Figure 11.19 presents some of the findings from this study. The scores were computed by subtracting the participants’ ratings from those made by single, unattached college students who had also participated in the experiment. As you can see, commitment had virtually no effect in the low-threat condition but a sizable effect in the high-threat condition. The negative value for the high-commitment participants in the high-threat condition is particularly noteworthy. This value shows that when the other person posed a threat to their dating relationship, participants who were highly committed to maintaining their relationship viewed the person as much less attractive than did unattached students. Along with other research, these findings suggest that people who are happy with their current relationship devalue the attractiveness of alternative relationships as a means of fostering their dependency and maintaining their commitment (Bazzini & Shaffer, 1999; D. J. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon, Fitzsimons, & Naidoo, 2003; R. S. Miller, 1997; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990).

7. A General Model of Interpersonal Relationships

In this section we have examined the nature of interpersonal relationships, with an eye toward understanding why some relationships survive when others don’t. Figure 11.20 presents a model of relationship functioning that integrates many of the topics we have covered (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). The model is reciprocal, which means we can enter at any point and move forward or backward (P. J. E. Miller & Rempel, 2004). For purposes of illustration, we’ll start at the far left-hand side, representing the point at which Jack becomes dependent on his relationship with Jill. Dependence, defined as the perception that the relationship provides desired benefits one can’t enjoy with anyone else, builds Jack’s commitment to maintain his relationship with Jill. His commitment then gives rise to a host of relationship maintenance behaviors, such as the use of constructive problem-solving strategies, willingness to sacrifice, and a tendency to think in terms of “us and ours” rather than “I or mine.” These behaviors instill trust in Jill, leading her to value the relationship more and building her dependence. The cycle then continues as Jill’s dependence...