Intimate Relationships

NINTH EDITION

Rowland S. Miller
Sam Houston State University

Mc Graw Hill

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, NINTH EDITION

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Preface to the Ninth Edition

Welcome to *Intimate Relationships!* I'm very pleased that you're here. I've been deeply honored by the high regard this book has enjoyed, and I'm privileged to offer you another very thorough update on the remarkable work being done in relationship science. The field is busier, broader, and more innovative than ever, so a new edition is warranted—and this one contains *almost 800* citations of brand-new work published in the last 3 years. No other survey of relationship science is as current, comprehensive, and complete.

Readers report that you won't find another textbook that's as much fun to read, either. I'm more delighted by that than I can easily express. This is a scholarly work primarily intended to provide college audiences with broad coverage of an entire field of inquiry, but it's written in a friendly, accessible style that gets students to read chapters they haven't been assigned—and that's a real mark of success! But really, that's also not surprising because so much of relationship science is so *fascinating*. No other science strikes closer to home. For that reason, and given its welcoming, reader-friendly style, this book has proven to be of interest to the general public, too. (As my father said, "Everybody should read this book.")

So, here's a new edition. It contains whole chapters on key topics that other books barely mention and has a much wider reach, citing hundreds more studies, than other books do. It draws on social psychology, communication studies, family studies, sociology, clinical psychology, neuroscience, demography, economics, and more. It's much more current and comprehensive and more fun to read than any other overview of the modern science of close relationships. Welcome!

What's New in This Edition

Two new features have enhanced the pedagogy and increased the lasting value of the book. **Key Terms** that are introduced are now listed at the end of each chapter alongside the page numbers that provide their definitions. And more importantly, the insights of each chapter are now synthesized into applied **Suggestions for Satisfaction** from relationship science that offer readers helpful recommendations that can improve their chances for contentment in their own relationships. (The Suggestions also provide instructors with starting points for enlightening discussions!)

In addition, as usual, after thorough, substantive revision, this new edition is remarkably up-to-date and cutting-edge. It contains **796** (!) new references that support new or expanded treatment of a variety of intriguing and noteworthy topics that include:

Tinder
Humility
Flooding
Savoring
Stealthing
Selfishness
Remarriage
Foodie calls
Social media
Transference
Open science
The Dark Triad

Sexual rejections
Implicit attitudes
Facial expressions
Life History Theory
Friends with benefits
Commitment readiness
Traditional masculinity
Back burner relationships
Satisficers and maximizers
Transgenders' relationships
Consensual non-monogamy
Evolutionary perspective on attraction

Further, in substantially expanded discussions of **gender** and **sexual orientation,** the book now quietly but explicitly rejects any assumptions that there are just two genders or that heterosexual relationships are in some fashion more genuine than same-sex partnerships. Both assumptions, of course, are simply untrue. I'll also note in particular the book's brand-new consideration of *transgenders' relationships* and *consensual non-monogamy;* both topics have been of interest to relationship scientists since my last edition, and there's now news to share with you.

What Hasn't Changed

If you're familiar with the eighth edition of this book, you'll find things in the same places. Vital influences on intimate relationships are introduced in chapter 1, and when they are mentioned in later chapters, footnotes remind readers where to find definitions that will refresh their memories.

Thought-provoking **Points to Ponder** appear in each chapter, too. They invite readers to think more deeply about intriguing phenomena, and they can serve equally well as touchstones for class discussion, topics for individual essays, and personal reflections regarding one's own behavior in close relationships.

The book's singular style also remains intact. There's someone here behind these pages. I occasionally break the third wall, speaking directly to the reader, both to be friendly and to make some key points (and because I can't help myself). I relish the opportunity to introduce this dynamic, exciting science to a newcomer—what a remarkable privilege!—and readers report that it shows.

Finally, this new edition is again available as a digital SmartBook that offers a personalized and adaptive reading experience. Students do better when their text *tells* them which concepts are giving them trouble, so if you haven't examined the SmartBook for *Intimate Relationships*, I encourage you to do so.

Kudos and fond remembrance are due to Sharon Stephens Brehm, the original creator of this book, who was the first person to write a text that offered a comprehensive introduction to relationship science. Her contributions to our field endure. And despite the passage of some years, I remain deeply grateful to Dan Perlman, the co-author who offered me the opportunity to join him in crafting a prior edition. No colleague could be more generous. I've also been grateful during this edition for the wonderful support and assistance of editorial and production professionals, Elisa Odoardi, Susan Raley, Carrie Burger, Beth Blech, Danielle Clement, Maria McGreal, and Jitendra Uniyal. Thanks, y'all!

And I'm glad *you're* here! I hope you enjoy the book.

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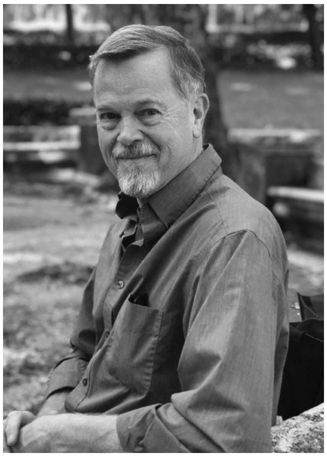
About the Author



Courtesy of Carolyn A. Miller

Rowland S. Miller is Distinguished Regents Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. He has been teaching a course in Close Relationships for over 35 years, and he won the 2008 Teaching Award from the International Association for Relationship Research (primarily as a result of this book). He's also been recognized as one of the most outstanding college teachers in Texas by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation, which named him a Piper Professor of 2016. He is a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and he won the Edwin Newman Award for Excellence in Research from Psi Chi and the American Psychological Association. His parents were happily married for 73 years, and he'd like to have as long with his wonderful wife, Carolyn, to whom this book is dedicated; she was a *huge* help behind the scenes, talking the author out of (nearly) all of his bad ideas.

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CHAPTER 1

The Building Blocks of Relationships

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF INTIMACY ◆ THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ◆ THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENCE ◆ THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ◆ THE INFLUENCE OF HUMAN NATURE ◆ THE INFLUENCE OF INTERACTION ◆ THE DARK SIDE OF RELATIONSHIPS ◆ FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION ◆ KEY TERMS ◆ CHAPTER SUMMARY ◆ SUGGESTIONS FOR SATISFACTION ◆ REFERENCES

How's this for a vacation? Imagine yourself in a nicely appointed suite with a pastoral view. You've got high-speed access to Netflix and Hulu, video games, plenty of books and magazines, and all the supplies for your favorite hobby. Delightful food and drink are provided, and you have your favorite entertainments at hand. But there's a catch: No one else is around, and you have no phone and no access to the Web. You're completely alone. You have almost everything you want except for other people. Texts, tweets, Instagram, and Snapchat are unavailable. No one else is even in sight, and you cannot interact with anyone else in any way.

How's that for a vacation? A few of us would enjoy the solitude for a while, but most of us would quickly find it surprisingly stressful to be completely detached from other people (Schachter, 1959). Most of us need others even more than we realize. Day by day, we tend to prefer the time we spend with others to the time we spend alone (Bernstein et al., 2018), and there's a reason prisons sometimes use *solitary confinement* as a form of punishment: Human beings are a very social species. People suffer when they are deprived of close contact with others, and at the core of our social nature is our need for intimate relationships.

Our relationships with others are central aspects of our lives. They're indispensable and vital, so it's useful to understand how they start, how they operate, how they thrive, and how, sometimes, they end in a haze of anger and pain.

This book will promote your own understanding of close relationships. It draws on psychology, sociology, communication studies, family studies, and neuroscience to offer a comprehensive survey of what behavioral scientists have learned about relationships through careful research. It offers a different, more scientific view of relationships than you'll find in magazines or the movies; it's more reasoned, more cautious, and often less romantic. You'll also find that this is not a how-to manual. Insights abound in the pages ahead, and there'll be plenty of news you can use, but you'll need to bring your own values and personal experiences to bear on the information presented here.

To set the stage for the discoveries to come, we'll first define our subject matter. What are intimate relationships? Why do they matter so much? Then, we'll consider the fundamental building blocks of close relationships: the cultures we inhabit, the experiences we encounter, the personalities we possess, the human origins we all share, and the interactions we conduct. In order to understand relationships, we need to consider who we are, *where* we are, and how we got there.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF INTIMACY

Relationships come in all shapes and sizes. We can have consequential contact with almost anyone—cashiers, classmates, fellow commuters, and kin (Epley & Schroeder, 2014)—but we'll focus here on our relationships with friends and lovers because they exemplify *intimate* relationships. Our primary focus is on intimate relationships between adults.

The Nature of Intimacy

What, then, is intimacy? That's actually a complex question because intimacy is a multifaceted concept with several different components. It's generally held (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2007) that intimate relationships differ from more casual associations in at least seven specific ways: **knowledge, interdependence, caring, trust, responsiveness, mutuality,** and **commitment.**

First, intimate partners have extensive personal, often confidential, *knowledge* about each other. They share information about their histories, preferences, feelings, and desires that they do not reveal to most of the other people they know.

The lives of intimate partners are also intertwined: What each partner does affects what the other partner wants to do and can do (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). *Interdependence* between intimates—the extent to which they need and influence each other—is frequent (they often affect each other), strong (they have meaningful impact on each other), diverse (they influence each other in many different ways), and enduring (they influence each other over long periods of time). When relationships are interdependent, one's behavior affects one's partner as well as oneself (Berscheid et al., 2004).

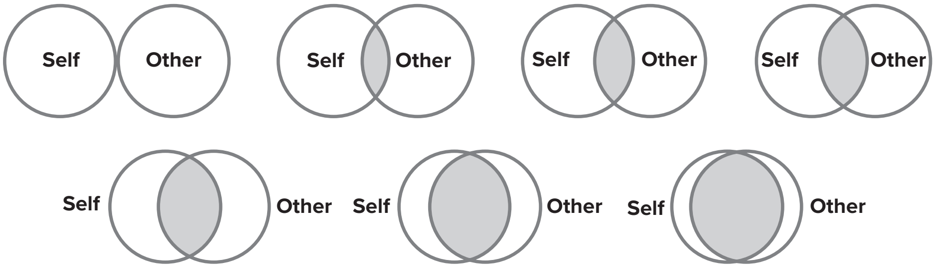
The qualities that make these close ties tolerable are caring, trust, and responsiveness. Intimate partners *care* about each other; they feel more affection for one another than they do for most others. They also *trust* one another, expecting to be treated fairly and honorably (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2015). People expect that no undue harm will result from their intimate relationships, and if it does, they often become wary and reduce the openness and interdependence that characterize closeness (Jones et al., 1997). In contrast, intimacy increases when people believe that their partners understand, respect, and appreciate them, being attentively and effectively *responsive* to their needs and concerned for their welfare (Reis & Gable, 2015). Responsiveness is powerfully rewarding, and the perception that our partners recognize, understand, and support our needs and wishes is a core ingredient of our very best relationships (Reis et al., 2017).

As a result of these close ties, people who are intimate also consider themselves to be a couple instead of two entirely separate individuals. They exhibit a high degree of *mutuality,* which means that they recognize their close connection and think of themselves as "us" instead of "me" and "him" (or "her") (Davis & Weigel, 2020). In fact, that change in outlook—from "I" to "us"—often signals the subtle but significant moment in a developing relationship when new partners first acknowledge their attachment to each other (Agnew et al., 1998). Indeed, researchers can assess the amount of intimacy in a close relationship by simply asking partners to rate the extent to which they "overlap." The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (see Figure 1.1) is a straightforward measure of mutuality that does a remarkably good job of distinguishing between intimate and more casual relationships (Aron et al., 2013).

Finally, intimate partners are ordinarily *committed* to their relationships. That is, they expect their partnerships to continue indefinitely, and they invest the time, effort, and resources that are needed to realize that goal. Without such commitment, people who were once very close may find themselves less and less interdependent and knowledgeable about each other as time goes by.

None of these components is absolutely required for intimacy to occur, and each may exist when the others are absent. For instance, spouses in a stale, unhappy marriage may be very interdependent, closely coordinating the practical details of their daily lives, but living in a psychological vacuum devoid of much affection or responsiveness. Such partners would certainly be more intimate than mere acquaintances are, but they would undoubtedly feel less close to one another than they used to (perhaps, for instance, when they decided to marry), when more of the components were present. In general, our most satisfying and meaningful intimate relationships include all seven of these defining characteristics (Fletcher et al., 2000), but intimacy can exist to a lesser degree when only some of them are in place. And as unhappy marriages demonstrate, intimacy can also vary enormously over the course of a long relationship.

FIGURE 1.1. **The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale.**
How intimate is a relationship? Just asking people to pick the picture that portrays a particular partnership does a remarkably good job of assessing the closeness they feel.



Please circle the picture below that best describes your **current** relationship with your partner.

Source: Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). "Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *63, 596–612.*

So, there's no one kind of intimate relationship. Indeed, a fundamental lesson about relationships is a very simple one: They come in all shapes and sizes. This variety is a source of great complexity, but it's also endlessly fascinating. (And that's why I wrote this book!)

The Need to Belong

Our focus on intimate relationships means that we'll not consider the wide variety of interactions that you have each day with casual friends and acquaintances. Should we be so particular? Is such a focus justified? The answers, of course, are yes. Although our casual interactions can be very influential (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014), there's something special about intimate relationships (Venaglia & Lemay, 2017). In fact, a powerful and pervasive drive to establish intimacy with others may be a basic part of our human nature. According to theorists Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995), we *need* frequent, pleasant interactions with intimate partners in lasting, caring relationships if we're to function normally. There is a human **need to belong** in close relationships, and if the need is not met, a variety of problems follows.

Our need to belong is presumed to necessitate "regular social contact with those to whom one feels connected" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 501). In order to fulfill the need, we are driven to establish and maintain close relationships with other people; we require interaction and communion with those who know and care for us. But we only need a few close relationships; when the need to belong is satiated, our drive to form additional relationships is reduced. (Thus, when it comes to relationships, quality is more important than quantity.) It also doesn't matter much *who* our partners are; as long as they provide us stable affection and acceptance, our need can be satisfied. Thus, when an important relationship ends, we are often able to find replacement partners who—though they may be quite different from our previous partners—are nonetheless able to satisfy our need to belong (Hirsch & Clark, 2019).

Some of the support for this theory comes from the ease with which we form relationships with others and from the tenacity with which we then resist the dissolution of our existing social ties. Indeed, when a valued relationship is in peril, we may find it hard to think about anything else. The potency of the need to belong may also be why being entirely alone for a long period of time is so stressful (Schachter, 1959); anything that threatens our sense of connection to other people can be hard to take (Leary & Miller, 2012).

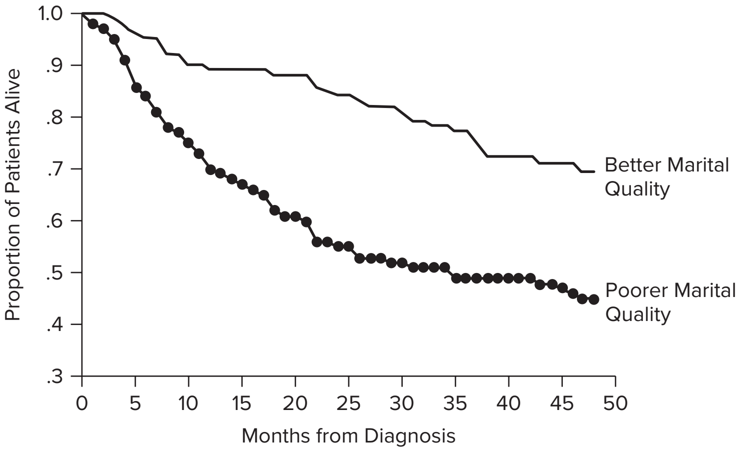
In fact, some of the strongest evidence supporting a need to belong comes from studies of the biological benefits we accrue from satisfying close ties to others. In general, people live happier, healthier, longer lives when they're closely connected to others than they do when they're on their own (Loving & Sbarra, 2015). Holding a lover's hand reduces the brain's alarm in response to threatening situations (Coan et al., 2006), and pain seems less potent when one simply looks at a photograph of a loving partner (Master et al., 2009). Wounds even heal faster when others accept and support us (Gouin et al., 2010). In contrast, people with insufficient intimacy in their lives are at risk for a wide variety of health problems (Valtorta et al., 2016). When they're lonely, young adults have weaker immune responses, leaving them more likely to catch a cold or flu (Pressman et al., 2005). Across the life span, people who have few friends or lovers—and even those who simply live alone—have much higher mortality rates than do those who are closely connected to caring partners (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015); in one extensive study, people who lacked close ties to others were *2 to 3 times* more likely to die over a 9-year span (Berkman & Glass, 2000). Married people in the United States are less likely to die from *any* of the 10 leading causes of cancer-related death than unmarried people are (Aizer et al., 2013). And losing one's existing ties to others is damaging, too: Elderly widows and widowers are much more likely to die in the first few months after the loss of their spouses than they would have been had their marriages continued (Elwert & Christakis, 2008), and a divorce also increases one's risk of an early death (Zhang et al., 2016).

A Point to Ponder

Why are married people less likely to die from cancer than unmarried people are? Are unhealthy people simply less likely to get married, or is marriage advantageous to our health? How might marriage be beneficial?

Our mental and physical health is also affected by the *quality* of our connections to others (Robles et al., 2014) (see Figure 1.2). Day by day, people who have pleasant interactions with others who care for them are more satisfied with their lives

FIGURE 1.2. **Satisfying intimacy and life and death.**
Here's a remarkable example of the manner in which satisfying intimacy is associated with better health. In this investigation, middle-aged patients with congestive heart failure were tracked for several years after their diseases were diagnosed. Forty-eight months later, *most* of the patients with less satisfying marriages had died, whereas most of the people who were more happily married were still alive. This pattern occurred both when the initial illnesses were relatively mild and more severe, so it's a powerful example of the link between happy intimacy and better health. In another study, patients who were satisfied with their marriages when they had heart surgery were over *3 times* more likely to still be alive 15 years later than were those who were unhappily married (King & Reis, 2012). Evidently, fulfilling our needs to belong can be a matter of life or death.



Source: Coyne, J. C., Rohrbaugh, M. J., Shoham, V., Sonnega, J. S., Nicklas, J. M., & Cranford, J. A. (2001). "Prognostic importance of marital quality for survival of congestive heart failure," American Journal of Cardiology, *88, 526–529.*

than are those who lack such social contact (Sun et al., 2020), and this is true around the world (Galínha et al., 2013). In contrast, psychiatric problems, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, inflammation, obesity, and sleep problems all tend to afflict those with troubled ties to others (Gouin et al., 2020; Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017). On the surface (as I'll explain in detail in chapter 2), such patterns do not necessarily mean that shallow, superficial relationships *cause* psychological problems; after all, people who are prone to such problems may find it difficult to form loving relationships in the first place. Nevertheless, it does appear that a lack of intimacy can both cause such problems and make them worse (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017). In general, whether we're young or old (Allen et al., 2015), gay or straight (Wight et al., 2013), or married or just cohabiting (Kohn & Averett, 2014), our well-being seems to depend on how well we satisfy the need to belong. Evidently, "we are wired for close connection with others and this connection is vital to our survival" (Johnson, 2019).

Why should we need intimacy so much? Why are we such a social species? One possibility is that the need to belong *evolved* over eons, gradually becoming a natural tendency in all human beings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). That argument goes this way: Because early humans lived in small groups surrounded by a difficult environment full of saber-toothed tigers, people who were loners were less likely than gregarious humans to have children who would grow to maturity and reproduce. In such a setting, a tendency to form stable, affectionate connections to others would have been evolutionarily *adaptive,* making it more likely that one's children would survive and thrive (Hare, 2017). As a result, our species slowly came to be characterized by people who cared deeply about what others thought of them and who sought acceptance and closeness from others. Admittedly, this view—which represents a provocative way of thinking about our modern behavior (and about which I'll have more to say later in this chapter)—is speculative. Nevertheless, whether or not this evolutionary account is entirely correct, there is little doubt that almost all of us now care deeply about the quality of our attachments to others. We are also at a loss, prone to illness and maladjustment, when we have insufficient intimacy in our lives. We know that food and shelter are essential for life, but the need to belong suggests that intimacy with others is essential for a good, long life as well (Sbarra & Coan, 2018). "Human beings need social connections just like we need oxygen, food, and water" (Gabriel, 2020).

Now, let's examine the major influences that determine what sort of relationships we construct when we seek to satisfy the need to belong. We'll start with a counterpoint to our innate need for intimacy: the changing cultures that provide the norms that govern our intimate relationships.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE

I know it seems like ancient history—smart phones and Snapchat and AIDS didn't exist—but let's look back at 1965, which may have been around the time that your grandparents were deciding to marry. If they were a typical couple, they would have married in their early twenties, before she was 21 and before he was 23.[1] They probably would not have lived together, or "cohabited," without being married because almost no one did at that time. And it's also unlikely that they would have had a baby without being married; 95 percent of the children born in the United States in 1965 had parents who were married to each other. Once they settled in, your grandmother probably did not work outside the home—most women didn't—and when her kids were preschoolers, it's quite likely that she stayed home with them all day; most women did. It's also likely that their children—in particular, your mom or dad—grew up in a household in which both of their parents were present at the end of the day.

Things these days are very different (Smock & Schwartz, 2020). The last several decades have seen dramatic changes in the cultural context in which we conduct our close relationships. Indeed, you shouldn't be surprised if your grandparents are astonished by the cultural landscape that *you* face today. In the United States,

- Fewer people are marrying than ever before. Back in 1965, almost everyone (94 percent) married at some point in their lives, but more people remain unmarried today. Demographers now predict that fewer than 80 percent of young adults will ever marry (and that proportion is even lower in Europe [Perelli-Harris & Lyons-Amos, 2015]). Include everyone who is divorced, widowed, or never married, and slightly less than *half* (49 percent) of the adult population of the United States is presently married. That's an all-time low.
- People are waiting longer to marry. On average, a woman is 28 years old when she marries for the first time, and a man is almost 30, and these are the oldest such ages in American history. That's much older than your grandparents probably were when they got married (see Figure 1.3). A great many Americans (43 percent) reach their mid-30s without marrying. Do you feel sorry for people who are 35 and single? Read the "Are You Prejudiced Against Singles?" box[2] on page 9.
- People routinely live together even when they're not married. Cohabitation was very rare in 1965—only 5 percent of all adults ever did it—but it is now ordinary. More Americans under the age of 44 have cohabited than have ever been married (Horowitz et al., 2019).
- People often have babies even when they're not married. This was an uncommon event in 1965; only 5 percent of the babies born in the United States that year had unmarried mothers. Some children were *conceived* out of wedlock, but their parents usually got married before they were born. Not these days. In 2018, *40 percent* of the babies born in the United States had unmarried mothers (Martin et al., 2019). On average, an American mother now has her first child (at age 26.9) before she gets married (at 28.0), and about one-third (32 percent) of children in the United States presently live with an unmarried parent (Livingston, 2018a).

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[1] These and the following statistics were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau at www.census.gov, the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics at www.cdc.gov/nchs, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics at bls.gov/data, the Pew Research Center at pewsocialtrends.org, and the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr.html.

[2] Please try to overcome your usual temptation to skip past the boxes. Many of them will be worth your time. Trust me.

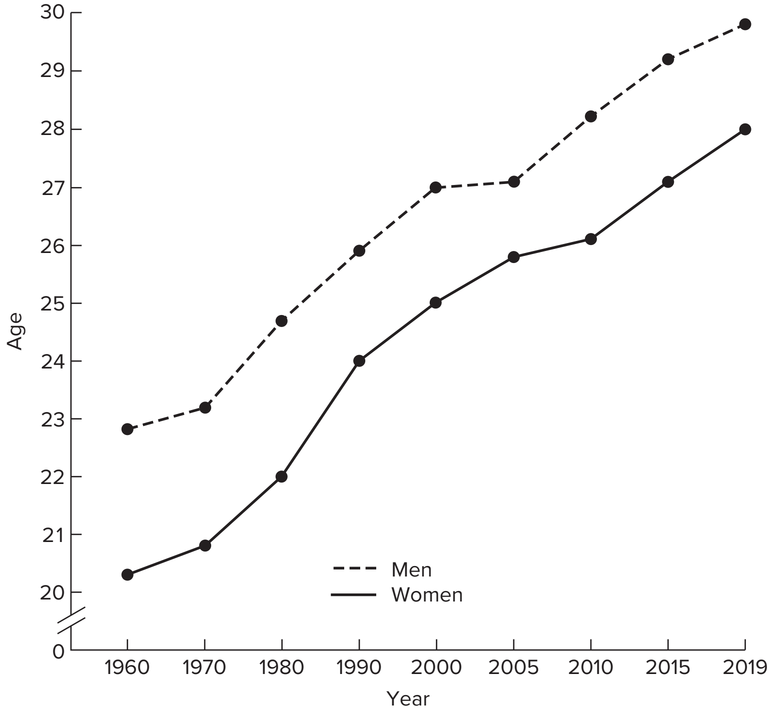

FIGURE 1.3. **Average age of first marriage in the United States.**
American men and women are waiting longer to get married than ever before.

- About one-half of all marriages end in divorce, a failure rate that's *2-and-a-half times* higher than it was when your grandparents married. In recent years, the divorce rate has been slowly decreasing for couples with college degrees—which is probably good news if you're reading this book!—but it remains high and unchanged for people with less education. In 2018, in the United States, there were just under half as many divorces as marriages (Schweizer, 2019). So because not all lasting marriages are happy ones, an American couple getting married this year is more likely to divorce sometime down the road than to live happily ever after.[3]
- Most preschool children have parents who work outside the home. In 1965, three-quarters of U.S. mothers stayed home all day when their children were too young to go to school, but only one-quarter of them (and 7 percent of fathers) do so now (Livingston, 2018b).

These remarkable changes suggest that our shared assumptions about the role that marriage and parenthood will play in our lives have changed substantially in recent years. Once upon a time, everybody got married within a few years of leaving high school and, happy or sad, they tended to stay with their original partners. Pregnant

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[3] This is sobering, but your chances for a happy marriage (should you choose to marry) are likely to be better than those of most other people. You're reading this book, and your interest in relationship science is likely to improve your chances considerably.

Are You Prejudiced Against Singles?

Here's a term you probably haven't seen before: ***singlism***. It refers to prejudice and discrimination against those who choose to remain single and opt not to devote themselves to a primary romantic relationship. Many of us assume that normal people want to be a part of a romantic couple, so we find it odd when anyone chooses instead to stay single (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). The result is a culture that offers benefits to married couples and puts singles at a disadvantage with regard to such things as Social Security benefits, insurance rates, and service in restaurants (DePaulo, 2014).

Intimacy is good for us, and married people live longer than unmarried people do. Middle-aged Americans who have never married are *2½ times* more likely than those who are married to die an early death (Siegler et al., 2013). Patterns like these lead some researchers to straightforwardly recommend happy romances as desirable goals in life. And most single people *do* want to have romantic partners; few singles (12 percent) prefer being unattached to being in a steady romantic relationship (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010), and a fear of being single can lead people to lower their standards and "settle for less" with lousy lovers (Spielmann et al., 2020).

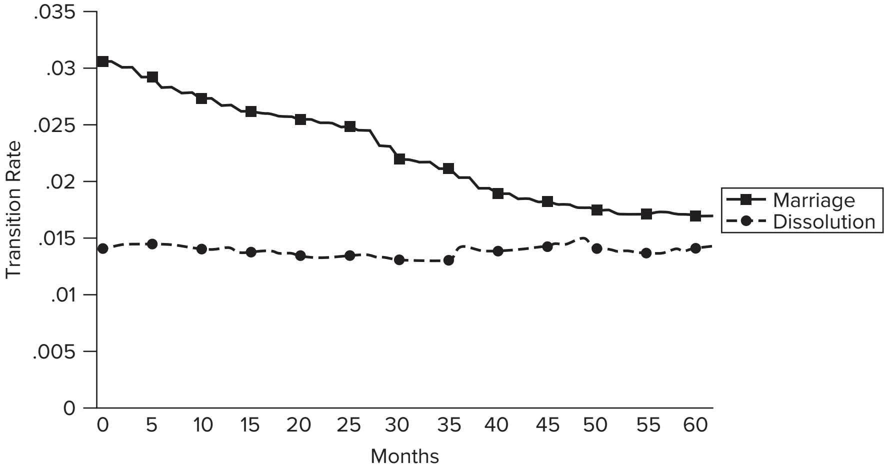
Still, we make an obvious mistake if we casually assume that singles are unhealthy, lonely loners. Yes, some singles remain unattached because they lack self-confidence and social skill (Apostolou, 2019), but many others are single by *choice* because they like it that way (Pepping et al., 2018). They have an active social life and close, supportive friendships that provide them all the intimacy they desire, and they remain uncoupled because they celebrate their freedom and self-sufficiency. They have *closer* relationships with their parents, siblings, neighbors, and friends than married people do (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016), and as one woman wrote to *Dear Abby* (2016), "I do what I want when I want and how I want. I control the remote, the thermostat and my money. I have no desire for male companionship and can honestly say I have never felt happier or more content in my life."

So, what do you think? Is there something wrong or missing in people who are content to remain single? If you think there is, you may profit by reading Bella DePaulo's blog defending singles at www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-single.

people felt they *had* to get married, and cohabitation was known as "living in sin." But not so anymore. Marriage is now a *choice,* even if a baby is on the way, and increasing numbers of us are putting it off or not getting married at all. If we do marry, we're less likely to consider it a solemn, life-long commitment (Cherlin, 2009). In general, recent years have seen enormous change in the cultural norms that used to encourage people to get, and stay, married.

Do these changes matter? Indeed, they do. Cultural standards provide a foundation for our relationships (Kretz, 2019); they shape our expectations and define the patterns we think to be normal. Let's consider, in particular, the huge rise in the prevalence of cohabitation that has occurred in recent years. Most young adults now believe that it is desirable for a couple to live together before they get married so that they can spend more time together, share expenses, and test their compatibility (Horowitz et al., 2019). Such attitudes make cohabitation a reasonable choice—and indeed, most people now cohabit before they ever marry. However, when people do not already have firm plans to marry, cohabitation does not make it more likely that a subsequent marriage (if one occurs) will be successful; instead, such cohabitation *increases* a couple's risk that they will later divorce (Rosenfeld & Roesler, 2019). There are probably several reasons for this. First, on average, those who cohabit begin living together at younger ages than their older—and possibly wiser—peers who get married (Kuperberg, 2014). But more importantly, couples who choose to cohabit are usually less committed to each other than are those who marry—they are, after all, keeping their options open (Wagner, 2019)—so they encounter more problems and uncertainties than married people do. They're less satisfied and they trust each other less (Horowitz et al., 2019) because they experience more conflict (Stanley et al., 2010), jealousy (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011), infidelity (Wagner, 2019), and physical aggression (Manning et al., 2018) than spouses do. Clearly, cohabitation is more tumultuous and volatile than marriage usually is. As a result, the longer people cohabit, the less enthusiastic about marriage—and the more accepting of divorce—they become. Take a look at Figure 1.4: As time passes, cohabitating couples gradually become *less* likely to ever marry but no less likely to split up; 5 years down the road, cohabitating couples are just as likely to break up as they were when they moved in together. (Marriage is fundamentally different. The longer a couple is married, the less likely they are to ever divorce [Wolfinger, 2005]). Overall, then, casual cohabitation that is intended to test the partners' compatibility seems to

FIGURE 1.4. **The outcomes of cohabitation over time.**
Here's what became of 2,746 cohabiting couples in the United States over a span of 5 years. As time passed, couples were less likely to marry, but no less likely to break up. After living together for 5 years, cohabiting couples were just as likely to break up as they were when they moved in together. (The transition rate describes the percentage of couples who either broke up or got married each month. The numbers seem low, but they reflect the proportion of couples who quit cohabiting each month, so the proportions add up and become sizable as months go by.)



Source: Wolfinger, N. H. (2005). Understanding the divorce cycle: The children of divorce in their own marriages. *Cambridge University Press.*

undermine the positive attitudes toward marriage, and the determination to make a marriage work, that support marital success (Busby et al., 2019). Couples who are engaged to marry when they move in together typically fare better than those who cohabit without plans to marry (Willoughby & Belt, 2016), but even they tend to be less happy with their relationships than those who marry without cohabiting first (Brown et al., 2017). So casual cohabitation is corrosive, and these days, cohabiting partners are actually less likely to ever marry than in the past (Sassler & Lichter, 2020). Widespread acceptance of cohabitation as a "trial run" is probably one reason why, compared to 1965, fewer people get married and fewer marriages last.[4]

Sources of Change

So, the norms that currently govern our intimate relationships differ from those that guided prior generations, and there are several reasons why. One set of influences involves *economics.* Societies tend to harbor more single people, tolerate more divorces, and support a later age of marriage the more industrialized and affluent they become (South et al., 2001), and levels of socioeconomic development have increased around the world. Education and financial resources allow people to be more independent, so that women in particular are less likely to marry than they used to be (Dooley, 2010). And in American marriages, close to one of every three wives earns more than her husband (Parker & Stepler, 2017), so "the traditional male breadwinner model has given way to one where women routinely support households and outearn the men they are married to, and nobody cares or thinks it's odd" (Mundy, 2012, p. 5).[5]

Over the years, the *individualism*—that is, the support of self-expression and the emphasis on personal fulfillment—that characterizes Western cultures has also become more pronounced (Santos et al., 2017). This isn't good news, but most of us are more materialistic (Twenge & Kasser, 2013) and less concerned with others (Twenge, 2013) than our grandparents were. And arguably, this focus on our own happiness has led us to expect more personal gratification from our intimate partnerships—more pleasure and delight, and fewer hassles and sacrifices—than our grandparents did (Finkel, 2017). Unlike prior generations (who often stayed together for the "sake of the kids"), we feel justified in ending our partnerships to seek contentment elsewhere if we become dissatisfied (Cherlin, 2009). Eastern cultures promote a more collective sense of self in which people feel more closely tied to their families and social groups (Markus, 2017), and the divorce rates in such cultures (such as Japan) are much lower than they are in the United States (Cherlin, 2009).

New *technology* matters, too. Modern reproductive technologies allow single women to bear children fathered by men picked from a catalog at a sperm bank whom the women have never met! Women can also control their fertility, having children only when they choose, and American women are having fewer children than they used to. The American birth rate is at an all-time low (Hamilton et al., 2019), and one in every four young American women has used emergency contraception—a "morning-after" pill—to help keep it that way (Haeger et al., 2018).

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[4] Most people don't know this, so here's an example of an important pattern we'll encounter often: Popular opinion assumes one thing, but relationship science finds another. Instances such as these demonstrate the value of careful scientific studies of close relationships. Ignorance isn't bliss. Intimate partnerships are complex, and accurate information is especially beneficial when common sense and folk wisdom would lead us astray.

[5] Well, actually, some men, particularly those with traditional views of what it means to be a man (Coughlin & Wade, 2012), *are* troubled when they earn less than their wives. Their self-esteem suffers (Ratliff & Oishi, 2013), and they are more likely than other men to use drugs to treat erectile dysfunction (Pierce et al., 2013). Traditional masculinity can be costly in close relationships, a point to which we'll return on page 28.

Modern communication technologies are also transforming the ways in which we conduct our relationships (Okdie & Ewoldsen, 2018). Your grandparents didn't have mobile phones, so they didn't expect to be able to reach each other anywhere at any time of day. They certainly didn't do any *sexting*—that is, sending sexually explicit images of themselves to others with a smartphone—as more than 20 percent of young adults now have (Garcia et al., 2016, who also found that 23 percent of the time, those who receive a sext *share* it with two or three others). And they did not have to develop rules about how frequently they could text each other, how long they could take to respond, and whether or not they could read the messages and examine the call histories on the other's phone; these days, couples are happier if they do (Halpern & Katz, 2017).

In addition, most of the people you know are on Facebook (Gramlich, 2019), connected to hundreds of "friends,"[6] and that can complicate our more intimate partnerships. Facebook provides an entertaining and efficient way to (help to) satisfy our needs for social contact (Waytz & Gray, 2018), but it can also create dilemmas for lovers, who have to decide when to go "Facebook official" and announce that they're now "in a relationship" (Seidman et al., 2019). (They also have to decide what that means: Women tend to think that this change in status signals more intensity and commitment than men do [Fox & Warber, 2013].) Thereafter, a partner's heavy use of Facebook (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019) and pictures of one's partner partying with others (Utz et al., 2015) can incite conflict and jealousy, and a breakup can be embarrassingly public (Haimson et al., 2018). Clearly, social media such as Facebook and Snapchat can be mixed blessings in close relationships.

Moreover, many of us are *permanently* connected to our social networks, with our smartphones always by our sides (Lapierre, 2020), and we are too often tempted to "give precedence to people we are not with over people we are with" (Price, 2011, p. 27). Modern couples have to put up with a lot of **technoference**, the frequent interruptions of their interactions that are caused by their various technological devices (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019), and **phubbing**—which occurs when one partner snubs another by focusing on a phone—is particularly obnoxious (Roberts & David, 2016). No one much likes to be ignored while you text or talk with someone else (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018), but it happens most of the time when two friends are eating together (Vanden Abeele et al., 2019). In fact—and this is troubling—our devices can be so alluring and distracting

A Point to Ponder

Which of the remarkable changes in technology over the last 50 years has had the most profound effect on our relationships? Birth control pills? Smartphones? Online dating sites? Something else?

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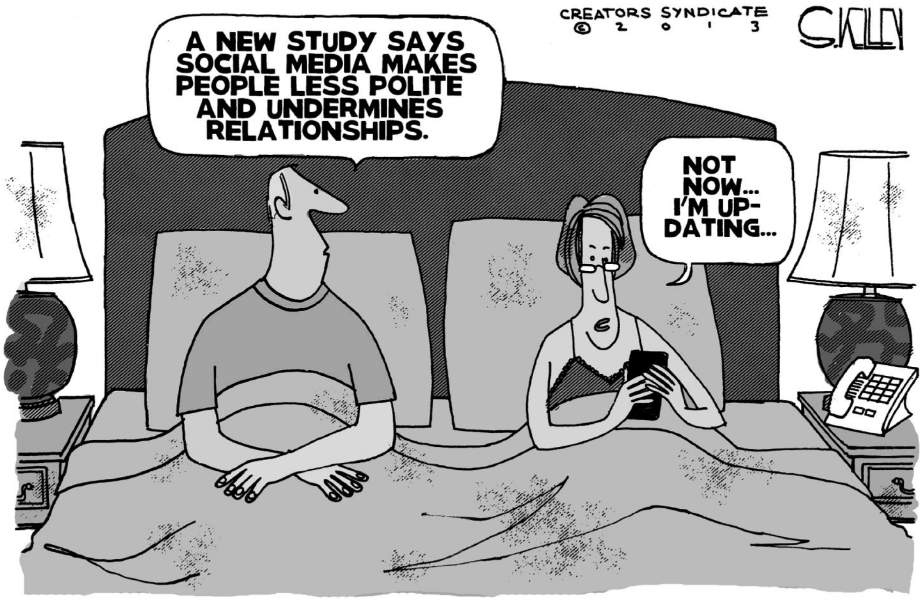
[6] Psychology students at Sam Houston State University (n = 298) do have hundreds of Facebook "friends"—562 each, on average—but that number doesn't mean much because most of them aren't real friends; 45 percent of them are mere acquaintances, and others (7 percent) are strangers they have never met (Miller et al., 2014). We'll return to this point in chapter 7, but for now, let me ask: How many people on your Facebook list are *really* your friends?


CREATORS SYNDICATE © 2013
S.KELLEY
A NEW STUDY SAYS SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES PEOPLE LESS POLITE AND UNDERMINES RELATIONSHIPS.
NOT NOW... I'M UP-DATING...

Steve Kelley Editorial Cartoon used with the permission of Steve Kelley and Creators Syndicate. All rights reserved.

Phubbing is obnoxious and is best avoided.

(Kushlev et al., 2019) that simply having your smartphone lying on the table is likely to reduce the quality of the conversation you share at dinner with a friend (Dwyer et al., 2018). Here's a suggestion: When you next go out to dinner with your lover, why don't you leave your phone in the car? "When technology diminishes our relationships with loved ones and distracts us from the things that truly matter, it's no longer a tool; it's a toxin" (Lane, 2017).

Finally, an important—but more subtle—influence on the norms that govern relationships is the relative numbers of young men and women in a given culture (Sng & Ackerman, 2020). Societies and regions of the world in which men are more numerous than women tend to have very different standards than those in which women outnumber men. I'm describing a region's **sex ratio,** a simple count of the number of men for every 100 women in a specific population. When the sex ratio is high, there are more men than women; when it is low, there are fewer men than women.

The baby boom that followed World War II caused the U.S. sex ratio, which had been very high, to plummet to low levels at the end of the 1960s. For a time after the war, more babies were born each year than in the preceding year; this meant that when the "boomers" entered adulthood, there were fewer older men than younger women, and the sex ratio dropped. However, when birthrates began to slow and fewer children entered the demographic pipeline, each new flock of women was smaller than the preceding flock of men, and the U.S. sex ratio crept higher in the 1990s. Since then, reasonably stable birthrates have resulted in fairly equal numbers of marriageable men and women today.

These changes may have been more important than most people realize. Cultures with high sex ratios (in which there aren't enough women) tend to support traditional, old-fashioned roles for men and women (Secord, 1983). After the men buy expensive engagement rings (Griskevicius et al., 2012), women stay home raising children while the men work outside the home. Such cultures also tend to be sexually conservative. The ideal newlywed is a virgin bride, unwed pregnancy is shameful, open cohabitation is rare, and divorce is discouraged. In contrast, cultures with low sex ratios (in which there are too few men) tend to be less traditional and more permissive. Women seek high-paying careers (Durante et al., 2012), and they are allowed (if not encouraged) to have sexual relationships outside of marriage (Moss & Maner, 2016). The specifics vary with each historical period, but this general pattern has occurred throughout history (Guttentag & Secord, 1983). Ancient Rome, which was renowned for its sybaritic behavior? A low sex ratio. Victorian England, famous for its prim and proper ways? A high sex ratio. The Roaring Twenties, a footloose and playful decade? A low sex ratio. And in more recent memory, the "sexual revolution" and the advent of "women's liberation" in the late 1960s? A very low sex ratio.

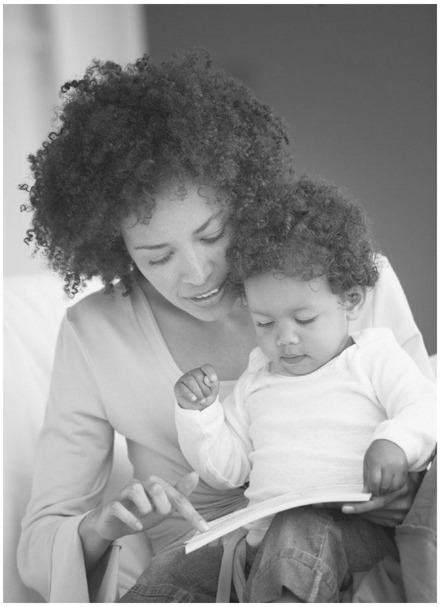
Thus, the remarkable changes in the norms for U.S. relationships since 1965 may be due, in part, to dramatic fluctuations in U.S. sex ratios. Indeed, another test of this pattern is presently unfolding in China, where limitations on family size and a preference for male children have produced a dramatic scarcity of young women. Prospective grooms will outnumber prospective brides in China by more than 50 percent for the next 25 years (Huang, 2014). What changes in China's norms should we expect? The rough but real link between a culture's proportions of men and women and its relational norms serves as a compelling example of the manner in which culture can affect our relationships. To a substantial degree, what we expect and what we accept in our dealings with others can spring from the standards of the time and place in which we live.

THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENCE

Our relationships are also affected by the histories and experiences we bring to them, and there is no better example of this than the global orientations toward relationships known as **attachment styles.** Years ago, developmental researchers (e.g., Bowlby, 1969) realized that infants displayed various patterns of attachment to their major caregivers (usually their mothers). The prevailing assumption was that whenever they were hungry, wet, or scared, some children found responsive care and protection to be reliably available, and they learned that other people were trustworthy sources of security and kindness. As a result, such children developed a **secure** style of attachment: They happily bonded with others and relied on them comfortably, and they readily developed relationships characterized by relaxed trust.

Other children encountered different situations. For some, attentive care was unpredictable and inconsistent. Their caregivers were warm and interested on some occasions but distracted, anxious, or unavailable on others. These children thus developed fretful, mixed feelings about others known as **anxious-ambivalent** attachments. Being uncertain of when (or if) a departing caregiver would return, such children became nervous, clingy, and needy in their relationships with others.

Finally, for a third group of children, care was provided reluctantly by rejecting or hostile adults. Such children learned that little good came from depending on others,



Tom Merton/Corbis

Children's relationships with their major caregivers teach them trust or fear that sets the stage for their subsequent relationships with others. How responsive, reliable, and effective was the care that you received?

and they withdrew from others with an **avoidant** style of attachment. Avoidant children were often suspicious of others, and they did not easily form trusting, close relationships.

The important point, then, is that researchers believed that early interpersonal experiences shaped the course of one's subsequent relationships. Indeed, attachment processes became a popular topic of research because the different styles were so obvious in many children. When they faced a strange, intimidating environment, for instance, secure children ran to their mothers, calmed down, and then set out to bravely explore the unfamiliar new setting (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Anxious-ambivalent children cried and clung to their mothers, ignoring the parents' reassurances that all was well.

These patterns were impressive, but relationship researchers really began to take notice of attachment styles when Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver (1987) demonstrated that similar orientations toward close relationships could also be observed among *adults.* Their surveys found that most people said that they were relaxed and comfortable depending on others; that is, they sounded secure in their intimate relationships. However, a substantial minority (about 40 percent) said they were *in*secure; they either found it difficult to trust and to depend on their partners, or they nervously worried that their relationships wouldn't last. In addition, respondents reported childhood memories and current attitudes that fit their styles of attachment. Secure people generally held positive images of themselves and others, and remembered their parents as loving and supportive. In contrast, insecure people viewed others with uncertainty or distrust, and remembered their parents as inconsistent or cold.

With provocative results like these, attachment research quickly became one of the hottest fields in relationship science (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). And researchers promptly realized that there seemed to be *four,* rather than three, patterns of attachment in adults. In particular, theorist Kim Bartholomew (1990) suggested that there were two different reasons why people might wish to avoid being too close to others. In one case, people could want relationships with others but be wary of them, fearing rejection and mistrusting them. In the other case, people could be independent and self-reliant, genuinely preferring autonomy and freedom rather than close attachments to others.

Thus, Bartholomew (1990) proposed four general categories of attachment style (see Table 1.1). The first, a **secure** style, remained the same as the secure style identified in children. The second, a **preoccupied** style, was a new name for anxious ambivalence. Bartholomew renamed the category to reflect the fact that, because they nervously depended on others' approval to feel good about themselves, such people worried about, and were preoccupied with, the status of their relationships.

The third and fourth styles reflected two different ways to be "avoidant." **Fearful** people avoided intimacy with others because of their fears of rejection. Although they wanted others to like them, they worried about the risks of relying on others. In contrast, people with a **dismissing** style felt that intimacy with others just wasn't worth the trouble. Dismissing people rejected interdependency with others because they felt self-sufficient, and they didn't care much whether others liked them or not.

It's also now generally accepted that two broad themes underlie and distinguish these four styles of attachment (Gillath et al., 2016). First, people differ in their ***avoidance of intimacy,*** which affects the ease and trust with which they accept interdependent intimacy with others. People who are comfortable and relaxed in close relationships are

TABLE 1.1. Four Types of Attachment Style

Which of these paragraphs describes you best?

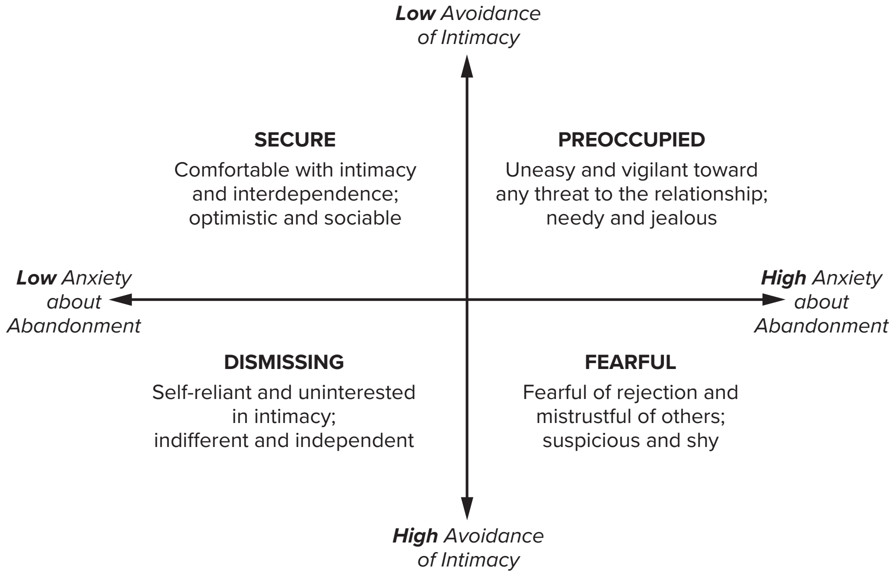
Secure	It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.
Preoccupied	I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.
Fearful	I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
Dismissing	I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

Source: Bartholomew, K. (1990). "Avoidance of intimacy: An attachment perspective," Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, *7, 147–178.*

low in avoidance, whereas those who distrust others, value their independence, and keep their emotional distance are high in avoidance (Ren et al., 2017). People also differ in their ***anxiety about abandonment,*** the dread that others will find them unworthy and leave them. Secure people take great comfort in closeness with others and do not worry that others will mistreat them; as a result, they gladly seek intimate interdependency with others. In contrast, with all three of the other styles, people are burdened with anxiety or discomfort that leaves them less at ease in close relationships. Preoccupied people want closeness but anxiously fear rejection. Dismissing people don't worry about rejection but don't like closeness. And fearful people get it from both sides, being uncomfortable with intimacy *and* worrying it won't last. (See Figure 1.5.)

Importantly, the two themes of avoidance of intimacy and anxiety about abandonment are *continuous* dimensions that range from low to high. This means that, although it's convenient to talk about attachment styles as if they were discrete, pure categories that do not overlap, it's not really accurate to do so (Lubiewska & Van de Vijver, 2020). When they are simply asked to pick which one of the four paragraphs in Table 1.1 fits them best, most people in the United States—usually around 60 percent—describe themselves as being securely attached (Mickelson et al., 1997).[7] However, if

FIGURE 1.5. **The dimensions underlying attachment.**


Low *Avoidance of Intimacy*
SECURE
Comfortable with intimacy and interdependence; optimistic and sociable
PREOCCUPIED
Uneasy and vigilant toward any threat to the relationship; needy and jealous
Low *Anxiety about Abandonment*
High *Anxiety about Abandonment*
DISMISSING
Self-reliant and uninterested in intimacy; indifferent and independent
FEARFUL
Fearful of rejection and mistrustful of others; suspicious and shy
High *Avoidance of Intimacy*

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[7] This isn't true of American college students; only about 40 percent of them are secure. And that proportion has been *declining* over the last 30 years; more collegians are insecure than in years past (Konrath et al., 2014). [Here's a Point to Ponder in a footnote! Why do you think that is?] Also, in many other countries, secure styles are more common than any of the other three styles but secure people are outnumbered by the other three groups combined. Thus, in most regions of the world, more people are insecure than secure (Schmitt, 2008). Nevertheless, there is some good news here: Around the world, people tend to become less anxious and avoidant as they age (e.g., Chopik et al., 2019). So, even if you're insecure now, time and experience may teach you to be more secure 30 years from now.

someone has moderate anxiety about abandonment and middling avoidance of intimacy, which category fits him or her best? The use of any of the four categories is rather arbitrary in the middle ranges of anxiety and avoidance where the boundaries of the categories meet.

So don't treat the neat classifications in Figure 1.5 too seriously. The more sophisticated way to think about attachment is that there seem to be two important themes that shape people's global orientations toward relationships with others. (You can see where you stand on the items that are often used to measure anxiety and avoidance on page 74 in chapter 2.) Both are important, and if you compare high scorers on either dimension to low scorers on that dimension, you're likely to see meaningful differences in the manner in which those people conduct their relationships. Indeed, current studies of attachment (e.g., Hudson et al., 2020) routinely describe people with regard to their relative standing on the two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance instead of labeling them as secure, preoccupied, fearful, or dismissing.

Nevertheless, the four labels are so concise that they are still widely used, so stay sharp. Developmental researchers used to speak of only three attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. Now theorists routinely speak of four styles, but they treat them as convenient labels for sets of anxiety and avoidance scores, not as distinctly different categories that have nothing in common. The biggest distinction is between people who are "secure" and those who are not (being those who have high anxiety about abandonment or high avoidance of intimacy, or both) (Arriaga & Kumashiro, 2019). And for now, the important point is that attachment styles appear to be orientations toward relationships that are largely *learned* from our experiences with others. They are prime examples of the manner in which the proclivities and perspectives we bring to a new relationship emerge in part from our experiences in prior partnerships.

Let's examine this idea more closely. Any relationship is shaped by many different influences—that's the point of this chapter—and both babies and adults affect through their own behavior the treatment they receive from others. As any parent knows, for instance, babies are born with various temperaments and arousal levels. Some newborns have an easy, pleasant temperament, whereas others are fussy and excitable, and inborn differences in personality and emotionality make some children easier to parent than others. Thus, the quality of parenting a baby receives can depend, in part, on the child's own personality and behavior; in this way, people's attachment styles are influenced by the traits with which they were born, and our genes shape our styles (Masarik et al., 2014).

However, our experiences play much larger roles in shaping the styles we bring to subsequent relationships (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). The levels of acceptance or rejection we receive from our parents are huge influences early on (Woodhouse et al., 2020). Expectant mothers who are glad to be pregnant are more likely to have secure toddlers a year later than are mothers-to-be whose pregnancies were unwanted or unplanned (Gillath et al., 2019). Once their babies are born, mothers who enjoy intimacy and who are comfortable with closeness tend to be more attentive and sensitive caregivers (Jones et al., 2015), so secure moms tend to have secure children, whereas insecure mothers tend to have insecure children (Verhage et al., 2016). Indeed, when mothers with difficult, irritable babies are trained to be sensitive and responsive parents, their toddlers

Was Your Childhood Calm or Chaotic?

Some of us experienced childhoods that were comfortable and full of familiar routines; our families didn't struggle financially, we didn't move often, and our parents didn't keep changing partners. Others of us, though, had childhoods that were comparatively harsh and/or unpredictable. Perhaps we were poor, so that life was austere and inhospitable, or perhaps upheaval was common, so that we never knew what to expect. Notably, these different past environments may be having more influence on our current relationships than we realize.

According to a perspective known as *life history theory*, harsh or unpredictable environments lead young adults to pursue *"fast"* strategies of mating in which they mature faster, have sex sooner (and with more people), and have more children (and at a younger age) (Simpson, 2019). If life is hard and uncertain, one needs to act fast! In contrast, comfortable and reliable environments support *"slow"* strategies; people reach puberty later, start having sex when they're older and have fewer partners and fewer children. Their relationships also tend to be more stable and lasting (Bae & Wickrama, 2019).

Remarkably, recent discoveries generally support life history predictions, with chaotic childhoods seeming to set people on paths in which secure attachments to others are relatively hard to attain (Szepsenwol & Simpson, 2019). We're not prisoners of our pasts (Hudson et al., 2020), but studies of life histories offer striking examples of the manner in which, consciously or not, we may import our past experiences into our present partnerships.

are much more likely to end up securely attached to them than they would have been in the absence of such training (van den Boom, 1994). And a mother's influence on the attachment styles of her children does not end in preschool: The parenting adolescents receive as seventh graders predicts how they will behave in their own romances and friendships when they become adults (Hadiwijaya et al., 2020), and remarkably, teens who have nurturing and supportive relationships with their parents will be likely to have richer relationships with their lovers and friends *60* years later (Waldinger & Schulz, 2016). There's no doubt that youngsters import the lessons they learn at home into their subsequent relationships with others (Fraley & Roisman, 2019).

We're not prisoners of our experiences as children, however, because our attachment styles continue to be shaped by the experiences we encounter as adults (Haak et al., 2017). Being learned, attachment styles can be *un*learned, and over time, attachment styles can change (Fraley, 2019). A devoted, fun, and supportive partner may gradually make an avoidant person less wary of intimacy (Arriaga & Kumashiro, 2019), but a bad breakup can make a formerly secure person insecure. Our attachment to a particular partner can even fluctuate some from day to day (Girme et al., 2018), but the good news is that those who *want* to become less anxious or avoidant usually suceed in doing so (Hudson et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, once they have been established, attachment styles can also be stable and long-lasting as they lead people to create new relationships that reinforce their existing tendencies (Hadden et al., 2014). By remaining aloof and avoiding interdependency, for instance, fearful people may never learn that some people can be trusted and closeness can be comforting–and that perpetuates their fearful style. In the absence of dramatic new experiences, people's styles of attachment can persist for decades (Fraley, 2002), with great effect: Marriages are happier when both spouses have secure styles (Siegel et al., 2019), and insecure people are more likely than those who are secure to be divorced and single (McNelis & Segrin, 2019).

Thus, our global beliefs about the nature and worth of close relationships appear to be shaped by our experiences within them. By good luck or bad, our earliest notions about our own interpersonal worth and the trustworthiness of others emerge from our interactions with our major caregivers and start us down a path of either trust or fear. But that journey never stops, and later obstacles or aid from fellow travelers may divert us and change our routes. Our learned styles of attachment to others may either change with time or persist indefinitely, depending on our interpersonal experiences.

THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Once they are formed, attachment styles also exemplify the idiosyncratic personal characteristics that people bring to their partnerships with others. We're all individuals with singular combinations of experiences and traits, and the differences among us influence our relationships. In this section of the chapter, we'll consider five influential types of individual variation: sex differences, gender differences, sexual orientations, personalities, and self-esteem.

Sex Differences

At this moment, you're doing something rare. You're reading an academic textbook about relationship science, and that's something most people will never do. This is probably the first serious text you've ever read about relationships, too, and that means that we need to confront—and hopefully correct—some of the stereotypes you may hold about the differences between men and women in intimate relationships.

This may not be easy. Many of us are used to thinking that men and women have very different approaches to intimacy—that, for instance, "men are from Mars, women are from Venus." A well-known book with that title asserted that

> men and women differ in all areas of their lives. Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment. (Gray, 1992, p. 5)

Wow! Men and women sound like they're members of different species. No wonder heterosexual relationships are sometimes problematic!

But the truth is more subtle. Human traits obviously vary across a wide range, and (in most cases) if we graph the number of people who possess a certain talent or ability, we'll get a distinctive chart known as a *normal curve.* Such curves describe the frequencies with which particular levels of some trait can be found in people, and they demonstrate that (a) most people have talents or abilities that are only slightly better or worse than average and (b) extreme levels of most traits, high or low, are very rare. Consider height, for example: A few people are very short or very tall, but most of us are only two or three inches shorter or taller than the average for our sex.

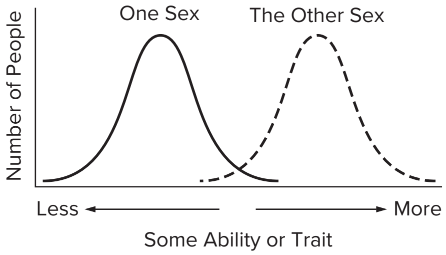
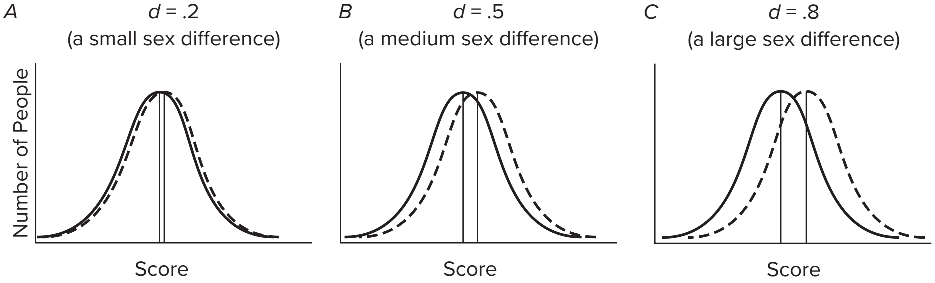


FIGURE 1.6. **An imaginary sex difference.**
Popular stereotypes portray the sexes as being very different, with almost no overlap between the styles and preferences of the two sexes. This is ***not*** the way things really are.

Why should we care about this? Because many lay stereotypes about men and women portray the sexes as having very different ranges of interests, styles, and abilities. As one example, men are often portrayed as being more interested in sex than women are (see the "Combating Simplistic Stereotypes" box on page 23), and the images of the sexes that people hold often seem to resemble the situation pictured in Figure 1.6. The difference between the average man and the average woman is presumed to be large, and there is almost no overlap between the sexes at all. But, despite the "Mars" and "Venus" stereotypes, this is ***not*** the way things really are. As we'll see in chapter 9, men do tend to have higher sex drives, on average, than women do. Nevertheless, *actual* sex differences take the form of the graphs shown in Figure 1.7, which depict ranges of interests and talents that *overlap* to a substantial extent (Hyde et al., 2019).

The three graphs in Figure 1.7 illustrate sex differences that are considered by researchers to be small, medium, and large, respectively. Formally, they differ with respect to a *d* statistic that specifies the size of a difference between two groups.[8] In

FIGURE 1.7. **Actual sex differences take the form of overlapping normal curves.**
The three graphs depict small, medium, and large sex differences, respectively. (To keep them simple, they portray the ranges of attitudes or behavior as being the same for both sexes. This isn't always the case in real life.)



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[8] To get a *d* score in these cases, you compute the difference between the average man and the average woman, and divide it by the average differences among the scores *within* each sex (which is the standard deviation of those scores). The resulting *d* value tells you how large the sex difference is compared to the usual amount by which men and women differ among themselves.

the realm of sexual attitudes and behavior, graph A depicts the different ages of men and women when they first have intercourse (men tend to be slightly younger), graph B illustrates the relative frequencies with which they masturbate (men masturbate more often), and graph C depicts a hypothetical difference that is larger than any that is known to actually exist. That's right. A sprawling analysis of modern studies of human sexuality involving 1,419,807 participants from 87 different countries failed to find *any* difference in the sexual attitudes and behavior of men and women that was as large as that pictured in graph C (Petersen & Hyde, 2010). Obviously, the real-life examples that do exist look nothing like the silly stereotype pictured in Figure 1.6. More specifically, these examples make three vital points about psychological sex differences:

- Some differences are real but quite small. (Don't be confused by researchers' terminology; when they talk about a "significant" sex difference, they're usually referring to a "*statistically* significant"—that is, numerically reliable—difference, and it may actually be quite modest in size.) Almost all of the differences between men and women that you will encounter in this book fall in the small to medium range.
- The range of behavior and opinions among members of a given sex is always *huge* compared to the average difference between the sexes. Men are more accepting of casual, uncommitted sex than women are (Petersen & Hyde, 2010), but that certainly doesn't mean that all men like casual sex. Some men like to have sex with strangers, but other men don't like that at all, and the sexual preferences of the two groups of men have less in common than those of the average man and the average woman do. Another way to put this is that despite this sex difference in sexual permissiveness, a highly permissive man has more in common with the average *woman* on this trait than he does with a low-scoring *man.*
- The overlap in behavior and opinions is so large that many members of one sex will always score higher than the average member of the other sex. With a sex difference of medium size (with men higher and a *d* value of .5), one-third of all women will still score higher than the average man. What this means is that if you're looking for folks who like casual sex, you shouldn't just look for *men* because you heard that "men are more accepting of casual sex than women are"; you should look for permissive *people,* many of whom will be women despite the difference between the sexes.

The bottom line is that men and women usually overlap so thoroughly that they are much more similar than different on most of the dimensions and topics of interest to relationship science (Zell et al., 2015). It's completely misguided to suggest that men and women come from different planets and are distinctly different because it simply isn't true (Hyde et al., 2019). "Research does *not* support the view that men and women come from different cultures, let alone separate worlds" (Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997, p. vi). According to the careful science of relationships you'll study in this book, it's more accurate to say that "men are from North Dakota, and women are from South Dakota" (Dindia, 2006, p. 18). (Or, as a bumper sticker I saw one day suggests: "Men are from Earth. Women are from Earth. Deal with it.")

Combating Simplistic Stereotypes

Here's a joke that showed up in my inbox one day:

How to Impress a Woman:
Compliment her. Cuddle her. Kiss her. Caress her. Love her. Comfort her. Protect her. Hug her. Hold her. Spend money on her. Wine and dine her. Listen to her. Care for her. Stand by her. Support her. Go to the ends of the earth for her.

How to Impress a Man:
Show up naked. Bring beer.

It's a cute joke. But it may not be harmless. It reinforces the stereotypes that women seek warmth and tenderness in their relationships, whereas men simply seek unemotional sex. In truth, men and women differ little in their desires in close relationships; they're not "opposite" sexes at all (Hyde, 2014). Although individuals of both sexes may differ substantially from each other, the differences between the average man and the average woman are usually rather small and often quite trivial. Both women *and* men generally want their intimate partners to provide them with lots of affection and warmth (Brumbaugh & Wood, 2013).

But so what? What are the consequences of wrongly believing that men are all alike, having little in common with women? Pessimism and hopelessness, for two (Metts & Cupach, 1990). People who really believe that the sexes are very different are less likely to try to repair their heterosexual relationships when conflicts occur (as they inevitably do). Thinking of the other sex as a bunch of aliens from another world is not just inaccurate—it can also be damaging, forestalling efforts to understand a partner's point of view and preventing collaborative problem solving. For that reason, I'll try to do my part to avoid perpetuating wrongful impressions by comparing men and women to the **other** sex, not the *opposite* sex, for the remainder of this book. Words matter (MacArthur et al., 2020), so I invite you to use similar language when you think and talk about the sexes.

Thus, sex differences in intimate relationships tend to be much less noteworthy and influential than laypeople often think. Now that you're reading a serious text on intimate relationships, you need to think more carefully about sex differences and interpret them more reasonably.[9] There are interesting differences between the sexes that are meaningful parts of the fabric of relationships, and we'll encounter several of them in the chapters that follow. But they occur in the context of even broader similarities between the sexes, and the differences are always modest when they are compared to the full range of human variation. It's more work, but also more sophisticated and accurate, to think of individual differences, not sex differences, as the more important influences on interpersonal interaction. People differ among themselves whether they are male or female (as in the case of attachment styles), and these variations are usually much more consequential than sex differences are.

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[9] Has this discussion led you to think that men and women are perhaps not as different as you had thought they were? If so, you may be better off. Reading about the similarities of the sexes tends to reduce people's sexist beliefs that one sex is better than the other (Zell et al., 2016), and that's a good thing. Such beliefs have corrosive effects on relationships (Cross et al., 2017), and they're best avoided. We'll return to this point in chapter 11.

Gender Differences

I need to complicate things further by distinguishing between sex differences and *gender* differences in close relationships. When people use the terms carefully, the term *sex differences* refers to biological distinctions between men and women that spring naturally from their physical natures. In contrast, *gender differences* refer to social and psychological distinctions that are created by our cultures and upbringing (Hyde et al., 2019). For instance, when they are parents, women are mothers and men are fathers—that's a sex difference—but the common belief that women are more loving, more nurturant parents than men reflects a gender difference. Many men are capable of just as much tenderness and compassion toward the young as any woman is, but if we expect and encourage women to be the primary caregivers of our children, we can create cultural gender differences in parenting styles that are not natural or inborn at all.

Distinguishing sex and gender differences is often tricky because the social expectations and training we apply to men and women are often confounded with their biological sex (Eagly & Wood, 2012). For instance, because women lactate and men do not, people often assume that predawn feedings of a newborn baby are the mother's job—even when the baby is being fed formula from a bottle that was warmed in a microwave! It's not always easy to disentangle the effects of biology and culture in shaping our interests and abilities.

Moreover, our individual experiences of gender are much more complex than most people think. Superficially, gender may seem to be a straightforward dichotomy—people are either male or female—but in fact, our genders are constructed from a variety of different influences (see Figure 1.8) that can create a variety of different outcomes (Hammack et al., 2019). Large surveys in the United States, for instance, find that between four (Watson et al., 2020) and six percent (Goldberg et al., 2020) of LGBTQ[10] people identify as *gender queer*; that is, they reject the notion that people must be either male or female, and they're often attracted to transgendered or other gender nonconforming people (Goldberg et al., 2020; see the "Transgenders' Relationships" box on page 26). Most of us are *cisgender,* which means that our current identities align with the sex we were assigned at birth—but only 26 percent of us assert that we *never* feel a little like the other sex, wish to some extent that we were the other sex, or wish now and then that we had the body of the other sex (Jacobson & Joel, 2018). Gender is so complex and can be so diverse that it's more sensible to think of gender not as a binary classification with two simple categories but as a *spectrum* that allows a range of possibilities (Reilly, 2019). Conceivably, "there are as many genders as there are people" (Bergner, 2019, p. 44).

So, the distinction between one's biological sex and one's gender is meaningful, particularly because some influential differences between men and women in relationships—gender differences—are largely *taught* to us as we grow up.

The best examples of this are our **gender roles,** the patterns of behavior that are culturally expected of "normal" men and women. Men, of course, are supposed to be "masculine," which means that they are expected to be assertive, self-reliant, decisive, and competitive. Women are expected to be "feminine," or warm, sensitive, emotionally expressive, and kind. You and I aren't so unsophisticated, but they're the *opposite* sexes

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[10] This familiar abbreviation refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer people.

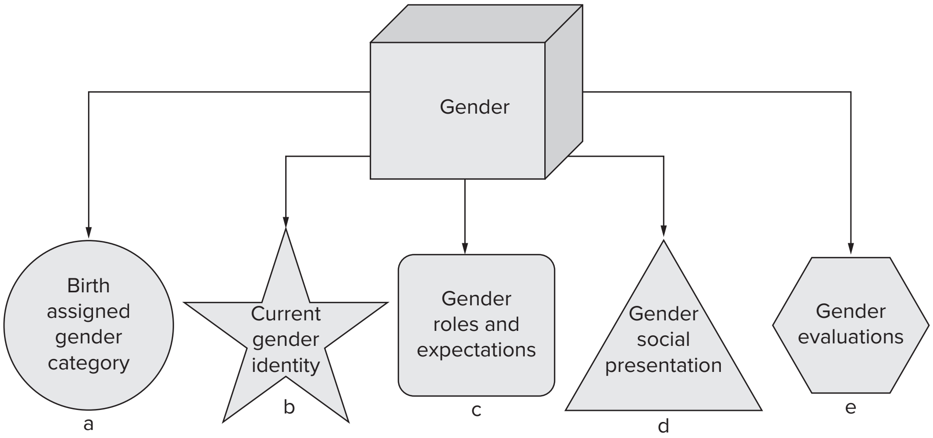

Gender
Birth assigned gender category
a
Current gender identity
b
Gender roles and expectations
c
Gender social presentation
d
Gender evaluations
e

FIGURE 1.8. **Components of your gender.**
Gender is multifaceted and complex. It emerges from a combination of (a) the sex to which you were assigned when you were born, (b) your sense of the gender category that now describes you best, (c) the social norms and expectations that you judge to apply to you, (d) the ways in which you communicate—through your clothing, personal pronouns, and other public acts—your gender to others, and (e) your preferences and judgments regarding your own and others' genders (including, for instance, sexism). These facets are presented with different shapes to emphasize the fact that each of them is a distinct aspect of the person you consider yourself to be.

Source: Tate, C. C., Youssef, C., & Bettergarcia, J. (2014). "Integrating the study of transgender spectrum and cisgender experiences of self-categorization from a personality perspective," Review of General Psychology, *18, 302–312.*

to most people, and to varying degrees men and women are expected to specialize in different kinds of social behavior all over the world (Löckenhoff et al., 2014). However, people inherit only about a quarter to a third of their tendencies to be assertive or kind; most of these behaviors are learned (Lippa & Hershberger, 1999). In thoroughgoing and pervasive ways, cultural processes of socialization and modeling (rather than biological sex differences) lead us to expect that all men should be tough and all women should be tender (Levant & Rankin, 2014).

Nevertheless, those stereotypes don't describe real people as well as you might think; only *half* of us have attributes that fit these gender role expectations cleanly (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017). Instead of being just "masculine" or "feminine," a sizable minority of people—about 35 percent—are both assertive *and* warm, sensitive *and* self-reliant. Such people possess both sets of the competencies that are stereotypically associated with being male and with being female, and are said to be **androgynous.** If androgyny sounds odd to you, you're probably just using a stereotyped vocabulary: On the surface, being "masculine" sounds incompatible with also being "feminine." In fact, because those terms can be confusing, relationship researchers often use alternatives, referring to the "masculine" task-oriented talents as **instrumental** traits and to the "feminine" social and emotional skills as **expressive** traits. And it's not all that remarkable

Transgenders' Relationships

Fewer than one-half of 1 percent of Americans are transgenders—being people whose gender identities do not match the sex they were assigned at birth—but they are not uncommon, numbering about 1,250,000 people (Meerwijk & Sevelius, 2017). Gender is complex (and frequently misunderstood by laypeople [Doan et al., 2019]) and those who were raised as one sex but who now seek to live as the other sex face a great number of challenges. When they decide to transition, their existing partnerships may undergo considerable change as their lovers adjust to their new identities (Platt, 2020). Loving partners may wish to support a transgender's well-being and growth but be uncertain about their romantic desire for their sweethearts after their transition (Dierckx et al., 2019). And once a transition is public, both transgenders and their partners may encounter disapproval and disregard from others that cause them distress (Gamarel et al., 2019).

If transgenders seek new romantic partners, their challenges continue. When cisgender, heterosexual men and women rate photos of the other sex, the images are judged to be much less attractive when the others are said to be transgender than when they're said to be cisgender (Mao et al., 2018). Indeed, when they're asked, 98 percent of heterosexual women and 97 percent of heterosexual men say that they would not consider dating a trans man or a trans woman. Gay men and lesbian women are more accepting, but not all that much—transgenders were written off by 88 and 71 percent of them, respectively—and just half (48 percent) of bisexual and gender queer men and women consider transgenders to be viable dating partners. These data "do not paint an uplifting picture" of the dating opportunities available to transgenders (Blair & Hoskin, 2019, p. 2091).

Nevertheless, when they do find partners, transgenders enjoy high levels of support (particularly when their partners are other transgenders) and are satisfied, on average, with their relationships (Fuller & Riggs, 2020). And the more commitment they experience, the easier it's for them to withstand the disapproval they may face from others (Gamarel et al., 2019). On the whole then, although it may be relatively hard for them to find loving partners, it appears that the intimate relationships of transgenders operate just the same as anyone else's. As we'll see on page 35 when we discuss sexual orientation, it doesn't much matter who we are or whom we love; people are happier when others they find attractive embrace them with responsive acceptance and affection in a committed relationship.

to find both sets of traits in the same individual. An androgynous person would be one who could effectively, assertively stand up for himself or herself in a heated salary negotiation but who could then go home and sensitively, compassionately comfort a preschool child whose pet hamster had died. A lot of people, those who specialize in either instrumental *or* expressive skills, would feel at home in one of those situations but not both. Androgynous people would be comfortable and capable in both domains (Martin et al., 2017).

In fact, the best way to think of instrumentality and expressiveness is to consider them to be two separate sets of skills that can range from low to high in either women or men (Choi et al., 2007). Take a look at Table 1.2. Traditional women are high in expressiveness but low in instrumentality; they're warm and kind but not assertive

TABLE 1.2. Gender Roles

Instrumental Traits	Expressive Traits
Assertiveness	Warmth
Self-Reliance	Tenderness
Ambition	Compassion
Leadership	Kindness
Decisiveness	Sensitivity to Others

Our culture encourages men to be highly instrumental and women to be highly expressive, but which of these talents do you *not* want in an intimate companion?

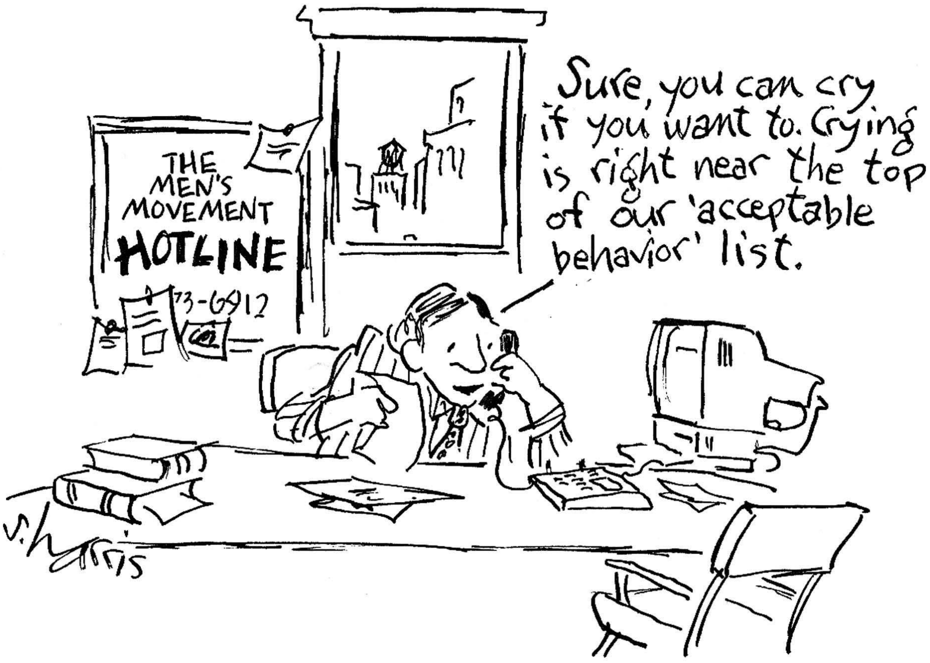
or dominant. Men who fulfill our traditional expectations are high in instrumentality but low in expressiveness and are stoic, "macho" men. Androgynous people are both instrumental and expressive. The rest of us—about 15 percent—are either high in the skills typically associated with the other sex (and are said to be "cross-typed") or low in both sets of skills (and are said to be "undifferentiated"). Equal proportions of men and women fall into the androgynous, cross-typed, and undifferentiated categories, so, as with sex differences, it's simplistic and inaccurate to think of men and women as wholly distinct groups of people with separate, different traits (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017).

In any case, gender differences are of particular interest to relationship researchers because, instead of making men and women more compatible, they "may actually be responsible for much of the *incompatibility*" that causes relationships to fail (Ickes, 1985, p. 188). From the moment they meet, for instance, traditional men and women enjoy and like each other less than androgynous people do. In a classic experiment, Ickes and Barnes (1978) paired men and women in couples in which (a) both partners fit the traditional gender roles, or (b) one or both partners were androgynous. The two people were introduced to each other and then simply left alone for 5 minutes sitting on a couch while the researchers covertly videotaped their interaction. The results were striking. The traditional couples talked less, looked at each other less, laughed and smiled less, and afterward reported that they liked each other less than did the other couples. (Should this surprise us? Think about it: Stylistically, what do a masculine man and a feminine woman have in common?) When an androgynous man met a traditional woman, an androgynous woman met a traditional man, or two androgynous people got together, they got along much better than traditional men and women did.

More importantly, the disadvantage faced by traditional couples does not disappear as time goes by. Surveys of marital satisfaction demonstrate that marriages in which both spouses adhere to stereotyped gender roles are generally *less* happy than those enjoyed by nontraditional couples (Helms et al., 2006). With their different styles and different domains of expertise, masculine men and feminine women simply do not find as much pleasure in each other as less traditional, less stereotyped people do (Marshall, 2010).

Perhaps this should be no surprise. When human beings devote themselves to intimate partnerships, they want affection, warmth, and understanding (Thomas et al., 2020). People who are low in expressiveness—who are not very warm, tender, sensitive people—do not readily provide such warmth and tenderness; they are not very affectionate (Miller et al., 2003). As a result, men or women who have spouses who are low in expressiveness are chronically less satisfied than are those whose partners are more sensitive, understanding, and kind. Around the world (Cao et al., 2019; Lease et al., 2013), across different ethnicities (Helms et al., 2019; Stanik & Bryant, 2012), and in both straight and gay partnerships (Wade & Donis, 2007), traditional men have romantic relationships of lower quality than more expressive men do. Thus, traditional gender roles do men a disservice, depriving them of skills that would make them more rewarding husbands. Arguably, "when you rob people of the ability to feel and express the whole range of human emotions in an appropriate way, you also undermine their ability to connect and have the kinds of relationships we want our boys to have" (Chotiner, 2020). In addition, the stoicism that is a hallmark of traditional masculinity can actually be disadvantageous to men's health; macho men are less likely than others to engage in preventive health care and to seek mental health care services when they need them (Pappas, 2019). Overall, it appears that no good "can come of teaching boys that they can't express emotion openly; that they have to be 'tough all the time'; that anything other than that makes them 'feminine' or weak" (Salam, 2019).

On the other hand, people who are low in instrumentality—who are low in assertiveness and personal strength—tend to have low self-esteem and to be less well adjusted than those who have better task-oriented skills (Stake & Eisele, 2010). People feel better about themselves when they are competent and effective at "taking care of


THE MEN'S MOVEMENT HOTLINE
73-6912
Sure, you can cry if you want to. Crying is right near the top of our 'acceptable behavior' list.
S. Harris

Sidney Harris/ScienceCartoonsPlus

Stoic, traditional masculinity can be disadvantageous in intimate relationships. People are happier when they're partnered with others who are higher in expressivity.

business” (Reis et al., 2000), so traditional gender roles also do women a disservice, depriving them of skills that would facilitate more accomplishments and achievements. Such roles also seem to cost women money; around the world, traditional women earn less on the job than their nontraditional co-workers do (Stickney & Konrad, 2007).

The upshot of all this is that both instrumentality and expressiveness are valuable traits, and the happiest, best-adjusted, most effective, mentally healthy people possess both sets of skills (Stake & Eisele, 2010). In particular, the most desirable spouses, those who are most likely to have contented, satisfied partners, are people who are both instrumental and expressive (Marshall, 2010). And in fact, when they ponder the partners they’d like to have, most people say that they’d prefer androgynous partners to those who are merely masculine or feminine (Thomae & Houston, 2016). So, sure enough, boys in high school who are sensitive to others’ feelings have close to *twice* as many friendships with girls as their more traditional peers do (Ciarrochi et al., 2017).

So, it’s ironic that we still tend to put pressure on those who do not rigidly adhere to their “proper” gender roles. Women who display as much competitiveness and assertiveness as men risk being perceived as pushy, impolite, and uppity (Williams & Tiedens, 2016). If anything, however, gender expectations are stricter for men than for women (Steinberg & Diekman, 2016); girls can be tomboys and nobody frets too much, but if a boy is too feminine, people worry (Miller, 2018). U.S. gender roles are changing slowly but surely; in particular, U.S. women are becoming more instrumental (Eagly et al., 2020), and young adults of both sexes are gradually becoming more egalitarian and less traditional in their views of men and women (Donnelly et al., 2016). Nonetheless, even if they limit our individual potentials and are right only half the time, gender stereotypes persist (Haines et al., 2016). We still expect and too often encourage men to be instrumental and women to be expressive (Ellemers, 2018), and such expectations are important complications for many of our close relationships.

A Point to Ponder

If you saw a YouTube video of a new father crying when he holds his newborn baby for the first time, would you admire him or disrespect him? Why?

Personality

Shaped by our experiences, some consequential differences among people (such as attachment styles and gender differences) may change over a few years’ time, but other individual differences are more stable and lasting. Personality traits influence people’s behavior in their relationships across their entire lifetimes (Costa et al., 2019) with only gradual change over long periods of time (Damian et al., 2019).

The central traits known as the Big Five traits characterize people all over the world (Baranski et al., 2017), and they all affect the quality of the relationships people have. On the positive side, extraverted, agreeable, and conscientious people who are open to new experiences have happier relationships than do those who score lower on those traits (Schaffhuser et al., 2014). Extraverted people are outgoing and agreeable people are compassionate and trusting, so they tend to be likable. Conscientious people work hard and tend to follow the rules, so they weren’t very popular in high school (van der Linden et al., 2010), but once they grow up, they make dependable, trustworthy,

The Big Five Personality Traits

A small cluster of fundamental traits does a good job of describing the broad themes in behavior, thoughts, and emotions that distinguish one person from another (Costa et al., 2019). These key characteristics are called the Big Five traits by personality researchers, and they differ in their influence on our intimate relationships. Which of these traits do you think matter most?

Open-mindedness—the degree to which people are imaginative, curious, unconventional, and artistic versus conforming, uncreative, and stodgy.

Extraversion—the extent to which people are gregarious, assertive, and sociable versus cautious, reclusive, and shy.

Conscientiousness—the extent to which people are dutiful, dependable, responsible, and orderly versus unreliable, disorganized, and careless.

Agreeableness—the degree to which people are compassionate, cooperative, good-natured, and trusting versus suspicious, selfish, and hostile.

Negative Emotionality—the degree to which people are prone to fluctuating moods and high levels of negative emotion such as worry, anxiety, and anger.

The five traits are listed in order from the least important to the most influential (Malouff et al., 2010). People are happier when they have imaginative, adventurous, sociable partners, but what you *really* want is a lover who is responsible and reliable, generous and thoughtful, and optimistic and emotionally stable. And after you've been together for 30 years or so, you may find that conscientiousness becomes particularly important (Claxton et al., 2012); dependable partners who keep all their promises are satisfying companions (Williams et al., 2019).

desirable partners (Nickel et al., 2019). "People who are less conscientious exceed their credit limit . . . cancel plans, curse, oversleep, and break promises" (Jackson et al., 2010, p. 507), so they tend to be unreliable companions.

The most influential Big Five trait, however, is the one that has a negative impact: negative emotionality (Malouff et al., 2010). High scorers are prone to anxiety and anger, and those unhappy tendencies tend to result in touchy, pessimistic, and argumentative interactions with others. In fact, a remarkable study that tracked 300 couples over a span of 45 years found that a full 10 percent of the satisfaction and contentment spouses would experience in their marriages could be predicted from measures of their negative emotionality when they were still engaged (Kelly & Conley, 1987). The more optimistic, positive, and emotionally stable the partners were, the happier their marriages turned out to be, and that's a result that has stood the test of time (van Scheppingen et al., 2019). Everyone has good days and bad days, but some of us chronically have *more* bad days (and fewer good ones) than other people (Borghuis et al., 2020)—and those unlucky folks are especially likely to have unhappy, disappointing relationships. (Do take note of this when you're shopping for a mate! And assess your own Big Five traits, if you like, with the scale in Table 1.3.)

The Big Five are famous, but other notable traits influence our relationships, too. Consider **selfishness.** Unselfish people are attentive to others' needs and are generally

TABLE 1.3 The Big Five Inventory–2 Extra-Short Form

These 15 items provide a very efficient way to reliably assess our Big Five traits (Soto & John, 2017). To which trait does each item pertain? Which of the Five characterize you best?

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who *likes to spend time with others?* Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Disagree strongly	**Disagree a little**	**Neutral; no opinion**	**Agree a little**	**Agree strongly**

I am someone who...

1. ____ Tends to be quiet.
2. ____ Is compassionate, has a soft heart.
3. ____ Tends to be disorganized.
4. ____ Worries a lot.
5. ____ Is fascinated by art, music, or literature.
6. ____ Is dominant, acts as a leader.
7. ____ Is sometimes rude to others.
8. ____ Has difficulty getting started on tasks.
9. ____ Tends to feel depressed, blue.
10. ____ Has little interest in abstract ideas.
11. ____ Is full of energy.
12. ____ Assumes the best about people.
13. ____ Is reliable, can always be counted on.
14. ____ Is emotionally stable, not easily upset.
15. ____ Is original, comes up with new ideas.

Before you add up your scores for each of the traits, *reverse* the rating you gave yourself on items 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, and 14. That is, if you gave yourself a 1, change it to 5; 2 becomes 4, 4 becomes 2, and a 5 should be changed to 1. Then, compile your total score for each trait this way:

Extraversion: items 1, 6, 11
Agreeableness: 2, 7, 12
Conscientiousness: 3, 8, 13
Negative Emotionality: 4, 9, 14
Open-Mindedness: 5, 10, 15

How do your scores compare to those of American college students? Average scores for Extraversion range from 2.2 to 4; for Agreeableness, 3 to 4.4; for Conscientiousness, 2.6 to 4.2; for Negative Emotionality, 2.1 to 3.9; and for Open-Mindedness, 2.7 to 4.3. Above or below those scores, you're noticeably higher or lower on that trait than most collegians in the United States (Soto & John, 2017).

The BFI-2 items are copyright 2015 by Oliver P. John and Christopher J. Soto and are reprinted with the generous permission of Dr. Soto and Dr. John.

considerate and charitable (Diebels et al., 2018), and their selflessness is attractive (Arnocky et al., 2017), in part because they seem trustworthy to others (Mogilski et al., 2019). Their generosity also seems to pay off down the road; unselfish people have more children and higher incomes during their lives than greedy, selfish people do (Eriksson et al., 2020).

Negatively related to (but distinct from) selfishness is **humility.** Humble people think that “no matter how extraordinary one’s accomplishments or characteristics may be, one is not entitled” to special treatment from others (Banker & Leary, 2020, p. 738). They not only lack arrogance, but they also recognize and accept their limitations and don’t take offense when others disagree with them (Porter & Schumann, 2018)—and they’re more forgiving than most, too (Antonucci et al., 2019). So, they’re easy to live with (Van Tongeren et al., 2019), and indeed, potential dating partners who are humble are preferred to those who are more egotistical or self-important (Van Tongeren et al., 2014). Selfishness and humility may well be other characteristics you’ll wish to consider when you’re evaluating potential partners!

There are other more specific personal characteristics that regulate our relationships, and I’ll mention several in later chapters. (Check out, for instance, whether or not we like casual sex [on page 356] and whether or not we can control ourselves [on page 549].) For now, let’s note that although our personalities clearly have a genetic basis (Vukasović & Bratko, 2015), they can be shaped to a degree by our connections to others. For instance, the agreeableness of husbands and wives *drops* during the first 18 months of their marriages as they adjust to their new roles and greater interdependence (Lavner et al., 2018). Overall, however, our personalities affect our relationships more than our relationships, good or bad, change our personalities (Deventer et al., 2019). People do mature and change as they age: On average, we become more conscientious, more agreeable, and more emotionally stable over time. But our standing relative to our peers tends *not* to change, so that those of us who worry more than most tend to remain more prone than others to negative emotions throughout our lives (Damian et al., 2019). Whatever traits distinguish and characterize a potential partner in his or her twenties are likely to still define him or her 50 years from now.

Self-Esteem

Most of us like ourselves, but some of us do not. Our evaluations of ourselves constitute our **self-esteem,** and when we hold favorable judgments of our skills and traits, our self-esteem is high; when we doubt ourselves, self-esteem is low. Because people with high self-esteem are generally happier and more successful than those with low self-regard (Orth & Robins, 2014), it’s widely assumed that it’s good to feel good about yourself (Leary, 2019).

But how do people come to like themselves? A leading theory argues that self-esteem is a subjective gauge, a **sociometer,** that measures the quality of our relationships with others (Leary, 2012). When others like us, we like ourselves; when other people regard us positively and value their relationships with us, self-esteem is high. However, if we don’t interest others—if others seem not to care whether or not we are part of their lives—self-esteem is low (Leary & Acosta, 2018). So, “self-esteem helps us keep track of how well we are doing socially” (Leary, 2019, p. 2). It operates in this manner, according to sociometer theory, because it is an evolved mechanism that serves our need to belong. This argument suggests that, because their reproductive success depended on staying in the tribe and being accepted by others, early humans became sensitive to any signs of exclusion that might precede rejection by others. Self-esteem became a psychological gauge that alerted people to declining acceptance by others, and dislike or disinterest from others gradually caused people to dislike themselves (Kavanagh & Scrutton, 2015).

This perspective nicely fits most of what we know about the origins and operation of self-esteem. There's no question, for instance, that people feel better about themselves when they think they're attractive to the other sex (Bale & Archer, 2013). And the regard we receive from others clearly affects our subsequent self-evaluations (Jayamaha & Overall, 2019). In particular, events that involve interpersonal rejection damage our self-esteem in a way that other disappointments do not. Leary and his colleagues (1995) demonstrated this point in a clever study in which research participants were led to believe that they would be excluded from an attractive group either through bad luck—they had been randomly selected to be sent home—or because they had been voted out by the other members of the group. Even though the same desirable opportunity was lost in both situations, the people who had been personally rejected felt much worse about themselves than did those whose loss was impersonal. It's also interesting to note that public events that others witness affect our self-esteem more than do private events that are otherwise identical but are known only to us. In this and several other respects, whether we realize it or not, our self-evaluations seem to be much affected by what others think of us (Cameron & Granger, 2019), and this is true around the world (Denissen et al., 2008).

Here is further evidence, then, that we humans are a very social species: It's hard to like ourselves (and, indeed, it would be unrealistic to do so) if others don't like us, too. In most cases, people with chronically low self-esteem have developed their negative self-evaluations through an unhappy history of failing to receive sufficient acceptance and appreciation from other people (Orth, 2018).

And sometimes, this is very unfair. Some people are victimized by abusive relationships through no fault of their own, and, despite being likable people with fine social skills, they develop low self-esteem as a result of mistreatment from others. What happens when those people enter new relationships with kinder, more appreciative partners? Does the new feedback they receive slowly improve their self-esteem?

Not necessarily. A compelling program of research by Sandra Murray, John Holmes, Joanne Wood, and Justin Cavallo has demonstrated that people with low self-esteem sometimes sabotage their relationships by underestimating their partners' love for them (Murray et al., 2001) and perceiving disregard when none exists (Murray et al., 2002). Take a look at Table 1.4. People with low self-regard find it hard to believe that they are well and truly loved by their partners and, as a result, they tend not to be optimistic that their loves will last. "Even in their closest relationships," people with low self-esteem "typically harbor serious (but unwarranted) insecurities about their partners' feelings for them" (Holmes & Wood, 2009, p. 250). This leads them to overreact to their partners' occasional bad moods (Bellavia & Murray, 2003); they feel more rejected, experience more hurt, and get more angry than do those with higher self-esteem. And these painful feelings make it harder for them to behave constructively in response to their imagined peril. Whereas people with high self-regard draw closer to their partners and seek to repair the relationship when frustrations arise, people with low self-esteem defensively distance themselves, stay surly, and behave badly (Murray, Bellavia et al., 2003). They also feel even worse about themselves (Murray, Griffin et al., 2003).

TABLE 1.4. How My Partner Sees Me

Sandra Murray and her colleagues use this scale in their studies of self-esteem in close relationships. People with high self-esteem believe that their partners hold them in high regard, but people with low self-esteem worry that their partners do not like or respect them as much. What do you think your partner thinks of you?

In many ways, your partner may see you in roughly the same way you see yourself. Yet in other ways, your partner may see you differently than you see yourself. For example, you may feel quite shy at parties, but your partner might tell you that you really seem quite relaxed and outgoing on these occasions. On the other hand, you and your partner may both agree that you are quite intelligent and patient.

For each trait or attribute that follows, please indicate *how you think that your partner sees you.* For example, if you think that your partner sees the attribute "self-assured" as moderately characteristic of you, you would choose "5."

Respond using the scale below. Please enter your response in the blank to the left of each trait or attribute listed.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
Not at All Characteristic		**Somewhat Characteristic**		**Moderately Characteristic**		**Very Characteristic**		**Completely Characteristic**

My partner sees me as . . .

____ Kind and Affectionate
____ Critical and Judgmental
____ Self-Assured
____ Sociable/Extraverted
____ Intelligent
____ Lazy
____ Open and Disclosing
____ Controlling and Dominant
____ Witty and Humorous
____ Moody
____ Tolerant and Accepting
____ Thoughtless
____ Patient
____ Rational
____ Understanding
____ Distant
____ Complaining
____ Responsive
____ Immature
____ Warm

All of this occurs, say Murray and her colleagues (Cavallo et al., 2014), because we take large risks when we come to depend on others. Close ties to an intimate partner allow us to enjoy rich rewards of support and care, but they also leave us vulnerable to devastating betrayal and rejection if our partners prove to be untrustworthy. Because they are confident about their partners' love and regard for them, people with high self-esteem draw closer to their partners when difficulties arise. In contrast, people with low self-esteem have lasting doubts about their partners' regard and reliability, so when times get tough, they withdraw from their partners in an effort to protect themselves. We all need to balance connectedness with self-protection, Murray's team suggests, but people with low self-esteem put their fragile egos before their relationships, and that's self-defeating when they have loving, devoted partners and there is nothing to fear (Murray et al., 2013).

As a result, the self-doubts and thin skins of people with low self-esteem lead them to make mountains out of molehills. They stay on alert for signs of rejection (H. Li et al., 2012), and they wrongly perceive small bumps in the road as worrisome signs of declining commitment in their partners. Then, if they seek reassurance, they do so timidly and receive less understanding and support from their partners as a result (Cortes & Wood, 2018). Even their Facebook updates tend to be pessimistic and self-critical, and they receive fewer "likes" and comments than others do (Forest & Wood, 2012). By comparison, people with high self-esteem correctly shrug off the same small bumps and remain confident of their partners' acceptance and positive regard. The unfortunate net result is that once it is formed, low self-esteem may be hard to overcome (Kuster & Orth, 2013); even after 10 years of marriage, people with low self-esteem still tend to believe that their spouses love and accept them less than those faithful spouses really do (Murray et al., 2000), and that regrettable state of affairs undermines their—and their spouse's—satisfaction (Erol & Orth, 2013).

There is some good news in all of this: When they notice their lover's insecurity, devoted partners may increase their expressions of regard and affection (Lemay & Ryan, 2018), intentionally offering compliments and encouragement that can boost their lover's self-esteem (Jayamaha & Overall, 2019). And overall, our self-esteem tends to increase over the decades from young adulthood through middle age (Orth et al., 2018). That's fortunate because low self-esteem undermines relationships, making them more fragile (Luciano & Orth, 2017), and relationships are clearly more fulfilling for both partners when they both have high self-esteem (Robinson & Cameron, 2012).

Thus, our self-esteem appears to both result from and then subsequently steer our interpersonal relationships (Harris & Orth, 2020). What we think of ourselves seems to depend, at least in part, on the quality of our connections to others. And those self-evaluations affect our ensuing interactions with new partners, who provide us further evidence of our interpersonal worth. In fundamental ways, what we know of ourselves emerges from our partnerships with others and then matters thereafter (Mund et al., 2015).

Sexual Orientation

The last individual difference we'll consider actually doesn't make much of a difference. Like gender, our sexual orientations are complex, being comprised of our *identities* (that is, our self-definitions and self-presentations as heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, or asexual[11]), our sexual *attractions*, and our actual sexual *behaviors*—and these components do not always cohere as well as you might expect (Fu et al., 2019). Lots of people who consider themselves to be heterosexual have experienced infatuations with, and fantasies involving, others of the same sex (Savin-Williams, 2014). And in fact, in a large U.S. sample, 15 percent of those who judged themselves to be "exclusively heterosexual" were nevertheless strongly attracted to the other sex, and 6 percent of them had had sex with someone of the same sex in the past year (Legate & Rogge, 2019). Like attachment styles, sexual orientation is better understood as a *continuum* that takes various forms than as a set of simple categories that don't overlap at all (see Table 1.5).

---

[11] Asexuals don't feel much sexual desire and aren't sexually attracted to anyone.

TABLE 1.5. Sexual Orientation is a Spectrum

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completely, exclusively, heterosexual	Mostly	Mildly	Bisexual equally attracted to men and women	Mildly	Mostly	Completely, exclusively, homosexual
	heterosexual			homosexual		

Scales like this one that allow people to report *levels* of other-sex and same-sex attractions and behavior instead of simple categories of “heterosexual,” “bisexual,” or “homosexual” are now routinely used in studies of sexuality. In 2019, using a similar scale, 24 percent of a large sample of adults in Great Britain said they *weren’t* exclusively heterosexual *or* homosexual (Waldersee, 2019).

Around the world, most people (90 percent of men and 91 percent of women) say they’re heterosexual. Women (7 percent) are more likely to report a bisexual identity than men (5 percent) are, whereas men (5 percent) are more likely than women (2 percent) to report a homosexual identity (Rahman et al., 2020). Being minorities, and despite dramatic recent shifts in public attitudes about same-sex relationships (see page 345), lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) couples still often face a variety of burdensome stressors—disregard, disapproval, and discrimination (Diamond & Blair, 2018)—that don’t distress heterosexual couples (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017).

So, the social environments that LGB couples inhabit can still differ from those of their heterosexual brothers and sisters (Ecker et al., 2019)—but the intimacy they share inside their relationships does not (Frost et al., 2015). The nature and workings of fulfilling connections between partners are not affected much by sexual orientation at all. Other than their relative numbers, LGBs and heterosexuals are resoundingly similar on most of the topics we’ll encounter in this book. For instance, gays and lesbians exhibit the same attachment styles in the same proportions as heterosexual men and women do (Roisman et al., 2008), and they, too, are happier with romantic partners of high (rather than low) expressivity (Wade & Donis, 2007). They fall in love the same way (Kurdek, 2006), benefit from marriage to the same extent (Chen & van Ours, 2018), and feel the same passions, experience the same doubts, and feel the same commitments as heterosexuals do (Joyner et al., 2019). (Why would you expect anything different?)

Now, there *are* some potentially important differences between same-sex and other-sex relationships. Gay men tend to be more expressive than heterosexual men, on average, and lesbians tend to be more instrumental than other women, so gays and lesbians are less likely than heterosexuals to adhere to traditional gender roles (Lippa, 2005). Gays and lesbians also tend to be better educated and to be more liberal (Grollman, 2017). But the big difference between same-sex and other-sex relationships is that a gay couple is composed of two people who identify as men and a lesbian couple is composed of two people who identify as women. To some degree, same-sex couples may behave differently than heterosexual couples do, not because of their sexual orientations but because of the sexes of the people involved. For instance, when their relationships are

A Point to Ponder

Obviously, in same-sex partnerships, people have partners of the same sex. How much do you think that contributes to the success of their relationships? Why?

new, gay men have sex more often than heterosexual couples do, and lesbian couples have sex less often than heterosexual couples do (Diamond, 2015). The more men there are in a partnership, the more often the couple has sex—but that's probably because men have higher sex drives than women do (see page 360), not because there's anything special about gay men (Regan, 2015).

Notably, where differences in relationship functioning do exist, gays and lesbians are the clear winners. They have *better,* more satisfying relationships than heterosexuals do, on average (Coontz, 2020). They divide up household chores more fairly, communicate openly and honestly, and respect and appreciate individual differences, so that they experience less conflict than other-sex couples do (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017). Any notion that there's anything basically wrong with same-sex relationships is clearly absurd.

Bisexuals, however, tend not to fare as well. On average, they're less satisfied with their romantic relationships than lesbian, gay, or heterosexual couples are (Perales & Baxter, 2018), and there may be several reasons why. Most of them (88 percent) are partnered with someone of the other sex (Brown, 2019) who may or may not share their orientation (Mark et al., 2020). In being attracted to both sexes, they elicit suspicion from both heterosexuals and gays and lesbians (Feinstein & Dyar, 2018), and in many cases, "their lesbian or gay counterparts are their harshest critics" (Matsick & Rubin, 2018, p. 150). As a result, bisexuals are much less likely than gays or lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to others; whereas 75 percent of gays and lesbians have "come out" to all or most of the important people in their lives, only 19 percent of bisexuals have done so—and 26 percent of them haven't come out to *anyone* (Brown, 2019).

Note, however, that the difficulties bisexuals face result from misunderstanding and disapproval from others. When they attain it, comfortable intimacy is satisfying to bisexuals just as it is everyone else (Mark et al., 2020), and the bottom line is that there's no reason to write two different books on *Intimate Relationships*[12]: Intimacy operates the same way in both same-sex and other-sex partnerships, regardless of sexual orientation.

THE INFLUENCE OF HUMAN NATURE

Now that we have surveyed some key characteristics that distinguish people from one another, we can address the possibility that our relationships display some underlying themes that reflect the animal nature shared by all humankind. Our concern here is with evolutionary influences that have shaped close relationships over countless generations, instilling in us certain tendencies that are found in everyone (Buss, 2019).

Evolutionary psychology starts with three fundamental assumptions. First, *sexual selection* has helped make us the species we are today (Puts, 2016). You've probably heard of *natural* selection, which refers to the advantages conferred on animals that cope more effectively than others with predators and physical challenges such as food shortages. Sexual selection involves advantages that result in greater success at reproduction. And importantly:

---

[12] Thank goodness.

> Contrary to what many people have been taught, evolution has nothing to do with the survival of the fittest. It is not a question of whether you live or die. The key to evolution is reproduction. Whereas all organisms eventually die, not all organisms reproduce. Further, among those that do reproduce, some leave more descendants than others. (Ash & Gallup, 2008, p. 313)

This point of view holds that motives such as the need to belong have presumably come to characterize human beings because they were *adaptive,* conferring some sort of reproductive advantage to those who possessed them. As I suggested earlier, the early humans who sought cooperative closeness with others were probably more likely than asocial loners to have children who grew up to have children of their own. Over time, then, to the extent that the desire to affiliate with others is heritable (and it is; Tellegen et al., 1988), sexual selection would have made the need to belong more prevalent, with fewer and fewer people being born without it. In keeping with this example, evolutionary principles assert that any universal psychological mechanism exists in its present form because it consistently solved some problem of survival or reproduction in the past (Buss, 2019).

Second, evolutionary psychology suggests that men and women should differ from one another only to the extent that they have historically faced different reproductive dilemmas (Geary, 2010). Thus, men and women should behave similarly in close relationships except in those instances in which different, specialized styles of behavior would allow better access to mates or promote superior survival of one's offspring. Are there such situations? Let's address that question by posing two hypothetical queries:

> If, during one year, a man has sex with 100 different women, how many children can he father? (The answer, of course, is "lots, perhaps as many as 100.")
>
> If, during one year, a woman has sex with 100 different men, how many children can she have? (Probably just one.)

Obviously, there's a big difference in the minimum time and effort that men and women have to invest in each child they produce. For a man, the minimum requirement is a single ejaculation; given access to receptive mates, a man might father hundreds of children during his lifetime. But a woman can have children only until her menopause, and each child she has requires an enormous investment of time and energy. These biological differences in men's and women's obligatory **parental investment**—the time, energy, and resources one must provide to one's offspring in order to reproduce—may have supported the evolution of different strategies for selecting mates (Geary, 2000). Conceivably, given their more limited reproductive potential, women in our ancestral past who chose their mates carefully reproduced more successfully (with more of their children surviving to have children of their own) than did women who were less thoughtful and deliberate in their choices of partners. In contrast, men who promiscuously pursued every available sexual opportunity may have reproduced more successfully. If they flitted from partner to partner, their children may have been less likely to survive, but what they didn't offer in quality (of parenting) they could make up for in quantity (of children). Thus, today—as this evolutionary account predicts—women do choose their sexual partners more carefully than men do. They insist on smarter, friendlier, more prestigious, and more emotionally stable partners than men will accept, and they are less interested in casual, uncommitted sex than men are (N. Li et al., 2012). Perhaps this sex difference evolved over time.

Another reproductive difference between the sexes is that a woman always knows for sure whether or not a particular child is hers. By comparison, a man suffers **paternity uncertainty;** unless he is completely confident that his mate has been faithful to him, he cannot be absolutely certain that her child is his (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Perhaps because of that, even though women cheat less than men do (Tsapelas et al., 2011), men are more preoccupied with worries about their partners' infidelity than women are (Schützwohl, 2006). This difference, too, may have evolved over time.

An evolutionary perspective also makes a distinction between *short-term* and *long-term* mating strategies (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Men and women both seem to pursue different sorts of attributes in the other sex when they're having a brief fling than when they're entering a longer, more committed relationship. In particular, men have a greater desire than women do for sexual liaisons of short duration; they are more interested in brief affairs with a variety of partners, and when they enter new relationships, they're ready to have sex sooner than women are (Schmitt, 2016). As a result, when they're on the prowl, men are attracted to women who seem to be sexually available and "easy" (Schmitt et al., 2001). However, if they think about settling down, the same men who consider promiscuous women to be desirable partners in casual relationships often prefer chaste women as prospective spouses (Buss, 2000). When they're thinking long-term, men also value physical attractiveness more than women do; they seek wives who are young and pretty, and as they age, they marry women increasingly younger than themselves (Conway et al., 2015).

Women exhibit different patterns. When women select short-term mates—particularly when they have extramarital affairs (Greiling & Buss, 2000)—they seek sexy, charismatic, dominant men with lots of masculine appeal. But when they evaluate potential husbands, they look for good financial prospects; they seek men with incomes and resources who presumably can provide a safe environment for their children, even when those men aren't the sexiest guys in the pack (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). In general, women care more than men do about the financial prospects and status of their long-term partners (Conroy-Beam et al., 2015).

The effort to delineate human nature by identifying patterns of behavior that are found in all of humanity is one of the compelling aspects of the evolutionary perspective. In fact, the different preferences I just mentioned—with men valuing good looks and women valuing good incomes—have been found in dozens of cultures, everywhere they have been studied around the world (Buss, 2019).[13] However, an evolutionary perspective does not imply that culture is unimportant.

[13] Here's a chance for you to rehearse what you learned earlier in this chapter about sex differences. On average, men and women differ in the importance they attach to physical attractiveness and income, but that doesn't mean that women don't care about looks and men don't care about money. And overall, as we'll see in chapter 3, men and women mostly want the *same* things, such as warmth, emotional stability, and generous affection, from their romantic partners. Despite the sex differences I just described, people do not want looks or money at the expense of other valuable characteristics that men and women both want (Li, 2008). Finally, before I finish this footnote, do you see how differences in parental investment may underlie men's interest in looks and women's interest in money? Think about it, and we'll return to this point in chapter 3.