Stages of Relationships: How Relationships Are Formed, Maintained, and Ended

In this chapter, we take a look at the whole life span of a relationship. We start with a review of some of the kinds of love we examined in Chapter 3 and discuss how researchers understand the temporal course of those kinds of love.

Next we jump right into practice and take a closer look at a new way in which people are finding their mates: speed dating. Then we consider the effects of cohabitation on couples and what happens as these couples move on to marriage. We also

discuss mechanisms that help or hinder couples in the maintenance of their relationships. Finally, we examine the usual means of ending relationships: breakup and sometimes divorce.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

As you may remember, we discussed different kinds of love in Chapter 3. Obviously, the trajectories of different kinds of love may be quite different as well. Let us examine some of those kinds of love in more detail and find out what researchers have to say about their likely course through time.

Consider these three scenarios:

- Larry and Ann have known each other for what seems like ages. They first met when they were on their university's rowing teams and were exercising together. Soon thereafter, the activities of Larry and Ann went beyond their rowing squadrons: They found themselves going to the movies together and helping each other study for exams. They never got romantically involved but have been close friends for years. Larry was Ann's best man at her wedding, and Ann helped Larry through a tough time in his relationship with his longtime girlfriend, which ultimately ended in their separation. They now live in different parts of the country but keep in touch by e-mail and occasional phone calls.
- Missy and Joe have been married for 7 years. They fell madly in love with each other when Missy interned at a local newspaper, where Joe worked as a reporter. Within a few months they were married, and for their honeymoon they took a 3-month trip around the world. Since then they have had two children, and Missy is currently a stay-at-home mom. The passion they once felt for each other has mostly dissipated, but the two feel it has made way for a solid relationship that gets them through thick and thin.
- Alicia met Maria during a spaghetti dinner organized by the local church. Although Alicia is substantially younger than Maria, the two immediately felt like they were on the same wavelength. Soon thereafter Maria had a stroke, and she has been in the hospital for several weeks. She has no relatives who live close by, and Alicia is filling the role of family by visiting Maria every day and coordinating her medical examinations as well as following up on Maria's needs with her doctor and with the hospital staff.

Can you guess what kinds of love these scenarios describe? Have one more look at each of them and think about the kind of love you read about in Chapter 3 that fits best.

The first scenario describes companionate love—a friendship between two people who share interests and also share many aspects of their lives with each other. The second scenario is obviously about romantic love. That one wasn't too hard to figure out, was it? As you may also have noticed, the passion Missy and Joe once felt for each other has declined and has made way for a more stable, if less fiery, relationship. The third scenario is about compassionate love. Compassionate love also has been called "pure love," "selfless love," and "altruistic love," as well as many other things. It features prominently in religion as well as in literature about love, and often can be found in caregiving relationships.

Companionate love is a kind of love that typically develops relatively slowly. Think about your own friends. You probably did not become best friends with them within a day or even a week after you met. Instead, that friendship grew over time. Friendships are relatively stable and often endure over a long period, if not a lifetime. In Larry and Ann's case, you can see how their friendship grew over a long period, during which they shared

both good and bad times together. All these shared experiences brought them closer together. And we can expect that they will enjoy their friendship for a long time to come, barring any significant events leading to a breakup (Berscheid, 2010). But things are not so rosy for relationships in general.

A longitudinal study by Hatfield, Pillemer, O'Brien, and Le (2008) revealed that, within the first year of marriage, not only romantic love but also companionate love declines. Thus, we need additional studies to find out if companionate love is really as stable and enduring as has been presumed. It is commonly believed that passionate love in long-term relationships may subside and develop into companionate love (Walster & Walster, 1981). However, there is evidence that companionate love is important in a romantic relationship from the beginning, and not just later on (Berscheid, 2010).

Now that we are talking about romantic love, let us consider what happens to romantic love over the long term. If you hypothesize romantic love to be a combination of affection and sexual passion, then it is reasonable to assume that if one of those two components starts to fade, romantic love as a whole will be affected (Berscheid, 2010). Ellen Berscheid (see Kelly et al., 2002) suggested that people in relationships have expectations regarding how their partners will behave and how their well-being will be impacted by a partner's behavior. If your partner does something that enhances your well-being, you feel good; and if the partner's actions decrease your well-being, you won't feel very good about your partner.

In the beginning of a relationship, you are more likely to experience surprises in response to your partner's behavior. Again, if the partner does something that makes you feel good or supports you, you will experience positive emotions; if the results of your partner's actions make you feel bad or interfere with your goals, you will experience negative emotions. The longer people are in a relationship, however, the more predictable the relationship becomes. These days partners' actions are rarely

a surprise; people come to expect their partners to behave in certain ways, usually in ways that will enhance their well-being. Positive actions by a partner are no longer surprising and so no longer lead to unexpected feelings of happiness and bliss. Unexpected negative actions, however, still can surprise and can seriously endanger the relationship. That said, partners in long-term relationships mostly behave in expected ways, so intense emotions generally decrease as time goes on. Sexual intercourse also declines as relationships grow older.

As mentioned above, Hatfield and colleagues (2008) found that romantic love significantly declines during the first year of marriage. We can see some signs of this in Missy and Joe's relationship, where the initial passion has faded somewhat but has been replaced by what can be described as a solid friendship that makes their life together predictable and helps them navigate everyday affairs with greater ease as a result of the absence of the extreme highs and lows of passionate emotions.

Finally, let us consider the temporal course of compassionate love. It can develop quite quickly, as was the case with Alicia and Maria's relationship. A person can take an interest in someone else's fate within a short time and take actions immediately. A very important factor in the development of communal love is whether one person feels she can trust the other to (a) accept any support offered and (b) offer support if needed. Communal love is also part of a long-term relationship such as marriage, but conflicts and just the stress of everyday life can wear partners out and make them start keeping count of who did what for whom and when. If this happens, marital satisfaction usually decreases (Grote & Clark, 2001). There is not much research at this time with respect to the longevity of compassionate love and its development over time. The course a relationship takes may also depend on whether the altruistic acts of an individual are needed only on a short-term basis or whether, for example, a partner has gotten sick and will need intensive care for a long time or even the rest of his or her life.

EXCURSION: A NEW WAY TO FIND A MATE—SPEED DATING

The ways in which we come to know potential partners have changed significantly in recent decades. In the past, people were often limited to selecting potential partners from the pool of people who lived in their town or area. They chose their partners from the people they went to school with, or the ones they met through work or hobbies. Nowadays young people can connect with many more people with a fraction of the effort that was once required. They have at their disposal a multitude of media to connect with others literally around the world. Think of the Internet in general, Facebook, dating services and websites, speed dating events, and the affordability of long-distance phone calls. Chances are you know someone who is engaged in a successful long-distance relationship that is facilitated by Skype, phone calls, and e-mails. And you probably also know people who have met their partners online, right?

One relatively new option for finding a potential partner is speed dating. For those of you who are not familiar with speed dating, here's a short summary of how it works. At speed-dating events, you meet with a relatively large number of people one by one for a short time each, just long enough to gain a first impression and decide if you are interested in the potential partner. Usually, people are seated around tables across from each other, men on one side and women on the other. Everyone is assigned a number. After a conversation period of three or four minutes with one person, a bell rings and the men move down one seat so that everyone has a new partner. The whole procedure is repeated over and over until every man has met every woman. The participants are given score sheets on which they can write down the numbers of the people they would like to get to know further. After the event, they can enter their chosen numbers into

a system, and if a person they are interested in also entered their corresponding number, they can access their respective contact data so they can get in touch with each other. Depending on the event, you can meet between 15 and 30 potential partners in a single evening. In North America, the mean age of adults participating in speed-dating events is 33.1 years, with a standard deviation of 5.3 years (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005), meaning that about two thirds of all participants are between roughly 28 and 38 years of age.

One recent study investigated the results of speed dating in Germany (Asendorpf, Penke, & Back, 2011). Each event had an average of 22 participants. In all, 190 men and 192 women were involved in the study. After the event was over, a participant was chosen on average by 3.9 others. Remember, you only get the contact data for a person if he or she chose you in return. Each person had on average 1.3 reciprocated choices. About 60% of the participants achieved at least one match.

Let us first look at the features of the participants who were most popular at the speed dating event. Because no one has much time for conversation with any given person in such an event, you probably won't be surprised to hear that both the men's and women's popularity was based mainly on their physical attractiveness—in particular, the attractiveness of their face and voice as well as their weight and height. In fact, men seemed to use physical cues almost exclusively to choose the women in whom they were interested. Women used a number of other criteria as well to make their choices; they were interested in a man's willingness to have sex outside of a committed relationship (sociosexuality) as well as a man's income, education, and openness to experiences. What's interesting is that the cues women used in addition to physical attractiveness are all features that, as studies have shown, can be judged accurately even if you meet with someone only for a short time (see, e.g., Boothroyd, Jones, Burt, DeBruine, & Perret, 2008; Kraus & Keltner, 2009).

Unexpectedly, the more open men were to sex outside a committed partnership, the more popular they were with the women (although both men and women in speed-dating events generally are looking for long-term partnerships). It is possible that men who are more sexually oriented tend to have finely honed their flirting skills with women. In any case, shyness had a negative effect on a man's popularity, whereas shyness did not really make a difference to a woman's popularity.

As one might expect, the more popular a person was, the more picky she was in her choices. This makes sense because popular people have a greater number of potential partners who are interested in them, so they have a larger pool to pick from and hence can afford to be pickier. As the age of a woman increases, however, she tends to get less picky.

We discussed in Chapter 6 how people who have similarities feel attracted to each other. This similarity effect could not be detected in the speed dating study, however. The reason is probably that a few minutes of interaction is just not enough time for people to find out about their similarities.

Overall, the chances of finding a romantic partner in the speed dating event were about 5%. This may not sound like a high chance to you, but consider the likelihood of finding a partner when spending some time in a café. You probably have a better chance to find someone at a speed dating event than in a café.

LIVING TOGETHER

It has become commonplace for young people to move in together as a couple even if they have no plans to marry (yet). The number of young couples living together has grown significantly over recent decades, with about 7.6 million adults living together

in 2011 (up from 440,000 in 1960, www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2011.html). Many couples who go on to marry have cohabited (Manning & Smock, 2002); in fact, about 50% of all married couples today cohabited before getting married (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). But most couples who live together out of wedlock do not stay together for very long: More than half of such couples dissolve their relationship within a year after moving in together, and about 90% do so within 5 years (Lichter, Qian, & Mellott, 2006).

Consider the situation of Jessica and Tim. They have been living together for about 2 years. They met at college but did not get involved with each other until after graduation. At that time both of them took new jobs in New York City, and they met from time to time since they were both new to the city and didn't know many other people. They were also both from small towns, and each could relate to the challenges the other was experiencing in moving to a big city. Soon they were a couple, and they got along so well that they decided to move in together—both because they liked being with each other so much and because it would obviously save them a lot of money having to rent only one apartment instead of two. Things have gone well for them, and they're still deeply in love with each other—so much so, in fact, that Tim recently proposed to Jessica. Do you think that their having lived together happily for 2 years is a good predictor of the stability and happiness they will enjoy in their relationship once they're married?

Many people think that living together with a partner before marriage is a good way of trying out their relationship to see whether or not it will work in the long run once they get married, but research actually casts doubt on this view. Many studies have found that cohabitation is negatively correlated with marital satisfaction and stability (e.g., Jose, O'Leary, & Moyer, 2010; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Jose and colleagues (2010)

conducted a meta-analysis in which they analyzed the results of numerous studies examining the effects of premarital cohabitation on the quality of marriages and their rate of dissolution. As predicted, they found a negative correlation between cohabitation and marital stability. That is, people who had cohabited were more likely to split up with their marital partners. A negative relationship also existed between cohabitation and marital quality. But why is there such a difference between people who cohabit and people who don't? Studies have found that people who cohabit tend generally to be less religious and less traditional (e.g., Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004; Woods & Emery, 2002). Cohabitors also tend to have more negative interactions with each other (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002). Noncohabitors, on the other hand, tend to be more confident about their future together and are not as accepting of divorce as are cohabitors (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005; Kline et al., 2004). Interestingly, the negative relationship between cohabitation and marital stability was particularly pronounced in the United States and may not be a factor, or may exist to a lesser extent, in other countries.

Cohabitation is a trend that is on the rise, and not only among young people. Older adults age 50 and above also are cohabiting more and more with partners to whom they are not married. In the decade from 2000 to 2010, the number of cohabiting adults age 50 and over more than doubled, to about 2.75 million. One big difference between older and younger cohabiting couples is that the partnerships of older cohabiting couples seem to be much more stable. When Brown, Bulanda, and Lee (2012) started their study on cohabiting older couples, participating couples had already been living together an average of 8 years. During the next 8 years, only 18% of the couples separated. Over the same time, only 12% of them got married. It seems that for more mature people cohabitation is an alternative to marriage rather than a precursor.

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

Once partners have formed a stable relationship, there's still a lot of work left to do. As you probably know from your own experience, relationships of any kind need serious work to keep them in good shape. At least in romantic love, where the passion typically wears off after a while, keeping the happiness and satisfaction partners once felt is not easy to achieve. There are different strategies and mechanisms people can, and often automatically do, employ to keep their relationship going. Consider what Lea has to say about her husband of 7 years, Michael:

> Michael is one of the most thoughtful and considerate persons I have ever met. He is always trying to make me feel loved and special, and is always looking for ways to make me happy. He is a great match for me because he has such a cheerful attitude and a great sense of humor. There are few people who can make me laugh as he can. And even though he is now in his 40s, he is taking good care of himself, which you can see when you look at him. Of course, he sometimes upsets me when he forgets to run the errands he promised to do, and he does forget quite frequently. But he is just a forgetful person and doesn't mean to annoy me. I try to be understanding. So overall I don't think I could have been much luckier in my choice of a husband.

Can you detect some relationship maintenance mechanisms at work in Lea's description of Michael? Lea has a very positive outlook toward Michael and their relationship. She mentions how Michael expresses his love for her through big and small things almost every day, and he shares in the routine errands that are necessary for their life as a couple. Lea is very appreciative of Michael, and she perceives him with some positive thoughts—possibly illusions—that make him look his best while minimizing his flaws. She also believes he is better than most men, and thus we can assume that she does not pay too much attention to

the men in her immediate social surroundings who might otherwise seem to be attractive alternative mates. Let's have a look at these maintenance mechanisms in more detail.

Canary and Stafford (1992) developed the Relational Maintenance Model, which suggests that the type of relationship two people have and the degree of equity in their relationship influences what kinds of maintenance behaviors they engage in and how often they engage in them. They distinguish among five different maintenance strategies:

- *Positivity:* Partners have a positive outlook on, and attitude about, their relationship.
- *Openness:* Partners are willing to communicate and disclose information about themselves.
- *Assurances:* Partners express their love for each other and provide comfort in times of need.
- *Task sharing:* Partners share everyday duties and responsibilities.
- *Social networks:* Partners also have bonds with others, and value and share their social networks.

Edenfield and colleagues (2012) conducted a study that relates these relationship maintenance strategies to adult attachment styles. (Remember the different attachment styles we discussed in Chapter 2?) They found that people who are securely attached are more positive and open toward their partners and are more likely to give assurance to their partners regarding the relationship. People who are avoidant tend to distrust a partner's supportiveness and availability to them and tend to avoid emotional intimacy. Acting in these ways creates distance between the partners, which may exacerbate already existing problems.

Another thing that keeps people in relationships is feeling appreciated. A reason for divorce that is stated very frequently is that partners no longer feel loved and appreciated (Gigy & Kelly,

1992). Research has shown that when partners sense gratitude in their relationship, they feel closer to one another and are generally happier in their relationship (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Gordon, Arnette, & Smith, 2011). Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, and Keltner (2012) proposed a model that suggests that when people feel appreciated by their partners, it gives them a sense of security. When you feel secure, you're better able to concentrate on and perceive your own feelings of appreciation of your partner. When a person feels gratitude toward a partner and the relationship they have, the value of the relationship becomes clearer, which in turn leads to an increase in other behaviors that serve to maintain the relationship. The researchers conducted several studies that confirmed their model. When people felt more appreciated by their partners, they in turn felt gratitude for their partners and were happier in their relationships. Over the course of time, appreciated partners were more responsive and committed to their relationships than were people who felt less appreciated. Consequently, their relationships tended to last longer.

A person who is very committed to a partner also tends to think of the beloved partner in a particular way that helps the person stay committed to the partner and the relationship. For example, when the person thinks of the partner, the person sees him or her in an especially positive light; may see him or her as particularly smart or thoughtful, or may perceive the partner as being much better looking than the rest of the crowd. Even when the person thinks about the partner's flaws, the person perceives those flaws as less significant or less pronounced than the same flaws perceived in other people. Missteps the partner makes in the relationship are attributed not so much to ill will as to mistakes made accidentally (Conley et al., 2009; Neff & Karney, 2003). These interpretations of a partner's behavior and character are called *positive illusions* because the partner is seen

in an especially positive light. Along with those positive illusions comes another perception, namely, that of the superiority of the beloved over other people (*perceived superiority*). And, as illustrated earlier in Lea's description of her husband, there is another consequence of seeing someone in such a positive light and believing that person to be so much better than most other people out there: If you are with someone who is so great, you automatically do not pay much attention to other men and women you may encounter. This *inattention* to alternative potential mates protects the relationship in that partners do not spend much time looking for other potential mates or imagine themselves in other, possibly superior relationships.

While there are many more things one can do to keep one's relationship healthy and happy, there is one last aspect of relationships that should be discussed in more detail: forgiveness. When people engage with others, no matter whether in casual encounters or in close relationships, they are bound to make mistakes sooner or later. And the better you know someone, the easier it is to hurt that person because you know that person's vulnerabilities as well as his or her strengths. People typically are hurt the most not by the remarks or actions of strangers, but rather by those of the ones that are closest to them. So in order to keep up a relationship, one must be willing to forgive a friend's or loved one's transgressions. Forgiveness requires one to let go of feelings of hurt and anger and to forgo any actions of retaliation. It is an active decision that one makes and it requires continuing work to be integrated into one's life (Hope, 1987; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

There are three ways in which a person can grant forgiveness. Direct strategies require that the painful event be discussed; in such cases, the hurt person can even state directly that he or she forgives the transgressor. Forgiveness also can be granted indirectly by nonverbal behavior, including facial expressions. And forgiveness is sometimes granted conditionally such that it comes with some qualifications (Kelley, 1998).

BREAKING UP WITH A NONMARITAL PARTNER

Breaking up is always a hard thing to do, no matter how long you've been with someone. It is hard to hurt a person you love or once loved, and it is hard finding in your life an emptiness that once was filled by someone who shared that life with you. There are not many studies that have investigated the reasons why people break up with nonmarital partners. One study was conducted by Leslie Baxter in 1986. Baxter asked college students to describe the reasons why they broke up with their partners. All students who participated in her study were the ones who had ended the relationship rather than the ones being told about the breakup. There were some topics that appeared again and again in the descriptions. Participants described relationship guidelines that, if broken again and again, would possibly lead to a dissolution of the relationship. Some of these guidelines were:

- *Autonomy:* Allow and even encourage your partner to have friendships outside the partnership, to go out with friends, and to do things independently if the partner wishes to.
- *Similarity:* Share values and interests that are of importance to you.
- *Supportiveness:* Support your partner in his or her goals.
- *Openness:* Share intimate details about yourself with your partner.
- *Fidelity:* Do not cheat on your partner.

As you can see, there are some recurring behaviors that frequently cause friction in relationships. Even if a breakup was long overdue and ends a relationship that was not fulfilling anymore, and maybe hadn't been for a long time, there are many ill effects of a breakup on the partners. After a breakup, people's well-being is considerably lower, they are less satisfied with their lives, and

they experience more sadness and anger (Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011; Sbarra & Emery, 2005; Simon & Barrett, 2010). If you've been through a breakup yourself, none of this probably comes as much of a surprise. Throughout history, broken relationships have presumably always caused considerable distress in the affected people.

What has changed in recent years, however, is the way people go about ending a relationship. While most people still employ a direct approach and talk to their soon-to-be ex-partners in person (Zimmerman, 2009), a growing number of people are making use of the new technologies like e-mail and text messages. Weisskirch and Delevi (2012) conducted a study that examined breakup behavior with respect to communication technology and related the use of such technology to people's attachment styles. People who had attachment anxiety (i.e., they were worried about the responsiveness of a partner) were more likely to have been informed of a breakup by means of new communication technologies and also to use technology themselves as a means of breakup. Anxiously attached people may be particularly upset by the dissolution of a relationship, and their partners may be aware of this in one way or another. If the partners want to end the relationship but avoid a big emotional scene, they may choose to use new technologies as a means of dissolution. People with an avoidant attachment style were also more accepting of the use of technology to end a relationship. This makes sense, given that they are generally less willing to be intimate with a partner and to depend on him or her.

BREAKING UP IN MARRIAGE: DIVORCE

Dissolution of marriage has become quite common in American society—so common that the United States has the highest divorce rate in the world. In fact, it is so common that you almost certainly

know one or more people who have been affected by divorce or have been affected personally yourself. Currently, more than half of all marriages end in divorce. Consider these statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): In 2010 there were 6.8 new marriages per every 1,000 of the country's population. That same year there were 3.6 divorces per 1,000 (www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm). The divorce rate of adults age 50 and over even doubled between 1990 and 2009, such that about 25% of divorces in the year 2009 involved people who were age 50 years or older (Brown & Lin, 2012).

There are marked differences in divorce rates between states. Nevada, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming have relatively high divorce numbers, which hover between 5 and 6 cases per 1,000 in the population. Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York have consistently lower divorce rates, between 2 and 3 divorces per 1,000 in the population (www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/divorce_rates_90_95_99-10.pdf).

Most marriages end within the first 8 years (Kreider & Fields, 2001), but many people remarry quickly once they have divorced: The average time between divorce and a new marriage is not quite 4 years (Goodwin, Mosher, & Chandra, 2010). Generally, divorce rates are higher for those who have remarried than for those who are in their first marriage (Brown & Lin, 2012). This may be because when people remarry, they often have children from the first marriage, which may complicate the new marriage as a result of competition for resources and affection.

Reasons for divorce are obviously as diverse as the people who get married, but there are some topics that pop up again and again when people are asked why they got divorced. The issues leading to divorce range from infidelity and physical or emotional abuse, to alcohol and drug use, to people's growing apart or feeling incompatible with each other (Amato & Previti, 2003).

You may wonder whether the availability of the Internet has something to do with the rising divorce rates. After all, it is much

easier now to find mating partners because people are not confined to their towns and immediate environs anymore. Dating websites and social websites such as Facebook abound, and they provide an almost endless selection of potential partners who may seem more attractive than the person one is with currently. Search costs for a new partner are arguably much lower than they were before the advent of the Internet. So make a guess: Do you believe that states in which a higher number of people have access to the Internet also have higher divorce rates? Todd Kendall researched this question and found that there seems to be no correlation between Internet access rates and divorce rates after controlling for other variables like household income (Kendall, 2011).

Interestingly, one factor that affects divorce rates is the occurrence of disasters. Whereas natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, or hurricanes are followed by an increase in divorce rates in areas close to the disaster site (Cohan & Cole, 2002), human-made disasters have the opposite effect on divorce rates: They decrease them, at least temporarily (Nakonezny, Reddick, & Rodgers, 2004). A difference between natural and human-made disasters that may be responsible for the discrepancy is that the emphasis in the aftermath of a natural disaster is on the need to rebuild what has been destroyed, whereas in the case of unexpected man-made catastrophes, the emphasis is on the deaths that have been caused.

Catherine Cohan and Robert Schoen (2009) examined the effects of the September 11, 2001, attacks upon the World Trade Center on divorce rates both in areas close to Ground Zero and in urban areas across the country. In the months after the attacks, the divorce rate decreased not only in New York City and adjacent Bergen County in New Jersey, but also in Philadelphia and Los Angeles. No effect of the attacks was found in Chicago. So people in certain areas decided to postpone or even forgo a divorce after the September 11 events. Since New York City and Bergen County

are geographically close to Ground Zero, it was expected that the divorce rate would go down in these places. Even Philadelphia is relatively close to New York, and one of the commandeered planes crashed in Pennsylvania. But the psychological sense of being threatened in an urban area is not enough to explain the drop in divorce rates since no such drop was found in Chicago. If you consider, however, that three of the hijacked planes were originally headed for Los Angeles, you can see how people in that city may have been particularly affected by the events. That means that the effects of a disaster can be felt even in areas that are not geographically close to the disaster area as long as the event hits close to home "psychologically."

The decline in divorce rates can be explained by Bowlby's attachment theory, which we discussed in Chapter 2. In times of stress and catastrophe, family members will stay close together because the closeness is comforting. No extreme life changes will be implemented, and the physical proximity will be maintained until the immediate threat subsides. So under the shock of the September 11, 2001, attack, people's first reaction was to stay close to their families for comfort and security. Consciously or not, people made adjustments in their lives to increase their chances of their survival and conserve resources. There were other, biological effects of the attacks as well: In both New York and Los Angeles, the probability of a male birth dropped significantly in the 3 months after the attacks. According to Cohan, this can be explained in terms of evolutionary theory, in that weak males do not survive to increase the chances that females can survive and eventually reproduce in a stressful environment.

But once people have divorced, what happens next? Are they unhappy forever and ever, or can they be expected to recover relatively easily from their divorce? Of course, when two people have been miserable in their marriage for a long time, perhaps for many years, a divorce can come as a relief. Nevertheless, a divorce is a traumatic event. When asked 6 years later if their

divorce ultimately resulted in some good, however, about 75% of divorcees said yes (Hetherington, 2003). And, as mentioned, if people decide to remarry, the remarriage happens on average within 4 years after the divorce. Although good things can come out of a divorce, it is always a very difficult period for all people involved, and some will never be able to completely get over the trauma and stresses of their marital separation.