attractive faces as more potent. They did rate them as having more integrity and concern for others, which was not found in previous mainstream studies. Wheeler and Kim concluded that, although all cultures appear to stereotype on the basis of physical attractiveness, the contents of the stereotypes probably depend on cultural values.

Another study also demonstrated cultural differences in the psychological meaning derived from attractive faces. Matsumoto and Kudoh (1993) asked American and Japanese subjects to judge Caucasian and Japanese faces that were either smiling or neutral on three dimensions: attractiveness, intelligence, and sociability. The Americans consistently rated the smiling faces higher on all three dimensions, congruent with our traditional notions of person perception and impression formation. The Japanese, however, only rated the smiling faces as more sociable. There was no difference in their ratings of attractiveness between smiles and neutrals, and they rated the neutral faces as more intelligent.

But there is also evidence that judgments of attractiveness are consistent across cultures. Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, and Wu (1995) conducted three studies, all using basically the same methods. In the first, European Americans and Asian and Hispanic immigrants judged faces of Asian, Hispanic, African American, and European American women. In the second study, Taiwanese respondents rated the same stimuli. In the third study, African and European Americans rated African American female faces. The stimuli were photographs whose subjects ranged from college students to contestants in beauty contests in other cultures. In all three studies, the researchers obtained attractiveness ratings from the judges, as well as 28 separate measurements of facial features. The results across all three studies indicated extremely high correlations among the judge groups in their attractiveness ratings. Moreover, the attractiveness ratings by all groups correlated with the same facial characteristics, which included the nature of the eyes, nose, cheeks, chins, and smiles. Moreover, a meta-analysis reviewing 1,800 articles and 919 findings indicated that raters agree both within and across cultures about who is and is not attractive (Langlois, Kalakanis, Rubenstein, Larson, Hallam, & Smoot, 2000).

So, is beauty in the eye of the beholder? The findings of the studies described above, including the meta-analysis, would suggest not—that there is a universal standard for what does and does not constitute attractiveness. Of course, there may be individual differences in judgments and criteria for attractiveness, but on the average, it appears that what is attractive for one group is similarly attractive for another. On the individual level, however, beauty really is in the eye of the beholder.

**LOVE, SEX, AND MARRIAGE ACROSS CULTURES**

**Culture and Mate Selection**

So what do people look for in a mate, and is it different across cultures? In one of the best-known studies on this topic (Buss, 1989, 1994), more than 10,000 respondents in 37 cultures drawn from 33 countries completed two questionnaires,
one dealing with factors in choosing a mate and the second dealing with preferences concerning potential mates. In 36 of the 37 cultures, females rated financial prospects as more important than did males; in 29 of those 36 cultures, females also rated ambition and industriousness as more important than did males. In all 37 cultures, males preferred younger mates and females preferred older mates; in 34 of the cultures, males rated good looks as more important than did females; and in 23 of the cultures, males rated chastity as more important than did females. Buss (1989) concluded that females value cues related to resource acquisition in potential mates more highly than males do, whereas males value reproductive capacity more highly than do females. These findings were predicted, in fact, on the basis of an evolutionary-based framework that generated hypotheses related to evolutionary concepts of parental involvement, sexual selection, reproductive capacity, and certainty of paternity or maternity. The degree of agreement in sex differences across cultures has led Buss (1989) and his colleagues to view these mate-selection preferences as universal, arising from different evolutionary selection pressures on males and females.

Hatfield and Sprecher (1995) have replicated and extended the findings by Buss and his colleagues. In this study, male and female students in the United States, Russia, and Japan were surveyed concerning their preferences in a marital partner, using a 12-item scale. The items all referred to positive traits: physically attractive, intelligent, athletic, ambitious, good conversationalist, outgoing and sociable, status or money, skill as a lover, kind and understanding, potential for success, expressive and open, and sense of humor. Across all three cultures, the data indicated that the only scale on which men gave higher ratings than women was physical attractiveness. Women gave higher ratings than men on all the other scales except good conversationalist. There were also some interesting cultural differences. For example, Americans preferred expressivity, openness, and sense of humor more than did the Russians, who in turn preferred these traits more than did the Japanese. Russians desired skill as a lover most, while Japanese preferred it least. The Japanese gave lower ratings than the other two cultures on kind and understanding, good conversationalist, physical attractiveness, and status.

Other researchers offer an alternative explanation for interpersonal attraction based on a social construction perspective (for example, Beall & Sternberg, 1995). This perspective highlights the importance of individual and cultural, as opposed to evolutionary, factors in understanding interpersonal attraction. Indeed, social constructionists argue that there are more gender similarities than differences when it comes to choosing mates. For instance, a U.S. study of the most important traits reported by both men and women when looking for a partner are kindness, consideration, honesty, and a sense of humor (Goodwin, 1990).

A study by Pines (2001) provides evidence for both the evolutionary theory and the social construction theory of mate selection. In this study, American and Israeli students were extensively interviewed about their romantic relationships. As evolutionary theory would predict, more men than women mentioned physical appearance as a reason for attraction to their partner. However, as
social construction theory would predict, culture also played an important role in
determining what was considered attractive. For example, Americans were
attracted to the status of their partners more than Israelis were. Also, closeness
and similarity were more important factors for Americans than for Israelis.

There may also be developmentally different preferences in what one
considers attractive in a partner. For instance, a study involving Dutch and
German participants reports that as people get older, the stereotypical male
preference for appearance and female preference for financial prospects give
way to a preference for a steady relationship, home, and children (De Raad &

So there are some aspects of finding a mate that are universal, and some
that appear to be culture specific. But what about trying to romantically
attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship—that is, stealing
someone else’s mate? This is known as mate poaching, and a study involving
16,954 participants in 53 countries showed that it was most common in
Southern Europe, South America, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe, and
relatively less frequent in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and East Asia. In
all regions studied, men were more likely to have attempted mate poaching
and to be the victims of mate-poaching attempts by others. Across all regions
of the world, mate poachers tended to be more extroverted, disagreeable,
unconscientious, unfaithful, and erotophilic—being comfortable in talking
about sex. In all regions, successful mate poachers were more open to new
experiences, were sexually attractive, were not exclusive in their relationships,
exhibited less sexual restraint, and were more erotophilic. And men and women
in all regions who were the targets of mate-poaching attempts were more
extroverted, open to experience, sexually attractive, erotophilic, and low on
relationship exclusivity.

There were also some cultural differences in mate poaching. Cultures with
more economic resources had higher rates of mate-poaching attempts. Also, in
countries with more women than men, women were more likely to engage in
mate poaching; this was not the case for men, however. And the sex differences
in mate poaching tended to be smaller in cultures that were more gender
egalitarian.

Thus, not only are there universal and culture-specific aspects of finding a
mate; there also appear to be universal and culture-specific aspects to attracting
someone else’s mate. How does finding a mate, however, translate into falling
in love?

Culture and Love

Love is one of the uniquely human emotions, and it is important because it aids
in our finding potential mates and creating a social support system to buffer the
stresses of life. Love, it is said, “is a many-splendored thing,” and “love
conquers all.” In the United States, love seems to be a prerequisite to forming a
long-term romantic relationship. But is that so in other cultures as well?
Maybe not. Many studies, in fact, have demonstrated specific cultural differences in attitudes about love. Ting-Toomey (1991), for instance, compared ratings of love commitment, disclosure maintenance, ambivalence, and conflict expression by 731 participants from France, Japan, and the United States. Love commitment was measured by ratings of feelings of attachment, belongingness, and commitment to the partner and the relationship; disclosure maintenance by ratings of feelings concerning the private self in the relationship; ambivalence by ratings of feelings of confusion or uncertainty regarding the partner or the relationship; and conflict expression by ratings of frequency of overt arguments and seriousness of problems. The French and the Americans had significantly higher ratings than the Japanese on love commitment and disclosure maintenance. The Americans also had significantly higher ratings than the Japanese on relational ambivalence. The Japanese and the Americans, however, had significantly higher ratings than the French on conflict expression.

Simmons, vom Kolke, and Shimizu (1986) examined attitudes toward love and romance among American, German, and Japanese students. The results indicated that romantic love was valued more in the United States and Germany than in Japan. These researchers explained this cultural difference by suggesting that romantic love is more highly valued in cultures with fewer strong, extended family ties, and less valued in cultures in which kinship networks influence and reinforce the relationship between marriage partners.

Many other studies document cultural differences in attitudes about love and romance. Furnham (1984), for instance, found that Europeans valued love more than do South Africans and Indians. Murstein, Merighi, and Vyse (1991) found that Americans tended to prefer friendships that slowly evolve into love, as well as relationships in which the lovers are caught up in an excited, panicky state, but that the French rated higher on love as characterized by altruistic generosity. Wang (1994) found that contrary to popular stereotypes, Italian males report less passionate love feelings in their relationships than American males. Landis and O'Shea (2000) studied 1,709 participants from Denmark, England, Israel, Canada, and five cities in the United States, and found that some aspects of passionate love were unique to a specific country, such as protective intimacy ("I would get jealous if I thought he/she were falling in love with someone else.") and tender intimacy ("I will love him/her forever.") for men and women in the United States, and realistic closeness ("If she/he were going through a difficult time, I would put away my concerns to help her/him out.") and idealistic closeness ("No one else could love her/him like I do.") for Danish men and women. Dion and Dion (1993a) found that Chinese and other Asian respondents were more friendship-oriented in their love relationships than were respondents from European backgrounds. Ellis, Kimmel, Diaz-Guerrero, Canas, and Bago (1994) found that Mexicans rated love as less positive and less potent than Spaniards and Hispanic Americans.

Thus, it appears that, although love may be a universal and uniquely human emotion, it is valued differently in different cultures. Of course, there are many forms of love (Hatfield, 1988; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; Sternberg, 1988), and we do not know exactly what kinds of cultural similarities and
differences exist for what specific types of love. Future research will need to explore this interesting question.

**Culture and Sex**

Sex is, of course, necessary for human reproduction, and thus is a biological necessity for survival of the species. Yet it is associated with much psychological meaning, and thus with cultural meaning, especially before marriage. Many cultures of the world share some degree of normative attitudes toward sex, including a taboo on incest and a condemnation of adultery (Brown, 1991). Thus, there does appear to be some degree of universality in some types of norms regarding sex around the world.

There are also important cultural differences, especially regarding premartial sex and homosexuality. A 37-country study by Buss (1989), for instance, reported that people from many non-Western countries, such as China, India, Indonesia, Iran, and Taiwan, and Palestinian Arabs valued chastity very highly in a potential mate, whereas people in western European countries such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, West Germany, and France attach little importance to prior sexual experience. And homosexuality is generally more accepted in cultures that tend to be industrialized, capitalistic, and affluent (Inglehart, 1998). Cultures also differ in how open there are about expressing sexuality in public, for example, displaying advertising for condoms (Jones, Forrest, Goldman, Henshaw, Lincoln et al., 1985).

Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb (1998) surveyed 33,590 respondents in 24 countries on their attitudes toward premartial sex, teen sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality. Their findings indicated a widespread acceptance of premartial sex across the samples. Teen sex and extramarital sex, however, were not as accepted. And attitudes about homosexuality varied greatly across cultures. Widmer and colleagues then grouped the countries into those that had similar responses. One group was called the “Teen Permissives”; it included East and West Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Slovenia. A second group was called “Sexual Conservatives”; it included the United States, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Poland. A third group was called “Homosexual Permissives”; it included Netherlands, Norway, Czech Republic, Canada, and Spain. And the fourth group was called “Moderates”; it included Australia, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, Russia, New Zealand, and Israel. Japan and the Philippines did not merge with any of the groups, and had their own unique attitudes toward sex.

Cultures also affect sex within marriage. Cultures with fewer resources and higher stress—especially insensitive or inconsistent parenting, physically harsh environments, or economic hardships—are associated with more insecure romantic attachments, and higher fertility rates (Schmitt, Alcalay, Allensworth, Allik, Ault, & Austers, 2004). There may be an evolutionary explanation for these findings; stressful environments may cause insecure attachments, which may be linked to short-term mating strategies—to reproduce early and often. This link may be seen today; as cultures become more affluent, birth rates tend to decline.
When extramarital sex occurs, do people of different cultures differ in their responses? Apparently not: jealousy appears to be a universal reaction to the infidelity of one’s mate. There are interesting gender differences in the sources of infidelity; men appear to become jealous when they experience a loss of sexual exclusivity in their mates; women appear to become jealous when they experience a loss of emotional involvement in their mates. This pattern has been found in a wide variety of cultures (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, Choe, Lim, & Hasegawa, 1999; Fernandez, Sierra, Zubediar, & Vera-Villarroel, 2006). Buss and Schmitt (1993) suggest that these universal gender differences are predictable on the basis of biological sex differences and evolutionary needs. Violations of emotional involvement for women threaten the care of offspring; violations of sexual exclusivity for men threaten their ability to reproduce and produce offspring.

**Culture and Marriage**

Marriage is an institutionalized relationship that publicly recognizes the long-term commitment that two people make to each other. About 90 percent of people in most societies get married, or whatever is the equivalent of married in their society (Carroll & Wolpe, 1996). And a study involving 17,804 participants in 62 cultures around the world found that 79 percent of the romantic attachments people had could be considered “secure”—that is, one in which both the self and the other are considered valuable and worthy of trust; they are characterized as being responsive, supportive, comfortable in their mutual interdependence (Schmitt et al., 2004). This suggests a large degree of normativeness around the world in the way people form romantic attachments with others. These findings should tell us that there is something universal in the fact that people need and want to make such commitments with someone else.

But there are cultural differences in the ways in which people around the world form romantic attachments and view the role of love in marriage. For example, individuals in South, Southeast, and East Asia tend to score higher on preoccupied romantic attachment, in which attachments to others are relatively more dependent on the value that they provide to others and that others provide to themselves (Schmitt et al., 2004). That is, they tend to strive more for the approval of highly valued others in romantic relationships.

In the United States today, there is decreasing pressure on people, especially women, to get married before a certain age or to have children. Yet there are many people in many other cultures of the world that still harbor many traditional values concerning marriage, including the belief that women should get married before a certain age, such as 25, and have children before 30. These values are at conflict within cultures and societies that are, at the same time, becoming more economically powerful. As the children of these cultures leave to visit and/or study in cultures such as the United States, those types of conflicts come to a head, especially for women, who, on the one hand want to get an education, job, and career, and yet on the other feel the pressure from their families to get married, settle down, have children, and raise a family. Often these
families who provide the financial support for their children to get an international education are perceived to not really value the education their children are receiving, especially if they insist on an early marriage and child-rearing.

Marriage also differs in different cultures on the perceived role of love. Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, and Verma (1995), for instance, asked students in India, Pakistan, Thailand, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Australia, England, and the United States to rate the importance of love for both the establishment and the maintenance of a marriage. Individualistic cultures were more likely to rate love as essential to the establishment of a marriage, and to agree that the disappearance of love is a sufficient reason to end a marriage. Countries with a large gross domestic product also showed this tendency—not surprising, given the high correlation between affluence and individualism. Also, countries with high marriage and divorce rates, and low fertility rates, assigned greater importance to romantic love. Divorce rates were highly correlated with the belief that the disappearance of love warranted the dissolution of a marriage.

Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) compared 186 traditional cultures on love, and showed that in every culture but one, young people reported falling passionately in love; experienced the euphoria and despair of passionate love; knew of poems, stories, and legends about famous lovers; and sang love songs. Nonetheless, this did not mean that the young people from these cultures could pursue these feelings of love and marry the person they fell in love with. Instead, in many of these cultures, arranged marriages were the norm.

Arranged marriages are quite common in many cultures of the world. In India, for instance, arranged marriages date back 6,000 years (Saraswathi, 1999). Sometimes marriages are arranged by parents far before the age at which the couple can even consider marriage. In other cases, marriage meetings are held between prospective couples, who may then date for a while to decide whether to get married or not. In these cultures, marriage is seen as more than just the union of two individuals, but rather as a union and alliance between two entire families (Dion & Dion, 1993b; Stone, 1990). Love between the two individuals is often not part of this equation but is something that should grow in the marriage relationship. People from these cultures often report that they “love the person they marry,” not “marry the person they love.”

In fact, Hatfield and Rapson (1996) report that getting married based on romantic love is a relatively new concept—about 300 years old in the West and much newer in non-Western cultures. With globalization, however, young people from these countries are opting for selecting their own mates. For instance, 40 percent of young people in India intend to find a marriage partner on their own (Sprecher & Chandak, 1992). This trend is currently reflected in other countries as well, such as Japan, China, Egypt, and Turkey (Arnett, 2001).

**Intercultural Marriages**

Marriage in any culture is not easy, because two people from two different backgrounds, and often two different cultures within a culture, come together...
to live, work, and play. And being together with anyone 24/7 is tough, and bound to bring about its own share of conflicts and struggles (hopefully along with the joy and love!). Any marriage requires work from both partners to be successful, regardless of how "successful" is defined.

This is especially true for intercultural marriages, in which the partners come from two different cultural backgrounds. Given the existence of cultural differences in attitudes toward love, interpersonal attraction, and marriage, and the fact that any marriage in any culture is not easy, it is no wonder that intercultural marriages bring with them their own special problems and issues. Studies of intercultural marriages (see Cottrell, 1990, for a review) have generally shown that conflicts in intercultural marriages arise in several major areas, including the expression of love and intimacy, the nature of commitment and attitudes toward the marriage itself, and approaches to child-rearing. Other potential sources of conflict include differences in perceptions of male–female roles, especially with regard to division of labor (McGoldrick & Preto, 1984; Romano, 1988), differences in domestic money management (Ho, 1984; Hsu, 1977; Kivel, 1973; McGoldrick & Preto, 1984), differences in perceptions of relationships with extended family (Cohen, 1982; Markoff, 1977), and differences in the definitions of marriage itself (Markoff, 1977).

It is no wonder that couples in intercultural marriages experience conflicts with regard to intimacy and love expression. As described in Chapter 8, people of different cultures vary considerably in their expression of basic emotions such as anger, frustration, and happiness. And as we have seen, cultures differ on the degree to which emotions such as love and intimacy are seen as important ingredients of a successful marriage. These differences arise from a fundamental difference in attitudes toward marriage. Americans tend to view marriage as a lifetime companionship between two individuals in love. People of many other cultures view marriage more as a partnership formed for succession (that is, for producing offspring) and for economic and social bonding. Love does not necessarily enter the equation for people in these cultures, at least in the beginning. And in fact many literatures, songs, and today, television and cinema dramas depict the heartbreak of the breakup of a love relationship in order for lovers to get married to someone else through an arranged marriage. With such fundamental differences in the nature of marriage across cultures, it is no wonder that intercultural marriages are often among the most difficult of relationships.

Sometimes the differences between two people involved in an intercultural marriage do not arise until they have children. Often, major cultural differences emerge around issues of child-rearing. This is no surprise, either, because of the enormous differences in socialization practices and the role of parenting in the development of culture, as discussed in Chapter 3. Although it has been a common belief that children of intracultural marriages have stronger ethnic identities than children of intercultural marriages, research does not tend to support this claim (for example, Parsonson, 1987). Children tend to develop strong or weak ethnic identities based not on their parents’ similarities or
differences, but on their upbringing, especially with regard to attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding their single or dual cultures. Children with stronger ethnic identities, however, are more likely to want to marry within their own ethnic group (Parsonson, 1987).

How can intercultural couples overcome these additional obstacles in their relationships to build successful marriages? Of course, communication is important in any relationship, and such communication is especially important in intercultural relationships (Atkeson, 1970). Ho (1984) has suggested that three types of adjustments help to resolve differences: capitulation, compromise, and coexistence. **Capitulation** refers to the ability and willingness to give up one's own cultural behaviors and accept the other's position occasionally. **Compromise** refers to finding a mutual point, with both partners partially giving up their positions and partially accepting each other's. **Coexistence** refers to the process by which both partners live with their respective differences by accepting each other "as they are" in their marriage.

Tseng (1977) offers some additional ways of dealing with intercultural relationships. Tseng's "alternating way" is one in which partners take turns in adapting their cultural behaviors. A "mixing way" is one in which partners take some behaviors and customs from both cultures and randomly introduce them into their marriage. "Creative adjustment" is when partners invent a completely new set of behavior patterns after deciding to give up their respective cultural norms.

There is yet another way of negotiating the trials and tribulations of intercultural marriage, which we will call the "context constructionistic" way. Cultural differences between two people will manifest themselves in specific contexts. One way for two people from different cultures to deal with these differences is to discuss the perspectives of both cultures in relation to each context in which there is a conflict or difference. The couple can then discuss the pros and cons of both perspectives in relation to their lives as a whole—work, family, children, and cultural and ethnic "balance"—and make functional decisions based on these discussions. In some cases, a couple may choose to go with one cultural perspective, in other cases, with the other perspective. The couple may choose to alternate perspectives, or to be creative and establish their own unique perspective on the situation, blending their cultural knowledge. In this fashion, the everyday negotiation of intercultural marriage is an interesting and exciting journey in which the couple as a unit must engage, rather than a "problem" to be dealt with.

In many ways, intercultural marriages are the prime example of intercultural relationships. For them to be successful, both partners need to be flexible, compromising, and committed to the relationship. If these three ingredients are in play, couples will often find ways to make their relationships work. Despite the difficulties, anecdotal evidence suggests that intercultural marriages are not necessarily associated with higher divorce rates than intracultural marriages. Perhaps it all comes down to how much both spouses are willing to work to negotiate differences, compromise, and stay together. Sounds like a good recipe for intracultural marriages as well.