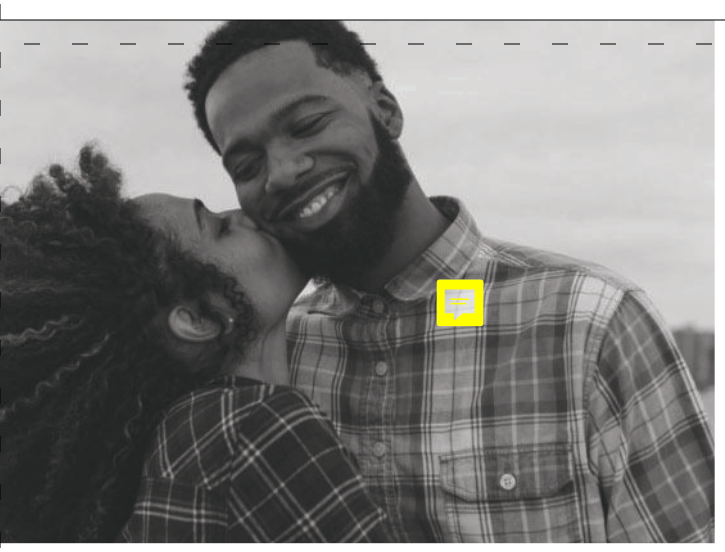
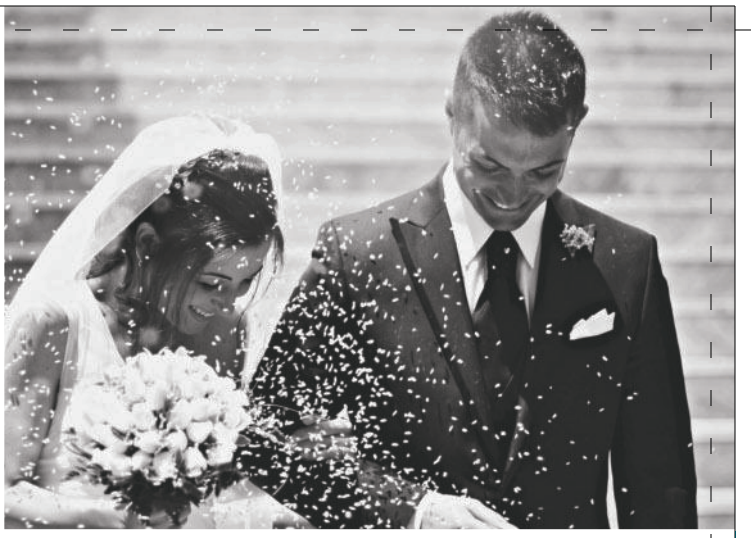
Intimate Relationships

THIRD EDITION

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY NEW YORK LONDON





Intimate Relationships

THIRD EDITION

Thomas N. Bradbury

University of California, Los Angeles

Benjamin R. Karney

University of California, Los Angeles

W. W. Norton & Company has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder Norton and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The firm soon expanded its program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By mid-century, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

Printed in Canada

Editor: Ken Barton
Associate Managing Editor: Melissa Atkin
Assistant Editor: Eve Sanoussi
Editorial Assistant: Katie Pak
Development and Copy Editor: Betsy Dilernia
Managing Editor, College: Marian Johnson
Managing Editor, College Digital Media: Kim Yi
Production Manager: Stephen Sajdak
Media Editor: Scott Sugarman, Kaitlin Coats
Associate Media Editor: Victoria Reuter
Assistant Media Editor: Alex Trivilino, Allison Nicole Smith
Marketing Manager: Ashley Sherwood
Design Director: Rubina Yeh
Designer: Lissi Sigillo
Photo Editor: Agnieszka Czapski
Photo Researcher: Rona Tuccillo
Director of College Permissions: Megan Schindel
Permissions Specialist: Bethany Salminen
Composition/Illustrations: Achorn International, Inc.
Manufacturing: Transcontinental Printing
Illustrations by Penumbra Design, Inc.

ISBN: 978-0-393-64025-0

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com
W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

The scientific study of intimate relationships would not exist without the visionary work of

John Bowlby
Urie Bronfenbrenner
Reuben Hill
Neil Jacobson
Harold Kelley

With gratitude, we dedicate this book to them.

about the authors

THOMAS N. BRADBURY earned his BA in psychobiology from Hamilton College, his MA in general psychology from Wake Forest University, and his PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Illinois. A Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, Bradbury specializes in using observational and longitudinal methods to examine how newlywed marriages develop and change. The recipient of the American Psychology Association's Distinguished Early Career Award, Bradbury has edited two books: *The Psychology of Marriage* (with Frank Fincham) and *The Developmental Course of Marital Dysfunction.* Each year he teaches a large undergraduate class and small honors seminars on intimate relationships, and in 2013 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Catholic University in Milan. Tom and Cindy, his wife of 30 years, have two sons, Timothy and Nicholas, and live in Los Angeles with two very large and affectionate Bernese Mountain Dogs.

BENJAMIN R. KARNEY earned his BA in psychology from Harvard University and his MA and PhD in social psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles. Before joining the faculty in the Department of Psychology at UCLA in 2007, Karney was a professor at the University of Florida, where he received numerous awards for his teaching, including the Teacher of the Year Award in 2003. As a Professor at UCLA, he offers graduate and undergraduate classes on intimate relationships, and he received the Distinguished Teaching Award from the UCLA Department of Psychology in 2011. Honored for Early Career Achievement by the International Association for Relationships Research, Karney has directed research funded by the National Institutes of Health, the Administration on Children and Families, and the Department of Defense. He has published extensively on the various ways that intimate partners interpret the events of their relationships, and the effects of stress on lower-income and military marriages. Ben lives with his wife, Ali, in Los Angeles, is the proud parent of two children, Daniella and Gabriel, and owns far too many books.

In the nearly 30 years they have been collaborating, Bradbury and Karney have twice received the National Council on Family Relations Rueben Hill Research and Theory Award for outstanding contributions to family science.

brief contents

a letter to students

If you are reading this book, chances are good that we have something in common. Maybe you've wondered how two people who began the day as strangers can fall deeply in love, and why two other similar people may not. Perhaps you have wondered, as we have, how two completely committed partners can declare their undying love for each other, but then grow unhappy and distant. Maybe you've felt frustrated or confused with your own relationship but mystified about how to strengthen it or move it forward. Or perhaps you have been so overjoyed that you wanted to know every possible way to make your relationship last forever.

We think constantly about questions like these, and we are lucky to be in a profession where we can try to answer them. The scientific study of human intimacy and relationships has grown rapidly over the past several decades, with scholars in various fields, including psychology, family studies, sociology, communications, social work, economics, and anthropology, all wondering: How do intimate relationships work? What makes them succeed or fail? How can we make them better? We wrote this book to give you the most up-to-date answers to these and many other relevant questions. In doing so, we highlight research studies and ideas that are particularly insightful, and then pull them together in ways that reveal important truths about human intimacy.

We love to read books that make us smarter about compelling subjects, and we kept this goal—making you smarter about intimate relationships—in the forefront of our minds as we wrote these chapters. Simply presenting research studies and interesting examples is a great way to accomplish this goal, but more than anything else, we wrote this book to help you become more critical, analytical, and thoughtful, when it comes to topics like attraction, love, closeness, and effective communication. Our goal is not simply to present you with this information but to show you how to critique it, evaluate it, and apply it to your life.

If you are a curious person who likes an occasional challenge or puzzle, then this is a book that will draw you in, keep you captivated, and help you see why we and so many others are fascinated by intimate relationships. If you have ideas for improving the next edition, please let us know.

Thomas Bradbury, bradbury@psych.ucla.edu
Benjamin Karney, karney@psych.ucla.edu

preface

Scope, Purpose, and Approach

Welcome to the third edition of *Intimate Relationships*. Before the first edition was published, we had each been teaching classes and seminars on human intimacy and relationships for several years. Even then, we could not believe our good fortune at having such rich material and such enthusiastic audiences, and we were eager to showcase all the remarkable theories and new discoveries in this rapidly changing field. The books available at the time brought us reasonably close to this goal, but we wanted something different for our students: a fresh and up-to-date introduction to all the key facets of intimate relationships, combining surprising insights from research with critical analysis of influential theories and studies. Conversations with colleagues confirmed the need for a lively but tightly organized text that would sharpen and deepen students' grasp of human intimacy. Equally apparent was the need for a support package that would give instructors tools they could use to be more effective and efficient in the classroom.

We originally wrote the book to address these needs, but our agenda was even broader. We wanted to give our undergraduates a book they could not wait to read. We wanted to cover topics that other books had only glossed over, topics like gender and sexual orientation, the biological basis of intimacy, stressful circumstances, cultural influences on relationships, couples therapy, and the role of intimacy across the lifespan. We wanted to show our colleagues that the study of intimate relationships is now a well-established topic of profound importance in the social sciences, as well as a topic long overdue for a scholarly text with a support package coordinated by active researchers. Above all, we set out to capture the excitement we felt after reading a well-crafted journal article, hearing a great talk or lecture, interviewing couples in our research studies and after our workshops, or watching a good movie or reading a good novel: Intimate relationships are fascinating! Look at the diverse forms they take; how much they've changed over the years and how much they remain the same. That excitement naturally led to inquiries: How do they work? Why are relationships so hard sometimes? What are the principles that guide them? How can we use what we know to make improvements?

In the previous editions of this textbook, we drew on hundreds of research reports and dozens of scholarly books to answer these questions. In the years since the last edition was published, the science of intimate relationships has continued to grow and mature. With this fully updated and revised third edition, we have kept our eyes on the cutting edge, building on the

accumulated wisdom of researchers, while describing the most exciting new developments. We have done something else as well. Feedback from our own students, along with comments from expert reviews by our colleagues in the field, have allowed us to build upon the strengths of the last edition, while listening and responding to the occasional constructive criticism. Some users of the second edition noted that, in our enthusiasm, we occasionally used several words when one or two might have been sufficient. Those readers will be pleased to find the third edition more streamlined and focused.

Our excitement for the field—and for teaching this class—has only grown. We hope students will sense our enthusiasm on every page, and we hope you will find this book and the supporting resources essential to your success in teaching this material.

Organization of the Book

One of our greatest satisfactions in developing this book was to impose an intuitive but incisive organizational structure on the wealth of available material. This third edition consists of 15 chapters that we believe mirror the distinctions people naturally make when discussing and investigating intimate relationships. Although we believe there are some advantages to presenting the material to students in the sequence we chose (particularly starting with Chapters 1, 2, and 3), we wrote the chapters so they can be taught in any order. While giving instructors flexibility in how they move through the various topics, we've also included cross-references between chapters to give students a sense of continuity, as well as opportunities to see familiar ideas extended to new areas.

From foundations to elements and processes to changes in intimate relationships, we believe that these 15 chapters provide students with an introduction to this complex and fascinating subject that is at once broad and deep, classic and contemporary, rigorous and relevant. Arguably, though, the most important part of this book is not in the chapters, but in the roughly 2,500 published works we cite in the reference section. These publications span an incredible array of topics and academic disciplines, and a disproportionate number were published in just the last 10 years—clear evidence that rapid advances are continuing to be made in our understanding of intimate relationships. This work is the driving force behind our desire to provide our students and yours with a timely new perspective on this vital field.

Special Features

Although the topics covered in the chapters are diverse and varied, they are unified by a clear design and consistent format. The first page of each chapter

presents students with a chapter outline listing the major section headings that organize the material. Every chapter starts with an opening vignette taken from movies, television shows, books, or real life, each one designed to draw students in and highlight a different side of intimate relationships. Here are some examples:

- The relationships of Albert Einstein, the smartest man in the world (Chapter 1)
- The challenges of raising a genderless infant (Chapter 4)
- The true story of the couple that led the Supreme Court to legalize same-sex marriage (Chapter 5)
- The enduring business of matchmaking (Chapter 7)
- What happens to the couple who decide to have sex every day for a year (Chapter 9)
- The consequences of a leading politician's infidelity (Chapter 11)
- The experience of a bisexual college student coming out to her Indian parents (Chapter 12)

Each vignette prompts a series of specific questions that encourage students to read more deeply, while familiarizing them with asking critical questions and thinking about the evidence they need to answer them. The key questions that will be addressed later in the chapter are also presented here.

The chapters are populated with graphs that illustrate important concepts and research findings, tables that summarize or sample widely used measurement tools, and case studies. The text is also enriched with many kinds of other materials—poems, songs, cartoons, photographs, and actual dialogue from couples—to show how so many of the ideas connect with everyday experiences. Every major section within each chapter is anchored by a list of Main Points that provide a quick and effective review of all the key ideas.

At least once in each chapter, we shine a Spotlight on an idea from the text and then develop it in a new or controversial direction. In each case, we identify a provocative, well-defined question or problem, explain its significance, and give students a focused briefing on that issue. Here are some examples:

- The surprising complexity of measuring relationship satisfaction (Chapter 3)
- Changing places and gender roles (Chapter 4)
- The science and politics of divorce (Chapter 6)
- Hooking up and its prevalence among college students (Chapter 7)
- Consensual nonmonogamy and polyamory (Chapter 9)
- Arranged marriages compared to those in which spouses choose each other (Chapter 13)

Though the chapters are independent enough to be taught in any order, a goal of ours was to write a book with a strong narrative flow from chapter to

chapter, which we saw as an improvement over the more typical topic-by-topic organization. At the end of each chapter, we reinforce this flow with Conclusions that relate back to the opening vignette and forward to the chapter that follows. For example, Chapter 9, on sexual intimacy, begins with the story of a couple who vowed to have sex every day for a year, setting us up to discuss the various functions sex can serve in the development and maintenance of an intimate relationship. The chapter ends by noting that, as powerful as sex is for keeping two people connected, experiences of physical intimacy coexist alongside partners' disagreements and differences of opinion. How do partners navigate these differences? What does relationship science have to say about the effective management of the differing agendas that are inevitable in relationships? Chapter 10, on conflict, gives students some clues, and in the process builds a logical bridge between these two areas of interpersonal interaction.

New to the Third Edition

As we considered how to update and improve *Intimate Relationships* for this third edition, we solicited feedback not only from the thousands of students who have used the book in our own classes, but also from colleagues who have been teaching from the book at other universities. We received lots of praise for some of the features we were especially excited about in the last edition: the way our chapters organize the field, our emphasis on identifying the key questions of this field and the progress we've made in answering them, our extensive support package, and the book's inviting graphic design. All these features have been preserved in this third edition.

We also received a number of requests for new features and material that users of the book hoped to see in a next edition. This third edition responds to these requests with the addition of *four entirely new chapters*. The first of these is a new chapter on *Gender* (Chapter 4), in which we address the historical development of our ideas about gender, including the rise of **transgender** visibility, **gender nonconformity**, and **nonbinary gender identities**. The new chapter includes a table listing the **over 30 different possible gender identities Facebook allows users to choose from**.

We have also written a new chapter on *Sexual Orientation* (Chapter 5), which similarly breaks down outdated assumptions that sexual orientation can be described by a simple set of categories. The new chapter captures modern students' experience that **sexual orientation is multifaceted**, that **sexual attraction is different from sexual behavior**, that **sexual identity can be fluid**, and that **the most common sexual identity is "mostly heterosexual."** Furthermore, we address **asexuality, internalized homonegativity**, and **the biological and social origins of sexual orientation**.

Our new chapter on *Sexual Intimacy* (Chapter 9) is just as cutting edge, discussing **the functions of sex in relationships, the elements of a satisfying**

sex life, and **the challenges of finding time for sex**. Furthermore, our text now addresses **consensual nonmonogamy** and **polyamory**.

Our new chapter on *Infidelity and Aggression* (Chapter 11) examines the many ways that intimate partners betray one another. The chapter presents the latest theories of **how infidelity happens**, drawing upon evolutionary, social, and biological models. We also present the latest views on intimate partner violence, distinguishing between **controlling coercive violence** and **situational couple violence**.

Of course, the text has also been streamlined and more sharply focused throughout. Every chapter includes updated references, reflecting the latest developments in relationship science. Throughout the new edition, we have included new examples and references to research on ethnically diverse and same-sex relationships.

The Support Package

We know from teaching large-market courses, such as introductory psychology, social psychology, and abnormal psychology, that students benefit when instructors have excellent supplemental resources, and we were surprised that few of the existing texts on intimate relationships offered instructors much support. We received a lot of gratified responses to the extensive ancillary package that accompanied the first and second editions of *Intimate Relationships*, and all of those features have been updated for the third edition.

The feature we are perhaps the most excited about is *The Norton Intimate Relationships Videos*, a collection of video clips that we created to accompany each chapter. Because the scientific study of intimate relationships is still relatively new as a discipline, many highly influential scholars are alive today and can share their insights with us. To capitalize on this fact, we worked with filmmakers David Lederman and Trisha Solyn to interview several of the most prominent relationship scholars working today. These interviews of scholars sharing their wisdom and perspectives, along with young adults and couples giving their opinions and relating their experiences, have been edited together to create fascinating and entertaining video material relevant to each chapter in the book. In several videos, we also present extended case studies. These include a young gay man discussing his experience with coming out, a young woman talking about how her early difficulties with a stepfather affected her later relationships, a young woman talking about conflict and aggression in her relationships, and a middle-aged couple talking about how chronic financial stress affected their relationship and the husband's health. At 10 minutes in length or less per clip, the individual videos can easily be shown during class.

Instructors can access the videos through the Interactive Instructor's Guide (IIG), a repository of lecture and teaching materials for instructors accessible through the Norton website. Teaching materials can be easily sorted

by either the textbook chapter/headings or key phrases. The videos are accompanied by teaching tips and suggested discussion questions, which can be used either in the classroom or as homework. The IIG also offers chapter summaries, additional teaching suggestions, discussion questions, and suggested additional resources to help instructors plan their courses.

Several other instructor resources are available to enhance student learning. These include:

- PowerPoint Slides for each chapter, which include all the photographs and illustrations from the text along with lecture suggestions from instructors who have taught the course for many years.
- A Test Bank, featuring concept outlines and 55–60 multiple-choice and 15 short-answer/essay questions per chapter (over 1,000 questions total), available in Word RTF and through the ExamView Assessment Suite (which can be downloaded free of charge from the Norton website by instructors using *Intimate Relationships*). The Test Bank contains a flexible pool of questions for each chapter that allows instructors to create a quiz or test that meets their individual requirements. Questions can be easily sorted by difficulty or question type, making it easy to construct tests that are meaningful and diagnostic.

Acknowledgments

Many people contributed to the new edition of this book, and we are indebted to all of them for their efforts and fine work. First and foremost, we are so grateful to Ken Barton, our editor at W. W. Norton, for his constant enthusiasm and commitment to this book, and for ably taking over where our beloved previous editor, Sheri Snavely, left off. In preparing this third edition, Ken assembled and organized a tremendous team of talented individuals. In particular, we had the great fortune to work with Betsy Dilernia, our exceptionally careful, insightful, and rigorous developmental editor and copyeditor. As she was for the previous edition, Betsy has been the taskmaster we needed to rein in our natural exuberance, and this new edition is leaner and much better as a result of her excellent judgment.

Through the production process, project editor Melissa Atkin managed the flow of chapters and somehow got everyone to do their jobs while she remained unfailingly calm and pleasant. Production manager Stephen Sadjak kept us on schedule and ensured that the book came out on time. Photo editor Agnieszka Czapski and photo researcher Rona Tuccillo dug into the deepest recesses of the Internet to find photographs illustrating ideas we could only vaguely articulate. Media/ancillary editors Scott Sugarman, Kaitlin Coats, and Victoria Reuter, with the assistance of Alex Trivilino and Allison Nicole Smith, helped create a support package that is second to none. Katie Pak and

Eve Sanoussi provided enthusiastic, cheerful, and invaluable editorial assistance throughout the lengthy revision process. If you like the cover of this book (and we adore it), then you have the brilliant Tiani Kennedy and Debra Morton Hoyt to thank for it. And last but not least, design director Rubina Yeh and book designer Lissi Sigillo designed this beautiful book you hold in your hands.

Across the three editions of this book, several scholars provided excellent feedback, and their insights continue to inform the material. We gratefully acknowledge the valuable feedback we have received from:

Miranda Barone, *University of Southern California*
Susan D. Boon, *University of Calgary*
M. Jennifer Brougham, *Arizona State University*
Jennifer L. Butler, *Case Western Reserve University*
Rod Cate, *University of Arizona*
Rebecca Cobb, *Simon Fraser University*
Melissa Curran, *Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences*
Carolyn Cutrona, *Iowa State University*
Crystal Dehle, *University of Oregon*
Lisa M. Diamond, *University of Utah*
Brent Donellan, *Michigan State University*
Kathy Dowell, *University of Minnesota Duluth*
William Dragon, *Cornell College*
Paul Eastwick, *University of California, Davis*
Eli Finkel, *Northwestern University*
Omri Gillath, *University of Kansas*
Meara Habashi, *University of Iowa*
Mo Therese Hannah, *Siena College*
Chandice Haste-Jackson, *Syracuse University*
John Holmes, *University of Waterloo*
Emily Impett, *University of Toronto Mississauga*
Molly Ireland, *Texas Tech University*
Justin Lavner, *University of Georgia*
Tamara Lawrence, *Baylor University*
Shanhong Luo, *University of North Carolina, Wilmington*
Amy Muise, *York University*
Lauren M. Papp, *University of Wisconsin-Madison*
Allison Reisbig, *University of Nebraska Lincoln*
Dylan Selterman, *University of Maryland*
Nicole Shelton, *Princeton University*

We are particularly grateful to all the distinguished scholars who took the time to be filmed for our video clips: Chris Agnew, Purdue University; Art Aron, Stony Brook University; Niall Bolger, Columbia University; Andrew Christensen, UCLA; Nancy Collins, University of California, Santa Barbara;

Joanne Davila, Stony Brook University; Lisa Diamond, University of Utah; Garth Fletcher, University of Canterbury; John Holmes, University of Waterloo; John Lydon, McGill University; Neil Malamuth, UCLA; Gayla Margolin, University of Southern California; Harry Reis, University of Rochester; Rena Repetti, UCLA; Philip Shaver, University of California, Davis; Jeffry Simpson, University of Minnesota; and Gail Wyatt, UCLA. We consider ourselves extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to include these scholars in this project. Several students and acquaintances also devoted their time and insights to the video series, and we thank them for their willingness to talk about their personal lives with us. Although the final set of video clips is about 2 hours in total duration, those 2 hours were gleaned from more than 100 hours of interviews that we conducted in collaboration with David Lederman and Trisha Solyn. David and Trisha delivered a final product that far exceeded our expectations, and it is because of their devotion to the project and their sheer brilliance as filmmakers that we are able to offer students and instructors this fine series of clips.

Other aspects of the support package were produced by equally industrious and talented people. Jennifer Gonyea, University of Georgia, created the PowerPoint lectures and student study materials, as well as the additional resources for lecture planning and classroom activities. Ashley Randall, Arizona State University, and Laurel Wroblicky of the Bittner Development Group coauthored and revised the Test Bank.

contents

1 Love and Why It Matters

The Relationships of the Smartest Man in the World

Albert Einstein's scientific discoveries are widely known, but the details of his private life remained hidden until his personal correspondence was released to the public long after his death. Einstein's scholarly brilliance, we would learn, stands in stark contrast to his turbulent relationships. The most prominent person in Einstein's intimate life was Mileva Marić (**FIGURE 1.1**). Albert and Mileva met in 1896 as physics students at Zurich Polytechnic—he was just 17, she was 20. Their shared passion for physics gave rise to mutual affection, leading Einstein to wonder, "How was I able to live alone before, my little everything? Without you I lack self-confidence, passion for work, and enjoyment of life—in short, without you, my life is no life" (Holton, 1995, p. 62).

Mileva's unexpected pregnancy would reveal the limits of Einstein's commitment to their relationship. He rarely saw Mileva during the pregnancy, preferring instead to tutor students or hike in the Alps. He never told his family or friends about his daughter, Lieserl, nor did he see her himself; she probably died in infancy from scarlet fever. Although Einstein did marry Mileva after Lieserl's birth, the union was motivated more by a sense of duty than deep affection.

Challenges to their marriage soon arose, including health problems for Mileva, the birth of two boys, Einstein's demanding travel schedule, and his interest in other women. With the marriage deteriorating, Einstein outlined conditions that Mileva had to fulfill for their relationship to continue:

> You will obey the following points in your relations with me: (1) you will not expect any intimacy from me, nor will you reproach me in any way; (2) you will stop talking to me if I request it; (3) you will leave my bedroom or study immediately without protest if I request it. (Isaacson, 2007, p. 186)

Mileva's rejection of her husband's selfish demands led to a separation in 1914, and they eventually divorced in 1919. Years later Einstein's younger son would comment, "The worst destiny is to have no destiny, and also to be the destiny of no one else"

FIGURE 1.1 Albert Einstein with his first wife, Mileva Marić, in 1911.

(Overbye, 2000, p. 375). Einstein's older son would remark, "Probably the only project he ever gave up on was me" (Pais, 2005, p. 453).

Hastening the end of Einstein's marriage was his relationship with his cousin Elsa. Acquaintances since childhood, Einstein and Elsa grew close when he was still married to Mileva. While Elsa managed their finances and their apartment in Berlin, Einstein provided Elsa with a link to fame and fortune. They married in 1919 and established a comfortable relationship, despite his affairs with several women. Later, Einstein would write to the son of one of his friends, "What I admired most about [your father] was the fact that he was able to live so many years with one woman, not only in peace but also in constant unity, something I have lamentably failed at twice" (Isaacson, 2007, p. 540).

Consider the paradox of Einstein's intellect: An unequaled master at revealing mysteries of the cosmos, Einstein puzzled in vain over matters of the heart! Can we draw a conclusion about which is the greater challenge?

Questions

Albert Einstein, by his own admission, failed as a husband and struggled as a father, suggesting that success in intimate relationships requires something more than a shrewd intellect. Imagine you and Einstein are close friends, and he turns to you for advice about exactly what this "something more" might be. His marriage is failing, his boys are begging for attention, Elsa is inviting him to Berlin, and work demands are piling up. Just when you start to feel smug about telling a soon-to-be Nobel laureate how to live his life, your friend Albert implores you to help: "What is it about relationships that makes them so delightful at the beginning and so difficult as time passes? Why do I feel utterly secure sometimes but under attack at other times? Can both people ever get what they want from a relationship?!"

We wrote this book to answer these questions and to show how the tools of science can be applied to the mysteries of love and relationships. In doing so we aim to give you the knowledge you need—to respond to a friend like Albert, but also to give you a smart way to think about the relationships in your own life. In this first chapter, we explain how intimate relationships are different from all other relationships, and we discuss what love is and why it can be so elusive. But first we have to ask: Why do relationships matter? And how do intimate relationships come to hold so much power in our lives?

Why Intimate Relationships Are Important

With just a few biographical details, we can speculate about the emotional dramas that unfolded in Einstein's life: his joy when Mileva first smiled at him, the passion he felt when they were physically close, his dismay at Mileva's pregnancy, the sadness prompted by Lieserl's tragic death, the frustra-

> "No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own."
>
> —David Hume, Scottish philosopher, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740)

tion that marked his first marriage, and the contentment he found in his later years with Elsa.

Intimate relationships matter because they are the only setting in which feelings and experiences like these occur. And while Einstein was unique as a scientist, he holds no special claim on the joys and sorrows that arise from close social bonds. For all of us, to love and be loved are the most basic of human needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and few punishments are more costly than loneliness and social isolation (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014). People the world over view their closest relationships as a vital source of meaning and purpose in life (Bonn & Tafarodi, 2013; Taforodi et al., 2012). When we are down, sick, or dying we want nothing more than physical comfort and the company of those who love us the most. We learn about who we are, what we will tolerate, and what we can accomplish from our closest relationships. Without an understanding of intimate relationships, we cannot fully appreciate the whole range of experiences that give our lives depth, color, and significance.

Relationships are so fundamental to our emotional lives that we can be soothed and comforted by even the smallest gesture. Imagine this: You are a participant in a research study, lying on your back in an MRI scanner, looking up at a video monitor. A technician explains that when you see a red *X*, you have a 20 percent chance of receiving a small shock via an electrode attached to your ankle. When you see a blue *O*, you have a 0 percent chance of receiving a shock. The large magnet encircling your head detects tiny changes in your brain activity after you see the *X* or the *O* and translates these signals into images of your brain. You are shown either an *X* or an *O* under three separate conditions: holding your intimate partner's hand, holding the hand of a stranger who is the same sex as your partner, and holding no hand at all.

In the actual study, analysis of the brain images that were collected after women were shown the dreaded *X* or the safe *O* (but before any shock actually occurred) indicated that brain regions governing emotional and behavioral threat responses were activated less when holding a partner's hand than when holding either no hand or a stranger's hand. In other words, the participants registered less threat simply by holding their partner's hand. In fact, the happier the women reported being in their relationships, the less their threat-related brain regions were activated when the shock was signalled (Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006) (**FIGURE 1.2**).

This research shows that we are biologically attuned not just to people in general, but to the person with whom we share an intimate bond. As remarkable as it may seem, when we are holding our partner's hand, we are exerting control over our mate's nervous system, empowering him or her to be strong in the face of uncontrollable threat. This human capacity for intimacy—like the capacity for language, reasoning, or social perception—enables us to

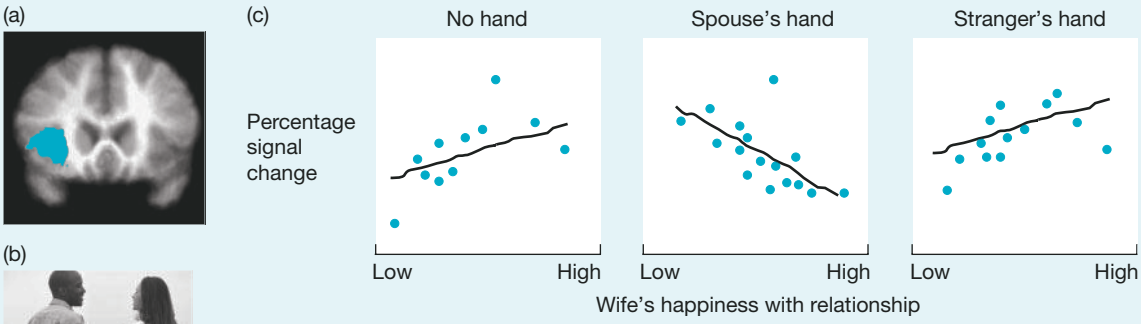


FIGURE 1.2 The hand-holding study. (a) Certain brain regions, including the right anterior insula, are known to respond to threats that people perceive in their environment. (b) When women hold their husband's hand, however, these regions become less active—the "signal change" is reduced—compared to when they hold a stranger's hand or no hand at all (c). This benefit appears to be greatest for women in happy marriages. As shown in the middle scatter plot, women who report happier marriages show more deactivation in these regions compared to women who report less happiness. As happiness goes up, activation of these threat-related brain regions goes down. (Source: Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006.)

regulate our emotions and the emotions of people close to us, and therefore adapt to the world in which we live. The lead author of this study, neuroscientist James Coan, would later write:

> One of the original hand holding study participants left the scanner crying and, when asked what was wrong, reported that the combination of threat and soothing from her husband caused her to remember the way her husband held her hand during labor—a memory that brought her tears of joy. (Beckes & Coan, 2013, p. 90)

Understanding intimate relationships, this basic feature of who we are, is thus essential to understanding the human condition.

One of life's cruel ironies is that the closeness that makes us glow with feelings of passion and companionship also leaves us vulnerable to the pain that relationships can cause. Few of us will escape the unpleasant experiences that can occur in relationships. We may feel unappreciated or misunderstood, or have to face jealousy and heartache, or suffer through sexual rejection, verbal abuse, or infidelity. We might even inflict such feelings or behaviors on someone we profess to love. Experiences even more extreme than these are far from rare in relationships; for example, about 4.8 million women and 2.9 million men are assaulted by their intimate partners each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In the time it takes for you to finish reading this book, news reports in virtually every major U.S. city will document how one partner has killed another, and perhaps their children, because of relationship difficulties.

If intimate relationships are capable of bringing out the very best and the very worst in all of us, then it should follow that they will have all sorts

of powerful consequences, far beyond the emotions they evoke. Below we round out our discussion of why relationships are important by outlining several such consequences.

Intimate Relationships Affect Our Happiness and Well-Being

Our relationships affect our **subjective well-being**, or how happy we are with life in general. For example, knowing someone's **relationship status** tells us something about that person's subjective well-being. In research studies, married people report greater happiness when compared to people who are unmarried and living together, and compared to people who are divorced, separated, or widowed. Among people who are unmarried, those who live with a partner tend to be happier than those living alone (Diener, Gohm, Suh, & Oishi, 2000; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Dush & Amato, 2005; Stack & Eshleman, 1998).

Is every person who is in a relationship happier than every person who is single? Of course not. Relationship status matters when it comes to subjective well-being, but other important factors come into play. After all, plenty of people who choose to remain single thrive when doing so, in part because they can create social networks that contribute to their happiness (DePaulo, 2014). For people who are in committed partnerships, **relationship quality**—how good or bad people judge their relationship to be—can affect their overall subjective well-being. For example, while the average married person is happier than the average unmarried person, a married person in a lousy relationship will probably experience less subjective well-being than an unmarried person in a good relationship (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). In fact, so powerful is the quality of intimate relationships that it indicates more about a person's overall subjective well-being than does his or her satisfaction with any other domain in life, including work, finances, friendships, community, and health (Glenn & Weaver, 1981; Headey, Veenhoven, & Wearing, 1991; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004) (**FIGURE 1.3**). Having a happy life in general does not necessarily bring about a happy relationship (Be, Whisman, & Uebelacker,

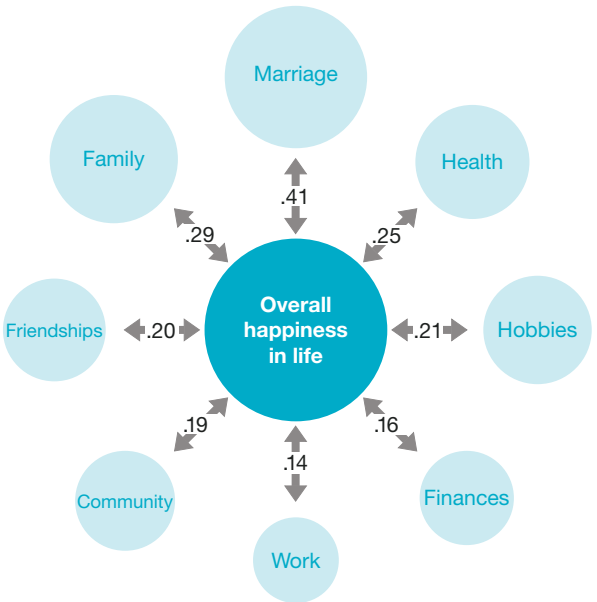


FIGURE 1.3 Intimate relationships and personal happiness. Overall happiness with life corresponds more closely to happiness in marriage than to satisfaction with any other domain. The numbers shown in this figure can range from 0 to 1, with higher numbers indicating stronger correspondence.

> "The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction."
>
> —Tony Kushner, playwright, *Angels in America: Perestroika* (1991)

2013), but people who are happy in their relationship do tend to become happier overall with their lives (Carr, Freedman, Cornman, & Schwarz, 2014).

Will all the people who are reasonably happy in their relationship experience a high degree of subjective well-being or overall happiness in life? Again, the answer is no; just because partners are happy right now in their relationship does not mean the relationship is consistently fulfilling. As great as it is to be in a happy relationship, the real benefits come to those couples who manage to sustain that high standard over time (Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008).

The important idea here is that people tend to be happier when they are in a relationship that is of high quality and that endures. And this leads to a new question: How exactly do intimate relationships protect us and make us happy? What do relationships provide that promotes happiness? Research supports three factors.

First, intimate relationships promote happiness because of their effect on our physical health. For example, studies have shown that people who can resolve relationship conflicts are less vulnerable to catching a common cold after being exposed to an experimentally administered virus (Cohen et al., 1998). Cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune functioning are all stronger when conflict and hostility are at a minimum in intimate relationships (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993, 1996). In addition, the body actually heals more quickly with the support of a caring close relationship (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005). Married people are less likely than unmarried people to be diagnosed with cancer, to receive inadequate care for cancer, and to die as a result of cancer (Aizer et al., 2013). People who remain in committed relationships, and avoid divorce, also live longer, compared to people with unstable partnerships (Sbarra, Law, & Portley, 2011). Because of these many links between intimacy and health, married people in general live longer than unmarried people do (e.g., Kaplan & Kronick, 2006), and they gain an added advantage in longevity when their relationships are rewarding (Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014) (**FIGURE 1.4**).

FIGURE 1.4 Intimate relationships and physical health. Intimate relationships are important because they affect our health and well-being. We can expect that this man's recovery will be slowed by the woman's selfish response to his illness.

In exploring why relationships improve longevity, scholars speculate that people in relationships, and those in healthy, positive relationships, receive more support than people who are on their own do. Researchers

test this speculation by directly observing what couples are doing that seems to promote better health. For example, a team of investigators followed 188 couples dealing with one partner's congestive heart failure (Coyne et al., 2001). In visits to couples' homes, research assistants interviewed and gave standardized questionnaires to each partner in separate rooms. At the end of the visits, the partners were reunited and videotaped for 10 minutes talking about a disagreement in their relationship. The researchers examined the recorded conversations in detail and counted the number of times the partners said supportive and critical things to each other. Combining these counts with the interview and questionnaire data produced an index of overall relationship quality. Public records documented which patients died over a span of 4 years and when those deaths occurred. Using the composite index to distinguish between couples who were higher and lower in relationship quality, the researchers showed that people in happier relationships were less likely to die in this 4-year period compared to those in unhappier relationships (**FIGURE 1.5**).

A second way close relationships promote happiness is through sexual intimacy. People say that sex is the activity that makes them happiest day-to-day. (Commuting is the worst activity; see Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004.) Who is benefitting from this fact? You may have heard this old joke: "What do married and single people have in common? Each thinks the other is having more sex." It turns out that the single people

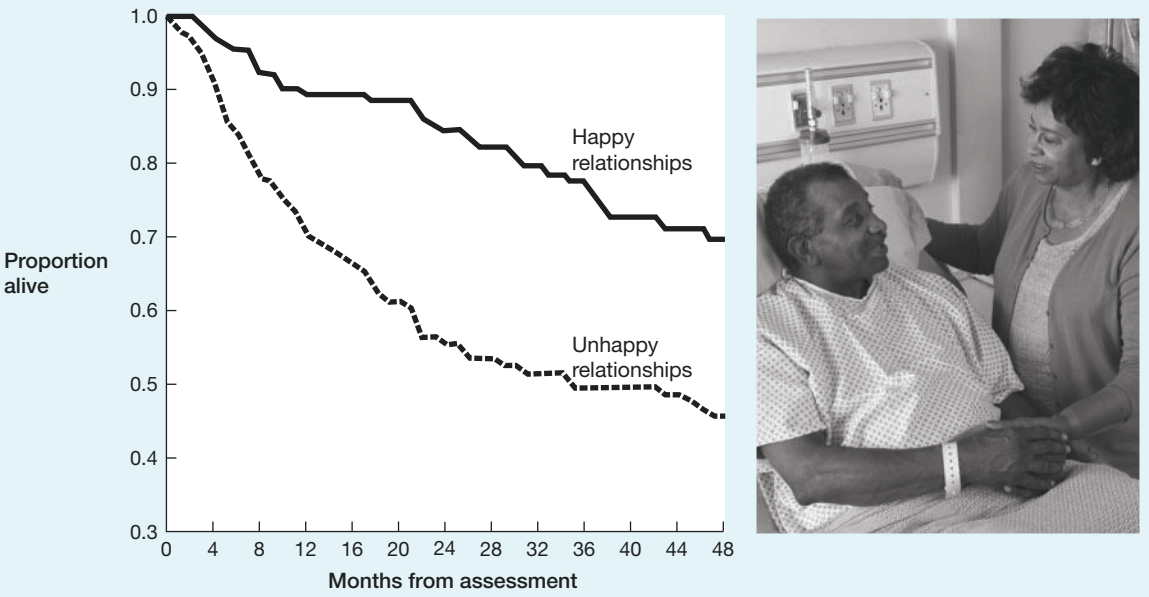


FIGURE 1.5 The heart attack study. In the 48 months following one partner's heart attack, about 30 percent of the patients in happy relationships died, compared to 55 percent of the patients in unhappy relationships. (Source: Adapted from Coyne et al., 2001.)

are correct: People with a steady partner have sex far more frequently than those who are not partnered. For example, a survey of U.S. adults shows that unmarried people who are living with a partner have sex about 90 times per year, whereas those without a partner have sex about 35 times per year (Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2017) (**FIGURE 1.6**). These results confirm earlier studies (e.g., Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994), but they leave open the possibility that having sex with many more different partners may give unattached people an added boost in happiness. However, as one team of economists stated, "The happiness-maximizing number of sexual partners in the previous year is calculated to be 1" (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004, p. 393).

Finally, relationships have a surprising effect on financial well-being. Economists using surveys of income and relationship status estimate the value of marriage to be roughly $100,000 per year, relative to being separated or widowed (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004). Studies indicate that people who remain married throughout adulthood accumulate more wealth than those who never marry, cohabit, or divorce (e.g., Hirschl, Altobelli, & Rank, 2003; Lerman, 2002; Wilmoth & Koso, 2002). In addition, people tend to pay a price for **relationship transitions**, especially when partnerships end. People take a large financial hit when they divorce or dissolve a cohabiting relationship. Women are particularly vulnerable: Their household income drops 58 percent

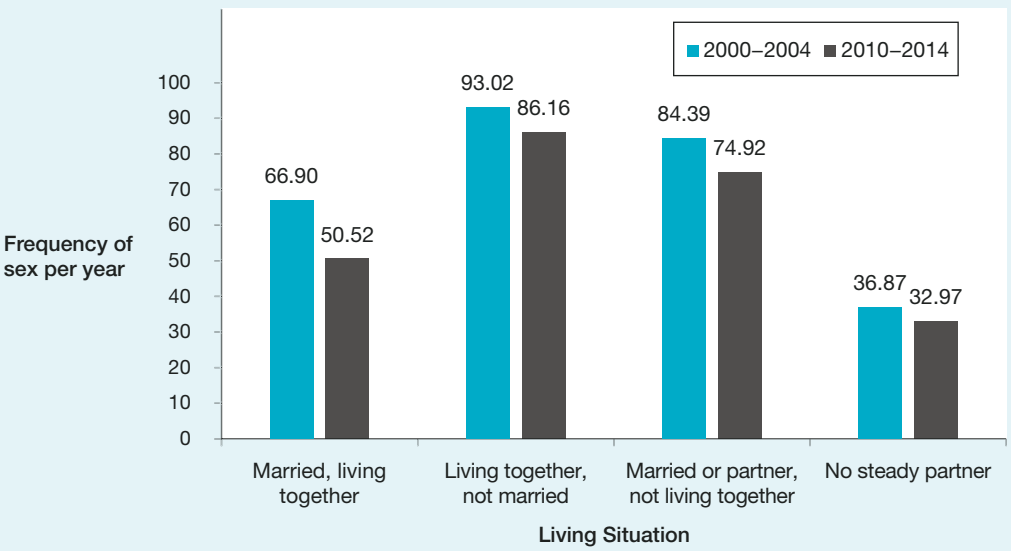


FIGURE 1.6 Frequency of sex based on relationship status. Compared to those who do not have a steady partner, partnered people have substantially more sex each year, regardless of whether they are married or living together. Survey results are shown for two time periods: 2000–2004 and 2010–2014. Can you guess why married couples living together have the least sex of all partnered people? (Hint: Married people are older.) (Source: Adapted from Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2017.)

when they divorce and 33 percent when they end a cohabitation (Avellar & Smock, 2005).

When considering the ways good relationships can promote happiness, you might wonder: Can we be certain that our relationships are the true cause of our well-being? Maybe happy and healthy people are more likely to get into relationships in the first place. They then go on to have better lives *because* they were already inclined toward happiness and good health—not because the relationship itself is giving them any extra boost. Your hunch is right: People who are happier are more likely to marry than stay single, and people who are happier before marriage are also less likely to divorce (Marks & Fleming, 1999; Stutzer & Frey, 2006). These outcomes are referred to as **selection effects**, because happiness is said to "select" people into certain sorts of relationships, and it is the initial happiness that makes for the better relationship, not the reverse.

Does this mean that intimate relationships are not good for us after all? Not really. Selection effects can exist alongside so-called **protection effects**, which capture the idea that something real about being in a committed relationship provides some measure of protection that is not otherwise available to single or cohabiting individuals. The heart attack study described above illustrates how this might happen, and other studies also make this point. For example, studies of siblings varying in biological relatedness can control for genetic and environmental effects, and show that people in relationships really do experience better mental health than people who are unmarried or divorced (Horn, Xu, Beam, Turkheimer, & Emery, 2013). Similarly, when married people are compared to a group of very similar people who remained single, depression and alcohol use declines for everyone over a 7-year period, but that rate of decline is faster for those who are married (Horwitz, White, & Sandra Howell-White, 1996). These and other studies support the idea that something about relationships, and not just the people who "select themselves" into different versions of them, really does produce benefits in the form of greater happiness and well-being.

Intimate Relationships Influence the Well-Being of Children

As infants, humans enter the world with remarkable potential but nearly absolute helplessness. To survive and realize this potential, infants depend on devoted caregivers to provide food, shelter, safety, stimulation, and affection (followed, eventually, by expensive orthodontics, a smartphone, and a laptop). Because of the infant's profound dependence and vulnerability, it's easy to see how the developing child might be affected by the intimate relationships of his or her caregivers.

Just as relationship status, relationship quality, and relationship transitions relate to the subjective well-being of the partners, those factors contribute to the well-being of their children. For example, the relationship status

> "The child, like a sailor cast forth by the cruel waves, lies naked upon the ground, speechless, in need of every kind of vital support, as soon as nature has spilt him forth with throes from his mother's womb into the regions of light."
>
> —Lucretius, Roman poet and philosopher (99–55 BCE)

of parents is more influential than their race and education in determining whether their children will experience severe poverty. Using data collected from 4,800 U.S. households over a 25-year period, sociologists have demonstrated that 81 percent of children with unmarried parents experienced severe poverty, compared with 69 percent of black children and 63 percent of children whose head of household had completed fewer than 12 years of school (Rank & Hirschl, 1999). Biological children of cohabiting parents have more behavioral and emotional problems, and are less engaged in their schoolwork, compared to the biological children of married parents, in part because having fewer financial resources can interfere with effective parenting (e.g., S. L. Brown, 2004).

The quality of the parents' relationship is also related to their children's well-being. Children feel more upset and are less emotionally secure when their parents argue, leading them to act out and display aggression with their peers (e.g., Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003). Relationship conflicts can lead parents to withdraw emotionally from each other and from their parental duties, and children's behavior problems and problems at school increase as a consequence (e.g., Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). Conflict between parents also affects a wide range of biological systems in developing children, even reducing the quality of their sleep (El-Sheikh, Buckhalt, Mize, & Acebo, 2006), speeding up the onset of puberty (Belsky et al., 2007), and compromising their physical health (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002; Troxel & Matthews, 2004). As children grow older, parental marital conflict disrupts adolescents' attachment to their mother and father, disrupts relationships with peers, and increases addictive online behavior, perhaps because the Internet can serve as an outlet for the negative emotions they experience at home (Yang, Zhu, Chen, Song, & Wang, 2016) (**FIGURE 1.7**).

Finally, children are affected by their parents' relationship transitions. Children who are exposed to more parental disruptions tend to have more behavioral problems (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007) and poorer health; for example, their risk for obesity grows as they anticipate and then experience their parents' separation (Arkes, 2012). As families undergo a separation, household income can drop sharply and the parents become less available, resulting in less supervision at home, fewer restrictions on TV watching, and even lowered expectations for attending college (Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1998). Though children with divorced parents differ in several developmental areas from those in intact families, how well the child fares seems to be more closely related to the quality of the parents' relationship before breaking up than to the split itself (e.g., Cherlin et al., 1991; Sun, 2001). This explains how some relationship transitions can benefit children; a child's well-being can improve following a divorce, for example, if the parents' marriage was marked by high levels of tension and conflict (Amato, 2003).

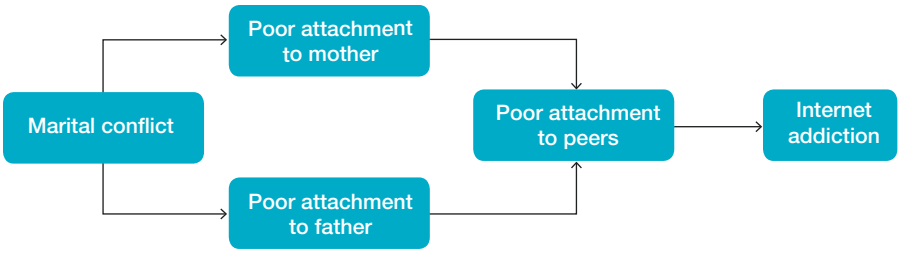


FIGURE 1.7 A tangled web. Adolescents exposed to frequent, intense, and unresolved marital conflict develop weak relationships with parents and peers, which in turn predict their unhealthy and compulsive Internet use. (Source: Adapted from Yang, Zhu, Chen, Song, & Wang, 2016.)

The bottom line here is simple: Children rely heavily on caregivers to help them make their way in the world, and the manner in which parents manage their intimate relationships can affect their willingness and capacity to give their children all the care they need. Before fully embracing this conclusion, however, we should address three more questions.

First: Do the effects of intimate relationships on children's well-being disappear as the kids get older? No. The families that children grow up in influence the way they manage their own intimate relationships even decades later. For example, people whose parents had more troubled marriages tend to complete fewer years of education, have more distant relationships with their parents, feel more tension as parents themselves, and experience more relationship problems of their own. In turn, they tend to raise children who grow up and follow in their footsteps (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

Second: Is there a genetic component? Do patterns like these occur merely because family members often share genes—some of which (such as an innate tendency to be hostile) could create a range of difficulties for anyone possessing them? The answer to this question turns out to be no, according to studies using the children of identical twins to examine the effects of parental divorce on their children's emotional difficulties (D'Onofrio et al., 2006) and tendencies to later divorce (D'Onofrio et al., 2007). Beyond the effects of the genes shared by parents and offspring, parental divorce really does increase the likelihood of emotional difficulties and divorce tendencies.

> "The family is the cornerstone of our society. More than any other force it shapes the attitude, the hopes, the ambitions, and the values of the child. And when the family collapses it is the children that are usually damaged. When it happens on a massive scale, the community itself is crippled."
>
> —President Lyndon B. Johnson, Commencement Address at Howard University, June 4, 1965

Third: Is a child's fate determined entirely by his or her parents' intimate relationships? Thankfully, no. Having a divorced parent increases one's chance of divorcing by about 10–20 percent beyond the level experienced by children from intact families (e.g., see Hetherington & Kelly,

2002). Although the percentages might seem high, most children with divorced parents can go on to have relationships that are indistinguishable from those of children who have intact parents.

Intimate Relationships Contribute to Larger Communities

You probably think about your intimate relationships as private rather than public, directly pertaining only to you and your partner, or at most to your family and friends. After all, it's hard to see how your intimate relationships would affect anyone beyond your closest social circle, nor is it immediately obvious how people outside this circle might affect your relationships. But are intimate relationships truly private? Consider these examples:

- When a relationship ends, and a shared home becomes two separate households, electricity and water usage goes up dramatically (Yu & Liu, 2007).
- Divorce reduces the likelihood that people will vote in an election, probably because divorce also increases residential mobility (Kern, 2010).
- More than half of all recent mass shootings in the United States involve an attack on a family member, often a current or former partner (National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 2013).
- In elementary school, the classmates of a child exposed to domestic violence go on to have lower reading and math scores, reducing those classmates' future earnings by as much as 4 percent 20 years later (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2010; Carrell, Hoekstra, & Kuka, 2016).
- Every divorce costs taxpayers approximately $30,000 in the form of welfare payments, child care, food stamps, and similar expenses (Schramm, 2006). In the United Kingdom, family disruptions cost the government about $58 billion per year in housing, social services, crime, and lost tax revenue (Centre for Social Justice, 2013).

Though the evidence is clear that dissolving a relationship is costly for society, we are not arguing that dissolving a relationship is always necessarily bad; few of us would oppose a divorce in which either partner was physically or verbally abusive, for example. But added up over countless children, countless relationships, and countless transitions between relationships, effects like these accumulate, helping us see that intimate relationships, whether they function well or poorly, are the strands and knots that constitute the very fabric of our society (**BOX 1.1**).

Social control theory helps explain this link between intimate relationships and the broader social impact of individual actions (Hirschi, 1969). According to this view, social relationships impose limits on how individuals behave, with weaker relationships increasing deviant behavior. This reg-

ulatory effect occurs because relationships encourage people to internalize and abide by social norms, due to the personal costs that can result when these norms are violated.

Though we think naturally of relationships during childhood as teaching cultural rules and practices, intimate relationships in adulthood also affect whether people follow or break laws, or conform to or go against social conventions. For example, if a convicted criminal forms a stable relationship, he or she is less likely to commit crimes in the future (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Capaldi, Kim, & Owen, 2008)—unless the partner also has a criminal record (Van Schellen, Apel, & Nieuwbeerta, 2012). Along similar lines, alcohol and drug use fluctuate with changes in relationships (Fleming, White, & Catalano, 2010), and these changes apparently are not just due to spending less time with deviant friends (e.g., Maume, Ousey, & Beaver, 2005). **FIGURE 1.8** shows how cocaine use drops as people enter into more committed relationships and increases when committed relationships are dissolved (Bachman, Wadsworth, O'Malley, Johnston, & Schulenberg, 1997). In short, while it is tempting to think of relationships as affecting only the couple involved and their immediate social circle, relationships actually influence a host of behaviors that affect the larger society.

> "In uncertainty I am certain that underneath their topmost layers of frailty men want to be good and want to be loved. Indeed, most of their vices are attempted short cuts to love."
>
> —John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (1952, p. 412)

BOX 1.1 SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

Intimate Relationships and Social Conformity

Sociologist Andrea Leverentz interviewed several women at a halfway house for female ex-offenders in Illinois (2006, pp. 477–478). Among them was a woman named Linette:

> Linette met her fiancé Chad when she was in a work-release program. During the interviews, they were living together in his mother's house.
>
> She described him as "*a big help. He's always trying to understand what's going on. He's a caretaker.*"
>
> Chad said, "*I've been into stuff myself. We both had done things . . . I'm getting too old; I woke up and realized it ain't no place to be. Now, I go to work and I come home. If I go out, we both go.*" He described Linette as "*a beautiful person, she's kind and honest. She's never told me a lie, as far as I know.*"
>
> In talking to each of them and watching them interact with each other, they did seem to have a strong and positive relationship. Linette may have served as a direct source of social control for Chad: he did not go out, other than to work, without her. Chad was a source of emotional and financial support for Linette. To a certain extent, he also may have served as a source of direct social control, but because she was unemployed and therefore home alone during the day, she had more opportunities to go out without him (if she chose to do so). . . . They each provided a stake in conformity, as they struggled to get their lives in order, get their own apartment, and regain custody of the child they shared.

This case demonstrates the power of mutual influence as a force in intimate relationships. In addition, high-quality relationships can encourage partners to guide each other toward socially sanctioned lifestyles.

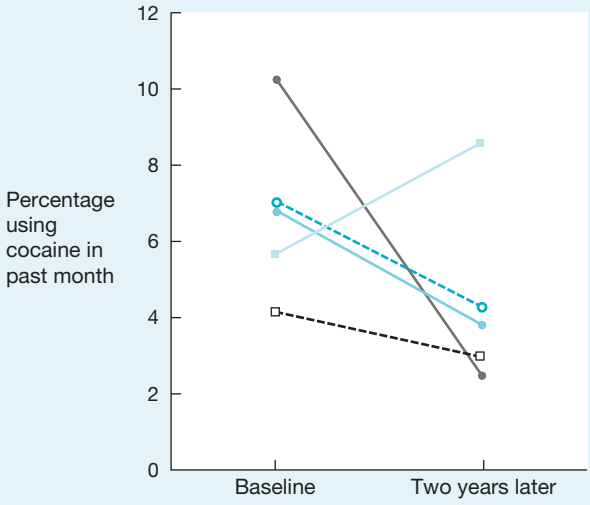


FIGURE 1.8 Intimate relationships and social norms. Data on cocaine use collected from about 33,000 men demonstrate how relationship transitions are related to deviant behaviors. Cocaine use increases only among men who transition from being married to being divorced. In contrast, cocaine use decreases as people become more committed in their relationships, particularly for divorced men who remarry. Results for women are similar but less dramatic because they tend to use less cocaine than men do. (Source: Adapted from Bachman et al., 1997.)

Intimate Relationships Are Universal

Intimate relationships merit our close attention for another reason: They are a universal human experience. Anthropologists William Jankowiak and Edward Fischer (1992) identified romantic love in the vast majority of the 166 hunting, foraging, and agricultural societies they studied, leading them to conclude that "romantic love constitutes a human universal, or at the least a near-universal" (p. 154) (**FIGURE 1.9**). A detailed analysis of recorded stories and myths from around the world led two English professors to conclude that "a clear preponderance of evidence derived from systematic studies of ethnography, neuroscience, folk tales, and even ethology converges to support romantic love's universality" (Gottschall & Nordlund, 2006, p. 463). Couples in all societies form lasting relationships, often for the purpose of raising children. Across nearly 100 industrial and agricultural countries, for example, more than 90 percent of all men and women have experienced some form of marriage by their late 40s (Fischer, 1989). Known more generally as **pair-bonds**, these unions can take different forms, but at their core they typically involve two individuals who have some degree of emotional and practical investment in each other (Wong & Goodwin, 2009).

A hardwired capacity for intimacy does not necessarily imply that this capacity is the same for all people within a culture, or for all cultures at a specific time, or for all people across historical time (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). For example, we know that the experience of love differs across cultures. Comparing popular love songs from the United States and China shows that

FIGURE 1.9 Tales and myths confirming the universality of love. Left: According to a Japanese legend, Komagawa and Asagao fall in love, but Asagao's parents have arranged for her to marry someone else. Asagao's tears blind her; despondent, she wanders the countryside singing a poem that Komagawa had written for her. When they reunite years later, "Asagao could hold up her fair head to the dew and sunshine of her lover's sheltering arms" (Davis, 1932, p. 49). Right: "Love's Passing," painted by Evelyn De Morgan in 1883, shows two young lovers seated by the River of Life. The man is captivated by the angel's piping, but the woman seems distracted by the footsteps of Old Age and Death behind her (Smith, 2002, p. 155).

songs in China refer to love as more enduring, more likely to include suffering and sadness, and more likely to result in disappointment (Rothbaum & Tsang, 1998). Cross-cultural research on intimate feelings reveal other differences. Young adults in North America and China identify the same basic emotions and categorize positive emotions and negative emotions that same way—except in the case of love (Shaver, Wu, & Schwartz, 1991). For North American students, love is intensely positive and is equated with personal happiness, but Chinese students view love as negatively tinged with unrequited feelings, infatuation, and sorrow. These differences may exist because Western cultures like the United States tend to prioritize personal goals over obligations to the larger group, whereas the opposite is the case in Eastern cultures like China (Triandis, 1996). The Buddhist concept of *yuan*—that the outcome of a relationship is predestined and that little can be done to change it—is often invoked in Asian cultures to explain these different experiences (Chang & Chan, 2007). With more constraints, less control, and more connection to surrounding circumstances, love and intimacy are likely to be different, and might even be more difficult, in Eastern than Western cultures.

> "Everywhere is love and lovemaking, weddings and babies from generation to generation keeping the Family of Man alive and continuing."
>
> —Carl Sandburg, American poet; prologue to *The Family of Man* (1955)

The distinction between individualistic societies like the United States and interdependent or collectivist societies like China and India can also be seen in how people choose mates. For example, in individualistic societies like the United States, the family is a support system for the individual, who leaves home, falls in

love, eventually introduces the mate to the family, and pursues a romantic relationship with that person to fulfill his or her personal needs. By contrast, individuals are the support systems for families in interdependent societies. Families collaborate to find partners for their offspring—not to promote the couple's happiness but to enhance the family's stability or social standing. Romance, sex, and individual autonomy are not part of the script; in fact, the prospective mate is likely to meet his or her in-laws before meeting the partner (Hortaçsu, 1999).

With increased globalization, and the spread of Western values, many couples in collectivist societies now routinely select their own mate. Which would you think is more satisfying—a marriage in which the partners select each other, or a marriage in which the families choose the mate? Formal experiments that would answer this question cannot be conducted, of course, but at least three large cross-sectional studies converge on a common conclusion. In their survey of 586 women married between 1933 and 1987 in the Chinese province of Sichuan, Xiaohe and Whyte (1990) showed that women having a choice in who they married were reliably more satisfied in their relationship than those whose partner was chosen for them. Interviews conducted in 1991 with more than 10,000 Chinese couples similarly showed that "love" marriages were more satisfying than those arranged by the family, which were no different in happiness from marriages arranged by friends (Jin & Xu, 2006). And in Nepal, where familial influence in mate choice is rapidly declining, people who participate more in choosing their partner report higher relationship satisfaction, a greater sense of togetherness, and fewer disagreements (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013). Maybe these findings are due to one's perceptions of having chosen a mate (motivating people to work harder to maintain the relationship), or the quality of the choice itself (allowing people to work less to maintain the relationship). But at this point arranged marriages do not appear to be superior, at least in terms of relationship satisfaction; they may, however, be beneficial to preserving larger family units.

As other nations are adopting Westernized values in intimate relationships, Westernized values themselves are undergoing dramatic change (**FIGURE 1.10**). Marriage, for example, has shifted from being an institution in which social obligations have paramount importance, to becoming a form of companionship in which the emotional bonds between partners are the highest priority (Cherlin, 2004). The responsibilities of marriage were once institutionalized by religious and legal codes and were closely regulated by social norms and sanctions. Not long ago, in fact, unmarried and divorced men experienced discrimination in the workplace. But these institutions have weakened over the past century, for a host of reasons: Industrialization and the growth of cities decreased the degree to which families depended on children to sustain the family unit; increased geographic mobility reduced the degree to which parents and families could monitor and influence their children; and growing educational achievements and economic independence for women have given them more control over their personal decisions (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007; Mintz & Kellogg, 1988).

FIGURE 1.10 Historical and cultural variety in intimate relationships. Because intimacy is universal, the people in these photographs are probably having relatively similar thoughts and feelings. But attitudes about different types of relationships differ across cultures and historical eras, changing how relationships are experienced and expressed.

The upshot of these changes is that marriage is no longer the default option it once was, and now there are plenty of alternatives. Even though marriage is becoming a relationship with greater potential to make individuals happy (e.g., people can more readily leave bad marriages now than in earlier times), achieving this new freedom comes at the cost of making marriage more fragile (Coontz, 2005).

To gain a deeper understanding of how intimacy is both universal and variable, you might consider interviewing an older family member or a fellow student from a culture different from yours. As **BOX 1.2** illustrates, in doing so you are likely to hear elements that are both familiar and unfamiliar to your own ideas of love and intimacy.

Intimate Relationships Determine the Survival of Our Species

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, dating to 1859, reveals that who we are today as a species is a product of **natural selection** operating over a vast expanse of time. Random changes in genes from one generation to the next sometimes lead to enhanced **fitness**, or improvements in the chances that the offspring will survive and reproduce. Why do we mention this here? Because our social relationships help to determine whether a specific gene or set of genes improves fitness. "Social interactions and relationships surrounding mating, kinship, reciprocal alliances, coalitions, and hierarchies are especially critical, because all appear to have strong consequences for

successful survival and reproduction" (Buss & Kenrick, 1998, p. 994). Intimate relationships are an essential part of the mechanism of evolution, as fitness is affected, directly or indirectly, by the ways human mates attract and select each other, their willingness and ability to reproduce, and the attachments they form with each other and their offspring. From this perspective, "romantic love is an adaptation—a commitment device—that facilitated long-term pair-bonding, which in turn . . . helped advance the evolution of the high levels of social intelligence that characterizes our species" (Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2015, p. 31).

> "Marvel not then at the love which all men have of their offspring; for that universal love and interest is for the sake of immortality."
>
> —Diotima, speaking to Socrates, in Plato's *Symposium* (circa 350 BCE; translation by Benjamin Jowett, 1892, p. 578)

How do we know love and intimacy have played an important role in human evolution? One good place to look for evidence is within the biological systems that enable procreation. Sexual desire and interaction, as magical as they may feel, are the result of an intricate cascade of neurochemical events linking erotic stimuli, both physical and psychological, to spinal reflexes that excite the brain's limbic system and sensory cortex, which in turn prompt the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland to produce hormones that alter the sensitivity and functioning of the sex organs.

Romantic love appears to be no less biologically based. MRI scans taken while participants gaze at their beloved partner reveal brain activation in

BOX 1.2 SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

Talking About Love in Different Cultures

In most cultures, people talk about love. But how they do so, and how often, varies a great deal.

Mirgun Dev and Durga Kumari live in a tiny Nepalese village 100 miles southwest of Katmandu. Their love letters, along with others collected by anthropologist Laura Ahearn (2001, 2003), express sentiments that are surprisingly easy to understand by Western standards—despite being expressed in a cultural context markedly different from our own:

> One thing that I hope you will promise is that you will love me truly and that when you think about the future you will continue to want to do so and won't break up with me in the middle of our relationship. Okay? . . . Later on in the middle of our relationship you are not to do anything [i.e., break up]—understand? . . . I want you to love me without causing me suffering, okay? . . . Finally, if you love me, send a "reply" to this letter, okay?

This letter was sent not by e-mail but by a younger relative who was sworn to secrecy. While arranged marriages are gradually giving way to marriages based on love in this Nepalese village, men and women are still not allowed to spend time alone together during courtship. Moreover, by answering a man's letter, a woman is essentially agreeing to marry him. She must do so based on very little contact, and she is often shamed and disgraced if she does not marry her correspondent. Can you imagine the pressure this practice places on the early development of an intimate relationship? How would you react under similar pressure? It is no wonder that Durga Kumari sought specific assurances of Mirgun Dev's love.

In contrast, this interview from the television show *60 Minutes* presents a very different attitude toward talking about love—in Finland (Tiffin, 1993; cited in Wilkins & Gareis, 2006):

regions that are known to be stimulated when we receive a potent award (such as money or an intravenous injection of cocaine). Such responses can impel us to pursue these rewards, just as we might pursue closeness with our mate (**FIGURE 1.11**). Attending to the partner also deactivates brain regions known to be involved in sadness and depression, negative emotions, and critical social judgments (Bartels & Zeki, 2000, 2004; Acevedo, Aron, Fisher, & Brown, 2011; Xu et al., 2011).

The hormone oxytocin is believed to be involved in sexual desire and romantic love (Carmichael et al., 1987; Carter, 1998; Diamond, 2003). Oxytocin has been studied primarily in prairie voles, one of just 3 percent of mammalian species that are monogamous. An injection of oxytocin results in the formation of a lifelong relationship between two voles, even when sex does not occur; and chemically blocking oxytocin during sex inhibits the development of a relationship. Oxytocin is a key element in the human neurobiological system that promotes feelings of calmness, sociability, and trust, partly by reducing activity in fear-related brain structures like the amygdala and hypothalamus (Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2005; Uvänas-Moberg, Arn, & Magnusson, 2005). Blood oxytocin levels are higher among dating couples who continue their relationships compared to those who break up, and for those who continue their relationships, higher oxytocin levels correspond with increased displays of positive emotion, more affectionate touching, and a stronger sustained focus on the relationship (Schneiderman,

Morley Safer, moderator of *60 Minutes*: *Do people tell each other that they love each other?*

Terri Schultz, an American journalist living in Finland: *No! Oh my God no! No. Not even, I mean, even lovers, I think.*

Jan Knutas, a male journalist from Finland: *Well I'd say, you could say it once in a lifetime. If you say you have been married for 20 years, perhaps your spouse is on her death-bed. You could comfort her with saying "I love you," but umm . . .*

Safer: (laughs)

Knutas: *It's not funny.*

Arja Koriseva, a well-known female Finnish singer: *It's easier to me to say, like, to my boyfriend that "I love you." It's, we have heard it on, on TV, on movies. It's easier . . . to say "I love you" than "mina rakastan sinua." It doesn't sound very nice if I say "I love you" in Finnish.*

Safer: *You look slightly embarrassed when you say it in Finnish.*

Koriseva: (laughs) *Yeah, but we don't use "I love you" so much as you do. You love almost, almost everybody. When a Finnish guy or man says "I love you," he really means it.*

Neither of these anecdotes conclusively shows how these cultures feel about love as a whole, but they do illustrate different norms and expectations for expressing intimate feelings. How does this work for you? Why?

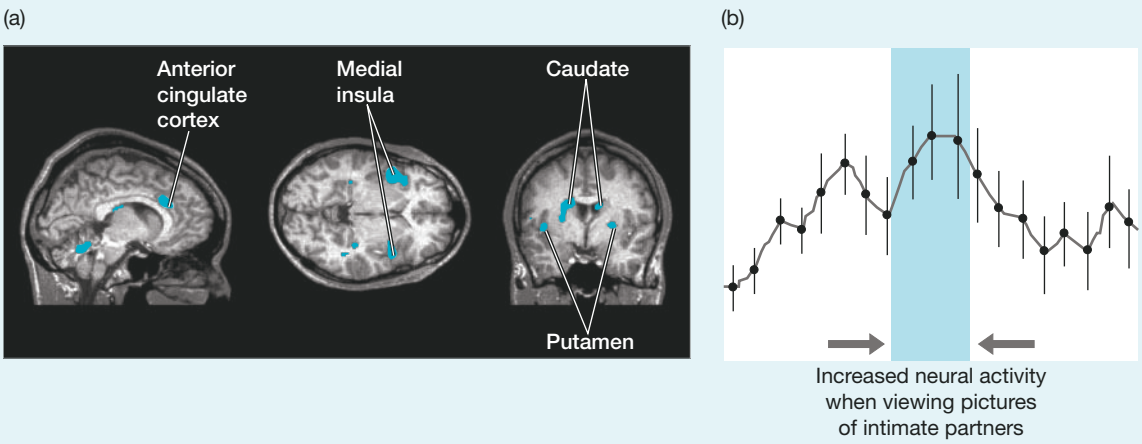


FIGURE 1.11 That special someone. (a) This MRI scan shows the brain activity (from the side, top, and front) of a person viewing a picture of his or her intimate partner, after adjusting for the brain's response to a picture of his or her close friend. Viewing the partner increases activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, the medial insula, the caudate, and the putamen, brain regions known to implement a range of functions including positive emotions, empathy, reward, and emotion regulation. (b) Viewing the partner picture (indicated as the period between the two arrows) causes an increase in anterior cingulate activity. The finding that brain activation differs in response to pictures of partners and close friends supports the distinction between relationships that are intimate and those that are merely close.

Zagoory-Sharon, Leckman, & Feldman, 2012). Experimental administration of oxytocin (via an intranasal squirt) leads people in relationships to see their partner as more attractive (Scheele et al., 2013), and to treat their partner with more kindness and less negativity (Ditzen et al., 2009), compared to people receiving a placebo.

All these findings point to the conclusion that biological systems within the body direct and support our sex drive and our capacity for affection and caregiving. It's logical, then, that we have evolved to form relationships, to nurture others, and to invest in the perpetuation of our species. As social psychologists Eli Finkel and Paul Eastwick note, pair-bonding

> . . . is arguably the defining feature of human mating tendencies. . . . [P]airbonds serve the ultimate evolutionary function by increasing the likelihood that one's offspring survive long enough to reproduce. . . . [T]hey tend to promote loving and stable family units that promote the mental and physical health of all involved. (2015, p. 10)

MAIN POINTS

- Unique in their ability to create our very best and our very worst personal experiences, intimate relationships merit careful scholarly analysis.
- Intimate relationships affect the physical and emotional health of partners, as well as their financial well-being.

- Intimate relationships influence the physical and emotional well-being of children.
- Intimate relationships affect communities by promoting conformity to social norms.
- Intimate relationships are universal across all known cultures.
- Intimate relationships reflect an evolved, biological capacity to reproduce and to nurture others.

What Makes a Relationship Intimate?

So far we've been a bit casual in our use of the phrase "intimate relationship." Because everyone has a pretty good understanding of what couples are all about, a concrete definition isn't always necessary. But in the same way that any couple eventually needs to have a "define the relationship" conversation, we also need to provide clarification, because there's plenty of room for ambiguity. Is a hookup an intimate relationship? Should we think of a "bromance" (or "womance")—a really close same-sex friendship that is nonsexual—as an intimate relationship? (We are looking at you, Ben Affleck and Matt Damon.) What if two people are engaged to be married but agree to postpone all sexual contact until after the wedding? And how about a couple who have been married for decades but stopped having sex when their last child left home? Intimate relationship, or not? Let's use an example to sort this all out.

Somewhere, as you read this today, two people—let's call them Emily and Martin—are meeting for the first time. Perhaps they will share an umbrella in the rain, or smile at the fact that they're both wearing Harry Potter T-shirts, or maybe they'll commiserate while waiting for a professor who has failed to show up for office hours. They might engage in small talk as the rain dies down, converse about their guilty binge-watching pleasures, or arrange to study together later that day; ultimately, they might exchange phone numbers so they can stay in touch. No longer strangers, Emily and Martin text each other, find out whether each is already dating someone else, spend more and more time together, and laugh at their good fortune of having worn those T-shirts and met on that fateful rainy day. As time passes Emily and Martin start to think of themselves as a couple, are identified as a couple by their friends, and agree to date only each other; they might have sex, disclose self-doubts, and wonder, however tentatively, about a future together.

> "Like other great forces in nature—such as gravity, electricity, and the four winds—a relationship itself is invisible; its existence can be discerned only by observing its effects."
>
> —Ellen Berscheid, social psychologist (1999, p. 261)

Most of us would think of this couple as now being in an intimate relationship. But why do we think that? What are Emily and Martin doing that leads us to view their relationship as intimate? And what happened over the course

of these several weeks that changes how we think about them and how they think of themselves? Asking these questions allows us to introduce the four criteria that define an intimate relationship.

Interdependence Is the Cornerstone of All Relationships

First, and most basically, you may have noticed that Emily and Martin affected each other right from the start, and then more and more as time passed. Referred to as **interdependence**, the mutual influence that two people have over each other is the defining feature of *any* social relationship, intimate or otherwise. Early on, Martin and Emily's connection was superficial, but eventually it grew stronger and deeper. If Emily sprained her ankle right after they first met, the smiley-face emoji with the thermometer might have worked for Martin. But the same injury weeks later might motivate him to bring Emily dinner and notes from English class—demonstrating real caring and prompting her to bring him chicken soup when he comes down with the flu.

What is interesting about interdependence is that it exists *between* two partners in a relationship, as if they were surrounded by an invisible net. And there is something else that's special: Interdependence is *bidirectional*, meaning it operates in both directions at once. Emily affects Martin, and Martin affects Emily. Without bidirectional interdependence, there can be no relationship. Contrast this with a unidirectional influence, like the kind that commonly happens when people use Tinder, the dating app: If only you swipe right, only you will get your hopes up about getting to know the cute person in that picture. The effect is unidirectional, and no relationship can happen. But if you and that cute person both swipe right, then the lines of communication might open up. Both partners acting in concert determined the next step in their relationship. Bidirectional influence is now possible, allowing opportunities for interdependence to grow even more.

Emily and Martin's interdependence is interesting for another reason: It extends over time, with later exchanges gaining meaning from earlier ones. We wouldn't say they had any real connection after that first brief meeting, because there was no prior interaction to build upon. However, we can see how their later musings about their good fortune in finding each other take their significance from that meeting. As ethologist Robert Hinde notes:

> "Relationship" in everyday language carries the . . . implication that there is some degree of continuity between the successive interactions. Each interaction is affected by interactions in the past, and may affect interactions in the future. For that reason a "relationship" between two people may continue over long periods when they do not meet or communicate with each other; the accumulated effects of past interactions will ensure that, when they next meet, they do not see each other as strangers. (1979, p. 14)

Can we conclude that Martin and Emily's bidirectional interdependence is the reason their relationship would be described as intimate? Not entirely. Interdependence is a *necessary* condition for intimacy—you cannot have intimacy without it—but it is not a *sufficient* condition for intimacy. After all, many relationships possess bidirectional interdependence but aren't intimate, at least as we propose to define intimacy here. A guard and a prisoner are interdependent but not intimate, as are a shopkeeper and a regular customer, a patient and a nurse, a mother-in-law and a son-in-law, two friends, and so on. In all these cases, the two individuals have enduring and bidirectional influences over each other—yet we would not say they are intimate. What's missing? What do Emily and Martin have that a patient and a nurse do not?

Only Some Social Relationships Are Personal Relationships

Intimate relationships occur not just between two interdependent people, but between two people who treat each other as *unique* individuals rather than as interchangeable occupants of particular social roles or positions (Blumstein & Kollock, 1988). The interdependence within the relationships involving the guard and prisoner, the shopkeeper and the regular customer, and the patient and nurse are driven primarily by the contexts and roles in which these people find themselves. Substituting different people into these relationships would not change them much; your relationship with your dentist is probably pretty similar to my relationship with my dentist. These relatively **impersonal relationships** tend to be formal and task-oriented.

Personal relationships are relatively informal and engage us at a deeper emotional level. Take, for example, the personal relationships involving a grandparent and grandchild, a mother-in-law and son-in-law, or two friends, or our couple Emily and Martin. In these cases, the interdependence is likely to be longer lasting and determined less by social roles and more by the uniqueness of the individuals involved. Swapping out one grandparent and inserting another would change the very character of the relationship, but swapping out one nurse for another should not change the relationship much at all. The unique character of personal versus impersonal relationships is demonstrated by our very different reaction to losing a grandparent than, say, to losing our favorite Starbucks barista—no matter how good the cappuccino.

Only Some Personal Relationships Are Close Relationships

Are all personal relationships intimate ones? Probably not, because the different sorts of personal relationships vary enough that we can still make

meaningful distinctions among them. Even in relationships where people treat each other as unique individuals, their degree of closeness varies quite a bit. Most of us would probably agree that a relationship between a mother-in-law and her son-in-law is not as close as a relationship between a grandparent and grandchild, which in turn is not as close as the relationship between Emily and Martin.

But what is closeness? According to Harold Kelley, a social psychologist, "the close relationship is one of strong, frequent, and diverse interdependence that lasts over a considerable period of time" (Kelley et al., 1983, p. 38). With Emily and Martin, we can see how closeness reflects an unusually high degree of interdependence. Compared to the relationship between a mother-in-law and her daughter's husband, for example, Emily and Martin will have far more contact with each other because they see each other nearly every day, and the effects they have on each other can be quite strong and wide-ranging. If Emily has a bad day, her mood will affect Martin a lot more than anyone else in her life. If your grandmother has a bad day, that is unfortunate but probably will not require a lot of adjustment from you; though it is a personal relationship, it is just not that close. Therefore, the presence of **closeness** adds something special to personal relationships, as reflected in the strength, frequency, and diversity of the influences partners have over each other.

Only Some Close Relationships Are Intimate Relationships

Is closeness the final ingredient, the special sauce that makes a personal relationship truly intimate? Consider your own relationships. Do you make a distinction between, say, your closest friendships and a relationship you might have with a boyfriend or girlfriend? Most people would say there *is* a difference here, which means that closeness—those strong, frequent, and diverse influences—is necessary but is not enough by itself to define a relationship as intimate. What's missing?

The difference between a close relationship and an intimate relationship lies, we would argue, in whether the two partners experience a mutual erotic charge, or a shared—though not necessarily articulated—feeling that they have the potential to be sexually intimate. By our definition, then, a bromance is a close relationship but not an intimate relationship. Two people who are in a close relationship are also in an *intimate* relationship only if they both experience a sexual passion for each other and an expectation that this passion will be consummated.

An interesting aspect of this idea is that sexual interaction without the element of closeness falls outside our definition of an intimate relationship. This means that one-night stands and sexual experiences people have when hooking up do not constitute intimate relationships. Although these people

were physically intimate, and they might eventually become more intimate in other ways, the fact that key elements are missing—frequent and strong interdependence, diverse forms of mutual influence lasting for a long time—means they are not in an intimate relationship yet.

Defining an intimate relationship in this way does not imply that the two partners are necessarily happy in their relationship. Einstein's troubled marriage to Mileva was no less an intimate relationship than his more fulfilling marriage to Elsa. Though discontent is likely to change the nature of the interdependence between partners, it does not eliminate the interdependency itself. As long as there is the prospect of sexual interaction in the context of a close relationship, we will assume that even unhappy partners are experiencing an intimate relationship.

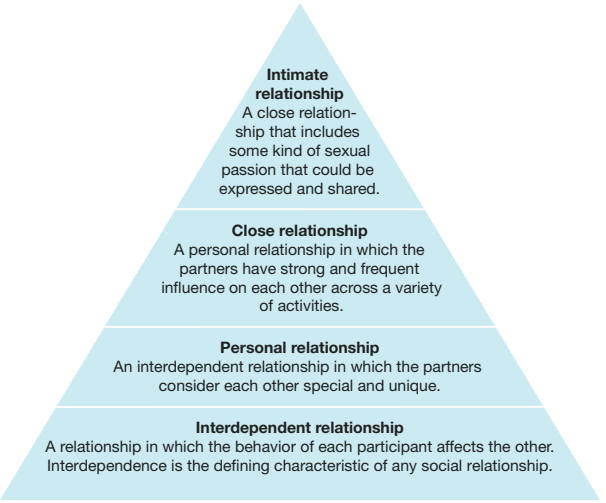


FIGURE 1.12 Distinguishing different types of social relationships.

FIGURE 1.12 captures the essence of the different types of social relationships we have described, allowing us to define an **intimate relationship** as being characterized by strong, sustained, mutual influence over a broad range of interactions, with the possibility of sexual involvement.

MAIN POINTS

- Four criteria distinguish intimate relationships from other types of social relationships.
- An intimate relationship involves bidirectional interdependence, which means that the partners' behaviors affect each other.
- An intimate relationship is personal, in the sense that the partners treat each other as special and unique, rather than as members of a generic category.
- An intimate relationship is close, where closeness is understood to mean strong, frequent, and diverse forms of mutual influence.
- An intimate relationship is, or has the potential to be, sexual.

Love and the Essential Mystery of Intimate Relationships

When I think back to Corsica, I remember the stony mountains and the brilliant sea and the polished blues of the sky, but I also recall a creeping sensation of