

partners to become close, they will have to disclose personal information to each other. Disclosing information in either relationship, however, opens the disclosing party to criticisms of core aspects of the self. When something we say is disconfirmed, our sense of self can also be put in jeopardy, especially when the content of our disclosure is part of our core self.

The second theory, **Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPMT)**, expands on this notion of openness-closedness. According to CPMT, "we are constantly in a balancing act" in close relationships (Petronio 2002, 1) with the primary tension being between privacy and disclosure. Private information is different for everyone, but it is most akin to the personal information described within Social Penetration Theory (see above). So, while you may choose *not* to reveal your attitude about a particular political candidate by "liking" a post submitted by a Facebook friend, others may readily "like" the post. Indeed, others may readily display political and other personal attitudes for not only their social network, but they may elect to display that information to anyone who cares to know it (i.e., make it "public" information on Facebook). Privacy is "the feeling that one has the right to own private information, either personally or collectively" (6). When you elect, for instance, to not share information on Facebook, you are enacting a **privacy boundary**. As our political attitudes example illustrates, we all have different boundaries (and we even have different boundaries for different people in our lives).

The consequences of the tension between privacy and disclosure for close relationships have much to do with a secondary tension highlighted by CPMT—**autonomy-connectedness**. When we disclose personal information with others we feel close (connected), but at the same time we lose a bit of our independence (autonomy). Similarly, when we keep information private or choose not to disclose details of our self to others, we retain autonomy but miss out on a potential to connect. Thus, we manage the privacy-disclosure tension in conjunction with the autonomy-connectedness tension, attempting to balance our needs for privacy with those of disclosure and continually managing how interdependent we want to be with others (i.e., how connected or autonomous).

As these theories relate to uncertainty in particular, each suggests that uncertainty is not necessarily a "bad" thing (see above critiques). Indeed, we continually seek to manage the level of certainty we desire in our various close relationships. Popular belief has it that mystery is a good thing in relationships—and there is some truth to that! As both RDT and CPMT suggest, people have opposing interpersonal needs. Knowing too much about a person can cause boredom ("Oh no! Not *that* story again!"), but knowing too little might cause worry ("Why have I never heard this story?"). Like privacy-disclosure, autonomy-connectedness, and openness-closedness, there is a dialectical tension between certainty and uncertainty in close relationships. This dialectic is generally called **novelty-predictability**. On the one hand we like surprise, change, and newness in our relationships, while on the other we enjoy routine, stability, and sameness. If you and your dating partner always go out to eat on Saturday night you are setting a routine, though you might try new restaurants or even do something other than go out to eat every once-and-a-while to keep it "fresh." Thus, in our most intimate relationships there is needed balance between certainty and uncertainty.

The Relationship Turbulence Model

The fact that we seek both certainty and uncertainty in our closest personal relationships is also acknowledged by our final theory in the process from initial interactions to intimacy, the **Relational Turbulence Model (RTM)**. The RTM is a

general theory of how relationships progress focusing on several mechanisms that explain the fluctuation in intimacy. The RTM was also one of the first to attempt to discover how uncertainty operates in established relationships and, thus, like RDT and CPMT it addresses our final critique of URT.

Although the RTM offers several insights to close relationships, the main thesis is that the experience of uncertainty is the highest during the turning point from casually dating to seriously dating; "the emergence of a mutually committed and interdependent relationship involves a period of heightened intensity and drama . . . We label the variety of tumultuous experiences that occur within romantic relationships **relational turbulence**" (Solomon and Knobloch 2004, 796). As you move from casually dating to seriously dating (what some used to call "going steady"), you move from being independent, autonomous individuals to interdependent and attached. According to Aron and colleagues (1995), as you fall in love, you begin to incorporate aspects of the other individual into your conception of self. "This means that a close relationship involves integrating, to some extent, other's resources, perspectives, and characteristics into the self. Having included these elements of the other in the self, the self is thereby expanded" (1103).

The RTM posits that during this transition in a romantic relationship, there are three important aspects of uncertainty. Each of these elements of uncertainty is a type of cognitive uncertainty first posited by URT (see above). The first aspect of uncertainty is **self uncertainty**, which refers to certainty about your own feelings and how involved you want to be in a relationship. When you ask yourself "How do I feel?" or "Do I want to be 'tied down' right now?" you are asking questions relevant to self uncertainty. The second aspect of uncertainty, **partner uncertainty**, asks questions like "How does the other feel?" and "Does s/he feel like I feel?" So this type of uncertainty has everything to do with the certainty about the other person's feelings and whether he or she reciprocates your feelings. Finally, **relationship uncertainty** is the certainty about the state of the relationship, in general. When we ask questions like "Are we casually dating?" and "Is this relationship going to last?" we are concerned with relationship uncertainty.

But what is the link between uncertainty and intimacy? Does it matter how much uncertainty we perceive in ourselves, our partners, and our relationship? Does it matter how we talk about uncertainty? A recent test of the RTM suggests interesting answers to these questions (Theiss and Solomon 2008).

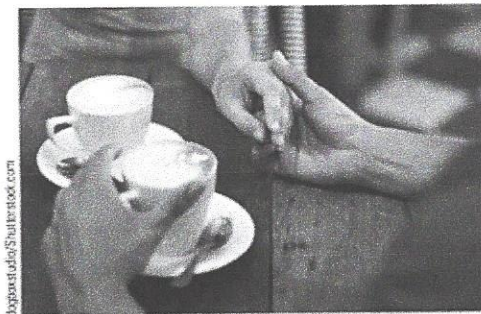
According to Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), the amount of uncertainty should predict feelings of intimacy in a linear fashion—that is, as uncertainty is reduced intimacy is increased. URT assumes that uncertainty is an undesirable state that people are motivated to reduce; thus, uncertainty acts as a barrier to intimacy within developing relationships and its removal will foster intimacy. Relational Dialectic Theory (RDT) and Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPMT) posit that uncertainty can be undesirable but does not have to be. When we feel that there is too much uncertainty about some aspect of our relationship we can engage in a variety of strategies to manage it; the most common of which is to seek information. When we seek information from our partner about something that is making us uncertain in the relationship we are engaging in **relationship talk**—conversations in which "the content of the messages reference the state of the relationship" (Theiss and Solomon 2008, 628). It is a general assumption in the communication field that when this talk is open—more direct, constructive, and explicit—such talk should help to "create a relational culture that welcomes openness between partners. When relational partners take advantage of opportunities to openly discuss their relationship, the potential exists to achieve a closer and more intimate bond" (629). Finally, the RTM posits that in addition to the amount of uncertainty in a relationship and

largely independent of how uncertainty is talked about, "the process of reducing uncertainty provides partners with opportunities to clarify ambiguities, resolve doubts, and achieve mutual understanding of the nature of their relationship" (630). When two people experience together the feeling that they decreased uncertainty, the satisfaction that stems from this experience should make them also feel closer, more intimate. As stated by Theiss and Solomon, "From this perspective [the Relational Turbulence Model], it is not an outcome of less uncertainty that is perceived as rewarding, but rather the efficacy that partners build by working together to surmount challenges and resolve relationship doubts. Thus, the actions that partners take to reduce their uncertainty might have unique benefits for the relationship, irrespective of the resulting amount of relational uncertainty" (630).

So, which is it: the amount, the openness of the communication, or the experience of engaging in uncertainty reduction? To find out Theiss and Solomon had 297 students (like you) "who had a romantic interest in another person with whom they had previously interacted and with whom they anticipated future interaction" answer surveys every week for six weeks. In the surveys were included questions about intimacy; self, partner, and relational uncertainty; and the openness-closedness of relationship talk. This methodology allowed them to track changes in intimacy and uncertainty over time and to see how these two variables changed together (or if they did not). Their results provided some level of support for all three explanations for the link between uncertainty and intimacy. Individuals with less uncertainty and more open communication perceived their relationship to be more intimate. In addition, the change in uncertainty over time, irrespective of amount or how it was communicated about, also positively predicted intimacy. Over the course of the six-week survey period, however, the process of uncertainty reduction was the most consistent and strongest predictor.

What does this mean for you? It basically means that you can have some uncertainty in your relationship! It's okay to be somewhat unsure! Of course, too much uncertainty can cause undue stress and lead to a dissatisfying relationship, but at the same time so too can too much certainty. Thus, it is important to manage the tension between certainty and uncertainty (and to manage the other dialectics discussed above). It also means that open talk about the relationship during times of uncertainty is not always beneficial. Open communication is only one of several strategies at your disposal for managing uncertainty in your close relationships. Sometimes having frank, open conversations is a good thing. When we do, we can foster a relational culture wherein we feel comfortable disclosing personal information. As the skill similarity model would have us believe, however, for people who don't value open communication, talking openly may produce more uncertainty.

In our discussion of facets of attraction, we talked about the impact of socializing agents and we outlined two implicit theories of relationships, destiny beliefs and growth beliefs. People who have a growth belief may have an advantage in close relationships: Seeing relationships as "hard work" seems likely to foster working on the relationship, and working on the relationship can create feelings of satisfaction above and beyond how uncertain you are. Thus, you can create increased feelings of closeness in your important relationships by sitting down and talking about your uncertainties, by having open and honest



Seeing relationships as hard work may foster working on the relationship and increase satisfaction

discussions about very personal information. But that is not the only way in which uncertainty is managed. By finding it was the process (the third explanation which suggested the experience of uncertainty reduction most strongly predicts intimacy), Theis and Solomon's research suggests that "witnessing one's ability to reduce uncertainty about a romantic relationship can foster feelings of closeness, and it is that process—irrespective of the resulting amount of uncertainty—that has benefits for the development of intimate relationships" (648). Strategies for uncertainty reduction include "self-reflection, quiet observation, secret tests, or direct relationship talk" (649) each of which is appropriate at different times in the course of a developing relationship and for particular people with particular values and skill sets.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with a claim from Paula Abdul that "opposites attract." Hopefully throughout the course of the chapter you noticed that she is largely incorrect in her implicit theory of how relationships and attraction work. Indeed, we are much more likely to be attracted to people with whom we share interests (like movies and TV) and who agree with us on important issues. Thus, contrary to the song's lyrics, it is more fiction than fact that opposites completely attract. Of course, that is not to say that we have to share *everything* with another in order to be attracted to him or her. Indeed, research shows that we value partners who bring complementary skill sets to a relationship, and we are often drawn to others who complement our personal weaknesses.

In the chapter we also outlined several biological, environmental, socialization, economic, and communicative facets that predict whether we will find someone attractive. And it is important to note that many of these elements work equally well for potential friends and dating partners. In fact, most of our romantic relationships were born out of friendships. Thus, it is not surprising that many factors of relationship formation—that is, how we go from initial interactions to intimacy—are similar for friends and romantic partners.

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