



Close
ENCOUNTERS
COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

6 EDITION

Laura K. **GUERRERO** | Peter A. **ANDERSEN** | Walid A. **AFIFI**



Close Encounters

Sixth Edition

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Communication in Relationships

Sixth Edition

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*To our daughters—Gabrielle, Kristiana, Kirsten, Leila, and Rania
And to Peter's grandchildren—Elise and Jack
Our relationships with them bring us great joy.*

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PREFACE

We are pleased and privileged to release the sixth edition of *Close Encounters*. It's hard to believe that we wrote the first edition of this book almost 20 years ago. At that time, the number of upper division courses on relational communication and advanced interpersonal communication being taught at colleges and universities across the country was rapidly increasing. Much has changed since then, but one thing has stayed the same—courses on relationships are still popular on college campuses across the country. The research on relationships has also continued to flourish. Indeed, it is challenging to update the content in this book because there is so much new research on relational communication published each year. Because of space limitations, we can never include everything we want to include. Nonetheless, we believe that this edition aligns with our continued goal of including an appropriate mix of recent and classic research related to communication in relationships.

Our goal in writing *Close Encounters* has always been to produce an informative yet readable textbook that will help students understand their relationships better and be more critical consumers of information about relationships. This book is research based. We strive to present concepts and theories in more depth than the average textbook on interpersonal communication while writing in an accessible style. For us, writing this textbook is a rewarding experience; it lets us reach beyond the pages of scholarly journals to share information with students who are excited to learn more about relationships and gain new perspective on some of their personal experiences.

APPROACH

The book takes a relational approach to the study of interpersonal communication by focusing on issues that are central to describing and understanding close relationships, particularly between romantic partners and friends. One of the most exciting trends in the field of personal relationships is the interdisciplinary nature of research and theory. Scholars from fields such as communication, family studies, psychology, and sociology, among other disciplines, have all made important contributions to scholarly knowledge about relationships. This book reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the field of personal relationships while focusing strongly on interpersonal communication.

ORGANIZATION

Close Encounters is still organized loosely around the concept of relationship trajectories. All relationships are different, and no two follow exactly the same path. Nonetheless, from a developmental perspective, it is helpful to think of how relationships progress from initial meetings toward farewells. Of course, interesting and important communication

occurs throughout the course of a relationship. For example, conflict can be studied in terms of a couple's first big fight, the mundane disagreements that people have on a fairly regular basis, the conflicts that enhance relational functioning, or the argument that ultimately marks the destruction of a relationship. There are also various perspectives on how relationships change and develop over time. Thus, we include a chapter on relational stages, turning points, and dialectics to show students how these different perspectives complement one another. Some topics are also related to one another in important ways that guided our organization of *Close Encounters*. For example, relationship researchers have argued that both disclosure and privacy are important in relationships. Thus, information on "revealing and hiding ourselves" is included in the same chapter. Similarly, relational scholars have long recognized that conflict is not inherently good or bad, but rather it is how conflict is managed that determines positive or negative outcomes. Accordingly, the conflict management chapter now follows the relational maintenance chapter so instructors can emphasize that both relational maintenance behaviors and constructive conflict management are key ingredients in happy relationships. The three chapters that focus on relational transgressions, relationship repair, and disengagement are packaged at the end of the book to showcase how people deal with challenges in their relationships. Although these chapters may be considered to reflect the "dark side" of interpersonal communication, we believe most topics covered in this book have a dark side and a bright side. For example, affection is generally seen as a positive behavior, but too much affection can be smothering; breakups are usually considered as negative actions, but ending a bad relationship can pave the way for a better one in the future. These are examples of the types of complexities highlighted throughout this book.

FEATURES IN THIS EDITION

For this edition, we retained the features that have made *Close Encounters* successful while adding additional research and features. As has been the case since the second edition, all chapters start with a scenario that features fictional characters dealing with communication issues, and each chapter ends with a section called Summary and Application. These chapter endings tie back to the scenarios at the beginning of each chapter so that students can see how the information they learned can be applied to a specific situation. Throughout each chapter, we refer to the opening scenarios at various times to provide examples of how the concepts we discuss relate to real-life situations. With the exception of Chapter 1, all chapters include at least one Put Yourself to the Test box that enables students to find out how they rate on a particular concept. Our students have told us that they find these boxes very helpful in identifying their communication style as well as some of the characteristics of their relationships. Some instructors incorporate these self-tests into their course assignments. For example, students may complete some of these tests and then write self-reflection papers about their own communication style.

All of the chapters also include Tech Talk boxes, which highlight research that shows how various aspects of communication using technology and social media function within close relationships. This edition also still includes Highlights boxes that provide definitions and details for key concepts. New to this edition is the inclusion of figures that visually display important information about relationships, such as percentages

related to different types of breakups, changes in how people meet, sex differences in ways people show affection, and trends showing more interracial marriage in the United States, among many others.

This edition also includes Discussion Board Questions at the end of each chapter, which we have used successfully in our classes to generate discussion both in class and online. Rather than just having students answer a question and then respond to a student or two on a discussion board, we have had students answer the questions and then a couple days later read their classmates' posts and write a "postscript." The postscripts are summaries of what their fellow students wrote that can take various forms, including pointing out aspects that were different than their own posts, identifying trends, or discussing what they would change in their post after having read their classmates' posts. These types of discussion boards can be beneficial in showing students different perspectives on relationships. This edition also includes a glossary of key terms that students find helpful both as they read through the chapters and as they prepare for exams.

As with every new edition, fresh content has been added throughout the book to reflect current research as well as trends in relationships. Some of the biggest changes in this edition include a substantial revision of the sex chapter that includes current research on the college hookup culture; revised descriptions of relational dialectics theory 2.0, relational pursuit theory, relational turbulence theory, and face theory; a revamped discussion of breakups that includes strategies commonly used today, such as ghosting and the one-way fade; a new discussion about diversity in the opening chapter; and inclusion of more generations in the identity chapter. The figures mentioned earlier are also new to this edition and will be helpful visuals to highlight important data about relationships. As always, new research was added throughout all the chapters to reflect the ever-changing ways that people in the 21st century are communicating in their relationships and, perhaps just as importantly, in their potential relationships. As with past editions, our goal is to present topics that are at the forefront of relational communication research and are of high interest to students.

FEATURES

In addition to the features already discussed, *Close Encounters* is designed to appeal to students and professors alike based on the following features:

Current, interdisciplinary research: The research in *Close Encounters* reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the study of personal relationships and draws from across the social science disciplines while maintaining a focus on communication. This edition has been carefully updated to include recent cutting-edge research on interpersonal communication.

High-interest topics: Intriguing subjects, such as long-distance relationships, cross-sex friendships, friends with benefits, flirting, sexual interaction, cohabitation, breakups, and the "dark side" of relational communication are explored in depth.

Put Yourself to the Test boxes: These exercises, found throughout the book, assess various aspects of students' own relationships and communication styles.

Highlights boxes: These boxes highlight some of the main ideas in the text by summarizing or expanding on key issues in relationship research.

Figures: There are various figures throughout the book, some of which present information visually in graphs so students can see trends, sex differences, or rankings of categories in a memorable way.

Tech Talk boxes: These boxes, which complement the other ways electronic communication is featured in *Close Encounters*, take an in-depth look at specific research issues related to technology and social media—such as cell phones, social networking sites, and online dating sites—in relationships.

Discussion Board Questions: These questions, which are found at the end of each chapter, can help students prepare for class, or they can be used for online discussion boards or classroom discussion. Some instructors also have students write position papers in response to some of the discussion questions.

Instructor's Resources: The new instructor's resources include resources, class activities, suggestions for film and TV clips that can be used during class, test bank questions, PowerPoint slides, lecture notes, and student flashcards. This material can be found at www.sagepub.com/guerrero6e.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a textbook is an exciting challenge as well as a daunting task. As we worked on this edition of *Close Encounters*, our families had to listen to the click-click-click of our computer keyboards even more than usual. The support of our families and colleagues was critical in helping us complete this project, and we owe them our sincere gratitude. We are especially indebted to our partners—Vico, Janis, and Tammy—and our daughters—Gabrielle, Kristiana, Kirsten, Leila, and Rania. These special people not only provided us with invaluable social support but also examples and feedback that cross generational boundaries.

We would also like to thank the many people who helped during the writing and editing process. We are especially grateful to our editors, Lily Norton and Jennifer Jovin-Bernstein, and our editorial assistant, Sarah Wilson, who guided us through many aspects of the publication process. We would also like to thank our copy editor, Colleen Brennan; production editor, Kelle Clarke; and to acknowledge two other people who we consider to be part of the *Close Encounters* family—Holly Allen and Todd Armstrong. Holly Allen was the editor for the first edition; a conversation between Laura and Holly back in 1998 started the *Close Encounters* ball rolling. Todd Armstrong stepped in to publish a second and third edition of the book for SAGE, and he was always enthusiastic and supportive regarding our work.

Many of our colleagues across the discipline also deserve a word of praise. We have received formal and informal feedback from many valued colleagues throughout the years, including (but not limited to) Katherine Adams, Shae Adkins, Jess Alberts, Christine K. Anzur, Buy Bachman, Dawn Braithwaite, Leah E. Bryant, Brant Burleson, Daniel Canary, John Caughlin, Scott Christopher, Colleen Warner Colaner, Victoria DeFrancisco, Kathryn Dindia, Norah Dunbar, Renee Edwards, Lisa Farinelli, Cara Fisher, Kory Floyd, Anasheh Gharabighi, Michael Hecht, Daniel White Hodge, Susanne Jones, Carrie D. Kennedy-Lightsey, Leanne Knobloch, Kimberly L. Kulovitz, Brianna L. Lane, Pamela Lannutti, Tara McManus, Sandra Metts, Claude Miller, Paul Mongeau, Larry Nadler, Sylvia Niehuis, Donna Pawlowski, Sue Pendall, Sandra Petronio, Pam Secklin, Denise Solomon, Brian Spitzberg, Susan Sprecher, Laura Stafford, Glen Stamp, Claire Sullivan, Paul Turman, Zuoming Wang, Richard West, Christina Yoshimura, and Stephen Yoshimura. A special thanks goes to Judee Burgoon (Laura and Walid's PhD adviser and an exceptional role model) who suggested that we use the term *close encounters* as part of the title.

Finally, we would like to thank all the students we have had in our classes over the years. We use some of their examples in this book, and we have incorporated their feedback into every new edition. Just as importantly, lively dialogue with students has helped sustain our enthusiasm for teaching courses on interpersonal communication and relationships. We hope this book contributes to spirited discussions about relationships in your classrooms as well.

—L. K. G.

—P. A. A.

—W. A. A.

1

CONCEPTUALIZING RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION Definitions and Principles

People accomplish a lot by communicating with others. For example, take these three situations. Jake is having trouble with his statistics homework, which is due tomorrow. His friend and roommate, Dave, is amazing at math, so Jake tries to persuade Dave to stay home (rather than go to a party) and help him. Meanwhile, Su-Lin recently arrived in the United States as an international student and feels a lot of uncertainty about the university and student life. However, after joining a couple of student clubs and getting to know some of her classmates, she starts to feel more comfortable in her new surroundings. Kristi's husband moves out of the house and tells her he wants a divorce. Rather than sitting at home alone, moping around and feeling sorry for herself, Kristi drives over to her parents' house where she receives comfort and support from her mother.

Personal relationships are central to being human. As Fitness (2006) suggested, "Human beings are fundamentally social animals who depend utterly upon one another for their survival and well-being. Little wonder, then, that such a large proportion of people's thoughts and feelings—their cognitions and emotions—concern their relationships with others" (p. 285). People are born into relationships and live their lives in webs of friendships, family networks, romances, marriages, and work relationships. In fact, research shows that when people talk, the most common topics are relationship problems, sex, family, and romantic (or potential romantic) partners (A. Haas & Sherman, 1982). The capacity to form relationships is innate and biological—a part of the genetic inheritance that has enabled humans to survive over time. Humans have less potential for survival, creativity, and innovation as individuals than they do in relationships. Personal relationship experts have begun to unlock the mysteries of these universal human experiences, to assist people with problematic relationships, and to help people achieve greater satisfaction in their close encounters.

As Jake, Su-Lin, and Kristi illustrate, communication plays a central role in relationships. When we need help, comfort, or reassurance, communication is the tool that helps us accomplish our goals. Relationships cannot exist unless two people communicate with each other. "Bad" communication is often blamed for problems in relationships, whereas "good" communication is often credited with preserving relationships, although as we will learn throughout this book, communication and its effects on relationships

Relationships:

Ongoing interactions between people that result in interpersonal, affective, and behavioral connections.

Interpersonal communication:

The exchange of nonverbal and/or verbal messages between two people, regardless of the relationship they share (a broader term than *relational communication*).

Relational communication:

A subset of interpersonal communication that focuses on the expression and interpretation of messages within close relationships. Relational communication includes the gamut of interactions from vital relational messages to mundane everyday interactions.

are much more complex than that. In this introductory chapter, we take a close look at what constitutes both communication and relationships. First, however, we provide a brief history of the field of personal relationships. Then we define and discuss three important terms that are central to this book: (1) **relationships**, (2) **interpersonal communication**, and (3) **relational communication**. The chapter ends with principles of interpersonal and relational communication.

THE FIELD OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: A BRIEF HISTORY

People have been curious about their relationships for thousands of years, but the formal study of personal relationships is a relatively recent phenomenon. Today we take the study of personal relationships for granted, but until the latter part of the 20th century the scholarly investigation of relationships was often considered unscientific and a waste of resources. In 1975 Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin publicly criticized two of the finest and earliest relationship researchers, Ellen Berscheid and Elaine Hatfield (formerly Elaine Walster), for their research on love. Proxmire gave the “golden fleece award” for wasteful government spending to the National Science Foundation for supporting Berscheid and Walster’s research on love with an \$84,000 grant. The senator’s objections to “squandering” money on love research were twofold: (1) Scientists could never understand the mystery of love, and (2) even if they did, he didn’t want to hear it and was confident that no one else did either (E. Hatfield, personal communication, August 20, 1999). Months of harassing phone calls and even death threats to Berscheid and Walster followed (E. Hatfield, personal communication, August 20, 1999).

Today most people, including politicians, realize that close relationships are as important to study as earthquakes or nutrition, especially since having good relationships is associated with better mental and physical health (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017; Ryff, Singer, Wing, & Dienberg Love, 2001; S. E. Taylor et al., 2006). People today find social scientific knowledge compatible with personal political and religious beliefs. In fact, some churches conduct premarital workshops and marriage encounters based on relationship research. Bookstores and newsstands are crammed with books and magazines that focus on every aspect of relationships, providing advice (of variable quality) on topics such as the “These Are the Qualities Men *Actually* Look for in Women” (Keong, 2016) and why “My Husband and I Text More Than We Talk—and That’s OK” (K. Wright, 2015), as well as offering “11 Things You Need to Do to Have a Lasting Relationship” (L. Moore, 2016), “20 Body Language Signs That Mean He’s Into You” (Narins, 2015), and “10 Things You Should Never, Ever Say In a Fight With Your Girlfriend or Wife” (Walgren, 2016), just to name some of the books with relationship advice in the popular press. One critical function of scientific research on relationships is to provide checks-and-balances for the popular advice given in the media. Critical consumers can compare the scientific literature to the popular, often inaccurate, advice in magazines, best-selling books, and television shows.

The field of personal relationships is unusual because it is truly interdisciplinary and has the power to impact people’s everyday lives (Duck, 1988). Scholars from disciplines such as communication, social psychology, child development, family studies, sociology, and anthropology are all in the business of studying human relationships. In particular, research in interpersonal communication, social psychology, and other disciplines has contributed to the establishment and evolution of the field of personal relationships.

Contributions of Interpersonal Communication Research

The earliest research in this area dates to the 1950s, but interpersonal communication research began in earnest in the 1960s and 1970s (Andersen, 1982). Previously, communication scholars were preoccupied mainly with public speeches, political rhetoric, and mass communication. In the 1960s scholars realized that most communication takes place in small groups and dyads consisting of close friends, family members, and romantic partners (G. R. Miller, 1976). In the early 1970s, the first books on interpersonal communication emerged (e.g., McCroskey, Larson, & Knapp, 1971). The study of interpersonal communication thus began with a focus on how people communicate in dyads and small groups.

Scholars also realized that interpersonal communication differs based on the type of relationship people share. G. R. Miller and Steinberg (1975) proposed that the defining characteristics of an **interpersonal relationship** are that it is unique, irreplaceable, and requires understanding of the partner's psychological makeup. By contrast, "role relationships," like those with store clerks or tech helpline staff, possess few unique qualities, are replaceable, and are relatively impersonal. These shifts in communication scholarship reflected broader societal changes. The youth movement of the 1960s represented a rebellion against a society thought to be impersonal and manipulative. Sensitivity training, encounter groups, and other personal growth movements of the 1960s and 1970s turned people's attention inward to the dyad and to close relationships.

The evolution of interpersonal communication as a primary emphasis in the communication discipline was an outcome of the recognition that relationships are the primary locus for communication. Scholars also realized that relationships are an inherently communicative phenomenon. It is difficult to imagine how human relationships might exist in the absence of communication. Social interaction is what brings and keeps people together, whether it's through meeting someone in a class, online, or at work. By the 1980s, interpersonal and relational communication research had become increasingly sophisticated and theoretically driven (Andersen, 1982).

Interpersonal relationship: A connection between two people who share repeated interactions over time, can influence one another, and who have unique interaction patterns.

Contributions of Social Psychology

Early research in social psychology laid the groundwork for the scientific investigation of interpersonal relationships, with much of this work focused on social development and personality. From the late 1950s through the mid-1970s, however, social psychologists increasingly began studying interaction patterns related to group and dyadic processes. (For some of the major early works, see Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berscheid & Walster, 1969; Heider, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959.) This movement was not limited to social psychologists in the United States; in Great Britain, Argyle and his associates spent several decades studying aspects of relationships (see Argyle & Dean, 1965; Argyle & Henderson, 1985).

During the mid-20th century, several highly influential books were published. For example, Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) *The Social Psychology of Groups* eventually led to an explosion of research on social exchange processes in groups and dyads, bringing issues such as rewards (the positive outcomes people get from relationships) and reciprocity (the way one person's behavior leads to similar behavior in another) to the forefront. Berscheid and Walster's (1969) *Interpersonal Attraction* also had a major impact on both interpersonal communication research and the study of dyadic behavior in social psychology. This book

focused on emerging relationships between strangers, as did much of the early research in social psychology (see Altman & Taylor, 1973). A short time later, however, relational research began to focus on love, and the study of close relationships began to flourish (see Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Z. Rubin, 1970, 1973). Finally, Altman and Taylor's (1973) *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*, which examined the role of self-disclosure in relationships, helped generate research in communication, relationship development, and relationship disengagement.

The prestigious *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* also included a section on "Interpersonal Processes"; this peer-reviewed journal still publishes some of the best research on relationships. However, until the mid-1980s there were no journals that focused exclusively on relationships. In fact, the first professional conference devoted entirely to interpersonal relationships was held in 1982, again indicating the youthfulness of the field of personal relationships compared to other academic disciplines (see H. H. Kelley, 1986). This conference, called the International Conference on Personal Relationships, was founded and organized by Robin Gilmour and Steve Duck. The conference laid the groundwork for scholars from different disciplines to come together to promote and collaborate on relationship research. Two scholarly associations on relationships were also formed, with these organizations later merging into the International Association for Relationship Research (IARR). Two journals, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships*, also emerged as a result of these efforts.

Roots in Other Disciplines

Disciplines such as family studies, sociology, developmental and child psychology, clinical psychology, humanistic psychology, and anthropology also have made important contributions to the field of personal relationships. By the end of the 20th century, 37% of the research on personal relationships came from social psychologists, another 37% from communication scholars, and much of the rest from sociologists and family studies scholars (Hoobler, 1999). Sociologists often focus on issues such as cultural values, class, religion, secularization, divorce, marriage, gender equality, political attitudes, and generational differences—with an eye toward determining how relationships are embedded within the larger society. Family studies scholars examine relationships from a different lens, looking more at the internal dynamics of relationships between family members, either as a family system or as an interpersonal dyad within the broader family structure (e.g., parent–child or spousal relationships). Family scholars also examine developmental issues, such as determining how relationships within one's family of origin influence later relationships in adulthood.

Personal relationship research draws from these different disciplines, so a level of richness and diversity that is often absent in other fields characterizes the field of personal relationships. It is precisely because scholars in these various disciplines—communication, social psychology, sociology, family studies, and so on—have different theoretical and methodological approaches that the field of personal relationships has been so vital and evolved so quickly (Duck, 1988). Although this book draws on knowledge from various fields, the primary focus is on communication in close relationships, with three central terms: (1) relationships, (2) interpersonal communication, and (3) relational communication (see Highlights for definitions of these terms). Relationships can be broken down into three

general types—role relationships, interpersonal relationships, and close relationships. This book focuses primarily on relationships that fall under the latter two categories or have the potential to be close.

HIGHLIGHTS

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

1. *Relationships:*
 - a. *Role relationships:* Two people who share some degree of behavioral interdependence—although people in such relationships are usually interchangeable and are not psychologically or behaviorally unique. One person in a role relationship can easily replace another.
 - b. *Interpersonal relationships:* Two people who share repeated interactions over time, can influence one another, and have unique interaction patterns.
 - c. *Close relationships:* Two people in an interpersonal relationship characterized by enduring bonds, emotional attachment, personal need fulfillment, and irreplaceability.
2. *Interpersonal communication:* The exchange of nonverbal and verbal messages between people, regardless of the relationship they share.
3. *Relational communication:* A subset of interpersonal communication focused on the expression and interpretation of messages within close relationships. Relational communication includes the gamut of interactions from vital relational messages to mundane everyday interactions.

RELATIONSHIPS

Think about the various people you interact with in a given day. Do you have relationships with all of them or only some of them? With how many of these people do you have close or personal relationships? Defining the term *relationship* can be tricky. When do we cross the line from interacting with someone to having a relationship? And when do we move from having a casual or functional relationship to having a **close relationship**?

General Types of Relationships

Take a moment to think of all the different relationships you have. Now imagine a piece of paper with a circle representing you in the middle of the page. If you draw additional circles that represent each of the people with whom you have a relationship, where would you place those circles in comparison to yourself? You would likely place some individuals nearer to yourself than others based on the closeness you share with each person. How many people would be really close to you, and how many would be near the margins of the paper? Would anyone's circle overlap with yours? Research suggests that among the many relationships most of us have with friends, coworkers, family members, romantic partners, and others,

Close relationship: Two people in an interpersonal relationship characterized by enduring bonds, emotional attachment, and personal need fulfillment.

only a select few of those relationships become truly close. Most of these relationships stay at an interpersonal level, and others may never really progress beyond a role relationship.

Role Relationships

Behavioral interdependence:

One person's behavior affects another person's behavior, beliefs, or emotions, and vice versa. The basic requirement for all relationships.

Role relationship:

Two people who share some degree of behavioral interdependence, although people in such relationships are usually interchangeable and are not psychologically or behaviorally unique.

Mutual influence:

Two people affect one another in meaningful ways. Mutual influence increases as relationships move beyond role relationships to become interpersonal or close.

Unique interaction patterns:

Communicating in ways that reflect a relationship's special history, including shared experiences, inside jokes, and knowledge of private information. Unique interaction patterns help differentiate interpersonal (and close) relationships from role relationships.

According to many relationship scholars, the basic ingredient for having a relationship is that two individuals share some degree of **behavioral interdependence** (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983). This means one person's behavior somehow affects the other person's behavior and vice versa. Based on this definition, we have relationships with a variety of people, including the salesclerk who helps us make a purchase, the waiter who takes our orders and serves us dinner, and the boss we may rarely see but depend on for leadership, direction, and a paycheck. These basic role relationships are not true interpersonal relationships. Rather, **role relationships** are functional or casual and often are temporary; also, people in such relationships are usually interchangeable and not unique. An interpersonal or close relationship with someone requires more than simple behavioral interdependence.

Interpersonal Relationships

In addition to basic behavioral independence, interpersonal relationships require that two individuals influence each other in meaningful ways. This type of **mutual influence** goes beyond basic tasks such as exchanging money for coffee at Starbucks or thanking your hygienist after she cleans your teeth. In interpersonal relationships, influence extends to activities that create connection at a social or emotional level rather than a task level. For example, while helping Jake with his statistics homework, Dave might offer words of encouragement to boost his confidence. After the homework is finished, they may start talking about a political issue and in doing so affect one another's thinking. Knowing that Dave dreads public speaking, Jake may later reciprocate by offering to listen to a speech that Dave is preparing. These tasks take extensive time and effort and include providing emotional support and engaging in self-disclosure rather than just getting something done. Thus, these activities imply that Dave and Jake have moved beyond a simple role relationship.

Interpersonal relationships also have repeated interaction over time. Because they interact with one another frequently, Jake has the time and opportunity to reciprocate by helping Dave, which can strengthen their friendship further. Interactions that are limited in length or frequency rarely develop into interpersonal relationships. Finally, interpersonal relationships are characterized by **unique interaction patterns**. This means that the way Jake communicates with Dave will be different in some ways from how he communicates with other friends. They have a unique relational history, including shared experiences, inside jokes, and knowledge of private information; this history shapes how they communicate with each other.

Close Relationships

Close relationships have all the features of interpersonal relationships plus three more: (1) **emotional attachment**, (2) **need fulfillment**, and (3) **irreplaceability**. In a close relationship, we feel emotionally connected; the relationship is the basis of why we feel happy or sad, proud or disappointed. Similarly, close relational partners fulfill critical interpersonal needs, such as the need to belong to a social group, to feel loved and appreciated, or to care

for and nurture someone. When a relationship is irreplaceable, the other person has a special place in our thoughts and emotions, as well as in our social network. For example, you may have only one first love and one best friend, and there may be one person you feel most comfortable reaching out to in times of crisis.

Of course, distinctions between these three types of relationships are often blurred. Our close relationships contain some of the same features as interpersonal and role relationships. For instance, Kristi's close relationship with her mother is partially defined by her role as a daughter. Behavioral interdependence also characterizes all relationships, but as people move from role to interpersonal to close relationships, interdependence becomes more enduring (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983). Partners can also become interdependent in diverse ways, such as needing each other for emotional support, striving to reach shared goals, and influencing each other's beliefs and attitudes. In role relationships, such as those we have with salesclerks or waiters, behavioral interdependence is temporary and defined by the situation. Need fulfillment is also part of all three relationship types, but the needs that our closest relationships fulfill are more central and personal than the needs other relationships fulfill. It is important to keep in mind that every interaction has the potential for impact. Just because you are engaging with someone else in a particular role (e.g., server) doesn't mean that you each might not say or do something that leaves a lasting impact on the other.

Relationship Categories

Another way to think about relationships is to categorize them based on type. We do this every day; in our ordinary talk, we refer to some relationships as "friendships" and to others as "romances" or "marriages." We introduce someone as our "best friend," "brother-in-law," "wife," and so forth. These categorizations, although simple, help people understand and define the relationships we share. Within the broad category of romantic relationships, there are also many subtypes. Indeed, sometimes partners are unsure about which of these subtypes their relationships fall under, especially if their relationship is not "official." When partners are officially dating, other labels, such as "boyfriend," "girlfriend," and "significant other," come with the designation of being an official couple. But sometimes partners just "have a thing" or end up in an "almost relationship" where they repeatedly talk, flirt, and maybe even spend time together or have sexual activity but never actually date. These types of unclearly defined relationships can be ambiguous, leading to uncertainty (Truscelli & Guerrero, 2019).

When college students think about what constitutes a close relationship, they typically think about dating or romantic relationships. However, as the categories just listed suggest, we live in a network of relationships that includes family members, lovers, acquaintances, coworkers, employers, and so forth. We also have blended relationships, such as having a friend with benefits or a sibling who is also your best friend. Some relationships fit into neat categories such as boyfriend, coworker, wife, or student, but others fit into overlapping categories. As Wilmot (1995) put it, "Relational types are not necessarily mutually exclusive—their boundaries are often fuzzy" (p. 28). Moreover, relationships often move from one category to another, such as when a coworker becomes a friend, a friend becomes a dating partner, or a fraternity brother becomes an employee. In these blended relationships, people can be uncertain about how to behave appropriately, especially if two people define a relationship differently.

Emotional attachment: The feeling in close relationships of being emotionally connected to someone, where the relationship is a primary source of one's emotions.

Need fulfillment: When a partner fulfills critical interpersonal needs, such as the need to belong to a social group, to feel loved and appreciated, or to care for and nurture someone.

Irreplaceability: The perception that a person has a special place in your thoughts and emotions, as well as in your social network, such that no one else can take that person's place. Irreplaceability helps distinguish close relationships from other types of relationships.

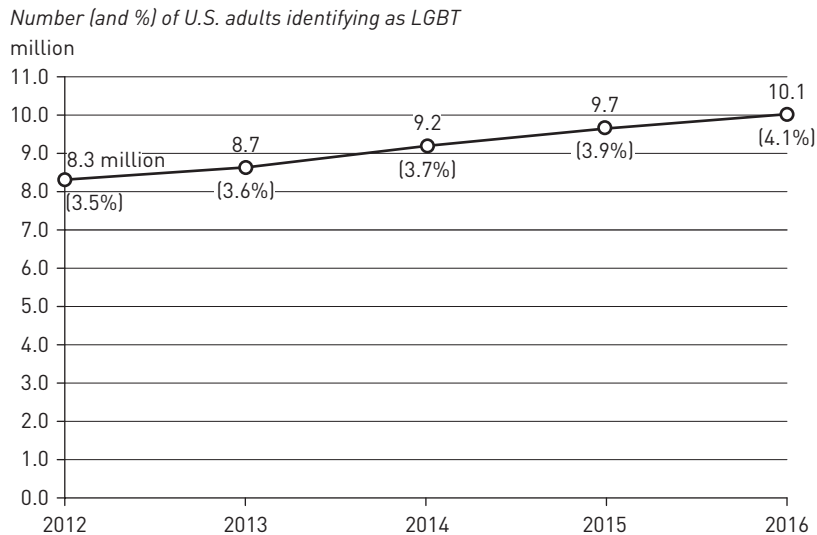
Recognizing Diversity

Of course, no one set of categories could capture the wide range of close relationships. Researchers have studied same-sex romantic couples (Feinstein, McConnell, Dyar, Mustanski, & Newcomb, 2018; M. Huston & Schwartz, 1995), polygamy (Altman & Ginat, 1996), consensual nonmonogamy (E. C. Levine, Herbenick, Martinez, Fu, & Dodge, 2018), cohabitation between unmarried individuals (M. J. Rosenfeld & Roesler, 2019), single-parent families (Royal, Eaton, Smith, Cliette, & Livingston, 2017), stepfamilies (Metts, Schrodt, & Braithwaite, 2017), interracial couples (S. Williams & Andersen, 1998), cross-generational relationships (Fernández-Reino & González-Ferrer, 2018), long-distance relationships (Belus, Pentel, Cohen, Fischer, & Baucom, 2019), and cross-sex friendships (see Chapter 10), among many others.

Yet, the balance of attention given by relationship scientists remains very uneven. For example, we know a lot more about heterosexual romantic relationships than those between members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex, or asexual or allied (LGBTQIA+) communities; we know more about the relationships of individuals (especially college students) in the United States than anywhere else in the world; we know more about “traditional” families (with a husband, wife, and two biological children) than “nontraditional” family types (an especially problematic label since “traditional” families are now fewer in some parts of the world than “nontraditional” ones); and the literature often perpetuates an assumption that marriages are voluntary associations that grow through a series of courtship steps, despite the fact that arranged marriages, or courtship set up by the social network, are the norm for some communities around the world. To elaborate, we will take a closer peak at the first two of these biases in research knowledge. You will notice that progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go for us to know about all relationships as much as we do about heterosexual romantic relationships in the United States.

The Heterosexual Bias

Despite advances, research on the romantic relationships of the LGBTQIA+ community lags far behind research on heterosexual romantic relationships. Peplau and Spalding (2000) reported that of 312 articles published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* from 1980 to 1993, only three examined any aspect of sexual orientation. Similarly, Wood and Duck (1995) noted that most research focused on the relationships of young, white, middle-class heterosexuals. To determine if the situation has improved, we conducted a search of articles published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships* from 2000 to 2016, using the keywords *gay*, *lesbian*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, *same-sex couple*, and *sexual orientation*. This search produced 43 articles that with those keywords, which is a significant improvement compared to the 1980s and early 1990s, but still only about 2% of the 1,700 or so articles published in those two journals during that time. That means that approximately 98% of the knowledge produced in the primary two journals that examine relationship science was focused on relationships among individuals with a heterosexual orientation. Compare that to between 3.5% and 4.5% of the U.S. population, which equates to about 10 million people, who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ (Newport, 2018). Moreover, younger generations are more accepting of diverse sexual and gender identities than are older individuals, so younger individuals are more likely to identify as LGBTQIA+ than are older individuals, as shown in Figure 1.1 (A. Brown, 2017).

FIGURE 1.1 ■ The Number of Americans Identifying as LGBT Is Rising

Source: A. Brown (2017).

While it's important not to overstate the impact that sexual orientation or gender identity has on relationships, Chevrette (2013) argues that this bias in research has blinded scientists to ways of communicating in relationships other than those found in relationships between heterosexuals. She asks researchers to “[shift] focus to populations frequently omitted from dominant conceptions of relationships and families” (p. 184).

THE UNITED STATES AND COLLEGE BIAS Another way in which the research on relationships is biased is that it is primarily about the relationships of white college students in the United States. Soliz and Phillips (2018), in reviewing the literature on family communication, concluded that research knowledge in that domain “is predominantly about Western families (primarily in the United States) and also, very limited in the understanding of family functioning and relationships and processes in ethnic-racial minority families” (p. 6). That analysis is consistent with summaries of the discipline of social psychology. For example, Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) noted that “a randomly selected American undergraduate is more than 4000 times more likely to be a research participant [in social psychology journals] than is a randomly selected person from outside of the West” (p. 63). Finally, an analysis that one of us did of interpersonal communication studies published between 2013 and 2018 in communication journals (W. A. Afifi & Cornejo, in press) showed that white college students in the United States appeared as participants in that research at a rate 20,000% higher than they are represented in the world population. No, that's not a typo. That group represents 0.13% of the world population but made up 27% of the interpersonal communication samples across those six years. More broadly, the U.S. population makes up about 8% of the world population but 69% of the samples. Not a single study was conducted in either Mexico or India, a country of nearly 1.4 billion people.