on the relationship. Decline, dissolution and repair of relationships were considered in tandem with the role of everyday routines and everyday talk.

Now, we can look at the family and at children’s relationships, perhaps the two most important kinds of relationship in life for us all.

Further reading