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An Introduction to Relationship Science

Big Questions	Learning Objectives
1. Why study intimate relationships?	1.1 Explain how relationships are associated with human survival, physical health, and mental health.
2. What are different kinds of intimate relationships?	1.2 Analyze theories regarding different types of liking and loving in human relationships.
3. How is this book organized?	1.3 Describe the order of chapters and within-chapter features you'll see throughout the book.

Intimate relationships might be the most important and influential aspect of daily life.

Our social connections are a fundamental part of us, a core aspect of being human. They affect our daily lives in a wide variety of ways. Relationships are vitally important—but how can we understand them from a scientific perspective? This book is designed to take you through the exciting and complicated world of the scientific study of intimate relationships.

No single text can contain all the theories, research studies, and applications that have been explored, but the goal here is not to provide a comprehensive, encyclopedia-like list of ideas that you memorize. Instead, I hope that you think critically about each section, apply it to your own life when relevant, and analyze what should happen next in the scientific study of each concept. In order to continue learning about and understanding intimate relationships, we need the next generation of scholars to get involved. Maybe that's you.

Why Study Intimate Relationships?

As we each navigate our own intimate relationships, they can often be a frustrating mystery.

Why doesn't the person I like find me attractive? Why can't my partner understand my perspective? How can I know whether I should commit to this person for the rest of my life? Intimate relationships can be confusing and emotional. So how can they really be studied and understood using scientific experiments, equations, and theories dreamed up by a bunch of professors who, to be honest, might not have the best relationships themselves?

The scientific study of intimate relationships is a relatively new endeavor. One of the best things about this field of study is that it is truly an **interdisciplinary approach** that combines ideas, methods, and results from a variety of academic fields. These fields include communication, sociology, biology, psychology, human development and family studies, anthropology, and more. Recently, attention has shifted from "traditional," heterosexual, monogamous relationships to other forms such as same-sex couples, polyamorous relationships, hookups, and so on, so this book also includes studies that highlight the wide diversity of forms of love.

Let's get started by considering why scholars have recently increased their attention toward a scientific study of intimate relationships.

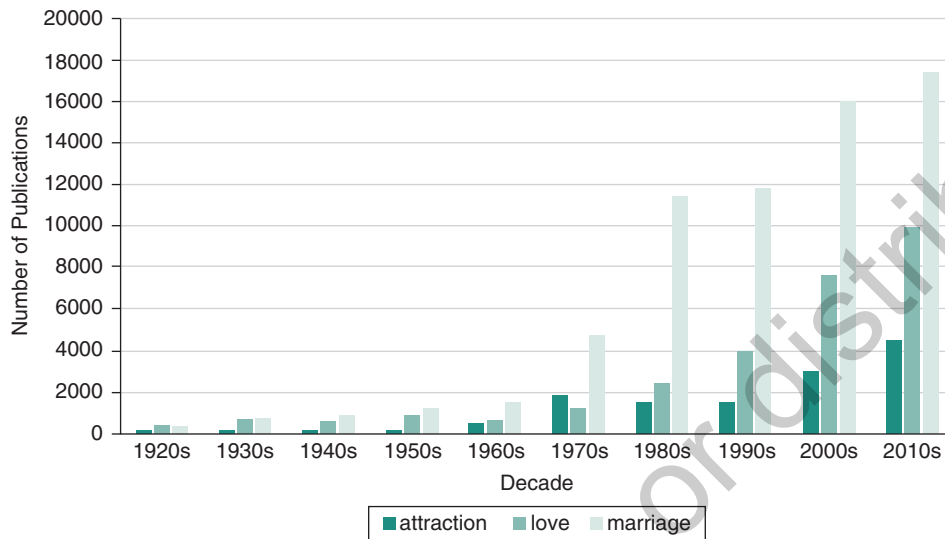
A Rise in Scientific Interest

Attraction, love, and commitment are ethereal topics. Some people balk at the very idea that "love" could ever be understood by science—it kind of saps the romance. Despite this skepticism, thousands of researchers all over the world are giving it their best effort, and the findings from these studies have offered both theoretical and pragmatic insights in contexts such as marital and family therapy.

In general, there are two motivations behind research on any topic—including relationships. **Basic research** is done when scientists explore research topics simply to understand a phenomenon more clearly, to advance theory, or to expand our base of knowledge on a given topic. For example, scientists might want to further understand what kinds of personality traits are often found in perpetrators of relationship abuse.

Basic research is the foundation for any academic field and is a necessary first step for the second motivation, **applied research**. Scientists doing applied research are extending theories and patterns from basic research in attempts to solve real-world problems, help people who are struggling, or proactively make our world a better place. Once personality traits associated with abuse are identified (in basic research), applied research might use that information to design different kinds of treatment programs to reduce abusive behaviors. Different programs could be linked to various personality traits so that treatments can be personalized for individual perpetrators. In this way, the applied research tries to make a real change, based on the understanding we gained from the basic research.

Scholarly attention toward the topic of intimate relationships—in both basic and applied forms—has blossomed in just the past few decades. One way to examine

FIGURE 1.1 ● Frequency of Publications in PsycINFO, by Year and Search Term

Research on attraction, love, and marriage has greatly increased over time.

interest in the field is by simply counting the number of publications on relevant topics over the last 100 years. This can be done by searching for articles and book chapters in online archives and databases that list publications. For example, in psychology **PsycINFO** is a relatively comprehensive database of publications (it's available through most college and university libraries).

Figure 1.1 displays trends in publications listed in PsycINFO over the past 100 years. To create this chart, the search terms “love,” “attraction,” and “marriage” were entered by decade. Of course, different results would come if different search terms were tried, but this gives us a good idea of the general increase in publications from a **longitudinal** view, or one with repeated measurement over time and multiple sessions of data collection. It's clear that research using any of these terms has exploded in frequency, especially since the 1980s.

The Importance of Relationships in Our Lives

An increase in scientific scholarship regarding intimate relationships is great, but it doesn't answer the question of *why* interest has increased. In addition, a question that might be more interesting to you, personally, is why *you* should be studying the science of intimate relationships. Why are you reading this book? Healthy, happy relationships are the cornerstone of life for many individuals. Their premier importance can be seen in a variety of contexts.

Relationships and Human Survival

At least some interpersonal contact is needed for the survival of the human species.

Biologically speaking, reproduction usually means sexual bonding between a man and a woman (although with advances in technology, this isn't always true). Many studies are inspired by understanding how biological or evolutionary instincts apply to relationship and sexual behaviors. Thinking about relationships on the macrocosm level of the entire species is fascinating, and an entire future chapter of this book is devoted to an evolutionary perspective of human relationships.

For now, consider briefly that Charles Darwin (1859) suggested that humans (and other species) evolved over time largely through **natural selection**. In this process, certain traits help an individual survive and attract sexual partners—for example, intelligence or physical strength—and these traits are thus more likely to be passed on to the next generation. These traits, which provided **enhanced fitness** from a biological perspective, may also help the babies and children survive, and again those traits stay in the gene pool. What particular characteristics do you think are most useful to human survival and our potential to reproduce successfully? Chapter 4 will go into detail with several fascinating research studies on this topic.

However, the evolutionary approach to understanding relationships can be criticized and is somewhat limited (as all theories are, really). For example, not all relationships have a sexual motivation behind them; in fact, for the vast majority of people, the proportion of sexual relationships compared to *all* of the relationships they'll have over a lifetime is tiny. A second limitation of the evolutionary approach is that many relationships that *are* sexual are not heterosexual, and thus biological reproduction is not the driving force behind these relationships. Third, there are many heterosexual couples who choose not to have children. In fact, research has shown that heterosexual couples without children are statistically happier than couples with children—but that might be due to childless couples having more money and less stress (Wallace, 2016).

So relationships encompass more than simply thinking about sexual interactions and reproduction. Instinctively, we also care about relationships because forming groups or communities increases our survival. One of the major benefits to living in social groups and thus having the relationships of neighbors and friends is access to shared resources; we thus naturally form alli-

ances and teams with people we think we can trust, even in abstract contexts like modern multi-player videogames (Belz, Pyritz, & Boos, 2013). In short, having friends and family around helps our survival, an instinct that's fundamental to our hopes and fears.



Intimate relationships can affect our physical health, and vice versa.

Relationships and Physical Health

Relationships can also affect our physical health.

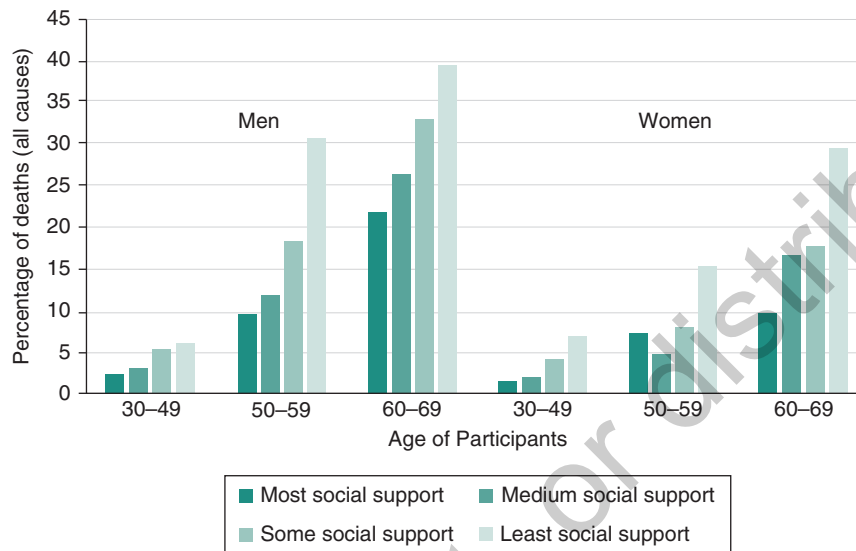
One popular area of research is the link between the presence of healthy relationships in someone's life and their ability to cope with challenges, failures, and stress. The general idea of these studies is that physical health will be associated with people's level of **social support**, or the number and quality of relationships they have on which they can rely in times of need (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). There are three specific types of social support (Wills, 1985):

- **Esteem support** occurs when other people in your life help you see yourself as a good person, worthy of love. They show you empathy and share your feelings.
- **Informational support** is offered by others when they provide facts or details that can help a stressful situation be understood or managed. They help you make decisions.
- **Instrumental support** comes from others when they offer physical aid, financial resources, or other pragmatic help. They provide tangible resources you need at the time.

For example, imagine a man whose wife of many years decides to divorce him. During this difficult and stressful time, his friends can offer all three types of social support. Esteem support may happen as they gather around to assure him that he's worthy of love and will eventually find another partner, if and when he wants a new relationship. Informational support might include helping him understand the state laws on divorce or providing recommendations for a good divorce lawyer. Finally, his friends might provide instrumental support if they loan him money, let him sleep in their guest room, or physically help him move his furniture into a new apartment.

How does social support translate into improved physical health? The first large-scale study to investigate this link was the Alameda County Study (Berkman & Syme, 1979). In 1965, researchers sent lengthy questionnaires to every single resident living in Alameda County, California, who was at least 20 years old; almost 7000 people completed and returned the surveys. One of the scales in the questionnaire asked about social support. It was measured by whether the respondents were married, how many friends and family members they had frequent contact with, and how many social groups they belonged to (such as church communities). The researchers then did follow-up checks with every participant over 9 years and tracked how many of them died.

Happily, death rates for people between 20 and 29 years old were very low, regardless of social support levels (so low they aren't even in Figure 1.2). As the trend in Figure 1.2 shows, for older participants, higher levels of social support were associated with lower death rates over the 9 years of the study. This trend was especially pronounced for men and was stronger as people got older. Overall, people with better social support were two to four times less likely to die. You can imagine how the three kinds of social support described earlier might contribute to healthier habits, more

FIGURE 1.2 ● Connections Between Social Support and Mortality

The older we get, the more social support matters for mortality rates.

Source: Berkman and Syme (1979).

exercise, more visits to the doctor, and so on. People might have a friend with whom they go to the gym a few times a week, or someone's partner might remind them to take their pills or make doctor's appointments. In these ways, having better social support might lead to better physical health outcomes.

On the other hand, the other way around might also be true: People with worse health might be less likely to go out with friends, less likely to initiate romantic relationships, or even less likely to join social groups, so maybe worse health leads to lower social support. This is a good example of a phrase scientists like to use: *Correlation does not imply causation*. We know that physical health and social support are tied together, but we can't say for sure whether one *causes* change in the other without a different kind of research. We'll talk more about correlations and what they mean in Chapter 2.

The Alameda County Study is a famous example of research on the link between relationships and physical health. Over the past several decades, additional research has established more evidence that happy, healthy relationships are correlated with our physical health (for an entire book on this topic, see Agnew & South, 2014). For example, good relationships are associated with better resilience to heart disease (Coyne et al., 2001; Newman & Roberts, 2013), healthier neural and immune system responses (Loving & Keneski, 2014), better stress reactions at the hormonal level (Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006; Slatcher, 2014), and better management of chronic pain, especially for people in rural and relatively isolated locations (Tollefson, Usher,

& Foster, 2011). The flip side of the coin is also true: Unhealthy and abusive relationships are tied to worse physical health and may even be the cause of chronic illness in some cases (Jetter, 2013).

Relationships are also tied to the chemicals our bodies produce. Sexual contact with others—even cuddling!—can trigger the release of dopamine and oxytocin in the brain, two natural chemicals in the body associated with feelings of pleasure, relaxation, and recall of positive memories (Blaicher et al., 1999; Carmichael et al., 1987; Depue & Collins, 1999; Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, Campos, & Altemus, 2006). Thus, the overlap between physical health and mental health matters.

Relationships and Mental Health

Of course, being surrounded by friends, family, and a loving partner would make anyone's life better. It should be no surprise that social support is also associated with better mental health across thousands of research studies. A term often used in this research is **well-being**, an overall or general summary of someone's happiness, mental health, and ability to cope with stress. In general, good intimate relationships are associated with better well-being.

In one simple exploration of the link between well-being and social support, 182 college students were given a survey that measured their anxiety, depression, hostility, and loneliness (Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987). Social support was measured by asking each student these three questions:

- Who accepts you totally, including both your worst and your best points?
- Whom can you really count on to tell you, in a thoughtful manner, when you need to improve in some way?
- Whom do you feel truly loves you deeply?

Students who said both that they had *more* loving, supportive people in their lives (quantity) and that these relationships were satisfying (quality) said that they had lower anxiety, depression, hostility, and loneliness.

Across many studies, positive and secure intimate relationships are associated with better well-being (e.g., Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer, & Florian, 1997; Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998; Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012; Merz & Consedine, 2009). For example, college students in Israel with secure and supportive intimate relationships reported better coping to missile attacks during the Gulf War (Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993). Mothers with newborn infants suffering from congenital heart disease were better able to emotionally deal with the infants' special needs if they (the mothers) felt secure in their adult intimate relationships (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). A wide variety of diagnosable mental illnesses are correlated with lower levels of social support, including personality disorders (Critchfield, Levy, Clarkin, & Kernberg, 2008), dissociative disorders (Ogawa, Sroufe, Weinfield, Carlson, & Egeland, 1997), eating disorders (Cole-Detke & Kobak, 1996), and schizophrenia (Fonagy et al., 1996). The list goes on and on, but it seems clear that intimate relationships can affect our mental health and happiness, and our mental health and happiness can affect our intimate relationships.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1.1** When understanding of any topic comes from combining theories, methods, and results from a variety of academic fields (such as psychology, biology, and anthropology), this approach is called:
- Interdisciplinary
 - Cross-cultural
 - Longitudinal
 - Basic research
- 1.2** You are visiting a new city for the first time and find the subway system confusing. So, you call your friend who lives there and they explain what trains and stops you need. In this case, which type of social support is your friend providing?
- Esteem support
 - Instrumental support
 - Egoistic support
 - Informational support
- 1.3** Which statement below is an accurate summary of the findings from the Alameda County Study?
- Social support was not correlated with mortality rates in this study.
 - Surprisingly, more social support was associated with higher mortality rates.
 - More social support was associated with lower mortality rates, especially among older men.
 - Social support and mortality weren't correlated for people between the ages of 30 and 59, but they were correlated for people over 59 years of age.

APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Figure 1.1 displayed how the frequency of publications on intimate relationships has greatly increased over the last 100 years. However, this claim is based only on the three search terms used within PsycINFO ("attraction," "love," and "marriage"). Do you think different patterns would emerge if different search terms were used? Would certain terms have surges or declines in popularity in particular years or decades, based on events

going on at the time? Are you curious about how common publications are on particular, specific topics such as gay or lesbian relationships, domestic violence, or interracial couples? What about in a database that lists articles in a field other than psychology? Choose three search terms and an online database of interest to you, personally, and create a graph similar to Figure 1.1. Then, analyze the patterns that appear to emerge.

CRITICAL THINKING

- This section introduced the idea of "basic" versus "applied" research. Which do you think is more valuable? Which do you, personally, find more interesting? Provide specific examples that support your opinion.
- Which of the three types of social support (esteem, informational, instrumental) do you value the most in your own life? What kinds of situations would change your answer, at least temporarily? Do different kinds of

people value some types of support more, regardless of the situation? Choose one idea you have regarding these questions and formulate a specific hypothesis. How would you test this hypothesis?

- Can you identify a time in your own life when having a supportive friend, family member, or romantic partner improved your *physical* health? Describe the circumstances of this situation.

Answers to the Check Your Understanding Questions

1.1 a, 1.2 d, and 1.3 c.

What Are Different Kinds of Intimate Relationships?

On some levels the question “What are different kinds of intimate relationships?” is easy to answer. In your own life, you have relationships with your friends, your family members, your professors, your dating partner(s), and so on. Each relationship type could be considered a different relationship category. But what is “intimacy” in the first place? Are intimacy and love the same thing? Are you “intimate” with your friends? What about distant relatives you only see every few years?

It’s important to know how researchers approach the definition and measurement of relationships. A **categorical approach** to relationships is one that groups types or forms of relationships into categories, like friends versus romantic partners. However, the question gets more interesting if you think about intimate relationships from a **continuous approach**, one that considers relationships on a sliding scale of intimacy. A continuous approach might, theoretically, look like what you see in Figure 1.3. Here, strong intimacy is one end of a possible range, with the other end being no connection at all.

Beyond whether relationships should be studied from a categorical or continuous approach, a difficulty in the scientific study of intimate relationships is how to define abstract ideas like “love.” In academic fields, “love” is a **construct**, a theoretical, abstract, and invisible concept or idea. To study it in research, we have to **operationalize** it, which means defining it in very specific ways related to how we plan to measure it within a given study. As you can probably imagine, different researchers have operationalized or defined love in a wide variety of ways over the years. While some studies operationalize love using objective numbers such as length of a relationship in months or years, most researchers use subjective self-report scales to assess psychological feelings or thoughts regarding participants’ experiences of love (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001).

Defining and Measuring Love: Rubin’s Scales

Over the years, many different researchers have defined love in many different ways. Everyday people also seem to have notions of different kinds of love, as heartbroken

FIGURE 1.3 ● A Continuous Approach to Types of Intimate Relationships

Relationships could be conceptualized along a continuum, with strong intimacy on one end and no feelings at all on the other.

suitors often immediately understand the meaning of the sentence “I love you, but I’m not *in love* with you.” Ouch.

Right around 50 years ago, one of the first scholars to operationalize “romantic love” was the social psychologist Zick Rubin (1970). His definition was this: “love between unmarried opposite-sex peers, of the sort which could possibly lead to marriage” (p. 266). Right away, you can probably see several problems with this definition:

- It assumes that most people in love are on a path toward marriage (while in fact many couples may not be interested in marriage at all).
- It assumes that romantic love exists only between “opposite-sex” peers, which means that only heterosexual, cisgender people feel love.
- It assumes that married people do not feel romantic love!

In spite of this severely limited (and, let’s be honest, a tad offensive by today’s standards) definition of romantic love, Rubin was still an important figure in the progression of research on intimate relationships because he was one of the first scholars to create a self-report measure of love that participants could complete in survey research. When he created his scale, he specifically made sure to include items that would distinguish “liking” from “loving” (a categorical approach), but scores on the scale also have a possible range to indicate strength of feeling (a continuous approach). The result is the scale shown in the “What’s My Score?” feature. Try answering the questions yourself to see what your score is on each set of items.

When Rubin asked college students to complete his loving scale regarding their current partner back in 1970, he found that higher scores on the scale really were associated with their estimates of how likely they were to get married (as his original definition suggested). However, scores were not correlated with length of the relationship; it seems that some people fall in love quickly, while others take time (Rubin, 1970). Since 1970, many studies have found other interesting trends by including **Rubin’s liking and loving scales**.

For example, one study (Kenrick, Gutierrez, & Goldberg, 1989) showed participants nude centerfolds from either *Playboy/Penthouse* (male participants) or *Playgirl* (female participants). Results showed that men who looked at the images reported lower love scores for their partners afterward, but that the images didn’t affect women’s love scores. Note, however, that when researchers tried to replicate these findings, or confirm them by doing the study again, neither men nor women had lower love scores after looking at erotica across three different groups of participants (Balzarini, Dobson, Chin, & Campbell, 2017).

WHAT'S MY SCORE?

The Rubin Scales of Liking and Loving

Instructions: For the items below, you'll see an X in place of a person's name. When you think about the love scale, replace X with your current partner's name (if you don't have a current partner, try

thinking about someone you *wish* you were dating). When you think about the like scale, replace X with your best friend's name. For each item, write your level of agreement using this scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Disagree completely								Agree completely

Love Scale

- If X were feeling badly, my first duty would be to cheer him or her up.
- I feel that I can confide in X about virtually everything.
- I find it easy to ignore X's faults.
- I would do almost anything for X.
- I feel very possessive toward X.
- If I could never be with X, I would feel miserable.
- If I were lonely, my first thought would be to seek X out.
- One of my primary concerns is X's welfare.
- I would forgive X for practically anything.
- I feel responsible for X's well-being.
- When I am with X, I spend a good deal of time just looking at him or her.
- I would greatly enjoy being confided in by X.
- It would be hard for me to get along without X.

Like Scale

- When I am with X, we are almost always in the same mood.

- I think that X is unusually well adjusted.
- I would highly recommend X for a responsible job.
- In my opinion, X is an exceptionally mature person.
- I have great confidence in X's good judgment.
- Most people would react very favorably to X after a brief acquaintance.
- I think that X and I are quite similar to each other.
- I would vote for X in a class or group election.
- I think that X is one of those people who quickly wins respect.
- I feel that X is an extremely intelligent person.
- X is one of the most likable people I know.
- X is the sort of person whom I myself would like to be.
- It seems to me that it is very easy for X to gain admiration.

Scoring: For each scale (love and like), add the items together to find your total score. The result should be a number between 13 and 117, with higher numbers indicating more loving or more liking.

(Continued)

[Continued]

When Rubin asked college students to take the scales back in 1970, the average scores were as follows:

- Men who took the love scale: 89.37
- Women who took the love scale: 89.46
- Men who took the like scale: 55.07

- Women who took the like scale: 65.27

Source: Rubin (1970).

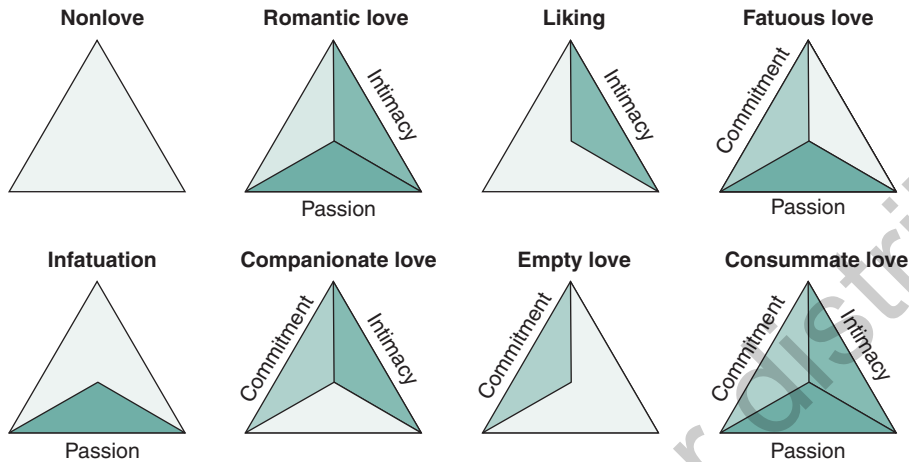
Critical Thinking: Do you think that some of the items in this scale are out of date or would be interpreted differently by people of different genders or sexual orientations? If so, what questions could be updated or added?

Another study found that higher scores on Rubin's love scale were associated with more certainty and confidence about the status of people's relationships, as well as more confidence in their own feelings about their partner and in their partner's feelings (Knobloch et al., 2001). People report being more in love when their current partners match their ideal expectations in terms of trustworthiness, attractiveness, and status (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001). When married couples filled out the Rubin love scale in another study, higher scores were correlated with better overall marital quality, more sexual satisfaction, and better communication (Perrone & Worthington, 2001). So, while Rubin's original definition of love may have been flawed, his ideas made him an early pioneer in inspiring research that continues today.

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

Of course, Rubin is not the only person to develop a definition and measurement of love. One researcher (Fehr, 1988) even noted that many definitions exist because there might not *be* a single, comprehensive definition. In Fehr's research, people listed features they said were part of "love" but not part of "liking," such as gazing at each other, sexual passion, and feelings of euphoria. Other researchers have published typologies that make distinctions between styles of loving (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Lee, 1977), love versus commitment (Kelley, 1983), and implicit models or styles of love and trust (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1958). The list could be longer—and many of these theories will be covered in later chapters—but you get the idea.

One of the most well-known theories attempting to define types of intimate relationship is the **Sternberg triangular theory of love** (Sternberg, 1986). It's called the "triangular" theory because Sternberg suggested that love is made up of three components, like ingredients in a recipe, and that the degree to which each of these components is present in any given relationship will determine its nature. In this way, Sternberg's triangular theory is both categorical (he suggests eight different types of relationship, as shown in Figure 1.4) and continuous, as levels of each component can range in degree or amount.

FIGURE 1.4 • Eight Types of Love in Sternberg's Triangular Theory

In this theory (Sternberg, 1986), there are eight kinds of love that vary based on whether they have intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Source: Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 119-135, reprinted with permission.

Let's start with examining the three components that Sternberg (1986) said might be present in any given relationship:

- **Intimacy:** The emotional component, intimacy is feelings of closeness, connection, bonding, and warmth toward a partner. High intimacy is associated with the desire to protect a partner, with high regard for them, and with more self-disclosures such as revealing secrets or deeply personal information.
- **Passion:** The physical, motivational, or behavioral component; passion is sexual drive or attraction toward a partner, including physical arousal and other bodily changes (increased heart rate, release of brain chemicals, etc.). While passion for someone else is not necessarily in our control, we're usually aware of our physical attraction toward certain others.
- **Commitment:** The cognitive component, commitment is a thoughtful, reasoned decision to stay with a given partner and maintain the relationship, often exclusively. Sternberg (1986) notes, "Loving relationships almost inevitably have their ups and downs, and there may be times in such relationships when the decision/commitment component is all or almost all that keeps the relationship going" (p. 123).

If you think about these components as being simply present or absent, there are eight different types of relationship that are theoretically possible; these are shown in Figure 1.4.

If a relationship has none of the components, Sternberg calls it "nonlove"; these would be relationships with casual acquaintances, such as people in your class whom you don't

know personally. Sternberg (1986) notes that “the large majority of our personal relationships” are nonlove (p. 123). The opposite would be “consummate love,” or complete and perfect love. In Sternberg’s theory, ideal romantic relationships have commitment, intimacy, and passion. If you have only one or two of these three essential components, you get one of the other six types of relationship. For example, “companionate love” is more like a deep friendship; it’s missing sexual or physical attraction, but it has all the other aspects of being with a partner. The other forms are romantic, liking, fatuous, infatuation, and empty love, which you can see result from different combinations.

From a categorical perspective, you can probably think of people you know who represent these different types of relationship. Younger couples might be more driven by passion, for example, and thus be more likely to experience infatuation, while older couples more interested in an emotional connection might be considered closer to liking relationships. However, remember that while Sternberg categorized these eight different types of love based on whether each component was present or absent, he also approached relationships from a continuous approach. If passion, intimacy, and commitment can all range on a continuum, then a *single* relationship might change categories over time.

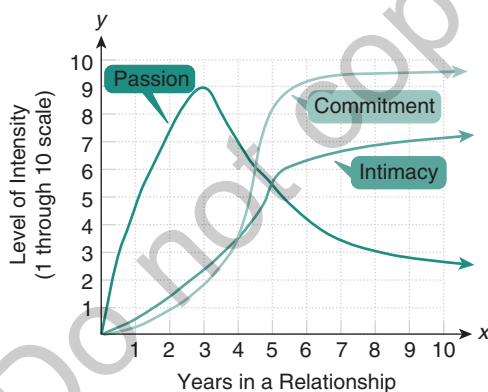
Take a look, for example, at Figure 1.5. Here we have a theoretical relationship between two people that ebbs and flows in its nature over the course of a relationship.

At the beginning of a new potential relationship, the two people involved barely know each other (nonlove); all three components are low. As time goes on, they quickly develop physical attraction toward each other; as their passion peaks and is the driving force behind spending time together, they are infatuated. This matches a finding (Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966) that on first dates, physical attraction is the most important factor in how much people feel satisfied by the end. A bit later, if they become emotionally invested and decide to commit to each other, for a moment in time they achieve consummate love.

Consummate love is hard to maintain, though. Sternberg (1986) wrote, “Attaining consummate love can be analogous in at least one respect to meeting one’s target in a weight-reduction program: Reaching the goal is often easier than maintaining it. The attainment of consummate love is no guarantee that it will last” (p. 124). In the theoretical relationship shown in Figure 1.5, the two couple members do slowly lose physical passion for each other, but their high levels of intimacy and commitment keep them together. This general pattern was mostly supported in a study (Sumter, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2013) that measured the three components in relationships of a wide range of ages (from 12 to 88 years); their results for participants currently in relationships are shown in Figure 1.6. In youth relationships (ages 12–17), all three components were relatively low, and all three peaked in young adult relationships (ages 18–29). In older couples (over 50), commitment stayed strong while intimacy and passion both declined.

While the vast majority of research studies inspired by Sternberg’s (1986) theory have used the

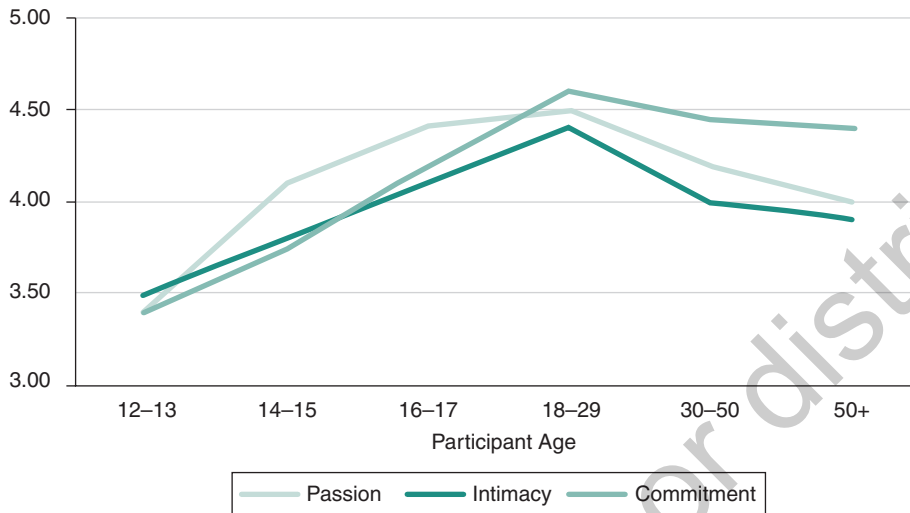
FIGURE 1.5 ● Changing Components of Love in a Theoretical Relationship Over Time



Commitment, intimacy, and passion can fluctuate up and down within a given relationship over time.

Source: Sternberg, Robert J., “A Triangular Theory of Love,” *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 119-135, reprinted with permission.

FIGURE 1.6 • Changing Components of Love in Real Relationships Over Time



Research shows that the components of love tend to differ, depending on how old couple members are.

Source: Sumter et al. (2013).

WHAT'S MY SCORE?

Measuring Intimacy, Passion, and Commitment

Instructions: Think about your current partner. Next to each item below, write how much you agree using this scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree						Strongly agree
Intimacy						
<input type="checkbox"/> My partner and I share personal information with one another.			<input type="checkbox"/> My partner and I self-disclose private thoughts and information to each other.			
<input type="checkbox"/> There is nothing I couldn't tell my partner.			<input type="checkbox"/> There are things I could tell my partner that I can't tell anyone else.			

(Continued)

(Continued)

- ___ My partner understands my feelings.
- ___ My partner and I are psychologically close to one another.

Passion

- ___ I feel a powerful attraction for my partner.
- ___ I am often aroused by my partner's presence.
- ___ My partner and I are very passionate toward one another.
- ___ My partner and I are very affectionate toward one another.
- ___ My partner is sexually exciting.
- ___ My partner and I have a very passionate relationship.
- ___ Sex is an important part of our relationship.

Commitment

- ___ I am committed to continuing our relationship.
- ___ I think of our relationship as a permanent one.

- ___ I am unlikely to pursue another relationship in the future.
- ___ Commitment is an important part of our relationship.
- ___ I think this relationship will last forever.
- ___ I would rather be with my partner than anyone else.

Scoring: For each subscale, add the items together and then divide by the number of items to find the average (note that intimacy and commitment have six items, while passion has seven). Higher numbers indicate stronger or more extreme experiences of that component.

When Lemieux and Hale (1999) asked college students to complete the scales, the average scores were as follows:

- Men: 5.4 for intimacy, 5.6 for passion, and 4.5 for commitment
- Women: 5.9 for intimacy, 5.8 for passion, and 5.3 for commitment

Source: Lemieux and Hale (1999, 2000).

Critical Thinking: Does one of these factors matter more to you? Do you think one is more important for predicting a healthy, long-term relationship? Are monogamous, "forever" relationships realistic in today's world?

scale he created to measure the three components of love, others have pointed out that his scale may not be the most statistically reliable option. Therefore, an alternative scale that seems to stand up well to tests of reliability and internal structure has been validated for both college students (Lemieux & Hale, 1999) and married couples (with an average age of 38; Lemieux & Hale, 2000). That scale appears in the second "What's My Score?" feature.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1.4 What type of love would Sternberg say includes high levels of passion, intimacy, and commitment?
- Companionate
 - Fatuous
 - Consummate
 - Romantic
- 1.5 According to research on Sternberg's triangular theory of love, which component below increases the most slowly, but also tends to stay relatively high after years of a couple being together?
- Intimacy
 - Commitment
 - Passion
 - Liking
- 1.6 This section discussed the difference between "continuous" constructs and "categorical" constructs. Which of the constructs or variables below is categorical?
- Height
 - Country in which you were born
 - Number of sexual partners
 - Scores on the Rubin "love" scale

APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Analyze two or three famous celebrity relationships you've seen in the news over the past several years. Do they seem to be driven by one, two, or all three of Sternberg's components in the triangular theory of love? Do these components seem

to have changed over time? Do you think that the nature of celebrity lifestyles makes relationships play out differently, from the perspective of Sternberg's theory?

CRITICAL THINKING

- Most of the studies based on Sternberg's theory have been conducted with "Western" participants in countries like the United States or with similar cultures. Do you think the same three components exist in every culture? Do different cultures emphasize different components, at different times or with different types of people?
- Imagine that you knew you would be in only one, monogamous romantic relationship for the rest of your life—and that relationship could only have *one* of Sternberg's three components. Which one would you choose, and why?
- Do you prefer to think about intimate relationships in a continuous way or a categorical way? Why does this system appeal to you?

Answers to the Check Your Understanding Questions

1.4 c, 1.5 b, and 1.6 b.

How Is This Book Organized?

Hopefully, you enjoy reading this book! But any textbook can seem overwhelming at first. Breaking down what to expect might help.

One way to anticipate what you'll read is to think about the order of chapters. There are really three major sections, although they aren't named or formalized. Chapters 1 and 2 are a basic introduction to how relationship scholars think about and study theory, from a scientific perspective. The next section of the book (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) is basically the "theoretical foundations" part. These chapters cover three of the most popular and broad-reaching theories used to understand relationship patterns. The theories attempt to explain why people act and think as they do in relationships, how that translates into different people's experiences, and how each theory can be applied in a wide variety of settings. This strong emphasis on a theoretical foundation can help you pull the theories through the rest of the book and, potentially, into your own thoughts or even research projects.

Finally, the second half of the book (Chapters 6 to 13) covers research regarding various forms of relationships and how relationships evolve over our individual lifetimes. The order of chapters is intentionally set up to take you through the beginnings of most relationships—friendship and attraction—through the next stages, like sexuality and commitment. Once a relationship is formed, how partners think about each other (social cognition), communicate, and resolve (or fail to resolve) conflict are covered. Finally, the last two chapters talk about the best and worst parts of intimate relationships. Chapter 12 discusses sexual assault and abuse, and the final chapter covers both breaking up (ending love) and research on how relationship partners can last the test of time (enduring love).

Within each chapter, you'll see "big questions" and learning objectives that guide it in the form of an outline, with two or three sections. Each chapter (starting with Chapter 2) includes three features. One is "What's My Score?" where you can take a self-report scale. Hopefully this will be a fun way to both see where you fall on an interesting variable and learn how that variable is operationalized in research studies. Next, "Relationships in Popular Culture" discusses how intimate relationships are featured in songs, television, or movies. Finally, the "Research Deep Dive" feature goes into detail about the method and results of a particular research study, reminding you of the scientific method behind all advances in the field of relationships.

Each section ends with some questions to make sure you understood the material, optional application activities, and critical thinking questions to consider or discuss with others. Finally, the end of each chapter provides a summary of the main ideas. The overall goal of the book is both to familiarize you with important research and applications of relationship science, and to get you to think about the relationships in your own life and social network. Relationships are all around us, an important part of our daily lives—so let's get started.

Chapter Summary

Big Questions

1. Why study intimate relationships?
2. What are different kinds of intimate relationships?
3. How is this book organized?

Why study intimate relationships?

The study of intimate relationships is interdisciplinary in that it combines research from several different fields of study (biology, anthropology, sociology, and so on). Scientific interest in the study of intimate relationships has grown quickly over the past 100 years, perhaps because relationships are important in so many different aspects of human life. Relationships are necessary for human survival and they affect our physical and mental health. One example of an important research study showing the link between social support and physical health is the famous Alameda County Study, which established links between levels of social support and mortality rates (meaning more social support was associated with lower probabilities of death); this association was especially strong as participants got older, and it was stronger for men than for women.

What are different kinds of intimate relationships?

How to define and measure “love” and related concepts has led to several theories regarding different types of intimate relationship. One of the first people to scientifically define romantic love was Zick Rubin, who distinguished between “liking” and “loving.” The scales he created to measure each type of love are still used in research today and are an

example of how defining love can be done with either a categorical approach (sorting types of relationship into groups or kinds of relationship) or a continuous approach (thinking about love on a range or continuum). Another popular early model of love is Sternberg’s triangular theory of love, which suggests that love relationships are made up of three components: passion, intimacy, and commitment. Different levels of each component translate into different forms of love relationship. If all three components are present at high levels, a relationship is called “consummate” and is considered the ideal form of romantic love. Sternberg’s components can also be considered as present or absent (a categorical approach) or as existing at different levels within any given relationship over time (a continuous approach).

How is this book organized?

The chapters in this book go from an introduction and research methods, to three major theoretical perspectives on relationships, to research on various aspects of a relationship as it evolves. Those later chapters follow along from friendship, attraction, sexuality, commitment, conflict, abuse, and both ending and enduring love. Each chapter has features to help readers understand and apply the material, such as self-report scales, application to popular culture, deep dives into research studies, and critical thinking questions.

List of Terms

Learning Objectives	Key Terms
<p>1.1 Explain how relationships are associated with human survival, physical health, and mental health.</p>	<p>Interdisciplinary approach Basic research Applied research PsycINFO Longitudinal Natural selection Enhanced fitness Social support Esteem support Informational support Instrumental support Well-being</p>
<p>1.2 Analyze theories regarding different types of liking and loving in human relationships.</p>	<p>Categorical approach Continuous approach Construct Operationalize Rubin's liking and loving scales Sternberg triangular theory of love Intimacy Passion Commitment</p>
<p>1.3 Describe the order of chapters and within-chapter features you'll see throughout the book.</p>	