3. Initiating a Relationship

In every relationship, the partners can tell a story of how they met. Most of the time, one partner develops an interest in the other and conveys this interest in hopes of having his or her affections reciprocated. To see how this process develops, C. L. Clark, Shaver, and Abrahams (1999) asked college students to describe the strategies they had used in the past to initiate a romantic relationship. Table 11.5 presents the 10 most frequently mentioned strategies. The most common strategy was to talk with the other person about matters of a personal nature. As we will see momentarily, this strategy is an excellent way to build intimacy. Other common strategies include touching, asking the person out on a date, and talking on the phone.

Not all romantic overtures meet with success. Part of the problem is that people tend to overestimate the extent to which they are communicating their interest in a potential romantic partner (Vorauer, Cameron, Holmes, & Pearce, 2003). We think our intentions are obvious, but they can be overlooked. Misunderstandings can also occur. Men too readily assume that a woman who shows an interest in them desires a sexual relationship, even when her interest is only to establish a friendship (Abbey, 1982, 1987). In Chapter 13 we explain that misunderstandings like these can have serious consequences involving date rape or other forms of sexual coercion (Muehlenhard, 1988).

4. Becoming Intimate

Most people who seek a romantic relationship hope to become intimate with their partner. But what is intimacy? The word comes from the Latin word *intimatus*, which