Part I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

Personal Relationships: An Introduction

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In a classic series of studies, Reed Larson and his colleagues (Larson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Graef, 1982) had 179 teenagers and adults carry electronic pagers with them wherever they went for 1 week. Once every 2 hours of their waking day, Larson beeped these individuals, asking them to indicate what they were doing and who, if anyone, was with them. More than 70% of the times they were paged, these individuals were in the presence of other people. Worked out over the course of a lifetime, from age 18 to 65, this means people are likely to spend 203,585 hours in the presence of others. As far back as Aristotle, humans have been recognized as social animals. Obviously, personal relationships are a salient and important aspect of our lives.

What precisely do we mean when we refer to personal relationships? Two classic definitions that specify the domain of this volume are as follows:

> *Two people are in a relationship with one another if they impact on each other, if they are interdependent in the sense that a change in one person causes a change in the other and vice versa. (Kelley et al., 1983)*

> *A relationship involves a series of interactions between two individuals known to each other. Relationships involve behavioural, cognitive, and affective (or emotional) aspects. Formal relationships are distinct from personal relationships. Relationships in which most of the behaviour of the participants is determined by their position in society, where they do not rely on knowledge of each other, are role or formal relationships. (Hinde, 1979)*

Personal relationships, in short, have a holistic quality. They are more than isolated interactive moments. They are more than highly scripted role-relations. Personal relationships include a range of relationships, including, but not exclusive to our most intimate relationships.

There are several reasons why personal relationships are important and why they are studied. When people are asked about what makes their lives meaningful, what contributes to their happiness, and what they value, they frequently identify close relationships. People have a pervasive, nearly universal need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Research suggests that we are eager

to form new bonds but dislike breaking them. Similarly, we devote considerable cognitive processing to interpersonal interactions and relationships (Fletcher, Overall, & Friesen, this volume). Finally, relationships are a key to our well-being. A plethora of evidence shows that close relationships are indeed vital to various indicators of well-being, including happiness, mental health, physical health, and even longevity (Berkman, 1995; Myers, 1999). As the slogan for a California public service program proclaims, "friends are good medicine." Undoubtedly, there are exceptions to these generalizations, and it is difficult to know for sure whether relationships are the cause of these outcomes. Nonetheless, the association of sociability with well-being cuts across time, cultures, measures of sociability, and indicators of well-being, and the association is a statistically strong one (Sarason & Sarason, ch. 23, this volume). In the health domain, cigarette smoking is one of the most widely studied and clearest hazards to health and longevity. Research demonstrates that sociability has as strong, probably even a stronger, association with well-being than does smoking. Stop smoking and have successful friendships: You'll live a long, happy life. Indeed one can argue that without relationships and social groups, humans would not be able to reproduce and survive (Reis, Collins, & Bersheid, 2000). The advances humans have made depend heavily on collective action.

Of course, relationships are not always positive experiences. There is a dark side to close relationships (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998). Personal relationships can serve as a context for a variety of negative emotions, including jealousy (Guerrero & Anderson, 1998) and hurt (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998). Furthermore, people can experience psychological (Straus & Field, 2003) or physical abuse (Johnson, this volume) at the hands of a loved one. Yet even when problematic, relationships are significant to us.

General Description

Because relationships are so central to people's lives, they have garnered the attention of researchers and theorists from a number of disciplines. Indeed, scholars have devoted a great deal of time and effort to understanding the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of close, interpersonal relationships.

The purpose of the *Handbook of Personal Relationships* is to present a synthesis of cutting-edge research and theory. This book integrates the varying perspectives and issues addressed by those who study how people relate to one another. To capture the breadth and depth of the literature in this area, the work of scholars from a variety of disciplines – including several subfields of psychology (e.g., social, developmental, personality, clinical), communication, family studies, and sociology – is highlighted.

The first section of the book comprises the current introduction. Following this editorial introduction, the second section offers a foundation for studying personal relationships. The history of the field is examined, as are the theories most frequently employed by researchers to explain processes associated with the development, maintenance, and decline of personal relationships. In this section of the book, there is an emphasis on introducing and comparing dominant theories (e.g., social exchange, attachment, evolutionary); the role of various theories in generating research is noted throughout the volume. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are discussed in terms of their unique applications and contributions to the relevant literature. In addition, the second section illuminates the ways relationships have been divided into types. The concerns raised in this section provide a foundation for examining personal relationships because they set the baseline for the ways that researchers observe, explain, and evaluate relationships.

The third section focuses on research and theory explicating the development of personal relationships, from when people meet until when relationships end. Chapters focus

on issues such as courtship, marriage, and divorce. Although the developmental course of relationships may be viewed as somewhat linear, much of the research covered in this section points to the complex, multifaceted nature of relationship development.

The fourth section focuses on relationships across the life span. The nature and functions of relationships vary depending, in part, on the age of relational partners. Children have different ways of relating and they develop relationships for different reasons than do adolescents or adults. People dealing with the tasks of middle age maintain different sorts of relationships than do the elderly. Chapters in this section describe some of the special concerns reflected in personal relationships in various life stages.

In the fifth section, individual differences that influence personal relationships are examined. People approach and enter relationships with some relatively stable characteristics. Whether those characteristics involve personality traits, attachment styles, biological sex, sexual orientations, or mental health, they affect the developmental course of people's relationships. The material covered in this section describes the effects of individual differences on personal relationships.

The sixth and seventh sections present relationship processes. In the sixth section, communication, cognition, emotion, and psychophysiology are discussed. These are fundamental processes that influence, and are influenced by, relationships as well as other arenas of life. The seventh section deals with processes that involve interpersonal interaction. These include disclosure, social support, conflict, and sexual behavior.

Over the past dozen years, researchers have focused attention on the problematic aspects of personal relationships. People involved in close relationships experience stress because of circumstances that occur outside their relationship as well as events inside the relationship that the partners themselves instigate. Relational partners sometimes feel jealous or lonely. They often lie to each other. They may engage in extradyadic liaisons and may even physically or psychologically abuse each other. Some relational threats are common and their successful navigation actually may add to partners' confidence in their union. Other threats not only damage the relationship, they may jeopardize the physical and psychological well-being of one or both partners. The eighth section of the *Handbook* covers several of the more widely studied threats to personal relationships.

The ninth section examines the major qualities that suggest how well relationships are doing. The study of relational satisfaction began in the 1920s and more recently has been augmented by investigations of love, commitment, and intimacy. This section addresses the antecedents and dynamics associated with these phenomena as well as the challenges that researchers face as they attempt to conceptualize and operationalize the qualities of personal relationships.

Of course, relationships do not happen in a vacuum. They are influenced by physical, social, and cultural contexts. The tenth section deals with some of the factors outside individuals and relationships that affect the bonds between partners. This section includes classic (e.g., social networks) as well as leading-edge topics (e.g., computer-mediated relationships).

Although the focus of much of the research deals with the initiation and establishment of relationships, relationships actually persist for a long time, sometimes with problems. The final section of the volume covers how people sustain their relationships over time and how therapists can intervene to repair problematic relationships.

To ensure consistency across the volume in terms of scope and coverage, authors were guided in the following ways. First and foremost, they were asked to provide an integrative synthesis of existing theory and research, featuring classic and cutting-edge references where appropriate. Authors were encouraged to provide an historical or conceptual framework for organizing the literature and to make note of any important conceptual shifts. Second, they were instructed to comment on basic paradigms

and research issues and to evaluate critically the area's methods. Third, authors were asked to provide judicious coverage of, and endeavor to resolve, any conflicts in the literature. Fourth, although this volume is primarily retrospective, authors were asked to signal directions for future research.

Authors

The individuals who contributed to the *Handbook* were selected as authors because they are recognized for the outstanding theoretical and empirical contributions they have made to the study of personal relationships. The contributors, in short, are distinguished, internationally known scholars. They herald from a variety of disciplines and approach personal relationships from a number of perspectives. They focus on topics ranging from the beginning to the ending of relationships, from micro to macro forces, and from the problematic to the sublime. Readers will find that the authors are adroit at expressing themselves in a scholarly yet readable fashion

Audience

Because the contributors offer sophisticated, new perspectives on extant literature as well as important theoretical and methodological recommendations for future research, the *Handbook* is an important volume for individual researchers and theorists to have on their shelves. Graduate students in social psychology, communication, family studies, sociology, and clinical psychology also will need to know the material published in this book. They may use the volume as a text in one of their courses or as an advanced introduction to the study of close relationships. Additionally, practitioners will be served by the volume. They will find that the theory and research presented provides a foundation for understanding relationships seminal to their therapeutic work with individuals confronting relationship issues, couples, and families.

Readers who are familiar with the literature on personal relationship will note that the current volume is one of three published in the last decade that summarizes research on personal relationships. In part, this is because of the speed with which the field has advanced. One of the other two books, also titled the *Handbook of Personal Relationships,* was edited by Steve Duck (1997) and published by Wiley. The other, *Close Relationships: A Sourcebook*, was edited by Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (2000) and was published by Sage. Both of these volumes serve as benchmarks for the field. The Duck *Handbook* conceives of the field of personal relationships as relatively new, and, as a consequence, its chapters provide researchers with compelling directions for future study. The Hendrick and Hendrick *Sourcebook* offers what they term a "panoramic view of close relationships research" (p. xxii); it provides an important overview of the literature. The current *Handbook* was conceived as a complement and an update to both of the prior volumes. It characterizes the field as relatively mature and highlights the established body of theory and research that has been generated over the past 3 decades. It offers readers a relatively detailed, sophisticated synthesis of existing literature. It is our hope that the insights and commentaries offered by the authors in *Handbook of Personal Relationships* will do as much to generate research and to advance the field as did the prior two volumes.

We believe social-science knowledge is best when it can be given away. If this volume is to succeed, it must engage you and leave you, the reader, wiser. Whether it is for your personal life, a course, your professional practice, or for conducting the next generation of research, the chapters should leave you better informed about, and with better tools for understanding, close relationships. We hope that you will develop an intimate relation with the contributors' ideas and join with us in helping to disseminate, apply, or empirically advance their wisdom.

Acknowledgments

We are indebted to many people for the important contributions they have made to this volume. This project came to fruition because of the work of a group of outstanding authors. The time, expertise, and careful thought that the authors willingly dedicated to writing chapters made this *Handbook* possible. We also are grateful to our editor, Philip Laughlin, who had the vision for this project. His willingness to respond to what must have seemed like an infinite number of questions, his patience, and his sense of humor made our work a pleasure.

To our universities we owe a debt of gratitude for their good libraries, for their computer systems, and for providing an environment that facilitates productivity. The project was started when Dan spent a very pleasant semester as a sabbatical visitor with the University of Texas Human Development and Family Sciences program. We also want to thank low-cost long-distance calling services for allowing us to work together on the phone for long periods without concern about telephone bills.

Being editors of a book about relationships, we are especially sensitive to how relationships enhance our lives and how there are trade-offs between work and family. We would like to thank our partners, John Daly and Lorrie Brubacher, for their support and understanding during the 3-year journey that the book has required. We also thank Abigail for reminding us, as young children will do, that relationships should come first.

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Part II

FOUNDATIONS FOR STUDYING RELATIONSHIPS

CHAPTER 2

The Seven Seas of the Study of Personal Relationships: From "The Thousand Islands" to Interconnected Waterways

Daniel Perlman
Steve Duck

In 1985, we wrote a projective overview of the field of personal relationships, describing it as a thousand islands of separate research traditions and practices that were in the process of coming together (Duck & Perlman, 1985). We now look out on a research world 20 years later, and we notice the connections – the oceans – rather than the separations. This chapter attempts historical overview of these developments and of previous tides and currents that led the research scholarship to today's position.

Whereas any historians – of an academic field or anything else – are necessarily selective and so offer only one perspective on history, the fact that we start from two or three or four disciplines (D. P. from social psychology and family studies; S. D. from communication studies and social psychology) ought to broaden our vision. Quite frankly, it has led to some friendly disputes between us about the placement of emphasis or precedence for ideas. We are aware, both in the abstract and through concrete experience, then, that there are differences in the points of view of researchers looking at the last 20 years, let alone the last century of research on personal relationships. Readers, too, especially those who have labored in the field during the last 20 years, may have their own favorite ways of looking at the progress that has been made, as well as regrets about the roads less traveled. These observations therefore place us in an interesting dualistic relationship to the study of personal relationships and those who conduct it. First, our personal perspectives are individual and yet share some common space; second, our interpersonal attempts to create consensus about the venture reflect what happens when two people enter a friendship or romance. The trick is to end up with both sides agreeing more than they disagree.

In this chapter, we discuss 20th century trends in the study of personal relationships. We do this using the period in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a reference point. At that time, most work that is identifiably "relational" was done by social psychologists, sociologists, and family scientists, with the clearest lead being taken by social psychologists of attraction (Levinger, Newcomb) and scholars concerned with trait

complementarily (e.g., sociologist Robert Winch). Social psychologists were focused on experimental investigations of interpersonal attraction (e.g., the question of liking), whereas the other two disciplines tended to be most interested in demographic and normative–performative aspects of relationships (Tharp, 1963, and Barry, 1970, provide reviews of the psychological literature done in this era and Broderick, 1970, instituted the important tradition of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*'s decade review series). By the turn of the millennium, a variety of scholars was exploring the ways in which real-life relationships were developed, maintained, dissolved, carried on in the networks of other relationship in which they occurred naturally, and had a bearing on such other life issues as health (see Loving, Heffner, & Kiecolt-Glaser, this volume), coping with stress (Cutrona & Gardner, this volume), drug and tobacco usage (e.g., Farrell & White, 1998), and successful parenting (Kuczynski, 2003).

Against this broad canvas, we begin with a short early history of the field before the 1960s, discuss the 1960s and 1970s, and then cover trends since that time. Our analysis focuses on key contributors to the field, the methods of research being used, the dominant theoretical perspectives, and the substantive concerns being addressed. As the reader will see, however, the decision to select what are the key issues can be differently decided in different disciplines: Whereas a psychologist emphasizes inner activity, a communication researcher emphasizes interaction, a sociologist emphasizes embeddedness within a larger system, and a developmentalist the progressions made during the life span. We mention this point several times in review, because an interdisciplinary field has to be just that – one with its own developing sense of selfhood, and one that attempts not to privilege one type of research focus over others.

Our goal in this chapter is to provide a general historical picture. Many of the other authors in this volume highlight key developments and contributors of significance to more narrowly defined areas of work.

As part of the analysis, we report citation data and empirical analyses of the publication literature. To some extent, this grounds the analysis in objective evidence, yet any commentary on trends is necessarily highly selective and subjective. For example, citation indices are a measure of a person's visibility but require the assumption that every author reads and duly cites relevant work from all suitable places. Where authors do not read or research outside their own disciplinary boundaries, then these indices reflect the tendency to credit one's own. Because it is our major case that interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity (Acitelli, 1995) have evolved in the last 20 to 25 years, some of the sliding of previously prominent authors in the index lists can be attributed to the "dilution" effect produced by a newer and more diverse group of citing authors who cite, as classic work, different sorts of sources. Tracking the dilution effect is difficult, but the field has now moved to the point where collaboration among and the contribution of various disciplines is being recognized and folded into the development of the field.

With scholars from several disciplines contributing to the study of relationships and sharing elements of a common history of ideas, they often run in parallel without much crossover. To some extent, these scholars communicated and influenced one another, but the pressures to gain tenure in an existing discipline, using its familiar outlets and sources, tended to isolate people within their own intellectual traditions and emphases in practice, but without formally ruling out possible connectedness. Perhaps such pressures still exist to some extent. Yet as we noted in 1985 (Duck & Perlman, 1985), one of the great excitements in the early 1980s was the dawning recognition of the possibility that connectedness could be soundly established between different traditions.

This chapter focuses on what is currently called the area of close or personal relationships, the central concern for members of the International Association for Relationship Research (IARR) formed from the amalgamation of the previous International

Society for the Study of Personal Relationships (ISSPR) and the International Network on Personal Relationships (INPR). Our approach is linked most tightly with the disciplines of psychology and communication, especially in North America. This complements the current state of relationships field; Hoobler (1999) recently found that 85% of senior authors of articles in the field's two leading journals (*Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships*) between 1989 and 1998 were either psychologists (62%) or communication scholars (23%). Increasingly, psychologists cite communication (Acitelli, 1995) and each discipline adapts some of its own traditions by acknowledging the values and research techniques of other disciplines, such as health communication and biology. If this chapter had been written by scholars from a different background (e.g., a family scientist, a social gerontologist or a sociologist), the analysis would undoubtedly refer to a somewhat different body of literature and reach somewhat different conclusions. Adams (1988), Bahr (1991), and Nye (1988), for example, provided analyses that complement this one, but they focus on family relationships (rather than close relationships more generally) and work from a family sociology or family studies perspective. Similarly, Cooper and Sheldon (2002) presented a content-analytically based overview of research since the 1930s on romantic relationships done by personality psychologists. These other disciplines and specialties within psychology mark out the progress of the field in different ways (Duck, Acitelli, & Nicholson, 2000), but one general truth is that each discipline has its heroes in the development of the field.

The History of Research on Close Relationships Before the 1960s

Philosophical Beginnings

More than 2,300 years ago, Aristotle wrote:

> *One person is a friend to another if he is friendly to the other and the other is friendly to him in return. . . . People are also friends if the same things are good and bad for them, or if they are friends to the same people and enemies to the same people. . . . We are also friendly to those who have benefited us. . . . Also to those who are friends of our friends and those who are friendly to the people to whom we ourselves are friendly. (Aristotle, 330 B.C. trans. 1991, pp. 72–73)*

Aristotle's writings, along with other materials from the same general period, testify that concern with relationships dates back a long time. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* and his treatise on *Rhetoric*, Aristotle addressed a number of topics, including the definition and types of friendship, the functions of friendship, the role of friendship in maintaining a stable society, who we select as friends, the role of individual differences in our friendships, the breakdown of relationships, and so on. Other Greek philosophers dealt with shyness, jealousy, love, bereavement, and the like. Although consideration of relationships is not new, it remains true that empirical testing and development of an understanding of factors that are important in relationships has grown enormously in the last two decades.

The philosophical approach that Aristotle used dominated the analysis of close relationships until the late 1880s (see Reisman, 1979, ch. 2, and Blieszner & Adams, 1992, ch. 2, for brief histories of the analysis of friendship; see Pakaluk, 1991, for selected writings). In the late 1880s and early 1900s, founding figures in the modern social sciences began developing their viewpoints. Their ideas had implications for our understanding of relationships. For example, Freud wrote on the role of parent–child relationships in personality development (see Hall & Lindzey, 1957, ch. 2). His analysis has led some to believe that we transfer onto adult relationships feelings and expectations based on childhood experiences and may seek a marital partner similar to our opposite-sex parent. James (1981) contended that the self-concept is defined in our relationships with others. Durkheim (1897/1963) was concerned with social organization. In what was one of his most