Introduction: Why Was This Book Written?

This book reports the findings of a cross-cultural study to update and extend the groundbreaking Boston Couples Study and other research on intimate relationships. It develops comprehensive models of relationship dynamics and makes explicit comparisons across relationship types and cultural regions, which are missing in the research literature. It is written in a style appropriate for college students, researchers, therapists, and others.

WHY WAS THIS STUDY CONDUCTED?

In 1972, Zick Rubin, Anne Peplau, and I began a pioneering longitudinal study of college-age dating couples, known as the Boston Couples Study. This research has been cited in numerous textbooks and journal articles. Our first of many articles (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976) has been cited more 750 times (Google Scholar, 2018).

In the four decades that I have been lecturing about the Boston Couples Study, my students have wondered: What about our generation? Do the findings apply to us? So I decided to update and extend the Boston Couples Study by conducting in collaboration with colleagues around the world an online study of intimate relationships that is cross-cultural and includes adults of all ages, with either opposite-sex or same-sex partners who are either unmarried or married.

This book presents the first published findings from this large and inclusive new study. In updating the Boston Couples Study, the book cites key findings of that pioneering study that have previously been scattered across many journal articles, book chapters, and conference presentations (see Boston Couples Study Publications). It also reports the results of a thirty-eight-year follow-up of some participants in the Boston Couples Study who participated in the new online study of intimate relationships, as well as unpublished results from the Boston Couples Study. In addition, the book

reports unique findings about gay marriages, and additional findings about parent-choice versus own-choice marriages.

HOW DOES THE BOOK EXTEND THE RESEARCH LITERATURE?

Although there has been a great deal of research on close relationships, less is known about cross-cultural similarities or differences in romantic or sexual relationships. Recent books have reviewed intimate relationships (e.g., Bradbury & Karney, 2013; Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2013; Miller, 2017; Vangelisti & Perlman, 2018). One book focuses on stages of the life cycle (Khaleque, 2018) and cites some cross-cultural research. But none makes comprehensive comparisons across cultures.

Other textbooks have examined ethnic families in the United States (e.g., Coltrane & Adams, 2013; Knox & Schacht, 2015; Lamanna, Riedmann, & Stewart, 2014) and around the world (Ingoldsby & Smith, 2006; Queen, Habenstein, & Adams, 1961). A recent journal issue has explored interethnic marriages in the United States (Gaines, Clark, & Affful, 2015), and two online articles have discussed family variations and changes across cultures (Georgas, 2003; Kagitchibasi, 2002). Two edited volumes have discussed mate selection in various cultures, but neither makes explicit cross-cultural comparisons (Hamon & Ingoldsby, 2003; Scott & Blair, 2017). And an edited volume reviews research on marriage in selected cultures from an evolutionary psychology perspective (Weisfeld, Weisfeld, & Dillon, 2018).

There are a few older books and book chapters on relationships and culture (Dion & Dion, 1997; Gaines, 1997; Goodwin, 1999), as well as a few more recent book chapters (Gaines & Hardin, 2013; Gaines & Ketay, 2013; Heine, 2016). Also a few books deal with specific aspects of relationships and culture (Agnew, 2016; Goodwin, 2008; Hatfield & Rapson, 2005; Rosenblatt & Weiling, 2015); there are two books on relationships written in Mexico (Diaz-Loving & Sanchez Aragon, 2004, 2010), and a book on intermarriage (Singla, 2015).

In addition, a classic study compares same-sex and opposite-sex cohabiting couples in the United States (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), and there are two reviews of same-sex couples (Hunter, 2012; Diamond & Blair, 2018). Other books have explored the lives of persons who remain unmarried (DePaulo, 2006; Stein, 1981).

But currently, no other contemporary book exists that develops comprehensive models of relationship dynamics, with comparisons across cultures and across various types of romantic or sexual relationships.

FOR WHOM WAS THIS BOOK WRITTEN?

This book was written to be a supplemental textbook for undergraduate and graduate students studying social relationships, as well as for researchers and

therapists. Hence it includes many references, measures, and statistical results. Key concepts are highlighted in bold when they are introduced, and measures have initial letters capitalized to distinguish them from concepts. For example, **relationship commitment** refers to the concept when it is introduced, while Relationship Commitment refers to the measure of it used throughout this book.

It is very important to study Chapter 1, to know the tools for thinking needed to understand the remainder of this book. These include conceptual tools for understanding the comparisons made, and statistical tools for understanding the results. But since the subject of the book is intrinsically interesting to almost anyone, the book attempts to explain these tools and the study in a way that will be understandable to other readers.

Readers are encouraged to think about each of the book's questions, and how they might apply to themselves. Participants in the Boston Couples Study reported thinking and talking about the questions in that study, which served as a form of couples counseling (Rubin & Mitchell, 1976). The first webpage (https://cf.whittier.edu/chill/ir) of this new online study described it as a way for participants to evaluate their intimate relationships and their well-being. I hope that reading this book, and thinking about its questions, will do the same. The overall goal of the study and the book is to provide insights that will help people have satisfying intimate relationships and meaningful lives.

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How Do We Know What Matters in Intimate Relationships?

This book reports the results of a comprehensive cross-cultural study of intimate relationships. The study was designed to do the following:

- Update the findings of the Boston Couples Study and other research.
- Develop comprehensive models that combine the findings.
- Compare the models across relationship types and cultures.

Previous books have generally reported research conducted in one culture, or an anthology of separate studies in a few ethnicities or cultures without comprehensive comparisons among them.

To understand the present study, it is important to have certain tools for thinking. These include **conceptual tools**, which consist of the concepts used to categorize study participants for comparisons, as well as theoretical concepts for explaining which factors were measured and why they matter. They also include **statistical tools** for making comparisons and determining how much the factors matter. Statistical tools are used to reveal the results throughout this book. This chapter reviews these conceptual and statistical tools to facilitate the reader's understanding of this study, as well as other research on intimate relationships.

WHAT KINDS OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS ARE FOCUSED ON IN THIS BOOK?

There are various ways of being intimate, including physical (touching, hugging, kissing, sexual), emotional (sharing feelings), cognitive (sharing thoughts), and experiential (sharing activities), as noted by Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2004). There are also many kinds of intimate relationships, including friendships, dating, marriage, and other relationships among family members or non-relatives. This book focuses primarily on dating, marriage, and other romantic or sexual relationships.

Sociologists have a long tradition of conducting research on marriage (e.g., Bossard, 1932; Burgess, Wallin, & Schultz, 1954; Winch & Goodman, 1968). Early research by psychologists examined interpersonal attraction (Berscheid & Walster, 1969; Rubin, 1973), and there was theorizing about what happens between initial attraction and marriage (Murstein, 1976).

The Boston Couples Study was one of the first to actually study dating relationships, following opposite-sex couples in college over time to see who stayed together or broke up (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976) and who eventually married (Hill & Peplau, 1998), as well as other aspects of their relationships (see Boston Couples Study Publications, p. 221 in this book). Many other studies of close relationships soon followed (Hendrick, 1989; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1983, 2000; Kelley et al., 1983; Perlman, Duck, & Hengstebeck, 2018).

HOW IS WHAT MATTERS DETERMINED IN THE PRESENT STUDY?

The present study investigates what matters using a questionnaire that has been online at https://cf.whittier.edu/chill/ir for participation in the study and is also available in pdf format at www.cambridge.org/0781107196629. The questions measure factors found to be important in the Boston Couples Study and other research. To determine whether these factors matter in this extended study, data analyses examine whether they predict **having a current partner**, and whether they predict **relationship satisfaction** and **relationship commitment.** Implications for well-being are also explored.

Previous research has studied people who are in an on-going intimate relationship, and people who are single, but little is known about comparisons between those who do or do not have a current partner. One goal of the present study is to develop a comprehensive model of factors that predict having a current partner, as indicated in Figure 1.1. For example, having a current partner might be predicted by one's desire to have a partner, one's confidence in approaching potential partners, one's readiness for a committed relationship, and one's opportunities to find a partner.

Prior research has examined factors that predict relationship satisfaction, which predicts relationship commitment (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012). The present study expands this by exploring to what extent various factors predict relationship commitment indirectly through relationship satisfaction, and to what extent they predict relationship commitment directly, independent of relationship satisfaction. In other words, what factors predict commitment to a relationship whether relationship satisfaction is high or low? This is illustrated in Figure 1.2. For example, relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment might be predicted by characteristics of the

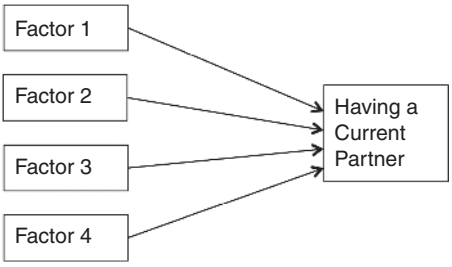

FIGURE 1.1 *Comprehensive Partner Model* being developed

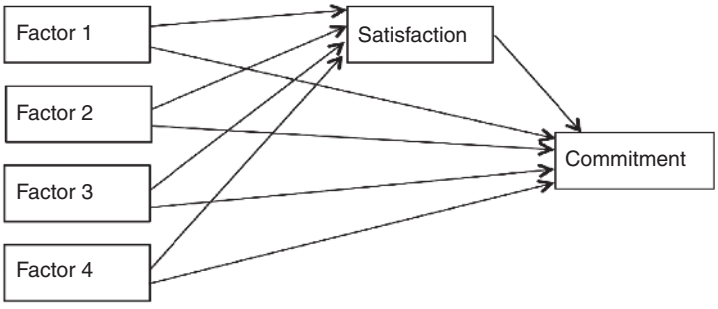

FIGURE 1.2 *Comprehensive Commitment Model* being developed

partner, feelings of love, equal involvement in the relationship, and positive ways of coping with conflict.

Studies comparing cultures, and studies comparing relationship types, have generally focused on differences in the **average levels** of various factors. For example, Sorokowski et al. (2017) focus on the average levels of marital satisfaction in various countries. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) examine which partner has more power in opposite-sex couples and in same-sex couples. Studies of factors that **predict** relationship commitment have generally focused on one relationship type in one culture. For example, using data from the Boston Couples Study, Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) tested Rusbult's Investment Model that commitment is a function of attraction to one's partner, investment in the relationship, and the lack of alternatives.

The present study is unique in comparing predictions of having a current partner and predictions of relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment across various relationship types and various cultural regions. The goal is to see whether the same factors make the same predictions, in spite of any differences in the average levels of those factors. For example, does the degree of love predict the degree of commitment, whether the degrees of love and commitment are low or high, across relationship types and cultural regions?

Hence, the distinction between predictions of factors and average levels of factors is crucial for understanding the findings reported in this book. This distinction is illustrated later in this chapter after statistical tools are introduced.

WHAT FACTORS ARE EXAMINED IN EACH CHAPTER OF THE BOOK?

Chapter 2 asks why people seek intimate relationships. Chapter 3 asks how partners are selected. Chapter 4 asks what is love and how is intimacy expressed. Chapter 5 asks about sexual attitudes and behaviors. Chapter 6 asks about the dynamics of exchange and power. Chapter 7 asks how couples cope with conflict. Chapter 8 asks how external factors matter in intimate relationships. Chapter 9 asks how intimate relationships relate to well-being.

Chapter 10 summarizes the predictions from previous chapters and combines them into a *Comprehensive Partner Model* and a *Comprehensive Commitment Model*. Chapter 11 explores how much the levels of factors vary. Chapter 12 discusses limitations of the study, and implications of the findings for self-reflection, couples' counseling, and well-being. Chapter 13 asks how the findings might apply to other social relationships and proposes a *Comprehensive Relationship Model.* The Epilogue identifies future research needed using the statistical tools and conceptual tools described in this book.

Included in most chapters are SPOTLIGHTS contributed by collaborators that focus on particular factors, relationship types, or cultures. They provide insights on how average levels of factors vary. Most chapters also include *SELF-REFLECTION* sections to encourage readers to apply the findings to their own lives.

WHY DO THESE FACTORS MATTER?

Theorizing about the importance of these factors occurs in each of the chapters and is summarized in Chapter 10. Included in this theorizing are key concepts from theories that view relationships from a **social exchange** perspective. These theories include Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976), Incremental Exchange Theory (Huesmann & Levinger, 1976), Resource Theory (Foa & Foa, 1980), the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult et al., 2012), and Interdependence Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Dainton, 2015). Key concepts in these theories include rewards, costs, investments, alternatives, comparison levels, and commitment (Clark et al., 2015).

According to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), we exchange not only tangible things like goods and favors but also intangible things like advice and love. When one person gives a reward to another, the other is **obligated** to reciprocate in an appropriate manner. We are taught a norm of reciprocity,

that we are supposed to give in return, but even more importantly, we must reciprocate if we want to receive future rewards. For example, if you receive a gift on a holiday, you feel obligated to give a gift in return; if you don't, you may feel embarrassed, and the other is less likely to give you a gift in the future.

In social exchange, what is given in return is generally unspecified, unlike **economic exchange** in which the obligations are always specified. This requires trust that the other will reciprocate. Hence, relationships usually begin with small rewards to minimize the risk that an offer of a reward might be refused, or accepted but not reciprocated. If the other person accepts and reciprocates, that builds trust. Hence, there often is **incremental exchange**, with increasing rewards as trust increases (Huesmann & Levinger, 1976). For example, on first meeting we disclose little personal information, but as the other person shares more, we also share more, keeping us equally vulnerable to the revelation of private information. But if the other person doesn't share equally private information, or reveals secrets to others, we share less in the future.

When deciding whether or not to continue a relationship, one considers not only the **current rewards and costs** but also the **investment costs** of time, money, and effort spent developing that relationship, as well as the **opportunity costs** of not having pursued other relationships, and whether there are suitable **alternative** relationships potentially available. Thus, one may stay in a less than satisfactory relationship with attempts to salvage one's investment, especially if one is less confident about finding an alternative with its uncertain outcome.

In evaluating rewards and costs, people also consider **comparison levels** of rewards and costs in their previous relationships, other people's relationships, and potential alternative relationships, as well as notions about relationships from fairy tales and the media. For example, as people learn about the relationships of their relatives and friends, they compare them to positive and negative aspects of their own relationships. And fairy tales and movies tell us that couples live happily ever after once they fall in love and are married, giving unrealistic expectations for relationships that actually require effort to succeed.

Additional theoretical concepts are introduced in chapters where relevant and summarized in Chapter 10. References for theoretical perspectives on relationships are included in a comprehensive bibliography by Le and Emery (2015) and are described in chapters in Simpson and Campbell (2013).

FOR WHOM DO THESE FACTORS MATTER?

The present study expands the Boston Couples Study and other existing research by investigating the following question: In what ways are intimate

relationships similar, and in what ways are they different, across relationship types and cultures? The relationship types include the eight combinations of men or women, in opposite-sex or same-sex relationships, who are unmarried or married. Cultures are studied by comparing nine cultural regions around the world, which are described later in this chapter.

In previous research, cross-cultural comparisons have often been conceptualized in terms of individualist cultures, which emphasize independence and individual achievement, and collectivist cultures, which emphasize interdependence and group harmony (Argyle et al., 1986; Hofstede, 1980, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Smith & Bond, 1993; Triandis, 1995). Western countries are generally more individualistic while Eastern countries are generally more collectivistic.

But there are differences between North American and Latin American countries, between Western and Eastern European countries, and between East Asian and other Asian countries. Hence the present study makes comparisons of cultural regions around the world, keeping in mind that there are cultural and individual variations within each of these regions. For example, each region usually has more than one religious tradition, and there often are individual differences in adherence to religious restrictions on intimate behavior.

To make sure that the questions would be appropriate for different relationship types and cultures, a draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by thirty colleagues of various social and cultural backgrounds for social inclusiveness and cultural appropriateness. Collaborators have translated the final questionnaire into multiple languages, which the author has used to create webpages that have been online at https://cf.whittier.edu/chill/ir. He met these collaborators by giving and attending research presentations at international psychology conferences around the world.

FROM WHERE HAVE PARTICIPANTS BEEN RECRUITED?

Hill and his collaborators have recruited students and non-students in countries in North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, South Asia, East Asia, South East Asia, Africa, and Oceana. Participants have also responded from other countries in these regions, which further increases the diversity of the participants. Specific countries and numbers are listed later in this chapter.

In addition, Hill obtained addresses from marriage license records to recruit same-sex and opposite-sex newlyweds to provide unique comparisons of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual marriages. The marriage licenses were obtained from Los Angeles County in California and from Hennepin County in Minnesota, and they included licenses for newlyweds who came to those states from other states where same-sex marriage was not yet legal.

Hill attempted to obtain marriage license records from other states, but they had been made confidential. In addition to these newlyweds, other adults in opposite-sex and same-sex relationships, both marital and non-marital, were among the participants recruited elsewhere.

Hill also invited former participants of the Boston Couples Study to participate in the online study, by sending each an individual code number to enter online to provide a thirty-eight-year follow-up of their original responses. In spite of missing addresses, sixty-six of them are included in the analyses throughout this book. Key comparisons with their earlier responses in the Boston Couples Study are discussed in Chapter 9.

To supplement the online questionnaire, colleagues in Pakistan administered a printed shorter version in Urdu to both members of 125 married couples, of which 65 were parent-choice ("arranged") marriages and 60 own-choice ("love") marriages. They are included in analyses throughout the book, with comparisons of marriage types in a SPOTLIGHT in Chapter 8.

The couples in Pakistan are the only participants whose id numbers link them as partners. All others participated anonymously as individuals, even though their partners may have also participated in some cases. Being in the same couple reduces the independence of their responses, which slightly affects the statistical significance of statistical tests, but with the large sample sizes in this study that does not affect the conclusions.

How many participants are analyzed in this book?

Among the 8839 participants in this study, 69% are women and 31% are men. It is common for women to volunteer more than men for psychological research (Hill, Rubin, Peplau, & Willard, 1979). Women and men are compared throughout this book. In addition, there were 40 persons who differed from the binary gender categories used to define relationship types in this book; they are discussed in Chapter 12.

The ages of the participants range from 18 to 84, with a median (half above and half below) age of 21, reflecting the fact that 75% are students. Chapter 12 documents that the *Comprehensive Commitment Model* developed in this book makes similar predictions for both students and non-students.

Among the 72% overall who report a current relationship, 84% describe an opposite-sex partner and 16% describe a same-sex partner, and 25% of all partners are married. Numbers in each category are reported in the next sections.

How many participants have a current partner?

Combining gender and whether or not they Have a Current Partner results in the groups that are compared in Table 1.1.