

Seventh Edition



# Intimate Relationships

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Rowland S. Miller

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SEVENTH EDITION

*Rowland S. Miller*  
*Sam Houston State University*





INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, SEVENTH EDITION

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 DOC/DOC 1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4

ISBN 978-0-07-786180-3

MHID 0-07-786180-9

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Cover Designer: *Studio Montage, St. Louis, MO*

Cover Image: *DEA Picture Library/Getty Images/RF*

Compositor: *Laserwords Private Limited*

Typeface: *10/12 Palatino*

Printer: *R. R. Donnelley*

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Miller, Rowland S.

Intimate relationships / Rowland S. Miller, Sam Houston State University—Seventh edition.  
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-07-786180-3 (alk. paper)

1. Family life education. 2. Interpersonal relations. I. Title.

HQ10.B735 2015

306.707—dc23

2014018983

The Internet addresses listed in the text were accurate at the time of publication. The inclusion of a website does not indicate an endorsement by the authors or McGraw-Hill Education, and McGraw-Hill Education does not guarantee the accuracy of the information presented at these sites.

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# *Preface to the Seventh Edition*

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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 am privileged to be able to provide you another very thorough update on the remarkable work being done in relationship science. The field is busier and broader than ever before, so this edition contains several *hundreds* of citations to brand-new work published in the last 3 years. You'll find no other survey of relationship science that is as current, comprehensive, and complete.

I'm told that you won't find another textbook that's as much fun to read, either. I'm very glad. 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 cites hundreds more studies than other books do. It draws on social psychology, communication studies, family studies, sociology, clinical psychology, neuroscience, 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*

Each chapter now contains new pedagogical tools, thought-provoking **Points to Ponder**, that invite readers to think more deeply about intriguing phenomena and to inspect their personal reactions to the text material. The Points will serve equally well as touchstones for class discussion, topics for individual essays, and personal reflections regarding one's own behavior in close relationships.

In addition, this edition contains 727 new references that support new or substantially expanded discussion of topics that include:

Prayer	Cues to deception
Revenge	Social networking
Cheaters	Perceived similarity
Churning	Friends with benefits
Having fun	Relationship turbulence
The color red	Attachment mismatches
Gay marriage	Smell and chemosignals
Online dating	Compassionate love acts
Responsiveness	Social contagion of divorce
Ovulatory shifts	Long-distance relationships
Facebook Friends	Facial width-to-height ratios
Sex on a first date	Computer-mediated communication

I have produced new PowerPoint slides that outline the chapters, and they and a new Instructor's Manual and Test Bank are available online at [www.mhhe.com/millerint7e](http://www.mhhe.com/millerint7e).

### *What Hasn't Changed*

If you're familiar with the sixth 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.

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'm always delighted, privileged, and honored to be granted the opportunity to introduce this dynamic, exciting science to the newcomer—and readers report that it shows.

Kudos and thanks go to Sharon Brehm, the original creator of this book, and to Dan Perlman, the co-author who enticed me into doing it in the first place. I've also been grateful for the wonderful support and assistance of editorial and production professionals, Penina Braffman, Melanie Lewis, Melissa Leick, Erin Guendelsberger, Sheri Gilbert, and Kala Ramachandran. Thanks, y'all.

I'm glad you're here, and I hope you enjoy the book.



## *About the Author*

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**Rowland S. Miller** is a Professor of Psychology at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. He has been teaching a course in Close Relationships for over 25 years, and he won the 2008 Teaching Award from the International Association for Relationship Research (primarily as a result of this book). He is a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, and a winner of the Edwin Newman Award for Excellence in Research from Psi Chi and the American Psychological Association. His parents were happily married for 73 years. He's pictured here with his lovely wife, Carolyn, for two reasons: First, she's the co-author of his most important intimate relationship, and second, she was hugely helpful and supportive behind the scenes, talking the author out of (nearly all of) his bad ideas.

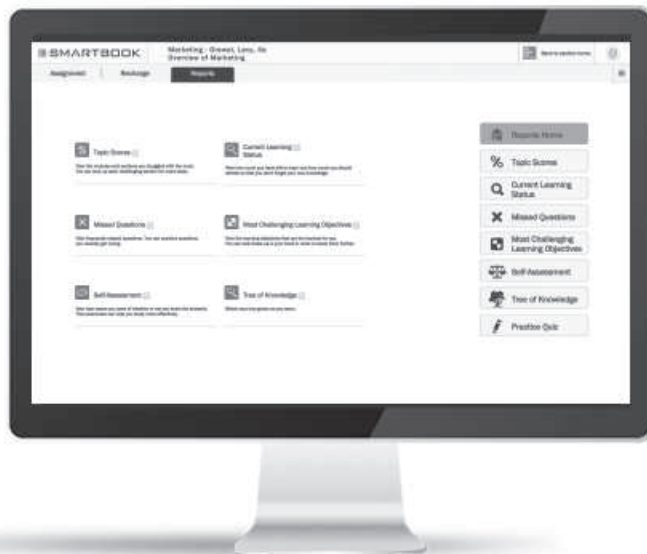


***The 7th edition of Intimate Relationships is now available as a SmartBook™—the first and only adaptive reading experience designed to change the way students read and learn:***

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# *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 ♦ CHAPTER SUMMARY

How's this for a vacation? Imagine yourself in a nicely appointed suite with a pastoral view. You've got cable, 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, and Facebook 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, 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 can bring us great joy when they go well, but cause great sorrow when they go poorly. Our relationships are 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, and it reports what behavioral scientists have learned about relationships through careful research. The book 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. There are many insights awaiting you 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. This book's intent is to survey the scientific study of close relationships and to introduce you to the diverse foci of relationship science.

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 must first 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, colleagues, and kin—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 (Prager et al., 2013). 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. *Interdependence* between intimates—the extent to which they need and influence each other—is frequent (they often affect each other), strong (they have meaningful impacts 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 (Simpson, 2007). 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, 2014). 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, 2013).

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 “her” (or “him”) (Fitzsimons & Kay, 2004). 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 sometimes 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).

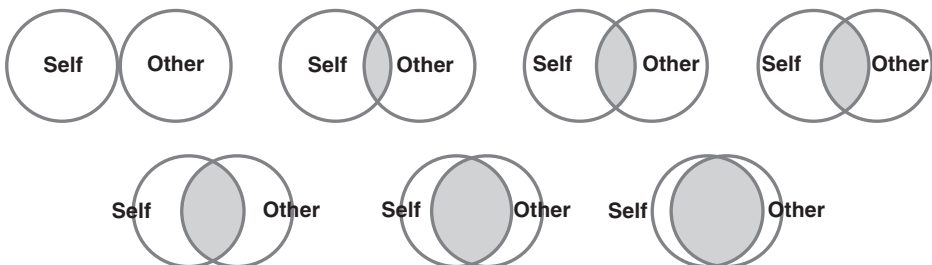
Finally, intimate partners are ordinarily *committed* to their relationships. That is, they expect their partnerships to continue indefinitely, and they invest the time, effort, and resources that are needed to realize that goal. Without such commitment, people who were once very close may find themselves 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 (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). Still, intimacy can exist to a

FIGURE 1.1. **The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale.**

How intimate is a relationship? 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 et al., 1992.

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.

Thus, there is 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 can also be a source of endless fascination. (And that's why I wrote this book!)

### *The Need to Belong*

Our focus on intimate relationships means that we will not consider the wide variety of the 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 (Fingerman, 2009), there's something special about intimate relationships. 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. 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 (Spielmann et al., 2012).

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 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 (Kern et al., 2014). 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

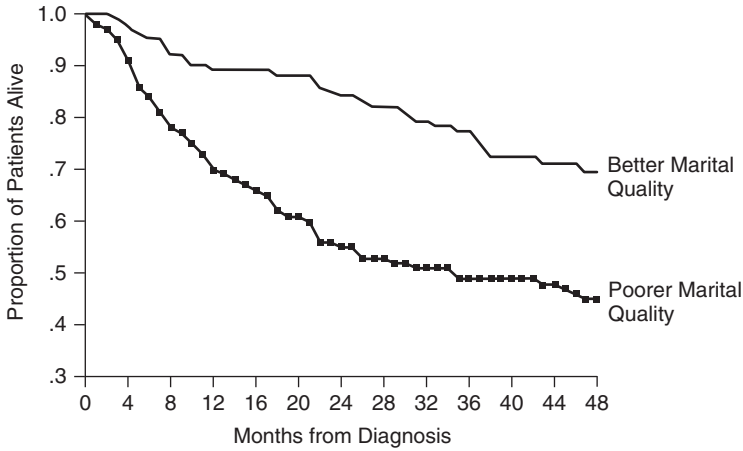
photograph of a loving partner (Master et al., 2009). Wounds even heal faster when others accept and support us (Gouin et al., 2010). In contrast, people with insufficient intimacy in their lives are at risk for a wide variety of health problems (Hawley & Cacioppo, 2013). When they're lonely, young adults 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 have much higher mortality rates than do those who are closely connected to caring partners; 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).

### **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 than are those who lack such social contact (Nezlek et al., 2002), and this is true around the world (Galinha et al., 2013). In contrast, psychiatric problems, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse tend to afflict those with troubled ties to others (Whisman, 2013). 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 (Eberhart & Hammen, 2006). In general, whether we're gay or straight (Wight et al., 2013), married or just cohabiting (Kohn & Averett, 2014), our well-being seems to depend on how well we satisfy the need to belong.

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 tribal 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. 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.



Source: Coyne et al., 2001.

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.

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, water, 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 (Kenrick et al., 2010).

Now, let's examine the major influences that will 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 Facebook and AIDS didn't exist—but let's look back at 1960, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 1960 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.

Now, however, things are very different. 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 1960, almost everyone (94 percent) married at some point in their lives, but more people remain unmarried today. Demographers now predict that only 85 percent of young adults will ever marry (and that proportion is even lower in Europe [Cherlin, 2009]). Include everyone who is separated, divorced, widowed, or never married, and only about *half* (51 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 26-and-a-half years old when she marries for the first time, and a man is 29, 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 (46 percent) reach their mid-30s without marrying. Do you feel sorry for people who are 35 and single? Read the box on p. 9!<sup>2</sup>
- People routinely live together even when they’re not married. Cohabitation was very rare in 1960—only 5 percent of all adults ever did it—but it is now ordinary. Most young adults—about two-thirds of them—will at some time live with a lover before they ever marry (Manning, 2013).
- People often have babies even when they’re not married. This was an uncommon event in 1960; 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 2012, *41 percent* of the babies born in the United States had unmarried mothers, and this was the highest rate ever recorded (Hamilton et al., 2013). On average, these days, an American mother has her first child (at age 25.3) before she gets married (at 26.6; Arroyo et al., 2013).

<sup>1</sup>These and the following statistics were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics at [www.cdc.gov/nchs](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs), and the Pew Research Center at [pewsocialtrends.org](http://pewsocialtrends.org).

<sup>2</sup>Please try to overcome your usual temptation to skip past the boxes. Many of them will be worth your time. Trust me.

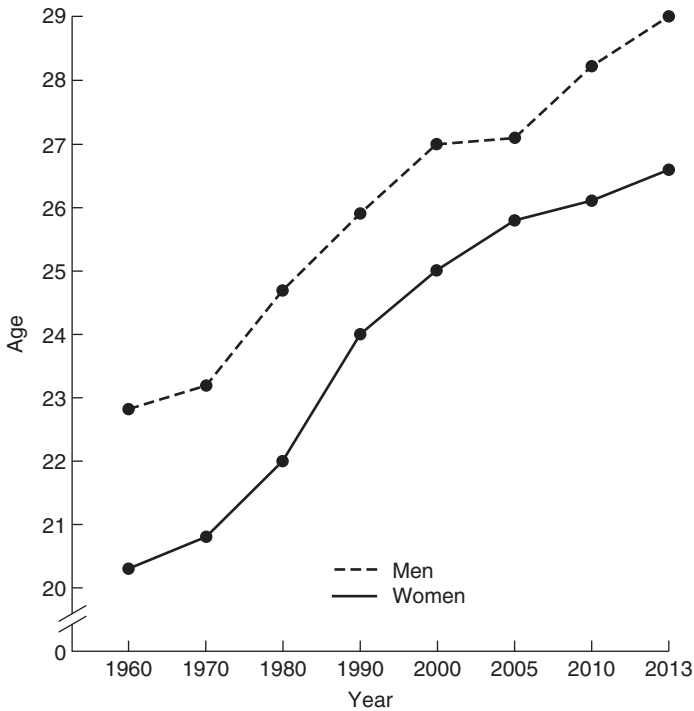


FIGURE 1.3. **Average age of first marriage in the United States.**

American men and women are waiting longer to get married than ever before.

- Almost one-half of all marriages end in divorce, a failure rate that's *2 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 (Cherlin, 2010). In 2011 in the United States, there were more than half as many divorces as marriages (Cruz, 2013). 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.<sup>3</sup>
- Most preschool children have mothers who work outside the home. In 1960, more than three-quarters of U.S. mothers stayed home all day when their children were too young to go to school, but only 40 percent of them do so now (Gibbs, 2013).

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

<sup>3</sup>This is depressing, 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. 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, 2011).

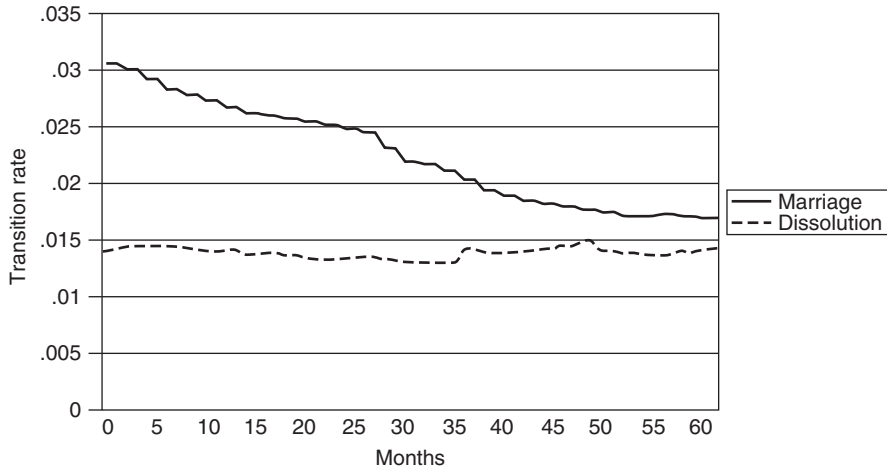
Intimacy is good for us, and married people live longer than unmarried people do. A study of 67,000 adults in the United States found that, compared to married people of the same age and social class, divorced people were 27 percent more likely to die over a 9-year span, and those who had been widowed were 40 percent more likely—but those who had never married were 58 percent more likely to die (Kaplan & Kronick, 2006). Results like these lead some researchers to straightfor-

wardly recommend a happy marriage as a desirable goal in life. And most single people *do* want to have romantic partners; only a few singles (4 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., 2013b). Still, we make an obvious mistake if we casually assume that singles are unhealthy loners. Some singles 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. Not everyone, they assert, wants or needs a constant companion or soulmate (DePaulo, 2011). 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](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-single).

leaving high school and, happy or sad, they tended to stay with their original partners. Pregnant 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 (Yen, 2014), 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 (Hefner & Wilson, 2013); 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 (Huang et al., 2011). 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





Source: Wolfinger, 2005.

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.)

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 (Jose et al., 2010). There are probably several reasons for this. First, on average, couples who choose to cohabit are less committed to each other than are those who marry—they are, after all, keeping their options open (Wiik et al., 2012)—so they encounter more problems and uncertainties than married people do (Hsueh et al., 2009). They experience more conflict (Stanley et al., 2010), jealousy (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011), infidelity (Thornton et al., 2007), and physical aggression (Urquía et al., 2013), so 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 undermine the positive attitudes toward marriage, and the determination to make a marriage work, that support marital success (Rhoades et al., 2009). Couples who are engaged to marry when they move in together typically do not suffer the same ill effects (Manning & Cohen, 2012), particularly when they agree that they'll be married within

1 year (Willoughby et al., 2012). But casual cohabitation is corrosive, so widespread acceptance of cohabitation as a “trial run” is one reason why, compared to 1960, fewer people get married and fewer marriages last.<sup>4</sup>

### Sources of Change

Thus, the norms that govern our intimate relationships differ from those experienced by prior generations, and there are several reasons for this. 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, more than one of every three wives earns more than her husband (Pew Research Center, 2013a), 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).<sup>5</sup>

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 (Greenfield, 2013). This isn’t good news, but most of us are more materialistic (Twenge & Kasser, 2013) and less concerned with others (Konrath et al., 2011) 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. 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, 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 number of American families with children at home is at an all-time low (U. S. Census Bureau, 2013), and almost one

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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 p. 25.

Our connected world...



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Modern technology is transforming the ways we interact with our partners. But is that always a good thing?

in every four American women aged 20–24 has used emergency contraception—a “morning-after” pill—to help keep it that way (Daniels et al., 2013).

Modern communication technologies are also transforming the ways in which we conduct our relationships. 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 cell phone—as about 20 percent of young adults now have (Strassberg et al., 2013). 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 (Miller-Ott et al., 2012).

In addition, most of the people you know are on Facebook (Duggan & Smith, 2014), connected to hundreds of “friends,”<sup>6</sup> and that can complicate our

<sup>6</sup>Psychology students at Sam Houston State University ( $n = 298$ ) 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 actually your friends?

more intimate partnerships. Facebook provides an entertaining and efficient way to (help to) satisfy our needs for social contact (Crosier et al., 2012), but it can also create problems for lovers, who have to decide when to change their status and announce that they're now "in a relationship." (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 (Clayton et al., 2013) and pictures of one's partner partying with others (Muscanell et al., 2013) can incite both conflict and jealousy. And altogether, the amazing reach and ready availability of modern technologies may too often tempt us to "give precedence to people we are not with over people we are with" (Price, 2011, p. 27). In fact—and this is troubling—simply having a stray mobile phone lying nearby reduced the quality of the conversation of two people who were just getting to know each other (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). Here's a suggestion: When you next go out to dinner with your lover, why don't you leave your phone in the car?

### **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? Mobile phones? Online dating sites? Something else?

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. 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 culture'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. If a pregnancy occurs, unmarried motherhood is an option (Harknett, 2008). 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 1960 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 30 years (Guilmoto, 2012). 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 the children 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 and clingy, and were 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, and they withdrew from others with an **avoidant** style of attachment. Avoidant children were often suspicious of and angry at 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.



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?

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*. They surveyed people in Denver and 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 *insecure*; 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, the 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, 2013). And researchers promptly realized that there seemed to be *four*, rather than