

Eighth Edition



Intimate Relationships

Rowland S. Miller

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Sam Houston State University

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INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, EIGHTH EDITION

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Preface to the Eighth Edition

Welcome to *Intimate Relationships*! I'm very pleased that you're here. I've been deeply honored by the high regard this book has enjoyed, and I'm privileged to offer you another very thorough update on the remarkable work being done in relationship science. The field is busier and broader than ever, so this edition contains *hundreds* and *hundreds* of citations of 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.

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

So, here's a new edition. It contains whole chapters on key topics that other books barely mention and cites hundreds more studies than other books do. It draws on social psychology, communication studies, family studies, sociology, clinical psychology, neuroscience, demography, 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

This edition contains 686 (!) new references that support new or substantially expanded discussion of topics including

Porn	Technoference
Rituals	Dark Triad traits
Oxytocin	Frequency of sex
Infidelity	Marital paradigms
Phubbing	Sexual satisfaction
Dating apps	Relational cleansing
Dealbreakers	Mismatches in looks
Cohabitation	Sexual growth beliefs
Pupil dilation	The effects of familiarity
Virtual reality	Instrumentality in attraction

What Hasn't Changed

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

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

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

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

Kudos and 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, Jamie Laferrera, Francesca King, Sandy Wille, Erin Guendelsberger, Reshmi Rajeesh, Melisa Seegmiller, David Tietz, Dheeraj Kumar, and Ryan Warczynski. Thanks, y'all.

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



About the Author

Rowland S. Miller is a University Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. He has been teaching a course in Close Relationships for over 30 years, and he won the 2008 Teaching Award from the International Association for Relationship Research (primarily as a result of this book). He's also been recognized as one of the most outstanding college teachers in Texas by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation, which named him a Piper Professor of 2016. He is a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, and 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, and he'd like to have as long with his wonderful wife, Carolyn. He's pictured here with another of his favorite companions, Foster Bear (who isn't his best friend but who, on a good day, comes close).



Courtesy of Rowland S. Miller

The 8th edition of Intimate Relationships is now available online with Connect, McGraw-Hill Education's integrated assignment and assessment platform. Connect also offers SmartBook for the new edition, which is the first adaptive reading experience proven to improve grades and help students study more effectively. All of the title's website and ancillary content is also available through Connect, including:

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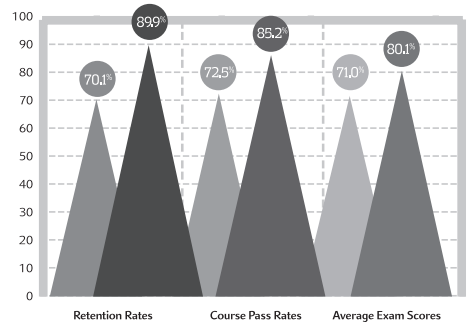
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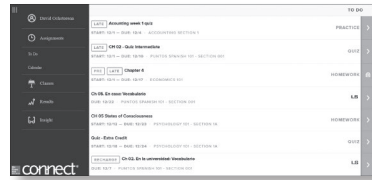
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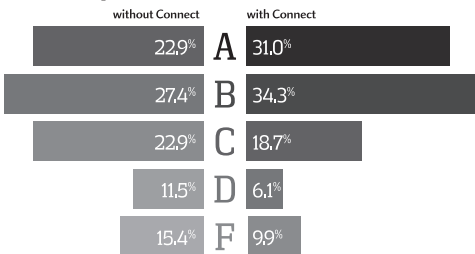
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The Building Blocks of Relationships

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 high-speed access to Netflix and Hulu, video games, plenty of books and magazines, and all the supplies for your favorite hobby. Delightful food and drink are provided, and you have your favorite entertainments at hand. But there's a catch: No one else is around, and you have no phone and no access to the Web. You're completely alone. You have almost everything you want except for other people. Texts, tweets, Instagram, and 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. Day by day, we tend to prefer the time we spend with others to the time we spend alone (Kahneman et al., 2004), 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. It offers a different, more scientific view of relationships than you'll find in magazines or the movies; it's more reasoned, more cautious, and often less

romantic. You'll also find that this is not a how-to manual. 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. Our 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 (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). *Interdependence* between intimates—the extent to which they need and influence each other—is frequent (they often affect each other), strong (they have meaningful impact on each other), diverse (they influence each other in many different ways), and enduring (they influence each other over long periods of time). When relationships are interdependent, one's behavior affects one's partner as well as oneself (Berscheid et al., 2004).

The qualities that make these close ties tolerable are caring, trust, and responsiveness. Intimate partners *care* about each other; they feel more affection for one another than they do for most others. They also *trust* one another, expecting to be treated fairly and honorably (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2015). People expect that no undue harm will result from their intimate relationships, and if it does, they often become wary and reduce the openness and interdependence that characterize closeness (Jones et al., 1997). In contrast, intimacy increases when people believe that their partners understand, respect, and appreciate them, being attentively and

effectively *responsive* to their needs and concerned for their welfare (Winczewski et al., 2016). 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 “him” (or “her”) (Soulsby & Bennett, 2017). In fact, that change in outlook—from “I” to “us”—often signals the subtle but significant moment in a developing relationship when new partners first acknowledge their attachment to each other (Agnew et al., 1998). Indeed, researchers can assess the amount of intimacy in a close relationship by simply asking partners to rate the extent to which they “overlap.” The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (see Figure 1.1) is a straightforward measure of mutuality that does a remarkably good job of distinguishing between intimate and more casual relationships (Aron et al., 2013).

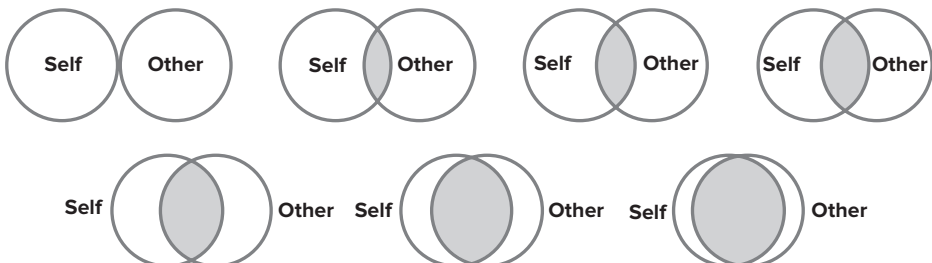
Finally, intimate partners are ordinarily *committed* to their relationships. That is, they expect their partnerships to continue indefinitely, and they invest the time, effort, and resources that are needed to realize that goal. Without such commitment, people who were once very close may find themselves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

None of these components is absolutely required for intimacy to occur, and each may exist when the others are absent. For instance, spouses in a stale, unhappy marriage may be very interdependent, closely coordinating the practical details of their daily lives but living in a psychological vacuum devoid of much affection or responsiveness. Such partners would certainly be more intimate than mere acquaintances are, but they would undoubtedly feel less close to one another than they used to (for instance, when they decided to marry),

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

How intimate is a relationship? Just asking people to pick the picture that portrays a particular partnership does a remarkably good job of assessing the closeness they feel.

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



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

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 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.

So, there's no one kind of intimate relationship. Indeed, a fundamental lesson about relationships is a very simple one: They come in all shapes and sizes. This variety is a source of great complexity, but it 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 (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014), 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. But we only need a few close relationships; when the need to belong is satiated, our drive to form additional relationships is reduced. (Thus, when it comes to relationships, quality is more important than quantity.) It also doesn't matter much *who* our partners are; as long as they provide us stable affection and acceptance, our need can be satisfied. Thus, when an important relationship ends, we are often able to find replacement partners who—though they may be quite different from our previous partners—are nonetheless able to satisfy our need to belong (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

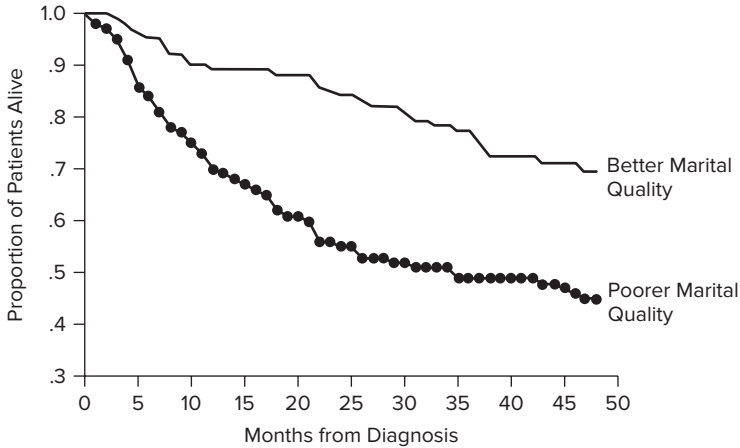
than they do when they're on their own (Loving & Sbarra, 2015). Holding a lover's hand reduces the brain's alarm in response to threatening situations (Coan et al., 2006), and pain seems less potent when one simply looks at a photograph of a loving partner (Master et al., 2009). Wounds even heal faster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

A Point to Ponder

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

Our mental and physical health is also affected by the *quality* of our connections to others (Robles et al., 2014) (see Figure 1.2). Day by day, people who have pleasant interactions with others who care for them are more satisfied with their lives than are those who lack such social contact (Gerstorf et al., 2016), and this is true around the world (Galínha 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 young or old (Allen et al., 2015), gay or straight (Wight et al., 2013), or married or just cohabiting (Kohn & Averett, 2014), our well-being seems to depend on how well we satisfy the need to belong.

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



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

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.

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. 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 Snapchat and AIDS didn't exist—but let's look back at 1965, which may have been around the time that your grandparents were deciding to marry. If they were a typical couple, they would have married in their early twenties, before she was 21 and before he was 23.¹ They probably would not have lived together, or “cohabited,” without being married because almost no one did at that time. And it's also unlikely that they would have had a baby without being married; 95 percent of the children born in the United States in 1965 had parents who were married to each other. Once they settled in, your grandmother probably did not work outside the home—most women didn't—and when her kids were preschoolers, it's quite likely that she stayed home with them all day; most women did. It's also likely that their children—in particular, your mom or dad—grew up in a household in which both of their parents were present at the end of the day.

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 1965, almost everyone (94 percent) married at some point in their lives, but more people remain unmarried today. Demographers now predict that fewer than 80 percent of young adults will ever marry (and that proportion is even lower in Europe [Perelli-Harris & Lyons-Amos, 2015]). Include everyone who is separated, divorced, widowed, or never married, and slightly less than *half* (49 percent) of the adult population of the United States is presently married. That's an all-time low.
- People are waiting longer to marry. On average, a woman is 27 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 (43 percent) reach their mid-30s without marrying. Do you feel sorry for people who are 35 and single? Read the box on p. 9!²
- People routinely live together even when they're not married. Cohabitation was very rare in 1965—only 5 percent of all adults ever did it—but it is now ordinary. Most young adults—nearly three-fourths of them—will at some time live with a lover before they ever marry (Lamidi & Manning, 2016).
- People often have babies even when they're not married. This was an uncommon event in 1965; only 5 percent of the babies born in the United States that

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

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

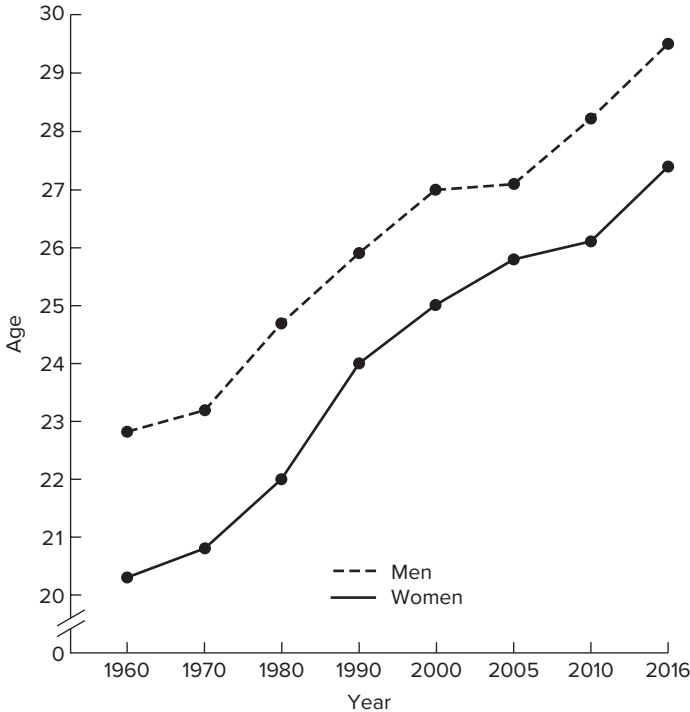


FIGURE 1.3. **Average age of first marriage in the United States.** American men and women are waiting longer to get married than ever before.

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 2015, 40 percent of the babies born in the United States had unmarried mothers (Hamilton et al., 2016). On average, an American mother now has her first child (at age 25.3) before she gets married (at 27.4).

- About one-half of all marriages end in divorce, a failure rate that's *2-and-a-half times* higher than it was when your grandparents married. In recent years, the divorce rate has been slowly decreasing for couples with college degrees—which is probably good news if you're reading this book!—but it remains high and unchanged for people with less education. In 2015 in the United States, there were more than half as many divorces as marriages (Anderson, 2016a). So because not all lasting marriages are happy ones, an American couple getting married this year is more likely to divorce sometime down the road than to live happily ever after.³
- Most preschool children have mothers who work outside the home. In 1965, three-quarters of U.S. mothers stayed home all day when their children were too young to go to school, but only 40 percent of them do so now.

³This 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, 2014).

Intimacy is good for us, and married people live longer than unmarried people do. Middle-aged Americans who have never married are *two-and-half times* more likely than those who are married to die an early death (Siegler et al., 2013). Patterns like these lead some researchers to straightforwardly recommend 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., 2016). Still, we make an obvious mistake if we casually assume that singles are unhealthy, lonely loners. Many 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, 2015). Indeed, on average, singles have *closer* relationships with their parents, siblings, neighbors, and friends than married people do (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016).

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.

These remarkable changes suggest that our shared assumptions about the role that marriage and parenthood will play in our lives have changed substantially in recent years. Once upon a time, everybody got married within a few years of leaving high school and, happy or sad, they tended to stay with their original partners. Pregnant 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 (Hayford et al., 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 (Anderson, 2016b). Such attitudes make cohabitation a