highlighted ways that men and women communicate within single sex groups and how
the differences between them cause misunderstanding and conflict. Examples from her
research include the tendency for women to say Sorry as a way to express empathy, while
men use it and hear it as an apology. Both variants serve the purpose of maintaining
same-sex relationships. Men who express a negative state of mood or feeling can be
frustrated when a woman responds with her own experience of a similar feeling rather than
acknowledging the importance of the man’s. Men typically interrupt each other and expect
to be interrupted in a rather competitive conversational style, while women tend to take
turns more fairly. Thus there is a difficulty for women who might want to speak in a group
of men but are unwilling to interrupt.

Although communication clearly has a role in maintaining relationships, it is important
to note that it is only one of many strategic or routine devices we employ to keep ourselves
together. The change and end of relationships is discussed on pages 272–274.

The role of culture in the formation and maintenance of relationships

A great deal of research has focused on relationships within individualistic societies such
as are dominant in the Anglo-American world and western Europe. However, the growth
of communities of ethnic minorities with different cultural values and the study of more
collectivist cultures have allowed us to more clearly understand the various roles that
culture plays in both the formation and maintenance of relationships.

One of the most important cultural differences is between those societies where young
adults typically make their own choice about whom their partner will be and societies where
marriages are arranged by the family. Although someone coming from a culture following the
first of these norms might find it hard to believe, a large percentage of arranged marriages appear to
be successful despite the absence of choice for the partners. Making such a choice for a relative can be
an elaborate process and families often take great pride in attempting to find a good match. Perhaps it
is no surprise that bypassing many of the distracting influences of passionate infatuation can have more
successful long-term results.

There are certain universals to attraction in terms of mate preference (pages 204–205) but there are also
cultural differences. In some countries, chastity and homemaking skills are more valued in women than
other characteristics, particularly in more traditional societies with more clearly defined gender roles (Buss
1990). In these societies, what makes a good wife for a man is more easily determined by a man’s family than
it might be in more individualistic Western societies where high value is placed on romance and passion.
Although there is evidence that this has little impact on marital satisfaction (Yelsma and Athappilly, 1988),
it may be problematic that so much research in this area relies on questionnaire methods.
Cognitive dissonance could well affect the answers of respondents from both groups, with people unable to write that they are dissatisfied. However, there may also be social norms affecting how appropriate it is to express dissatisfaction with a marriage. There are different understandings across cultures about what is a good or a bad marriage. Affection, for example, may not be a big part of relationships for some cultures. Indo-Pakistani marriages tend to be satisfying when there is a strong religious component to the relationship, when there is financial security, and when there is relatively high status and parental acceptance by families with good reputations (Ahmad and Reid, 2008).

There is also significant evidence that expectations are changing in many traditional societies and more intimacy and romance is expected than previously, which can lead to difficulties.

**EMPirical RESEARCH**

**Communication in South Asian Canadian relationships (Ahmad and Reid, 2008)**

The researchers in this study attempted to investigate whether special communication styles were required to maintain arranged marriages. They focused specifically on listening styles in the relationship and constructed a survey to be completed without participants sharing their answers with their spouse. A snowball sample was obtained by asking the participants to give surveys to others they knew.

In particular, the researchers expected that their survey would show a strong relationship between marriage satisfaction and marriage type where levels of traditionalism are low and self-ratings of levels of listening to understand (as opposed to listening to respond) are high.

The researchers measured marital satisfaction using the Revised Relationship Adjustment Survey; this includes items such as My partner understands and sympathizes with me as well as extra items relevant to the sample such as Our marriage has provided me with the financial and/or social security I want. The degree of traditionalism in the marriage was measured on the Traditional Orientation to Marital Relationship Scale specifically constructed for this study. Listening styles were measured with the Listening Styles in Committed Relationship Scale, which includes items such as When my partner is explaining him/her, I try to get a sense of what things must be like for him/her, so that I may better understand how he/she must be feeling (listening to understand), and I don't find it necessary to pay close attention when my partner is talking, because I already know what my partner is going to say before he/she even says it.

The researchers found significant correlations between scores on the scales as expected: there was less satisfaction among the more traditional relationships, and this was accompanied by a tendency to listen to respond rather than to understand. It is suggested that expectations of equality in the relationship increase effort to listen, which in turn increase satisfaction.

**EXERCISE**

7 This is a correlational study using self-report data from a survey. What kind of problems might this cause researchers when they interpret the results? What does the study show us about the role of culture in the formation and maintenance of relationships?

Canary and Dainton (2003) offer another example of how culture affects the maintenance of relationships. They show how Koreans tend to use less direct and explicit maintenance behaviours; for example, trying to appease their partners not by asking what they want but by anticipating – so they might, for instance, pour a second cup of coffee for a partner without asking. This links to the researchers’ finding that Confucian concepts form the basis of Korean intimate relationships. So, for example, as long as a Korean person believes that their partner is engaging in eu-ri, a long-term obligatory association, they will remain in the relationship.