

PART **1**

Introduction to  
the Volume



# The Blossoming of Relationship Science

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Provide  
Abstract &  
Key Words

## Abstract

## Key Words:

There is a well-known parable in which a wealthy man places his money under his servants' supervision while he is away on an extended trip. One servant is given five bags of gold, a second is given two bags of gold, and a third is given one bag of gold, each according to his own ability. The first two servants diligently put the money to work and manage to double the value of gold put under their care. The third servant, however, is afraid of losing any of the money he has and simply buries the gold in the ground. Upon his return, the wealthy man is pleased with the first two servants, but he is unimpressed with the third. Content to give back what was given to him, the third servant fails to take advantage of his assets and take the risks necessary to turn what he was given into something more profitable. One message of this parable is that individuals must make use of their abilities to continue to grow and improve.

How does this story relate to the blossoming of relationship science? For the field of relationship science to remain vibrant and grow, it must continuously utilize its talents and strengths and stride confidently toward new, uncharted territory. Our field can rightfully look back and take pride in the many theoretical and empirical accomplishments that have been made to date, but we must also keep looking forward, anticipating novel and fruitful avenues for future investigation. Contemplating an unknown future can be intimidating, as it was for the servant who simply buried his bag of gold. It requires faith in one's abilities and trust that things will work out well in the end. In a speech to Stanford graduates (2005), Steve Jobs, one of the co-founders of Apple, said "...you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust

in something—your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.” As a field, what are the specific things we should put our trust in so that the dots will connect in the future?

Building for the future requires tools as well as individuals who are trained to use them effectively. The field of relationship science is fortunate to have a very well-stocked toolbox, including both strong and diverse theoretical and methodological approaches for investigating relationship processes (Campbell & Rubin, 2012; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). These tools are being put to good use by a growing number of relationship scholars in diverse disciplines, as evident in the research showcased in this volume. We believe, therefore, that our field can place considerable trust in the powerful theories, methodologies, and talents of current and future scholars to ensure that the dots will continue to connect as our field moves forward.

Moving forward, however, also requires looking forward theoretically. Fortunately for the field of relationship science, many forward-thinking scholars have offered their views regarding the most fruitful future directions for research in our field (see, for example, Berscheid, 1999; Bradbury, 2002; Campbell & Surra, 2012; Finkel & Baumeister, 2010; Holmes, 2000, 2012; Huston, 2000; Kelley et al., 1983; Reis, 2007; Levinger, 1980; Simpson & Gangestad, 2001). The primary goals of this introductory chapter to the *Oxford Handbook of Close Relationships* are to present a distilled version of some of these suggested future directions and to briefly discuss how the chapters in this volume reflect one or more of these major themes.

In Table 1.1, we present eight overarching themes that we believe should guide relationship science in the coming decade and beyond. We identified these themes by reading the forward-looking articles cited above (along with many others) and by looking for additional evidence of them in the many excellent chapters in this volume. Arguably, more themes could be added to Table 1.1, but these eight repeatedly emerge in the literature, and they represent core issues in relationship science. In what follows, we discuss the impetus for each of the eight future-oriented themes, and we highlight the chapters in this volume that discuss or exemplify each theme.

### **Move Away from an Individualistic Perspective toward Interconnections between Partners**

One of the strongest and most consistently mentioned future direction themes for relationship

**Table 1.1 Future Directions in the Field of Close Relationships**

1. Move away from an individualistic perspective toward interconnections between partners
2. Develop theoretical integration within relationship science
3. Develop interdisciplinary connections
4. Build connections among basic researchers, practitioners, and policy makers
5. Develop and test person-by-situation models
6. Examine dual process models of social cognition and relationship processes
7. Study developmental relationship trajectories
8. Focus on relationships and physiological processes

science is the need to adopt a dyadic, rather than an individualistic, perspective on relationship processes. Indeed, the central feature of a close relationship is that individuals influence one another's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time (Kelley et al., 1983). As Berscheid (1999) commented, studying relationship processes requires a shift in how we view the causes of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in relationships; specifically "...relationship science requires a departure from business as usual for psychological researchers. It especially requires surmounting the *individualistic* orientation to human behavior that historically has pervaded the field..." (p. 261). Because a relationship is something that exists between two people, not within each individual, in order to understand the complexities of relationship processes, the patterns of interconnections *between* individuals within a relationship must be measured and modeled.

Movement from an individualistic to a dyadic perspective in the study of relationship processes is slowly progressing. A survey of articles that appeared in five journals that routinely publish relationship-focused research in 1994 and 2002 found that the majority of articles on relationship processes assessed the perspective of only one relationship partner (72.6 percent in 1994, and 73.5 percent in 2002; Kashy, Campbell, & Harris, 2006). Although research involving only one partner in a relationship can provide valuable insights into certain relationship processes, there are major limitations to this approach. Most notably, the way in which partners might influence each other

is confined to how just one partner responds when thinking of his or her partner or relationship at one point in time. The most direct route to studying how partners *jointly* influence each other requires the collection and modeling of data from *both* partners. Relationship scholars must continue to merge the theoretical definition of what constitutes a relationship with the study of dyads (i.e., both partners interacting with one another in important contexts).

Several chapters in this volume adopt a clear dyadic perspective. In their discussion of regulation in intimate relationships, Overall and Simpson address not only why partners are motivated to change one another but also the myriad interpersonal consequences of different regulation attempts. They discuss how expressing dissatisfaction with the current state of one's relationship to one's partner can result in hurt feelings and interpersonal conflict in the short-term but may produce more positive relationship outcomes over time. A key feature of Reis and Clark's chapter on responsiveness in relationships is the dyadic interplay between enacted and perceived responsiveness across time, including the role of perceived responsiveness in relationship development and maintenance. The central theme of interdependence theory, which is the focus of Arriaga's chapter, is that relationship partners tend experience certain patterns of interaction over time that result in unique modes of interpersonal influence. Understanding these patterns as they unfold in a relationship is crucial to understanding how that relationship functions over time.

The chapter by English, Gross, and John on emotion regulation also embraces a dyadic perspective. They argue that emotion regulation has both intrapsychic and interpersonal consequences. How an individual regulates his or her emotions can be influenced by the quality of the relationship, and it can also influence relationship processes both immediately and in the long term. Chen, Boucher, Andersen, and Saribay discuss the relational self—the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral tendencies exhibited toward various significant others. Dyadic processes help to form the relational self, and the nature of the relationship self can also influence interactions with other individuals when it is activated in different social contexts. Finally, Clark and Aargon adopt a dyadic perspective when explicating the core features of communal relationships.

## Develop Theoretical Integration within Relationship Science

Another emerging theme in the relationships field is the dire need to integrate and tie together existing theories and models *within* relationship science. This point has been echoed by many scholars, most recently by Reis (2007) and Holmes (2012). Reis, for example, claims that certain concepts are central, organizing principles in our field. One such candidate is partner responsiveness (see also Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). According to Reis (2007), if our field is to become a more cumulative science, we must identify and study the basic constructs and processes that current theories share in common rather than continuing to treat highly correlated constructs as qualitatively different. The role that partner responsiveness assumes in promoting higher quality relationships is central to all major relationship theories, even though this concept sometimes goes by different names (e.g., social support, felt security, perceived regard, caregiving). The same is also true of attachment anxiety (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), which correlates with and shares striking psychological similarities to both low self-esteem (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006) and rejection sensitivity (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998).

Holmes (2012) has also lamented that far too little integration exists among the major relationship theoretical frameworks, which include evolutionary theory, attachment theory, interdependence theory, and the self-expansion model (see the first section of this volume, Major Theoretical Approaches to Relationships). The constructs and psychological processes that these theories have in common and that make each theory unique must be explicated and studied in a much more systematic and refined manner in the coming years. Although there have been some empirical attempts to combine and test core principles of different theories, especially attachment theory and interdependence theory (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rholes, 2001; Tran & Simpson, 2009), these attempts have been few in number and rather isolated in focus.

Several chapters in this volume make new inroads toward further theoretical integration in our field. This is particularly true of the five chapters in the section, Major Theoretical Approaches to Relationships. Kenrick, Neuberg, and White review several evolutionary principles that bear on close relationships, focusing on how seven fundamental social goals—self-protection, disease avoidance, affiliation, status, mate acquisition, mate

retention, and kin care—shape how people think about, feel toward, and behave in the different types of relationships that characterize human social life. Arriaga presents a new model that integrates fundamental concepts from interdependence theory with recent research findings, demonstrating how situational characteristics and both relationship partners' personal characteristics can combine to affect each partner's perceptions and interaction behaviors in different situations. Focusing on attachment theory, Mikulincer and Shaver review recent research showing how attachment security contributes to interpersonal processes that promote relationship satisfaction and stability during three stages of relationship development—flirtation/dating, relationship consolidation, and relationship maintenance. Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, and Aron explain how self-expansion principles intersect with two other major relationship theories, namely interdependence theory and attachment theory. Cavallo, Murray, and Holmes review research on regulatory risk processes and how people with low versus high self-esteem navigate the pursuit of connectedness versus self-protection goals, both of which are activated in certain interpersonally risky situations. They also discuss how greater integration with the social cognition literature could extend our understanding of risk regulation processes in close relationships.

Several other chapters provide further theoretical integration. Eastwick, for instance, reviews the two meta-theoretical perspectives on culture—transmitted and evoked culture—and discusses the contributions that each meta-theory makes to predictions about assorted cross-cultural phenomena. He then presents a Psychological Model of Transmitted and Evoked Cultural Change, which blends and reconciles these meta-theories. Reis and Clark present an expanded theoretical account of what partner responsiveness is and how it typically operates within close relationships. In doing so, they emphasize conceptual linkages between responsiveness and several closely related constructs in the current relationships literature. Knobloch and Metts tie theories of emotion with people's experiences of emotion in close relationships by discussing four theoretical perspectives on emotion (discrete emotions models, appraisal theories, dimensional models, and prototype approaches) along with two theories (attachment theory and the Emotion-in-Relationships Model). Gaines and Hardin integrate the established literature on interdependence as a property of relationships with the emerging literature on

interdependence as a property of selves. Fincham and Beach merge the gratitude and forgiveness literatures by discussing similarities and differences across conceptual, prototype, theoretical, and empirical domains, identifying the commonalities and points of potential connection between them. And Fehr integrates ideas from assorted perspectives to clarify the nature of different types of love, including how different types of love are expressed in different cultures.

### Develop Interdisciplinary Connections

There have also been numerous calls to develop more extensive and deeper connections with ideas that exist in other fields within the social, behavioral, and cognitive sciences. Berscheid made this point quite eloquently in her seminal “greening of relationship science” *American Psychological Association* award address more than a dozen years ago, published in 1999. Shortly after that address, Simpson and Gangestad (2001) advocated for greater integration between relationship science and principles from the field of evolutionary biology in a special issue of *Personal Relationships*. Most recently, Campbell and Surra (2012) have suggested that if efforts are not made to break down the barriers that divide the major disciplines that study relationship processes (e.g., anthropology, communication, family science, medicine, psychology, sociology), the growth of specialty areas will prosper, but the conceptually broader field of relationship science could contract.

Many chapters in this volume heed this call. The evolutionary-based chapters by Kenrick and his colleagues, Eastwick, Maner and Ackerman, Gangestad and Garver-Apgar, and James and Ellis identify critical connections that can (and should) be made across different disciplines. Reviewing theories and empirical evidence from many fields, Maner and Ackerman describe some of the psychological mechanisms that help people solve the myriad challenges associated with romantic attraction, intrasexual competition, and intersexual conflict. While doing so, they highlight several new lines of research on lower order perceptual processes and psychological and behavioral changes that have been documented across the menstrual cycle in women. In addition to addressing the fundamental question, “What does human female sexuality reveal about human relationships?” Gangestad and Garver-Apgar examine how the existence, frequency, and quality of sex in a relationship affect how partners feel and behave. They accomplish this by reviewing theories,

ideas, and recent findings from various fields in the social and behavioral sciences.

Diamond reviews the vast and multidisciplinary literature on the development and functioning of sexuality in intimate relationships, focusing primarily on the unique dynamics of same-sex sexual bonds. Beckes and Coan address the numerous neurobiological bases of social and interpersonal behavior, focusing on a wide cross-section of work from several different fields. Haydon and Roisman review the conceptual, methodological, and empirical contributions that developmental psychology brings to the study of close relationships. In doing so, they review the social developmental antecedents of romantic relationship functioning in adulthood, focusing on both the unique and overlapping contributions of prior relationships with parents, friends, peers, and romantic partners on later romantic functioning.

### **Build Connections among Basic Researchers, Practitioners, and Policy Makers**

There have also been calls for building stronger connections among basic researchers, practitioners who work with individuals and couples to help or improve their relationships, and policy makers who make laws and decide which programs receive funding (e.g., Berscheid, 1999; Bradbury, 2002; Campbell & Surra, 2012). One compelling example comes from Snow (1998), who suggests that “two cultures” typically exist—artists and scientists (see also Kagan, 2009), with scientists producing the basic research and artists making most of the policy decisions. Even though members of both cultures often focus on the same set of issues, the lack of interconnection between them prevents policy decisions from being fully informed by empirical research. In modern societies, governments craft important public policy on issues relating to marriage (e.g., same-sex marriage, interpersonal violence), family policy (e.g., adoption, poverty, single-parent households), cohabitation (e.g., common-law marriage), and marital dissolution (e.g., How can divorce be prevented? How can the negative effects of divorce on children be minimized?). Each of these issues has been the focus of much empirical research, and relationship science has the potential—in fact the obligation (Berscheid, 1999)—to inform these important policy debates. In between the basic researchers and policy makers are the practitioners, the front-line workers who

can actually use research findings to develop and implement novel interventions.

One excellent example of how theory and basic research can be used to inform interventions and policy is Finkel and Eckhardt’s chapter on interpersonal violence. These authors argue that no coherent theoretical integration of the vast literature on interpersonal partner violence (IPV) currently exists, and they present a novel theoretical integration of the risk factors for IPV (called  $I^3$ , or I-cubed, theory). Given the many interpersonal and societal problems that flow from IPV, along with the fact that policy makers may be able to reduce its prevalence and deal more effectively with its consequences, Finkel and Eckhardt’s theoretical model has considerable practical appeal.

Marital separation and divorce also affect millions of people throughout the world, including not just the partners of dissolved relationships but also their children. Sbarra and Beck’s chapter provides a thorough overview of empirical research that has focused on the history, causes, and consequences of marital divorce and separation. The body of research reviewed in this chapter should be of tremendous value to practitioners and policy makers alike.

### **Develop and Test Person-by-Situation Models**

We also need to develop and test person-by-situation models more regularly than we currently do. This argument has been articulated by many scholars, ranging from Mischel and Shoda (1995), to Kelley et al. (2003), to Holmes (2012). Simpson and Winterheld (2012) recently reviewed several major person-by-situation models of particular importance for understanding close relationship functioning, including Mischel and Shoda’s (1995) Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS), Kelley and Thibaut’s (1978) interdependence theory, and Simpson and Rholes’ (2012) Attachment Diathesis-Stress Process Model, which addresses when different adult attachment orientations should statistically interact with certain types of stressors to affect how romantic partners think, feel, and behave in their relationships (see also Campbell & Marshall, 2011). Following the footsteps of Lewin (1946), each of these major theories claim that one cannot fully comprehend why romantic partners think, feel, and act as they do without knowing who each partner is, the current life situations or events each partner is facing, and how each partner perceives and responds to these situations or events.

Several chapters in this volume adopt a person-by-situation approach, either explicitly or implicitly. This is particularly true of the chapters by Arriaga, Mikulincer and Shaver, Cavallo and colleagues, Knee and Petty, Molden and Winterheld, Ickes and Hodges, McNulty, Lydon and Quinn, and Karney and Neff. Knee and Petty, for example, discuss how destiny and growth beliefs held by each partner should statistically interact with relationship threats and challenges to shape inferences about relationship experiences and how each partner copes with specific relationship events. Molden and Winterheld discuss how two self-regulatory priorities—concerns associated with growth and advancing social connections (*promotion*) and concerns about security and maintaining social connections (*prevention*)—dovetail with different types of situations to influence a variety of relationship outcomes. Ickes and Hodges explore the motivational dynamics of empathic accuracy, specifying different types of threatening situations in which perceivers should try to accurately or *in* accurately infer their relationship partner's private thoughts and feelings.

Adopting a personality perspective, McNulty theorizes about various trait-by-situation interactions, trait-by-trait interactions, and trait-by-partner trait interactions, including how they might affect different relationship outcomes. Lydon and Quinn focus on how relationship-threatening situations, such as the presence of attractive alternative partners or major partner transgressions, statistically interact with each partner's degree of commitment to affect relationship maintenance processes. Finally, Karney and Neff discuss the psychological mechanisms through which stress that is external to relationships influences what happens within them, along with the characteristics of couples that are more versus less susceptible to the effects of stress.

### Examine Dual Process Models of Social Cognition and Relationship Processes

In addition, there have been calls for relationship science to develop and test dual process models of relationship processes (e.g., Holmes, 2000, 2012). Dual process models propose that both explicit and implicit cognitive processes influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in many social contexts (e.g., Gawronski & Payne, 2010). Explicit processes tend to be deliberative in nature, whereas implicit processes tend to be more automatic and associative (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Explicit processes are usually assessed by self-reports, but the

exclusive use of self-reports to assess relationships can be problematic given the numerous limitations of this methodology (e.g., the limits of self-awareness; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Various indirect measures (e.g., the Implicit Association Task, lexical decision tasks) are employed to assess implicit processes.

Several chapters in this volume discuss implicit relationship processes. Banse and Imhoff comprehensively overview the history of implicit relationship processes, such as Freudian approaches and attachment theory, along with modern approaches that assess implicit relationship processes. Finkel and Eckhardt touch on implicit processes when discussing the factors that influence the enactment of interpersonal partner violence, and Fletcher and Kerr discuss implicit processes that may be responsible for positively biased partner perceptions. Haselton and Galperin propose that automatic implicit processes are partly responsible for men and women making predictable errors when judging the sexual or relational intent of prospective mates. And Cavallo, Murray, and Holmes propose that individuals use both automatic (implicit) and controlled (explicit) regulatory processes to maintain a balance between wanting to seek connection with their partners and wanting to avoid rejection.

### Study Developmental Relationship Trajectories

The expectancies, attitudes, and views that people have with regard to different types of relationships (e.g., close friends, romantic partners, children) develop across the life course based in part on how they have been treated by (or perceive they have been treated by) prior partners. All too often, however, relationship scholars focus on small snippets of current partner perceptions or relationship interactions when studying interpersonal processes rather than trying to discern how each partner's current thoughts, feelings, and behavior might have been shaped by interpersonal events that took place much earlier in life (for an exception, see Simpson, Collins, & Salvatore, 2011). Knowing where individuals "have been" can aid in predicting and understanding where they are likely "to head" in their current and future relationships. Many relationship scholars do not have access to longitudinal data sets, but some do, and more investigators are likely to gain access to such data sets in coming years given recent trends at the National Institutes of Health and other major funding agencies worldwide. Relationship scholars must be poised, both theoretically and methodologically, for this eventuality.

A few chapters in this volume offer a tantalizing glimpse of what a deeper understanding of developmental processes and trajectories can offer the field of relationship science. The best examples of this are the chapters in the section, Relationships across Development and Time. Haydon and Roisman, for example, discuss several novel avenues for research on relationships, highlighting areas in which a developmental perspective may advance our knowledge of close relationship processes and outcomes. James and Ellis discuss how life history theory and sexual selection theory, two major theories that address developmental and life-course issues, could be synthesized and used by developmental psychologists and by personality and social psychologists to account for the large variation in human reproductive behavior. Sbarra and Beck review theory and research on marital dissolution, including its history; epidemiological and demographic trends; multifaceted causes, correlates, and consequences; and some emerging themes. They accentuate the importance of adopting a development view of the origins of stable versus unstable marital patterns. Finally, West provides a comprehensive summary of state-of-the-art analyses that can now be used to model developmental change both within individuals and within dyads (couples), focusing on the newest repeated-measures dyadic data analysis methods.

### Focus on Relationships and Physiological Processes

A great deal of empirical evidence now suggests that the presence and quality of social relationships influence assorted physiological processes and health outcomes. In their seminal 1988 paper, House, Landis, and Umberson provided compelling evidence that relationships can and do profoundly influence morbidity and mortality. Since then, relationship researchers have sought to discover the psychological and physiological mechanisms responsible for these powerful associations. Although a reasonable amount of research has focused on relationships and physiological processes, most of it has been conducted by scholars who do not identify themselves as *close relationships* scholars (Loving & Campbell, 2011). Not surprisingly, much of the literature on this topic has appeared in journals that are not usually tracked by close relationships scholars, such as *Psychosomatic Medicine*; *Brain, Behavior and Immunity*; *Hormones and Behavior*; and *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. Relationship scholars must continue to test connections between relationship and physiological processes, but they also need

to read more broadly and integrate their empirical findings with those of other disciplines.

Four chapters in this volume focus on these connections. Loving and Slatcher provide a comprehensive overview of how relationship status and quality influence self-reported health, morbidity, and mortality. Lakey discusses how social support processes in relationships are linked to both mental and physical health. He also evaluates three theoretical approaches to understanding social support processes, including how and why each approach might explain certain links between social support and health. Sbarra and Beck touch on how marital separation and divorce tend to affect health. And Beckes and Coan focus on the neuroscience of relationship processes, discussing how relationship processes are encoded in the brain.

### Conclusion

The eight major themes discussed above anchor and interconnect the thirty-five stellar chapters contained in this volume. Each chapter not only provides an outstanding, up-to-date summary of the major theoretical ideas and empirical findings within the general topic of each chapter but also provides an excellent “roadmap” for future scholars interested in developing and testing new and promising ideas and hypotheses associated with each topic. In fact, one of our primary goals in editing this volume was to ask experts on specific topics to provide particular, concrete suggestions for where research on their topic needs to head in the coming decade. We encourage you—the reader—to set aside time so that you can carefully digest and think about the numerous novel, insightful, and important ideas contained in each of these chapters. If you do, it will be time very well spent.

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