

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In this chapter, we presented data suggesting that most couples wait until some emotional intimacy or commitment has developed before engaging in sex. We also reported a study indicating that around 10% to 15% of college students are virgins. Based on the conversations you have had with friends, do you think these numbers hold true for your school? Why might these estimates differ depending on the group of people responding?
2. Based on what you learned in this chapter, what strategies would you use to protect yourself from sexual coercion or harassment? Why do you think people misinterpret supposed sexual cues so often?
3. Why do you think people practice unsafe sex even though they know the risks involved? What communication strategies might partners use to ensure that they engage in safe sex?

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STAYING CLOSE Maintaining Relationships

After 3 years of serious dating, Yasser proposes to Rachel and she accepts. They move in together and start planning their wedding, with Rachel doing the bulk of the work. Although she loves Yasser and is excited about the prospect of marrying him, she starts to worry that getting married could change things. When she was in middle school, her parents divorced after several years of bitter fighting. To add fuel to her worries, a good friend of hers recently announced that she and her husband were separating after only 2 years of marriage. Sometimes it seems to Rachel that everyone is getting divorced. Yasser assures her that things will be different for them. After all, they love each other and have a great relationship. And Yasser's parents have been happily married for nearly 30 years, so he has seen how two people can work together to maintain a successful relationship. Rachel wonders what their secret is. How do Yasser's parents manage to keep their relationship so happy, and can she and Yasser do the same?

In fairy tales, everyone lives "happily ever after," as if happiness was bestowed on them with the flick of a magic wand. In real life, however, there is no magic recipe for a happy relationship. So what can couples like Rachel and Yasser do to keep their relationships happy? How might getting married change their relationship? Maintaining relationships requires effort and perseverance. The road to a successful relationship can be full of potholes and detours, but "staying on course" and maintaining important relationships is a worthwhile endeavor. In fact, because having a close relationship is a key determinant of overall happiness (Carr & Springer, 2010), people who have trouble maintaining close relationships

with others often are lonely and depressed, and they may doubt their self-worth (Segrin, 1998). Married people tend to report being happier and more satisfied with their lives than do single people (Carr, Freedman, Cornman, & Schwarz, 2014), yet 45% to 50% of first marriages in the United States end in divorce (Lansford, 2009). In 2008, estimates suggested that for every two people who got married in the United States, another person got divorced (Tejada-Vera & Sutton, 2009). Studies also show that marital satisfaction drops after parenthood, providing another maintenance challenge (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Given these facts, Rachel's concerns are certainly understandable and justified.

The research on **relational maintenance** provides important information on behaviors that couples like Yasser and Rachel can use to promote relational satisfaction and longevity. In this chapter, we look at several areas of research related to maintenance. First, we define relational maintenance and discuss specific types of behaviors people use to maintain a variety of close relationships, including romantic relationships and friendships. We also discuss some of the special challenges people face when trying to maintain cross-sex friendships, friends-with-benefits relationships, long-distance relationships, and cohabiting relationships. The chapter ends with a discussion of **equity theory**, which focuses on how benefits and fairness help keep relationships satisfying and stable.

DEFINING RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE

People maintain things that they care about. They take their cars in for routine maintenance service and repair mechanical problems when they occur. They maintain their homes by keeping them clean, mowing the lawn, trimming the hedges, and painting the walls. They maintain their good images at work by trying to be punctual, professional, presentable, and well organized. Similarly, people usually try to maintain and mend their relationships with others through contact and communication. As you may already know or will learn, maintaining a relationship is far more challenging than maintaining a car or a home.

Relational maintenance has been defined in various ways. According to Dindia and Canary (1993), there are four common definitions. First, *relational maintenance involves keeping a relationship in existence*. Although some relationships are kept in existence through extensive contact, others require minimal effort. For example, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter allow people to

keep in touch with one another without having to invest time and effort into communicating with each individual “friend” one-on-one. Similarly, you might send holiday or birthday cards to people who you do not have much contact with during the course of the year as a way of keeping a relationship in existence. Second, *relational maintenance involves keeping a relationship in a specified state or condition, or at a stable level of intimacy, so that the status quo is maintained* (Ayres, 1983). For example, friends might work to keep their relationship from becoming romantic, or sisters might try to keep their relationship as close as ever despite living in different cities. Third, *relational maintenance can involve keeping a relationship in satisfactory condition*. Dating and married couples often try to rekindle the romance in their relationships to keep them satisfying. They might have a candlelit dinner or spend a weekend away together. Similarly, friends might plan a weekend ski trip together to catch up with each other and have fun. Fourth, *relational maintenance involves keeping a relationship in repair*. The idea here is that people work to prevent problems from occurring in their relationships, and to fix problems when they do occur.

As Dindia and Canary (1993) stated, these four components of relational maintenance overlap. A critical part of keeping a relationship satisfying is preventing and correcting problems, and an important part of keeping a relationship in existence is keeping it satisfying. In a broad sense, relational maintenance can be defined as *keeping a relationship at a desired level* (Canary & Stafford, 1994). For some relationships, the desired level may be a casual friendship, professional association, or acquaintanceship, with occasional e-mails or contact through social networking sites such as Facebook being all that is necessary. For other relationships, physical and emotional closeness are desired, which typically requires more sustained maintenance efforts. It is also important to recognize that keeping a relationship at a desired level does not necessarily mean that a relationship remains at the same level of closeness over time. As people’s desires change, the way they define and maintain their relationships also changes.

Maintenance is a dynamic process that involves continually adjusting to new needs and demands.

BEHAVIORS USED TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS

So *how* do people maintain their relationships? Scholars began addressing this important question in the 1980s (Ayres, 1983; Bell, Daly, & Gonzalez, 1987; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Duck, 1988; Shea & Pearson, 1986). Since then, much has been learned about behaviors people use to maintain various types of relationships. Although various scholars have advanced different lists of behaviors used to maintain relationships, most maintenance behaviors can be characterized based on three distinctions: (1) how prosocial or antisocial they are, (2) their channel or **modality**, and (3) whether they are employed strategically or routinely.

Prosocial Maintenance Behaviors

The majority of behaviors used to maintain relationships are prosocial, positive behaviors that promote relational closeness, trust, and liking. Stafford and Canary (1991) asked dating and married couples what they did to maintain their relationships and keep them satisfying. Five primary maintenance strategies, all of which are prosocial, emerged: (1) positivity, (2) openness, (3) assurances, (4) social networking, and (5) task sharing. A summary of the research showed that couples who regularly use these five maintenance behaviors tend to have relationships characterized by high levels of satisfaction, commitment, liking, and love (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013). Couples who use high levels of these five prosocial maintenance behaviors also tend to have overlapping identities, which may lead them to want to work together and to share resources (Ledbetter, Stassen-Ferrara, & Dowd, 2013). Other researchers have identified supportiveness, joint activities, romance, humor, and constructive conflict as additional prosocial behaviors that are commonly used to maintain certain relationships (Afifi, Guerrero, & Eglund, 1994; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Stafford,

2003). These maintenance behaviors are described further in Box 10.1.

As mentioned previously, people who use high levels of prosocial maintenance behavior tend to be satisfied with their relationships (Stafford, 2003; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). **Relational satisfaction** refers to the “pleasure or enjoyment” that people derive from their relationships (Vangelisti & Huston, 1994, p. 173). Some studies have shown that positivity, assurances, and social networking are especially important for predicting how satisfied couples are with their relationships (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2001). In one study, people reported being the most satisfied in their relationships when their partners used higher levels of positivity and assurances than they expected them to use (Dainton, 2000). High levels of positivity and social networking are important in family relationships as well (Morr Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, & Poole, 2007). Spending time together is also important because it creates feelings of companionship, cohesion, and openness (Eglund et al., 1997; Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993). Likewise, when partners share tasks in a fair and equitable manner, they tend to feel closer and more satisfied with their relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Guerrero, Eloy, & Wabnick, 1993).

Not surprisingly, relationships characterized by high levels of prosocial maintenance also tend to be stable and committed. In a study by Guerrero et al. (1993), college-aged daters were surveyed near the beginning of the semester and then 8 weeks later. People who reported using more prosocial maintenance behaviors at the beginning of the study were more likely to have become more serious or stayed at the same intimacy level by the end of the eight weeks. Those who reported using low levels of prosocial maintenance behavior were likely to have de-escalated or terminated their relationships by the end of the 8 weeks. In another study, Ramirez (2008) had married couples complete two surveys that were spaced around 2 weeks apart. Couples who reported using more prosocial maintenance were more personally committed to their marriage when surveyed two weeks later, with personal commitment defined

BOX 10.1 HIGHLIGHTS

PROSOCIAL MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS

Behavior	Definition and Examples
Positivity	Making interactions pleasant and enjoyable (e.g., giving compliments, acting cheerful)
Openness and routine talk	Talking and listening to one another (e.g., self-disclosing, sharing secrets, asking how the partner's day went)
Assurances	Giving each other assurances about commitment (e.g., assuring the other you still care, talking about the future)
Social networking	Spending time with each other's social network (e.g., going to family functions together, accepting each other's friends)
Task sharing	Performing routine tasks and chores relevant to the relationship together (e.g., sharing household chores, planning finances together)
Supportiveness	Giving each other social support and encouragement (e.g., providing comfort, making sacrifices for the partner)
Joint activities	Engaging in activities and spending time together (e.g., hanging out together, playing sports, shopping together)
Romance and affection	Revealing positive, caring feelings for each other (e.g., saying "I love you," sending flowers, having a romantic dinner)
Humor	Using inside jokes, humor, and sarcasm (e.g., using funny nicknames, laughing together)
Constructive conflict management	Managing conflict in constructive ways that promote problem solving and harmony (e.g., listening to one another's positions, trying to come up with acceptable solutions)

as the extent to which a person was devoted to the partner and desired to remain in the relationship. Similarly, spouses use more prosocial maintenance behavior when they are both committed to their marriage (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008).

Even though prosocial maintenance behaviors are associated with greater commitment and relational stability, couples do not use these behaviors consistently throughout their relationships. In a summary of the research on relational maintenance, positivity, openness, and assurances actually decreased slightly the longer a couple had been

together (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013). Couples may use the highest levels of relational maintenance when they are moving their relationship from casual to committed, or when they are trying to rekindle or repair their relationship. Once a relationship is secure and committed, relational maintenance is still important, but partners may not feel the need to work quite as hard on the relationship all the time.

Antisocial Maintenance Behavior

In contrast to the prosocial maintenance behaviors that are related to commitment and satisfaction,

scholars have identified a set of antisocial or negative behaviors that are sometimes used to maintain relationships, although they tend not to increase (and may even decrease) relational satisfaction. These behaviors tend to discourage interaction or try to change the partner in some way; are often coercive, manipulative, or controlling; and include ultimatums, threats, and becoming distant (Dindia, 1989, 2003; Dindia & Baxter, 1987). Although it might seem puzzling that negative behaviors such as these would be used to try to maintain relationships, keep in mind that antisocial behaviors only qualify as maintenance when they are used specifically for that purpose. Antisocial maintenance behaviors are unlikely to be used to try to keep a relationship satisfying, but they may be used for other maintenance-related reasons, such as trying to control a partner who might break up with you, trying to force someone to see you as more attractive or desirable, or trying to avoid conflict.

Antisocial maintenance behaviors may also be used to try to keep a relationship at a given level of intimacy or closeness, as Ayres (1983) suggested is often the case when people use **avoidance** as a maintenance strategy. For example, you might avoid talking about how attracted you are to a friend if you worry that such a revelation could harm your friendship (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998); you might distance yourself from a friend who has a crush on you to signal that you are not interested (Eden & Veksler, 2010); or you might refrain from arguing with your partner on a particular topic if you think it could damage your relationship. In other cases, people use avoidance to keep their relationships at a casual level. For instance, if you are uncomfortable becoming close friends with a coworker or classmate, you might avoid personal topics of conversation when talking with this individual. In cross-sex friendships, people sometimes avoid flirting and instead talk about their romantic relationships with others as maintenance strategies that help keep the relationship platonic (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005; Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000). Box 10.2 further explains these and other antisocial maintenance behaviors.

Antisocial maintenance behaviors are sometimes designed to alter the partner's feelings or keep the partner in the relationship. At times, people use **jealousy induction** as a maintenance strategy for one or both of these purposes (Dainton & Gross, 2008; Fleischmann et al., 2005). The idea here is that jealousy might spark feelings of love and possessiveness, making a partner more likely to stay in the relationship. Spying or surveillance may also function to maintain relationships by providing information that reduces uncertainty about rival relationships and helps a jealous person compete with potential rivals (Dainton & Gross, 2008; Guerrero & Afifi, 1999). Dainton and Gross also identified infidelity, allowing control, and destructive conflict as negative behaviors that can be used to try to maintain relationships (see Box 10.2).

Obviously, antisocial behaviors such as jealousy induction, spying, infidelity, and destructive conflict can backfire, leading to more problems or to breakup rather than relational maintenance. Some of these antisocial maintenance behaviors may even represent desperate attempts to hang onto a relationship that is in trouble. For example, jealousy induction is often used when people are worried that their partner is interested in someone else (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998b), and people who do not have the communication skills to solve problems in a constructive manner sometimes use controlling strategies (Christopher & Lloyd, 2000). Not surprisingly, people who report using the antisocial maintenance behaviors of allowing control, destructive conflict, jealousy induction, and infidelity also report low levels of relational satisfaction (Dainton & Gross, 2008). Thus, although behaviors such as avoidance, no flirting, and talking about others can be effective and appropriate at times and can even lead to more relational satisfaction, many antisocial maintenance behaviors could have destructive effects on relationships.

Modality of Maintenance Behavior

Modality refers to the channel of communication; for example, is a message sent by words, facial expression,

BOX 10.2 HIGHLIGHTS**ANTISOCIAL MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS**

Behavior	Definition and Examples
Avoidance	Evading the partner in certain situations or on certain issues (e.g., planning separate activities, respecting each other's privacy)
No flirting	Refraining from flirting with someone to clearly communicate that you are not interested in pursuing a romantic relationship (e.g., being standoffish when someone flirts with you)
Talking about others	Talking about someone else to signal that you already have a special relationship with another person (e.g., repeatedly mentioning your significant other, explaining why someone is your "best" friend)
Jealousy induction	Attempting to make your partner jealous (e.g., leaving a note from a "secret admirer" out for your partner to see, flirting with someone in front of your partner)
Spying	Getting information about your partner without his or her knowledge (e.g., looking through your partner's text messages, asking your partner's friends for information)
Infidelity	Engaging in sexual activity with someone else (e.g., making out with someone else so your partner knows you have other alternatives, sleeping with someone else to get rewards that you are missing in your current relationship)
Allowing control	Focusing exclusively on the partner (e.g., ignoring your friends so you can spend time with your partner, letting your partner make all the decisions)
Destructive conflict	Using destructive conflict to control the partner (e.g., yelling at your partner if she or he does not do what you want, starting arguments so you can tell your partner how she or he should act)

voice tone, computer, or letter? Some researchers consider mediated communication, such as e-mail or text messaging, to be a special category of maintenance behavior based on its modality. However, mediated communication is not listed as a separate category in Boxes 10.1 or 10.2 because most maintenance behaviors can be employed in either face-to-face or mediated contexts. For example, friends can call and then catch up by having lunch or they can exchange e-mails. Similarly, individuals can spy on their partners by following them or by checking their

Facebook page. Mediated forms of maintenance behavior include communicating via social networking services (such as Twitter or Facebook), e-mail, text messaging, snapping, blogging, the telephone, and cards and letters (Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005; Marmo & Bryant, 2010; Wright, 2004). In fact, one study showed that college students text their romantic partners an average of six times a day and call them on their cell phones three to four times a day (Duran et al., 2011). As discussed in Box 10.3,

cell phones also play an important role in maintaining relationships.

Although people can enact various maintenance strategies through these different modalities, the same behavior may be interpreted differently depending on whether it occurs in face-to-face versus mediated contexts. Imagine receiving a holiday greeting card from a friend online versus in the mail. Now imagine receiving the card with a pre-typed signature versus a real signature. Which card is more personal? All three cards would likely help maintain the friendship, but each card would send a somewhat different message. Another example is discussing the nature of one's relationship. When couples engage in this type of relationship talk in a face-to-face context, they usually report being happy in their relationships. However, when couples discuss the nature of their relationship when texting, they tend to be less satisfied with their relationships (Brody & Peña, 2015). This may be because texting provides a relatively nonintimate context for discussing this type of serious issue. Some maintenance behaviors are also enacted differently depending on their modality. Take task sharing as an example. People can accomplish some task sharing, such as working together on a written project, through mediated communication. But other forms of task sharing, such as washing and drying the dishes together, can only be accomplished in face-to-face settings.

Mediated forms of communication are especially important for maintaining certain types of relationships, including friendships, online relationships, and long-distance relationships. In terms of friendships, Marmo and Bryant (2010) examined how acquaintances, casual friends, and close friends use Facebook to maintain their relationships. People in all of these friendship groups reported using strategies such as writing on each other's walls and commenting on each other's photos to keep in contact. Facebook users also reported sending messages related to assurances and positivity. For example, if someone posts a comment saying she's having a particularly hard day, her friends are likely

to respond with comments expressing support and empathy (Marmo & Bryant, 2010). The importance of positivity is highlighted by some of the implicit rules that govern how friends interact on Facebook. According to these rules, people expect others to present themselves and their friends positively (in messages, photos, etc.) on Facebook and to refrain from posting anything that could hurt a person's image (Bryant & Marmo, 2010, 2012). Another unwritten rule, which is reflected in reports of actual behavior, is that close friends should engage in more maintenance behavior on Facebook than casual friends, who should engage in more maintenance behavior than acquaintances (Marmo & Bryant, 2010). However, maintaining a relationship using Facebook alone may not be enough. One study showed that contact via Facebook was sufficient for maintaining acquaintanceships and casual friendships, but not enough for close friends and romantic partners, who also needed to use other means, such as talking face to face or on the phone, to maintain the high intimacy levels in their relationships (Bryant & Marmo, 2012).

Researchers have also studied relational maintenance in online relationships. Wright (2004) found that openness and positivity were the most frequently used maintenance behaviors in these relationships. Rabby (2007) compared maintenance in four types of relationships: (1) **Virtual relationships** were defined in terms of the partners having communicated only online. (2) **Pinocchio relationships** occur when partners first meet online but then start meeting in person (i.e., they become "real"). (3) **Cyber emigrant relationships** are those in which partners first meet in person but then start communicating primarily online. (4) Finally, communication in real-world relationships starts and continues primarily in face-to-face contexts. In Rabby's study, people in the virtual-only group reported using the least maintenance behavior. However, if people in the virtual-only group were highly committed to their partner, they used just as much relational maintenance as did people in the other three groups. This suggests that

BOX 10.3 TECH TALK

CELL PHONES AND RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

Research has shown that teens and young adults, in particular, see their cell phones as critical for maintaining relationships and keeping in contact with members of their social network (e.g., Yates & Lockley, 2008). Cell phones also play an important role in maintaining marriages, with Pew research from 2008 revealing that over 70% of married individuals in the United States in 2008 said that both they and their spouse had cell phones and that they communicated with one another via cell phone at least once a day. The more often people communicate using their cell phone, the more likely they are to report being satisfied with their relationship (Schwartz, 2008; Yin, 2009). In contrast, Yin's (2009) research suggested that text messaging, especially in the absence of talking to one another on the phone, is negatively related to satisfaction in long-distance romantic relationships. So text messaging may be seen as a less personal form of communication than talking on one's cell phone.

Studies also suggest that cell phone communication is most likely to be related to satisfaction when people follow certain rules. Duran and colleagues (2011) found that about one third of couples had rules for how to communicate via their cell phones. These rules often related to the content, timing, and frequency of cell phone communication. A related study by Miller-Ott, Kelly, and Duran (2012) identified six rules about cell phone communication that people sometimes set up in their relationships:

- *Contact with others:* Not talking or texting others when spending time together
- *Call times:* Not calling too late or early or during other specified times (e.g., during work hours)
- *Availability expectations:* Setting expectations for call-back times (e.g., expecting a call or text back within an hour; not expecting one's partner to have her or his cell phone on when at work)
- *Relational issues:* Casting certain topics, such as having an argument or talking about a serious relationship issue, as inappropriate for text messaging
- *Repetitive contact:* Giving the partner an appropriate amount of time to text or call back without leaving another message
- *Monitoring partner usage:* Not checking the partner's phone log

In Miller-Ott and others' (2012) study, couples who had set rules about contact with others and relational issues (see above) reported being happier with their cell phone communication. Moreover, couples who reported having rules about relational issues, repetitive contact, and monitoring partner usage reported being more satisfied with their relationships. Therefore, setting rules about cell phone communication—and following those rules—may contribute to keeping a relationship happy.

maintenance behavior is more strongly related to commitment than modality.

Mediated forms of maintenance behavior are also common in long-distance relationships between romantic partners, family members, and friends (Rabby & Walther, 2003; Rohlfing, 1995). In fact, social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are marketed as ways to maintain relationships or keep in touch with friends. Mediated communication can also be used to terminate a relationship, as can be the case if someone is "de-friended" on Facebook. Failure to answer an e-mail or even failing to send a

greeting card for birthdays or holidays may be also perceived as a sign that someone does not want to maintain a relationship (Dindia, Timmerman, Langan, Sahlstein, & Quandt, 2004). Some types of maintenance behaviors are especially amenable to mediated communication and therefore more likely to be used in long-distance relationships. In one study, people reported using computer-mediated forms of communication related to positivity and social networking as ways to maintain their long-distance relationships. In contrast, openness and shared tasks were more likely to occur in face-to-face contexts (Dainton & Aylor, 2002).



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Communicating with friends using Snapchat and social networking sites may be sufficient for maintaining acquaintanceships and casual friendships, but additional modes of communication are usually necessary to maintain our closest relationships.

Strategic and Routine Maintenance Behaviors

In addition to modality, maintenance behaviors can be distinguished by how strategic versus routine they are (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Dindia, 2003; Duck, 1986). **Strategic maintenance behaviors** are intentionally designed to maintain a relationship. For example, if you have an argument with your best friend, you might call with the intent of apologizing and repairing the situation. On Mother's Day, you might send your mom a bouquet of flowers so that she knows you are thinking of her. If you live far away from a loved one, you might call twice a week at a designated time or send the loved one a few Snapchats to keep in touch. These types of actions are deliberate and intentionally designed to maintain a positive relationship with someone.

Routine maintenance behaviors are less strategic and deliberate. They are used without the express purpose of maintaining the relationship, yet they still help people preserve their bonds with one another. Behaviors such as task sharing and positivity are especially likely to be used routinely rather than strategically (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). For example, roommates might share household responsibilities as a routine or habit. One roommate might do grocery shopping, pay bills, and vacuum and dust the apartment, and the other roommate might water

the plants, clean the bathroom, and do the cooking. Similarly, Yasser and Rachel might routinely engage in positivity by appearing happy when one partner arrives home from work and using polite communication such as saying "thank you" when doing favors for one another. Duck (1994) argued that routine talk is more important than strategic behavior for maintaining relationships. Other researchers have demonstrated that routine maintenance is a somewhat better predictor of relational satisfaction and commitment than strategic maintenance (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Thus, maintaining a relationship does not always require conscious "work." Sometimes maintenance rests in seemingly trivial behaviors that people enact rather mindlessly on a day-to-day basis.

Naturally, the line between strategic and routine maintenance behaviors is sometimes blurred. Many people cannot really tell if a given behavior is strategic or routine. Moreover, the same behavior can be strategic in some situations and routine in others. For example, holding your romantic partner's hand at the movie theater might be a habitual routine; you always hold your partner's hand at the movies. After an argument, however, reaching for your partner's hand might be a strategic move designed to repair the relationship and to restore intimacy. Strategic maintenance behaviors also may be used to prevent a relationship from becoming too intimate, to escalate or de-escalate the level of intimacy in the relationship, or to restore intimacy to repair a relationship. Both routine and strategic behaviors can contribute to relational maintenance in terms of keeping the relationship close and satisfying.

MAINTENANCE BEHAVIOR IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Maintenance behaviors vary based on the type of relationship people share. People maintain all types of relationships, but most research has focused on maintaining romantic relationships. Openness, assurances, and positivity seem to be more common in romantic relationships than in other types of relationships (Canary et al., 1993). Cohabiting romantic

partners use many routine maintenance behaviors, including task sharing, joint activities, and routine talk, more than most friends do. Thus, when Rachel and Yasser move in together after getting married, they may begin to use more routine maintenance behaviors.

Changes in Maintenance Over the Course of Romantic Relationships

Of course, Rachel and Yasser do not have to wait to get married to see changes in how they maintain their relationship. Changes have occurred from the time they first met until they became engaged, and more changes are likely to occur after they get married. Stafford and Canary (1991) compared couples at four relationship stages: (1) casually dating, (2) seriously dating, (3) engaged, and (4) married. They found that (1) married and engaged couples reported using more assurances and task sharing than did dating couples, (2) engaged and seriously dating couples reported using more openness and positivity than married or casually dating couples, and (3) married couples reported the most social networking. Adding to these findings, Dainton and Stafford (1993) compared the reports of maintenance behavior in dating versus marital relationships. They found that spouses shared more tasks than daters. Daters, however, engaged in more mediated communication, such as calling each other on the phone, exchanging cards and letters, and so forth. Another study showed that couples report less openness but more social networking, task sharing, and constructive conflict management the longer they are together (Dainton & Aylor, 2002).

These results make sense. As couples become more committed, partners may feel freer to provide assurances, and they may, by necessity, share more tasks, especially if they are living together. Similarly, couples may need to integrate social networks as the relationship becomes more committed and people come to view them as a "couple." However, openness and positivity may peak before romantic partners become fully committed. Once married, spouses may not feel the need to disclose their innermost

feelings all the time—in part because they have already told each other so much about themselves. Spouses may also express more negativity once they have the security of marriage. When spouses are still in the "honeymoon stage," they are more likely to be on their best behavior and to "put on a happy face." Moreover, the daily interaction that comes from living together makes it difficult for married couples to be positive all of the time. Complaints and conflicts are likely to occur, even in the best relationships.

In marriages, relational maintenance may follow a curvilinear pattern; in other words, spouses may use more maintenance behavior in the early and later years of marriage (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999). One explanation for this finding is that couples put considerable effort in their marriages during the honeymoon stage. Imagine how Rachel might act during the early years of her marriage with Yasser. Because being married is novel and exciting—and because she is concerned about making her marriage a success—she may be especially likely to engage in maintenance behavior. As the marriage progresses, she and Yasser may become preoccupied with their children and careers, leaving less time to devote to one another. Eventually, however, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch's research suggests that their level of maintenance will rebound, perhaps when their children are older or they settle into a comfortable work routine.

Maintenance in Gay and Lesbian Relationships

In addition to using the prosocial maintenance behaviors listed earlier, gay and lesbian couples use some unique strategies to maintain their relationships. Haas and Stafford (1998) found that partners in same-sex romantic relationships reported that it is important to live and work in environments that are supportive and not judgmental of their relationships. Similarly, same-sex couples emphasized the importance of being "out" in front of their social networks. Spending time with friends and family members who recognize and accept their relationship was a key relational maintenance behavior, as was being

able to introduce each other as “my partner.” Some gay and lesbian couples also reported modeling their parents’ relationships. Gay and lesbian couples tend to see their relationships as similar to heterosexual relationships in terms of commitment and communication but dissimilar in terms of nonconformity to sex-role stereotypes.

In a later study, Haas and Stafford (2005) found that although same-sex romantic relationships were characterized by many of the same maintenance behaviors as opposite-sex marriages, subtle differences existed. Sharing tasks was the most commonly reported maintenance behavior for both types of relationships. However, gay and lesbian couples reported using more maintenance behaviors that show bonding, such as talking about the commitment level in their relationships. Haas and Stafford argued that bonding communication was especially necessary in gay and lesbian relationships because, at the time of the study, these relationships were not legally validated the way marriages were.

MAINTENANCE BEHAVIOR IN SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS

Even though friendships are extremely important, people usually don’t work as hard to maintain their friendships as their romantic relationships (Dainton, Zelle, & Langan, 2003; Fehr, 1996). Perhaps this is because people take a more casual approach to friendships. People are taught that romantic relationships require a spark to get started and that the spark needs to be rekindled from time to time if the relationship is to stay strong. Friendships, on the other hand, are expected to be maintained with little effort most of the time. In fact, most people would think it was odd if Rachel was worried about maintaining a relationship with her best friend rather than her future spouse.

Nonetheless, friendships require maintenance. Fehr (1996) suggested that three maintenance behaviors are particularly important in friendships: (1) openness, (2) supportiveness, and (3) positivity.

Afifi, Guerrero, and Egland (1994) found that all three of these behaviors are associated with relational closeness in same-sex friendships between both men and women. Several studies have shown that openness, which includes both routine talk and intimate self-disclosure, is the cornerstone of all good friendships (Canary et al., 1993; Rose, 1985; Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984). Other maintenance behaviors, such as joint activities and affection, differ somewhat in importance depending on whether the friends are men or women.

Talking Versus Doing

Many studies have compared, directly or indirectly, how female versus male friends maintain their relationships. One common finding is that women tend to “talk” more while men tend to “do” more (Barth & Kinder, 1988; Sherrod, 1989). Wright (1982) referred to women’s friendships as “face to face” because of the focus on communication, and men’s friendships as “side by side” because of the focus on activity. This sex difference, albeit small, appears early in life and extends to mediated communication such as texting and online gaming. In a study on teens (Lenhart, 2015b), video games were found to play “a crucial role in the development and maintenance of [teen] boys’ friendships.” Teenage boys felt more connected to one another when they played video games together either in person or online, with 71% of boys saying that one of the ways they communicate with their friends is while playing games, compared to only 31% of girls. In contrast, teenage girls engage in more texting (62% to 48%) as well as more instant messages (32% to 23%) to stay connected to friends than do boys. Snapchat is by far the most common form of instant messaging teens use, but instant messaging includes a variety of applications, including WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and AOL Instant Message (O’Reilly, 2015). These differences between boys and girls reflect research showing that girls focus primarily on talk whereas boys focus primarily on activity. However, because they use many of the same social media, such as Snapchat and Twitter, teen boys and girls develop

similar patterns in how they use the technology on their smartphones to develop and maintain their relationships.

Males and females are similar in other ways too: Research shows that both men and women value self-disclosure in their relationships (Afifi et al., 1994; Floyd & Parks, 1995; Monsour, 1992; Parks & Floyd, 1996), but women disclose to one another a bit more. Similarly, both men and women value spending time with one another, even though men tend to engage in more focused activities than women. Supporting this, Fehr (1996) reviewed research showing that men and women spend similar amounts of time with their friends. The difference is that men engage in more activities, such as playing sports. In other words, women get together more often just to talk and spend time with one another, whereas men get together more often to do something specific, such as surf, play golf, or watch a game. Of course, sometimes men get together just to talk, and sometimes women get together to play sports. In fact, one study found no difference in how much male and female friends reported engaging in shared activities (Floyd & Parks, 1995). The difference between men's and women's activities is more subtle than dramatic; therefore, the talking versus doing distinction may be overstated.

Men and Women Are From the Same Planet

Taken as a whole, the research suggests that some sex differences exist in how men and women maintain their friendships. However, these differences are not dramatic; men and women are generally more similar than dissimilar, and when differences are found, they tend to be small (Andersen, 1998b; Canary & Hause, 1993). Everyone wants friends to talk to, do things with, and turn to in times of trouble, regardless of gender. In fact, both men and women see their friendships as one of the most important sources of happiness in their lives (Fehr, 1996; Rawlins, 1992). Box 10.4 examines the issue of whether men and women really are from “different planets.”

MAINTENANCE BEHAVIOR IN CROSS-SEX FRIENDSHIPS

Cross-sex friendships can be very rewarding (Werking, 1997). Both men and women like to get the perspective of the “other sex,” and many people perceive cross-sex friendships as fun and exciting. However, cross-sex friendships can be confusing and ambiguous at times. Think about your friends of the opposite sex. Do you sometimes wonder if they are physically attracted to you? Do you wonder what it would be like to get involved with them romantically? If one or both of you are heterosexual, these types of questions are likely to surface, even if only in your mind.

Challenges in Cross-Sex Friendships

As a result of this ambiguity, cross-sex friends sometimes face special challenges. O'Meara (1989) discussed four challenges that men and women face when they want to be “just friends” with one another. Three of these challenges—(1) the emotional bond challenge, (2) the sexual challenge, and (3) the public presentation challenge—are especially relevant to maintaining cross-sex friendships.

THE EMOTIONAL BOND CHALLENGE This challenge stems from men and women being socialized to see one another as potential romantic partners rather than platonic friends. This can lead to uncertainty regarding whether cross-sex friends have romantic feelings for each other. It may also be confusing to feel close to opposite-sex friends without also feeling romantic toward them. We grow up believing that when we feel close to an age-appropriate person of the opposite sex, we should also be able to fall in love with that person. For example, have you ever had a good friend of the opposite sex whom you thought was wonderful yet for whom you did not have romantic feelings? If so, you may have wondered how you could be so close without becoming romantic. This is because the line between emotional closeness and romantic attraction can be blurred in some cross-sex friendships. In contrast, heterosexual same-sex friends expect emotional closeness without romantic attraction.

BOX 10.4 HIGHLIGHTS**ARE MEN AND WOMEN REALLY FROM DIFFERENT PLANETS?**

If you watch television talk shows or read popular books on relationships, you have probably been introduced to the idea that men and women are very different from each other and that these differences can cause relational problems. For example, Deborah Tannen's popular 1990 book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* is built around the idea that boys and girls grow up in different cultures, with girls learning to communicate in ways that are confirming and create intimacy and boys learning to communicate in ways that enhance independence and power. According to Tannen, women and men have difficulty communicating with one another because of "cultural misunderstanding."

John Gray's 1992 best seller *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, discussed in Chapter 1, takes this argument a step farther by conceptualizing men and women as inhabitants of different planets. He put it this way:

Men and women differ in all areas of their lives. Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment. (p. 5)

According to Gray, these "interplanetary differences" are responsible for all the problems that people have in their opposite-sex relationships.

Most relationship researchers, however, do not take a position as extreme as Gray's. Some take a position similar to Tannen's in that they believe a different cultures

perspective can help explain communication differences between men and women (see Wood, 1994, 1996). According to this view, boys and girls grow up primarily playing in same-sex groups. Therefore, they learn different sets of rules and values, leading to distinct communication styles.

Some researchers, however, disagree with the different cultures perspective (Dindia, 1997). Instead, they believe that men and women are remarkably similar and that sex differences are small. These researchers are quick to point out that boys and girls grow up in a similar cultural environment, interacting with a variety of people, including teachers and family members, of both sexes. As Dindia has put it, "Men are from North Dakota, and women are from South Dakota."

What do you think? Andersen (1998b) summarized his take on the debate as follows:

The actual research on sex differences has led to one major, overall conclusion: Men and women are far more similar than different. They are not from different metaphoric planets or cultures. They are all earthlings with goals, hopes, dreams, emotions, fears, and communication behaviors that are a whole lot more similar than they are different. Of course, South Dakotans probably believe that North Dakotans are from another planet. From close range, differences are more obvious than similarities and they are certainly more newsworthy and sensational! From any vantage point other than Dakota, North and South Dakotans look pretty similar. (p. 83)

THE SEXUAL CHALLENGE This challenge involves coping with the potential sexual attraction that can be part of some cross-sex relationships. In the classic movie *When Harry Met Sally*, Harry declares that men and women cannot be friends because "the sex part always gets in the way." Although Harry's statement is extreme, it is true that cross-sex friends (particularly if both are heterosexual) are likely to think about sexual issues related to each other. In one study (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009), about 50% of the participants reported

having experienced sexual attraction toward a cross-sex friend. This percentage is higher for men, who tend to see their cross-sex friends as potential sexual partners far more often than do women (Abbey, 1982; Abbey & Melby, 1986; Shotland & Craig, 1988). Research has also shown that sex between friends is not uncommon. Although most cross-sex friends see themselves as strictly platonic (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005), nearly half of the college students surveyed in one study admitted to having had sex with a nonromantic friend (Afta & Faulkner, 2000).

These students also reported experiencing feelings of uncertainty after having sex with their friend. Later in this chapter, and also touched on in Chapter 1, we discuss the phenomenon of friends with benefits, which refers to nonromantic relationships between friends who have sex. Clearly, potential sexual attraction can complicate cross-sex friendships.

THE PUBLIC PRESENTATION CHALLENGE This challenge arises when other people assume there is something romantic or sexual going on in a cross-sex friendship. Cross-sex friends are sometimes careful about how they present their friendship to others and may be asked to explain the nature of their relationship to others. If you have a close cross-sex friend, you can probably relate to this. Have people ever asked you questions such as, “Are you really just friends?” or “Do you love her or him?” or “Have you ever slept together?” Romantic partners may also be suspicious and jealous of your close cross-sex friends leading to other complications.

Some scholars have criticized O’Meara’s four challenges for being applicable only to cross-sex heterosexual friendships. However, these challenges are also applicable to homosexual same-sex friends. Additionally, when one friend is homosexual and the other is heterosexual, these challenges may apply regardless of whether the friends are of the same or the opposite sex.

Coping With Romantic Intent

In cross-sex friendships that include at least one heterosexual partner, these challenges can make relational maintenance a complex and delicate matter (Werking, 1997). Two studies provide a closer look at how **romantic intent**, or the desire to move the friendship toward a romantic relationship, is related to maintenance behavior. The first of these studies (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005) examined four types of cross-sex friendships that differ in terms of romantic intent. Individuals in the *strictly platonic* group said that neither they nor their partner wanted the friendship to become romantic. Individuals in the *mutual romance* group said that both they and their partner wanted the friendship to become romantic.

they wanted the friendship to become romantic, but their partner wanted it to stay platonic. Finally, individuals in the *rejects-romance* group said that they wanted the friendship to stay platonic, but their partner wanted it to become romantic. In the second of these studies (Weger & Emmett, 2009), both friends reported on the degree of romantic intent that they felt toward their cross-sex friend. Together, these studies suggest that cross-sex friends report different levels of some maintenance behaviors depending on their romantic intentions.

Friends who have romantic intentions are especially likely to report using prosocial maintenance behavior. In Guerrero and Chavez’s (2005) study, friends in the mutual romance group said they used the most maintenance behaviors, which suggests that increases in maintenance behavior might mark a move from friendship toward romance. Those in the desires-romance group also reported relatively high levels of maintenance, with one notable exception: People who desired romance but believed that their friend did not were the least likely to report talking about the relationship with their friend, perhaps because they feared rejection and worried that confessing their feelings could jeopardize the friendship. In Weger and Emmett’s (2009) study, people who had romantic intentions toward their cross-sex friend were likely to report engaging in routine relationship activity, support and positivity, and flirtation, and were unlikely to report talking about the relationship with other people.

Individuals who reported low levels of romantic intent reported somewhat different patterns of maintenance behavior. In Guerrero and Chavez’s (2005) study, individuals in both the rejects-romance and strictly platonic groups reported using less joint activity and flirtation but more talk about outside relationships, such as referring often to their boyfriend or girlfriend. This suggests that individuals who want to keep the relationship platonic refrain from flirting with each other so as not to lead each other on. They also limit their public appearances by showing up at parties separately and engaging in less joint activity in public settings. This may be a way of managing O’Meara’s public presentation

spend together, others are less likely to see them as a potentially romantic couple. Finally, individuals in the rejects-romance and strictly platonic groups are especially likely to talk about their boyfriends, girlfriends, or spouses (assuming that they are already in another romantic relationship), perhaps as a way of signaling that they are already taken.

Keeping Friendships Platonic

Although some cross-sex friends have to deal with the sexual and romantic challenges O'Meara proposed, most cross-sex friends define their relationships as strictly platonic (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005; Messman et al., 2000). There are at least six reasons why people in cross-sex friendships want to maintain the status quo and keep their relationships platonic (Messman et al., 2000). First, people report that it is important to safeguard the relationship; people worry that a shift toward romance could hurt the quality of their friendship or result in a breakup. Second, people reveal that they are not attracted to their friend in a romantic or sexual way. Third, people say that there would be network disapproval if they became romantically involved with their friend; people in their social network might get upset. Fourth, people keep friendships platonic because one or both members of the friendship are already involved in another romantic relationship. Fifth,

people experience risk aversion, which involves feeling uncertain about the partner's reaction and worrying about potentially being hurt or disappointed. Finally, people take a time-out, meaning they do not want a serious romantic relationship with anyone at the present time.

Of these six reasons, safeguarding the relationship was the most common, followed by lack of attraction and network disapproval. Risk aversion and time-out were least common. Sex differences for keeping friendships platonic also exist. Women are more likely than men to want to safeguard the relationship and to say they are not attracted to their friend in a romantic way (Messman et al., 2000).

People also use different maintenance behaviors depending on their reason for keeping the friendship platonic. In particular, people who want to safeguard the relationship are most likely to report using openness, positivity, joint activities, and supportiveness in their friendships. People were most likely to say they used avoidance if they reported risk aversion, network disapproval, and time-out as reasons for keeping the relationship platonic. Finally, people who were unattached to their friend reported that they avoided flirting as a way to maintain the relationship. To determine why you may keep one of your friendships platonic rather than romantic, take the test in Box 10.5.

BOX 10.5 PUT YOURSELF TO THE TEST

WHY DO YOU KEEP ONE OF YOUR CLOSE CROSS-SEX FRIENDSHIPS PLATONIC?

Think about why you have kept a relationship with a good friend (of the opposite sex if you are heterosexual or the same sex if you are gay) platonic. Rate the following reasons using this scale: 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree			
<i>I keep our friendship platonic because:</i>							
1. My friend might reject me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My friend and/or I are already dating someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I do not want to risk losing our friendship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(Continued)

BOX 10.5 (Continued)

4. My friend is not the kind of person I want to be involved with in a romantic way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. At this time, I am not ready for a romantic relationship with anyone.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. My friend might end up hurting my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Other people would be upset if our relationship turned romantic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I value this person as a friend too much to change things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I think of this person <i>only</i> as a friend.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. My friend and/or I are already romantically involved with someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. This person is not sexually attractive to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I don't want to date anyone at this time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I am not sure that the romantic feelings I have for my friend are mutual.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Some of my friends or family would be upset with me if our friendship turned romantic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. My friend and/or I already have good romantic relationships with someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Getting romantic could cause problems within our social network.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Getting romantic could ruin our friendship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I'm not interested in a romantic relationship right now.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

To obtain your results, average your scores for the following items:

Emotional uncertainty: Items 1 + 6 + 13 = _____

Network disapproval: Items 7 + 14 + 16 = _____

Safeguard relationship: Items 3 + 8 + 17 = _____

Not attracted: Items 4 + 9 + 11 = _____

Time-out: Items 5 + 12 + 18 = _____

Third party: Items 2 + 10 + 15 = _____

Higher scores indicate stronger reasons for keeping your friendship platonic.

MAINTENANCE CHALLENGES IN OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

Cross-sex friends are not the only individuals who sometimes face special challenges in their relationships. Scholars have also identified friends-with-benefits relationships, long-distance relationships, and cohabiting relationships as especially challenging to maintain.

Friends-With-Benefits Relationships

In contrast to platonic friendships, some friends decide to have sex but stay friends rather than become a romantic couple. This type of relationship, which has been called a **friends-with-benefits relationship** in television shows and the popular press, is fairly common on college campuses. Across various studies, between 47% and 68% of college students report that they are currently or had previously been involved in at least one relationship characterized as friends with benefits (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; McGinty, Knox, & Zusman, 2007; Mongeau, Ramirez, & Vorrell, 2003; Reeder, 2000). The distinguishing characteristic of a friends-with-benefits relationship is that two people are having sex but do not consider themselves a romantic couple.

Although most studies have examined friends-with-benefits relationships as a form of cross-sex friendship, these relationships also occur between same-sex friends who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. They can also take many shapes and forms. Mongeau and his colleagues (2013) described seven types of friends-with-benefits relationships:

- **True Friends** (26.1%): Close friends who add sex to their friendship but don't consider themselves a couple even though they care about each other as friends
- **Network Opportunism** (14.5%): Partners within the same social network who are not particularly close but serve as a "sexual backup" if neither of them are with anyone else
- **Just Sex** (12.4%): Sexual partners whose interaction revolves almost exclusively around

planning and having sex without any real emotional connection

- **Transition Out/Ex-Sex** (11.2%): Former romantic partners who are no longer an official couple but continue or resume their sex relationship sometime after they break up
- **Intentional Transition In** (8.4%): Partners decide to start out in a friends-with-benefits relationship with the intention of becoming a couple if everything goes well and then they successfully make the transition to a romantic relationship
- **Unintentional Transition In** (7.6%): Partners intend to keep the relationship as friends with benefits but end up emotionally attached and become a couple
- **Failed Transition** (6.8%): One or both partners enter the friends-with-benefits relationship with the intention of eventually becoming a couple, but instead they do not move beyond being friends with benefits.

The percentages after each type represent the percentage of college students who described their most recent friends-with-benefits relationship this way. The total does not equal 100% because some of the descriptions did not fit neatly into one category. For example, in an on-again off-again relationship, what starts out as a transition out (ex sex) may turn into an intentional or unintentional transition back in. As can be seen, only a little more than half of friends-with-benefits relationships are between two people who consider themselves to be friends (ranging from casual to close friends). Just over one third of friends-with-benefits relationships are between people who either had, intend to have, or end up in a romantic relationship with their partner. Moreover, of those who intend to move their friends-with-benefits relationship to a romantic relationship, only a little more than half succeed.

College students have described several advantages and disadvantages associated with friends-with-benefits relationships. These advantages differ based on the type of friends-with-benefits

relationship people share. The overriding theme of the advantages is that a person is able to have “sex with a trusted other while avoiding commitment” (Bisson & Levine, 2009, p. 68), although this is mainly an advantage for those who are true friends, in the same network, just friends, or exes. Lack of commitment was mentioned as an advantage by almost 60% of students in Bisson and Levine’s study. A smaller percentage of students (7.3%) listed “becoming closer” as an advantage. This is likely an advantage for those who intend to become a couple or for those in an on-again off-again relationship. Nearly 9% said that there were no advantages associated with friends-with-benefits relationships, even though they had participated in one.

In terms of disadvantages, students worried that unreciprocated romantic feelings, jealousy, or hurt might develop, all of which could harm the friendship. Concern about developing romantic feelings was the top disadvantage, with over 65% of students mentioning this possibility. Some students also listed lack of commitment as a disadvantage rather than an advantage, and others noted the possible negative consequences of having sex as a disadvantage. These disadvantages reflect the different types of friends-with-benefits relationships. For partners who do not want to be more than friends, unreciprocated feelings is likely a top concern, but for those who want the relationship to turn into more, lack of commitment would be seen as a disadvantage.

There may also be differences in how men and women view the advantages and disadvantages associated with friends-with-benefits relationships. In one study, women were more likely to emphasize the “friends” part of the relationship by focusing on emotions, whereas men were more likely to emphasize the “benefits” part of the relationship by focusing on sex (McGinty et al., 2007).

Given that many participants in friends-with-benefits relationships worry about the possibility of developing romantic feelings, it is not surprising that about half the participants in Bisson and Levine’s (2009) study experienced

some uncertainty about their friends-with-benefits relationship. Sources of uncertainty included how they should label their relationship, how their relationship might change in the future, how they felt about each other now that they were having sex, whether they could stay friends, and how they could maintain their relationship. Despite this uncertainty, 76% of the students in the study said that they did not initiate any discussion about these issues, and 66% reported that they never negotiated any ground rules for the relationship.

When friends with benefits do talk about these issues, they appear to focus on establishing rules that help them maintain their relationship so that neither party gets hurt. According to research by Hughes and colleagues (2005), the most common rule in friends-with-benefits relationships involves staying emotionally detached. Friends with benefits often agree not to get jealous or fall in love with one another (Hughes et al., 2005). This rule is probably only important in friends with benefits who fit the categories of true friends, just sex, network opportunism, and sometimes transition out. Other rules for maintaining these friendships include negotiations about sexual activity (e.g., agreeing to use condoms), communication (e.g., making rules about calling one another, being honest about other relationships), secrecy (e.g., agreeing not to tell common friends that they have sex), permanence (e.g., agreeing that the sexual part of the relationship is only temporary), and the friendship (e.g., agreeing to value the friendship over the sexual relationship).

Although many of these maintenance rules help friends with benefits maintain the status quo, this type of relationship sometimes ends completely, returns to friendship only (no sex), or turns into a romantic relationship (Hughes et al., 2005). Friends with benefits often keep the sexual aspect of their relationship private, yet Hughes and her colleagues found that these friendships are more likely to continue if their broader network of friends is accepting of the

type of relationship they have. Of course, these types of friendships can be fraught with all kinds of challenges, including one friend wanting the relationship to turn romantic while the other person does not, or an ex using sex to try to get a former partner back when the partner just wants a friends-with-benefits relationship. Compared to other types of relationships, the friends-with-benefits relationship is probably one of the most challenging to maintain.

Long-Distance Relationships

Long-distance relationships can also be challenging to maintain. Many people have been in at least one long-distance romantic relationship, and virtually everyone has been in a long-distance relationship of some sort, whether it be with a friend or family member. With more individuals pursuing higher education, more couples having dual professional careers, and more people immigrating to the United States, the number of romantic partners separated by large distances is increasing. Within the college student population, between 25% and 50% of romantic relationships are long distance (Stafford, 2005) and approximately 3 million happily married couples in the United States are living apart at any given time (Bergen, Kirby, & McBride, 2007). Military couples, who make up part of this group, commonly face months of separation followed by reunions.

A primary challenge for maintaining long-distance romantic relationships is the lack of face-to-face communication (Stafford & Merolla, 2007), which is believed to be the glue that holds romantic relationships together. How, then, can couples stay close if partners are unable to engage in much face-to-face communication? Distance also prevents partners in long-distance relationships from displaying nonverbal affection, sharing most activities or tasks, and engaging in the same type of daily routine talk as couples in proximal relationships do. Indeed, studies show that people in long-distance relationships generally use less maintenance behavior, such as openness, assurances, and

joint activities, than people in geographically close relationships (Johnson, 2001; Van Horn et al., 1997). Yet many long-distance couples maintain happy relationships. In fact, studies suggest that individuals in romantic long-distance relationships are just as happy and maybe even more “in love” with their partners than are people in proximal romantic relationships (Dargie, Blair, Goldfinger, & Pukall, 2015; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990). Similarly, friends in long-distance relationships report as much relational satisfaction as friends in geographically close relationships (Johnson, 2001).

The concept of **idealization** has been offered as an explanation for why some long-distance relationships stay satisfying despite the lack of face-to-face interaction (Stafford & Reske, 1990). Idealization occurs when people describe their relationship and their partner in glowing, overly positive terms that sometimes reflect unrealistic expectations (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). This type of idealization keeps people committed to their relationships; dating couples are more likely to believe that they will get married one day if they idealize each other (Stafford & Reske, 1990). At first, it may seem counterintuitive that long-distance couples would idealize their relationships more than proximal couples would, but considering that people in such relationships were usually close before separating, these findings make sense. Moreover, partners in romantic long-distance relationships often think about how great their lives would be if they could be with their partners more of the time, making idealization more likely (Stafford & Reske, 1990); in this case, “absence indeed makes the heart grow fonder.” Idealization may also be fueled by some of the communication patterns that typically occur in long-distance relationships, including reliance on mediated communication and the tendency to be on one’s best behavior when together.

People in long-distance relationships often compensate for the lack of face-to-face communication by increasing their use of texting, snapping, and social media to maintain their relationships. Studies

have shown that romantic couples (Billede, Kerkhof, & Finkenauer, 2015) and friends (Vitak, 2014) who are in long-distance relationships use Facebook to maintain closeness more than do people who live near one another. Vitak (2014) identified four ways people use Facebook to maintain relationships: (a) supportive communication such as liking posts, (b) sharing interests, such as joining common Facebook groups, (c) passive browsing, such as scrolling through the partner's timeline, and (d) social information seeking, such as checking for updates. The latter two types of maintenance can provide information that is helpful when having voice-to-voice phone conversations or Facetime. Using Skype is also related to being satisfied in a long-distance relationship (Kirk, 2013), presumably because it allows people to talk in real time while seeing one another.

Maintenance through media such as texting and social media may offer a skewed perception of a partner's communication style, in part because people can control their communication more in mediated contexts than they can in face-to-face contexts (Stafford & Merolla, 2007), which can lead to more-intimate interactions and more idealization. For example, partners likely pick up the phone when they feel like talking, something over which each partner has almost complete control. Moreover, if someone is not in the mood to talk, it is easy to let the call go to voicemail, or to ask the partner to call back at another time. One study found that, in long-distance relationships, texts, video chats, and phone calls are usually rated as highly intimate because partners focus on presenting themselves in a positive light and reducing uncertainty (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Similar findings have been found for Internet-based relationships (Wright, 2004). People who send electronic messages showing positivity and openness tend to be regarded favorably by their Internet partners.

As these examples illustrate, individuals in long-distance relationships are typically on their best relational behavior when they are together. Compared to those in geographically close

relationships, people in long-distance relationships tend to engage in less joint activities, task sharing, and social networking (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Johnson, 2001), especially if they have limited contact with one another. However, when people in a long-distance relationship do get together, they often plan shared activities more carefully; work hard to treat each other in a fair and equitable manner; and have long, in-depth discussions. People in long-distance relationships often prepare well in advance for weekend visits and present an image of themselves that may not be consistent with the day-to-day reality of their lives. Dinner reservations are made, work calendars are cleared, and plans with friends and family are often suspended so the partners can spend quality time alone. Partners in proximal relationships seldom make such accommodations for each other. Thus, compared to partners in proximal relationships, partners in long-distance relationships often perceive that their communication is more restricted but of higher quality (Stafford & Reske, 1990). As Johnson (2001) stated, it may be the quality rather than the quantity of communication that is most important when it comes to maintaining long-distance relationships.

Although idealization helps long-distance partners maintain their relationships, it can also lead to difficulties when the relationship becomes proximal (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Suddenly, the once seemingly perfect partner needs to study or write a report for work when the other partner wants to spend quality time together, and the sensitive issues that were never discussed over Facetime lead to conflict in actual face-to-face interaction. Stafford and Merolla found that long distance couples who moved close to one another were twice as likely to break up as those who remained apart. The more long-distance couples had idealized each other and their relationship, the more likely they were to break up after they moved near one another. This research suggests that partners in long-distance relationships may need to work to keep their expectations realistic so

that they are not disappointed once the relationship becomes proximal. Some level of idealization is healthy in both proximal and long-distance relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996), but too much idealization in long-distance relationships appears to make the transition to a proximal relationship more difficult (Stafford & Merolla, 2007).

Interestingly, military couples who often cycle back and forth between living together and living apart have some particularly helpful strategies and perspectives for dealing with separation and reunion. Army wives reported some paradoxes in how they would maintain their relationships before, during, and after their husbands' deployment (Maguire, Heinemann-LaFave, & Sahlstein, 2013). Some recognized that there could be too much communication while they were separated. For example, if they shared too much while they were separated they would have less to talk about when reunited. One of the wives also noted that it was hard to stay connected on WebCam because she couldn't reach out and touch her husband, and another said that when her husband sent her gifts, it just made her miss him more. Wives also reported activities such as focusing on themselves and writing their thoughts and feelings down in a journal as ways to cope with the separation. These types of maintenance strategies may help reduce idealization in couples who endure repeated separations.

In sum, the good news is that long-distance relationships are as stable and satisfying, and perhaps more emotionally intense, than are proximal relationships (Van Horn et al., 1997). The bad news is that friends and romantic partners in long-distance relationships sometimes get frustrated with their lack of face-to-face communication (Rohlfing, 1995). Romantic partners in long-distance relationships also need to ensure that their positive perceptions of each other are not a function of idealization. This may be the biggest challenge facing long-distance partners who wish to maintain their relationships.

Cohabiting Relationships

Cohabitation, or living together without being married, can also pose some special challenges when it comes to maintaining relationships. Most couples initially view cohabitation as a transitional period that occurs between dating and marriage, or as a sort of precursor to marriage, and most couples in the United States live together for at least a short time before marrying (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012). In a large survey of cohabiting and dating couples, Willoughby, Carroll, and Busby (2011) found that 92.5% of cohabiting couples were planning to marry each other someday, but not necessarily soon. Yet studies suggest that fewer than half of cohabiting partners end up getting married to each other. In a study conducted from 2006 to 2010 by the National Center for Health, around 40% of the couples who were cohabiting at the beginning of the study were married three years later, around 32% were still living together but not married, and about 27% were no longer together ("Key Statistics," 2015).

The question then becomes this: Are cohabiting couples less likely to maintain their relationships than couples who do not live together before marriage? In line with this question, much of the research on cohabitation has focused on determining whether cohabitation is beneficial or harmful to long-term relationships. Researchers have compared couples who married without cohabiting first to couples who cohabited before getting married. Researchers have also compared cohabiting couples who marry to those who do not. These studies have focused on a number of issues, including relationship stability, relational quality, and communication patterns.

RELATIONSHIP STABILITY In general, marital relationships are more stable than cohabiting relationships. Some scholars have argued that cohabitation represents a looser bond than marriage because cohabitation involves more autonomy, less

commitment, and fewer social and legal barriers to dissolution than does marriage (Thornton, Axinn, & Teachman, 1995). For instance, a cohabiting couple is less likely to share property than a marital couple, and cohabiting couples can break up without having to file any legal paperwork. The **selection effect** provides another explanation for the instability found in some cohabiting relationships (Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995). According to the selection effect, people who choose to cohabit rather than marry have certain preexisting personal characteristics and attitudes that make it less likely that their relationships will last. These attitudes include greater acceptance of divorce and premarital sex, stronger needs for autonomy, and more negative feelings about marriage (Cunningham & Antill, 1994; Lillard et al., 1995; Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990). Willoughby and his colleagues (2011) summarized research showing that throughout the 21st century in the United States there has been a consistent pattern with couples who cohabit before marriage more likely to divorce than couples who do not; and this pattern is found in other cultures as well. However, the timing of cohabitation makes a difference. Couples who wait to move in together until after they are engaged are less prone to divorce than couples who move in together without being engaged (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009).

RELATIONAL QUALITY Some studies have shown that married couples who do not live together prior to marriage are more satisfied with their relationships than are cohabiting couples or couples who transition from cohabitation to marriage (Nock, 1995; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004). Other studies found no difference (Yelsma, 1986). Brown and Booth (1996) found that cohabitators who planned to get married were just as satisfied with their relationships as married couples, whereas cohabitators who did not plan to marry were less satisfied. Similarly, Willoughby et al. (2011) demonstrated that couples who waited to move in together until they

were engaged had better marriages than those who moved in earlier. Another study showed that when couples make the transition from dating to cohabiting there is a decline in satisfaction but an increase in commitment. There are also more constraints keeping the couple from breaking up (Rhoades et al., 2012). Shared bills and possessions, a common social network, and a more public display of commitment all work to keep cohabiting couples together.

Importantly, time in the relationship may be a better predictor of relational satisfaction than whether a couple lived together before marriage. Satisfaction levels appear to decrease over time in marriages regardless of whether couples cohabited or not (Stafford et al., 2004). This same pattern has been found in relationships between cohabiting gay and lesbian couples. In one study, satisfaction dropped during the first year that gay and lesbian couples lived together but then rebounded again after they had lived together 11 years or longer (Kurdek, 1989). Couples who move directly toward marriage may still be in the honeymoon phase of their relationships, and, therefore, might still be on their best behavior, using a lot of prosocial maintenance behaviors. Those who cohabited before marriage may have already moved beyond the honeymoon stage. Thus, some of the differences that researchers have found may be due more to time in the relationship than whether a couple had cohabited (Stafford et al., 2004).

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS Time may also be a better predictor of communication patterns than whether a couple cohabited or not. Stafford and her colleagues (2004) compared three types of couples at two points in time over a 5-year period: (1) cohabiting couples who had not married, (2) transitioned couples who had moved from cohabiting to marriage, and (3) married couples. Across all three types of couples, people reported less satisfaction, less sexual interaction, more conflict, and more heated arguing over time. There

were also some small differences in communication among the three types of couples. Cohabiting couples reported the most conflict, followed by transitioned couples. Married couples reported the least conflict. Cohabiting couples were also more likely to report violent behavior, such as hitting or throwing something, than either transitioned or married couples.

Other studies have found similar results. Brownridge and Halli (2000) reported that couples who lived together before marriage were 54% more likely to engage in violent behavior than couples who did not live together prior to marriage. Another study showed that cohabiting couples have more conflict than married couples (Nock, 1995). However, these differences may be strongest when the comparison is between married couples and cohabiting couples who do not plan to marry. Cohabiting couples who plan to marry do not differ from married couples in terms of conflict or violence (Brown & Booth, 1996).

Together, these studies suggest that cohabiting relationships are most likely to be characterized by satisfaction and high-quality communication when the couple plans to marry. In addition, it is important that partners have congruent perceptions about the future of the relationship and when they will marry. Willoughby and his colleagues (2011) classified couples into the following four groups:

- **Engaged, Incongruent** (around 59% of cohabiting couples): The couple plans to marry but each partner has different perceptions about when and how soon this will happen.
- **Engaged, Fast** (around 19% of cohabiting couples): The couple plans to marry and both agree that it will be soon.
- **Engaged, Slow** (around 14% of cohabiting couples): The couple plans to marry and both agree that it will not be for a while.
- **Not Engaged** (around 7.5% of cohabiting couples): The couple has no plans to marry.

The couples who were in the engaged/fast and engaged/slow groups fared the best in terms of relational satisfaction and better communication. This suggests that partners who are engaged and have a similar view of when they will marry have the easiest time maintaining their relationships. Unfortunately, though, in Willoughby et al.'s (2011) study most partners did not have congruent perspectives on when they would marry. It is important to remember that cohabiting relationships that are characterized by positive interaction and low levels of destructive conflict are usually as stable and satisfying as happy marriages (Brown, 2000). Therefore, using some of the prosocial maintenance behaviors discussed earlier, such as positivity and constructive conflict management, may be especially important for sustaining cohabiting relationships.

EQUITY THEORY

Equity also plays an important role in maintaining many types of relationships and may be especially important when people live together. Equity theory focuses on determining whether the distribution of resources is fair to both relational partners (Deutsch, 1985). Equity is measured by comparing the ratio of contributions (or costs) and benefits (or rewards) for each person. The key word here is *ratio*. Partners do not have to receive equal benefits (e.g., receiving the same amount of love, care, and financial security) or make equal contributions (e.g., investing the same amount of effort, time, and financial resources) as long as the ratio between these benefits and contributions is similar.

For example, as they prepare for their upcoming wedding, Rachel might put a lot more effort into planning and making the arrangements than Yasser, but having a certain type of wedding may also be more important to Rachel than to Yasser. Thus, even though Rachel is making more contributions, she is also getting more benefits when it comes to planning the wedding. To put it in numeric terms, Rachel may be making 10 contributions to planning the wedding, but she will also reap 20 benefits. Yasser, on the

other hand, may be making five contributions, but getting only 10 benefits. Their ratios of 10 to 20 and 5 to 10 are equitable—they both get two benefits for each contribution they make in connection to their wedding.

When determining how equitable or inequitable a relationship is, it is also important to consider that both equity and **inequity** occur at general levels as well as specific levels (Henningsen, Serewicz, & Carpenter, 2009). **General equity** (or inequity) represents an overall assessment of balance between two people's benefits and contributions. **Specific equity** focuses on the balance between people's benefits and contributions in a specific area, such as physical attractiveness, financial resources, social status, ability to influence each other, and supportiveness. A relationship can be unbalanced in terms of specific equity but balanced overall. For example, Yasser and Rachel's relationship is unequal but equitable when it comes to the wedding plans, but it may not be equitable in other areas. When it comes to the household chores, Rachel may do more than Yasser, leading her to feel frustrated at times. Yet Yasser may work harder to maintain their relationship by doing special things for Rachel, such as fixing her a nice dinner or rubbing her back and shoulders when she is tired after a long day's work. In terms of relational maintenance, then, Yasser does more than Rachel. Because each of them makes more contributions in some areas than others, their level of general equity may be balanced.

Principles of Equity Theory

Since Yasser and Rachel have an equitable relationship, they are likely to experience more satisfaction and commitment than a couple in an inequitable relationship would, largely because people feel distress when inequity is perceived to exist (Adams, 1965; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Five principles help explain why benefits and equity are associated with relational satisfaction and commitment (Canary & Stafford, 2001; Guerrero, La Valley, & Farinelli, 2008; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978):

1. Individuals try to maximize their benefits so that the benefits they receive in their relationships outweigh their costs and contributions.
2. People in groups and dyads develop rules for distributing resources fairly.
3. Within groups and dyads, people will reward those who treat them equitably and punish those who treat them inequitably.
4. When individuals are in inequitable relationships, they will experience distress. This distress will lead them to try to restore equity, such that the more distress they experience, the harder they will try to alleviate that stress.
5. Individuals in equitable relationships experience more satisfaction. They also engage in more prosocial communication, including relational maintenance behavior, than do individuals in inequitable relationships.

These principles have been tested and supported for people in the United States and other Western cultures. In other cultures, equity may operate differently (see Box 10.6).

BENEFITS OF EQUITY Around half of spouses report that their marriages are equitable (Peterson, 1990). Partners who perceive equity tend to be satisfied with and committed to their relationships. Early work on equity theory showed that individuals who perceived their dating relationships to be equitable reported being happier and more content than those who perceived their dating relationships to be inequitable (Walster, Walster, & Traupmann, 1978). Later work on married couples showed that people who perceive equity or see themselves as overbenefited are happier than those who perceive themselves as underbenefited (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999; Guerrero et al., 2008). Couples who perceive equity also tend to report more commitment to their relationships (Crawford, Feng, Fischer, & Diana, 2003). Equity in specific areas is also related to satisfaction and commitment. For example, one study showed that when partners are equitable in how much they influence one another, they report more

BOX 10.6 AROUND THE WORLD EQUITY ACROSS DIFFERENT CULTURES

Some researchers have suggested that equity and equality are valued differently depending on how fairness is conceptualized within a culture. People in Australia, North America (excluding Mexico), and Western Europe prefer equity, which means that they believe resources should be distributed based on the contributions people make. In contrast, people in Asia and Eastern Europe prefer **equality**, which means that they believe resources should be distributed equally among people regardless of their contributions (Carson & Banuazizi, 2008; Leung, 1988; Powell, 2005). For example, one study showed that people from the United States preferred equity more than people from Korea (Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990). Another study showed that inequity was related to anger and decreased liking for

people from the United States but not for people from Korea (Westerman, Park, & Lee, 2007). Yum and Canary (2009) examined the link between equity and relational maintenance behavior, such as being positive and open, in six countries—China, the Czech Republic, Japan, South Korea, Spain, and the United States. This link was strongest in the United States, followed by Spain. In these countries, people reported using more prosocial communication to maintain relationships that were perceived as equitable. However, equity was not related to maintenance behavior in China, the Czech Republic, Japan, or South Korea. These findings highlight that while equity is an important concept in the United States and other Western cultures, it is somewhat less important in other cultures.

satisfaction and commitment in their relationship (Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch, 2006).

Communication patterns may contribute to the satisfaction that couples in equitable relationships experience. For instance, couples and friends in equitable relationships report using more relational maintenance behavior than those in inequitable relationships (Canary & Stafford, 2001; Messman et al., 2000; Stafford & Canary, 2006). In particular, the maintenance behaviors of positivity, openness, and assurances are related to equity. Couples in equitable relationships also say that they express anger, guilt, and sadness in more constructive ways than do couples in inequitable relationships (Guerrero et al., 2008). For example, they talk about their anger in an assertive manner without resorting to aggression.

When relationships are inequitable, one individual is **overbenefited** and the other is **underbenefited** (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). The overbenefited individual receives more benefits or makes fewer contributions, or both, than does the partner, so that the ratio between them is unbalanced. In simple terms, this person is getting the “better deal.” In the scenario depicting Rachel as

doing more household chores than Yasser, Yasser is overbenefited. The underbenefited individual, by contrast, receives fewer benefits or makes greater contributions than does the partner, so that the ratio between them is not balanced. This person is getting the “worse deal,” as Rachel is when it comes to doing the household chores. Theoretically, inequity should always entail one person being overbenefited and the other person being underbenefited. However, perception does not always match reality. Because people tend to overestimate their own contributions to relationships, both dyadic members might think they are underbenefited even though this is not actually the case. For example, in a classic study by Ross and Sicoly (1979), husbands and wives rated the degree to which they had responsibility for various activities, such as caring for the children, washing the dishes, and handling the finances, on a scale from 0 (no responsibility) to 150 (complete responsibility). Thus, if a husband and wife split the task of doing the dishes evenly, both should have rated their responsibility at the 75-point midpoint. However, the results suggested that 73% of the spouses overestimated the amount of work they did; when their

ratings were summed and averaged across all the activities, they totaled over 150 points. (Apparently, a lot of dishes were being cleaned twice!) As this example illustrates, relational partners like Rachel and Yasser might both perceive themselves to be underbenefited, but in reality, it would be impossible for each person to be getting a worse deal than the other.

CONSEQUENCES OF UNDERBENEFITED INEQUITY According to equity theory, whether people are over- or underbenefited, they experience increases in distress and decreases in satisfaction and happiness (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Of course, underbenefited individuals experience a different kind of stress than overbenefited individuals. As you might suspect, underbenefited individuals are usually more distressed than overbenefited individuals (Canary & Stafford, 1994). They also report the least relational satisfaction (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999; Guerrero et al., 2008). When people are underbenefited, they tend to feel cheated, used, and taken for granted, and they experience anger or sadness (Walster, Walster, & Traupmann, 1978). Men may be particularly likely to be angry when they are underbenefited, while women may be especially likely to be sad, disappointed, or frustrated (Sprecher, 1986, 2001). Both men and women report expressing anger more aggressively when they are in the underbenefited position (Guerrero et al., 2008).

Underbenefited individuals also report that both they and their partners use less prosocial forms of communication. In a study on relational maintenance behaviors, underbenefited husbands reported that their wives used less positivity, offered fewer assurances, and shared fewer tasks than did overbenefited husbands and husbands in equitable relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Therefore, people may feel underbenefited if they do not receive adequate amounts of relational maintenance. Another study showed that the more women are underbenefited, the less likely they are to use positivity and social networking (Ledbetter et al., 2013). People who are underbenefited in terms of supportiveness

or physical attractiveness put less effort into comforting their partners when they are distressed (Henningesen et al., 2009). These studies suggest that people who are underbenefited might not feel like exerting much effort into maintaining a dissatisfying or unfair relationship. Doing so could make them even more underbenefited.

CONSEQUENCES OF OVERBENEFITED INEQUITY Overbenefited individuals tend to experience less distress than their underbenefited counterparts but more distress than individuals who are in equitable relationships (Guerrero et al., 2008; Sprecher, 1986, 2001; Walster, Walster, & Traupmann, 1978). People who perceive themselves as overbenefited may also feel smothered and wish that their partner would spend less time doing things for them. One study showed that overbenefited wives tend to express guilt by apologizing and doing nice things for their husbands (Guerrero et al., 2008). Another study showed that people who are overbenefited in terms of the balance of supportiveness in their relationship report using the most sophisticated comforting strategies when their partner is distressed (Henningesen et al., 2009). Thus, when people perceive themselves to be overbenefited, they might use prosocial behaviors to try to balance their relationships by increasing their partner's rewards. Yet some research shows that people in the overbenefited position use less relational maintenance behavior. For example, Ledbetter et al. (2013) found that the more overbenefited people were, the less likely they were to use social networking and task sharing. Both of these activities involves spending time together, so perhaps overbenefited individuals avoid these behaviors so as not to feel overwhelmed or smothered in a relationship where they already get a high level of benefits.

Not surprisingly, some overbenefited men and women feel quite content with their relationships and not guilty at all (Hatfield, Greenberger, Traupmann, & Lambert, 1982; Traupmann, Hatfield, & Wexler, 1983). One study even showed that people are increasingly happy the more

overbenefited they are (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999). People may need to be highly overbenefited before they experience distress and guilt. By contrast, being even somewhat underbenefited can lead to anger and frustration. In any case, if people perceive enough inequity, feelings of anger, sadness, and guilt may pervade the emotional fabric of the relationship and threaten its stability.

Reducing Distress in Inequitable Relationships

What happens when relational partners experience inequity and distress? According to Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978), they will be motivated to reduce inequity and the accompanying distress. There are three general ways to do this. The first two ways can help people maintain their relationships—they can either restore actual equity or adjust their perceptions. The third option is to leave the relationship.

RESTORING ACTUAL EQUITY People can attempt to restore actual equity by changing their behavior. For example, the overbenefited partner might contribute more to the relationship, whereas the underbenefited partner might do less. Alternatively, the underbenefited partner might ask the overbenefited partner to do more. Some research suggests that underbenefited people are more likely to ask their partners to change their behaviors to restore equity, whereas overbenefited people are more likely to change their own behavior (Westerman et al., 2007). This makes sense from an equity theory standpoint. Underbenefited individuals probably feel that they are already in a disadvantaged position, so why should they change their behavior? Overbenefited individuals, on the other hand, may change their behavior to make the relationship more equitable, thereby protecting the benefits they gain from being in the relationship.

ADJUSTING PSYCHOLOGICAL EQUITY People can also attempt to restore psychological equity. Recall that to some extent equity is “in the eye of

the beholder” in that perceptions are as important as actions. To restore equity, people sometimes reassess their costs and benefits and decide that they are actually getting a fairer deal than they first thought. For instance, if Rachel gets really frustrated about putting more effort into the household chores, she might take a minute and reflect on all he does for her. She might realize that Yasser actually does a lot for her. He massages her when her back and shoulders hurt, even if he is bone tired, and he regularly proofreads reports before she submits them to her boss, just to double-check that everything is right. When she thinks about all the special things he does for her—both on a routine basis and as a special treat—she recognizes that in actuality she is getting a fair deal. Sometimes mental adjustments such as these represent the situation more accurately than an initial assessment. However, there is also a potential danger in using this strategy. Individuals might continually readjust their perceptions even though the situation is, in actuality, inequitable. If this happens, a person might remain stuck in the underbenefited or overbenefited position.

LEAVING THE RELATIONSHIP Sometimes people temporarily leave as a way to try to restore equity. For example, Rachel could leave for a few days so that Yasser realizes how messy the place would be if she were not there to clean it up. Another way to restore equity, which is sometimes a last resort, is to end the relationship entirely. This is most likely to occur when people are receiving few benefits and making considerable contributions to the relationship, as explained next.

Combined Influence of Benefit-Cost Ratios and Equity

Although equity relates to a host of positive processes in relationships, equity does not tell the whole story. To be highly satisfied, a couple also needs to be in a relationship in which benefits outweigh costs. **Costs** include people’s contributions, such as the time and effort they put into accomplishing tasks and maintaining their relationships, as well as the negative

consequences of being in a relationship, such as having conflict and losing opportunities. Studies by Cate and his associates showed that the overall level of benefits (or rewards) associated with a relationship is more important than equity (Cate & Lloyd, 1988; Cate, Lloyd, & Henton, 1985; Cate, Lloyd, & Long, 1988). Some level of inequity might be inconsequential if both partners are receiving enough benefits. Thus, relationships that are characterized by equity as well as high levels of benefits are most likely to be satisfying. Relationships that are inequitable with benefits outweighing costs should also be satisfying, especially if the benefits are high and the inequity is fairly small. By contrast, relationships that are equitable with costs outweighing benefits are likely to be perceived as fair but somewhat dissatisfying. Finally, inequitable relationships in which costs outweigh benefits are the least satisfying.

Let's take a look at some examples that illustrate how equity and benefit-cost levels work together. Imagine that Joe and Darren are in a satisfied, committed relationship. Suppose that Joe receives 25 benefits for every 5 contributions he makes to his relationship with Darren. This means that Joe has a benefit-contribution ratio of 25:5. Darren has a ratio of 50:10. Is their relationship equitable or inequitable? Because both Joe and Darren are receiving five benefits per contribution, their relationship is

equitable. Notice that for the relationship to be equitable, Joe and Darren do not have to be receiving the exact same number of benefits, nor do they have to be making the same number of contributions. Instead, the ratios between each person's benefits and contributions must be the same. Notice also that their benefits outweigh their costs. Thus, Darren and Joe's relationship is equitable and rewarding and as a consequence satisfying.

In other cases, relationships can be equitable without being particularly rewarding. Imagine that Garrett has a benefit-contribution ratio of 15:30 while Sophia has a benefit-contribution ratio of 10:20. Both individuals are getting one benefit for every two contributions they make, so the relationship is equitable. But would Garrett and Sophia have a satisfying relationship? The answer seems to be yes and no. They might be satisfied in that both are getting a fair deal but dissatisfied because they are not maximizing their benefits, which, as discussed previously, is the first principle of equity theory. It would be better to be in a relationship where benefits outweigh costs even if that relationship was somewhat inequitable. In this case, if they wanted to maintain their relationship, it might be wise for Garrett and Sophia to increase their use of prosocial maintenance behavior so that they would both be receiving more benefits.

SUMMARY AND APPLICATION

The research on relational maintenance offers couples such as Rachel and Yasser advice about how to keep their relationship strong. Both routine and strategic maintenance are related to satisfaction, but routine behavior may be a little more important. Therefore, it is essential that Yasser and Rachel settle into a routine that includes prosocial maintenance behaviors, such as asking about each other's day and sharing tasks in a fair and equitable manner. For married couples, positivity and assurances appear to be especially effective maintenance behaviors. Rachel therefore

might try to compliment Yasser once in a while and to act cheerful and optimistic. Rachel might periodically offer Yasser assurances that she loves him and is committed to their relationship. Yasser should do the same. The couple should also focus on doing things together such as joint activities and social networking, as maintenance behavior. Engaging in these activities creates a partnership, reinforces similarity, and allows couples to have fun together.

Rachel wondered if getting married would change their relationship. It likely would.

Long-term committed relationships, such as marriage, tend to contain less openness but more social networking, task sharing, and constructive conflict management. Although Rachel and Yasser may engage in especially high levels of maintenance at the beginning of their marriage, these levels are likely to drop over time, especially if they have children. Later in life, however, maintenance behaviors may show a resurgence when they retire or their children leave the nest, giving Rachel and Yasser more time to spend together. Cohabiting before their marriage could also change their relationship. Research suggests that couples who cohabit before marrying sometimes have more conflict and are more likely to divorce than couples who do not live together before marriage. However, Rachel and Yasser are much less likely to experience these problems because they are engaged and already planning a wedding, rather than cohabiting without being seriously committed to one another.

As the wedding approaches, Rachel may get absorbed in the planning and, as a result, pay less attention to Yasser. This is why routine maintenance is so important: Routine patterns of prosocial maintenance behavior help sustain

relationships even when couples have little time to focus on one another. Yasser might feel a little neglected, and Rachel may feel overworked because she is doing a disproportionate share of the wedding planning and the household chores. This is where equity theory comes in. One of the cornerstones of a happy relationship is that partners believe that resources are being shared in an equitable manner, such that there is a fair distribution of benefits and costs in a relationship. It is also important that both partners are getting more benefits than costs. For Rachel and Yasser, there may be inequity in some areas. Rachel is doing more of the wedding planning and household chores. Yasser generally does more favors and other special things for Rachel. But when everything is considered together, the relationship is balanced. Even more importantly, both Yasser and Rachel are receiving more benefits than costs as a result of being in a relationship together. Keeping benefits high in comparison to costs, sustaining equity, and using prosocial maintenance behavior are some of the secret ingredients that help couples like Yasser's parents maintain a happy relationship across the years.

KEY TERMS

avoidance (p. 261)

costs (p. 283)

cyber migrant relationships
(p. 263)

equality (p. 281)

equity (p. 279)

equity theory (p. 258)

failed transition, as a type
of friends-with-benefits
relationship (p. 273)

friends-with-benefits
relationship (p. 273)

general equity (p. 280)

idealization (p. 275)

inequity (p. 280)

intentional transition in, as
a type of friends-with-
benefits relationship
(p. 273)

jealousy induction (p. 261)

just sex, as a type of friends-
with-benefits relationship
(p. 273)

modality (p. 259)

network opportunism, as
a type of friends-with-

benefits relationship
(p. 273)

overbenefited (p. 281)

Pinocchio relationships
(p. 263)

relational maintenance
(p. 258)

relational satisfaction (p. 259)

romantic intent (p. 270)

routine maintenance
behaviors (p. 265)

selection effect (p. 278)

specific equity (p. 280)