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CHANGING RELATIONS: ACHIEVING INTIMACY IN A TIME OF SOCIAL TRANSITION

In a fast-changing world, what impact does social change have on our everyday relationships? How do modernisation processes influence our broader values, and how might these then affect our desires to marry, have a family, and develop our social networks? And how do sudden events in a society – invasions, civil conflict, terrorist attacks, collapse of a political system – influence our relationship decisions and processes?

In this book, Robin Goodwin critically reviews the literature on modernisation and contemporary relationships, challenging simplistic conclusions about the end of intimacy and the inevitable decline of personal commitment. Reviewing work from across the globe, he also contends that adaptation to rapid change is moderated by individual, social class, and cultural variations, with consequently differing impacts on everyday relations. In doing so, he brings together contemporary debates in psychology, sociology, and the political sciences on coping with social change and its impact on personal relations.

Robin Goodwin is professor of social psychology at Brunel University, West London. A winner of the New Faculty (Steve Duck) Prize from the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships, he is an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, associate editor at the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, and past chair of the publications committee for the International Network on Personal Relationships.

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ADVANCES IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

HARRY T. REIS
University of Rochester

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University of South Carolina

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University of Texas, Austin

Although scholars from a variety of disciplines have written and conversed about the importance of personal relationships for decades, the emergence of personal relationships as a field of study is relatively recent. *Advances in Personal Relationships* represents the culmination of years of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work on personal relationships. Sponsored by the International Association for Relationship Research, the series offers readers cutting-edge research and theory in the field. Contributing authors are internationally known scholars from a variety of disciplines, including social psychology, clinical psychology, communication, history, sociology, gerontology, and family studies. Volumes include integrative reviews, conceptual pieces, summaries of research programs, and major theoretical works. *Advances in Personal Relationships* presents first-rate scholarship that is both provocative and theoretically grounded. The theoretical and empirical work described by authors will stimulate readers and advance the field by offering new ideas and retooling old ones. The series will be of interest to upper division undergraduate students, graduate students, researchers, and practitioners.

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ROBIN GOODWIN
Brunel University

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To Kinga
Whose Love, Wisdom, and Beauty have changed my life

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Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

Foreword by Daniel Perlman *page* xiii
Acknowledgements xxi

1 The Nature of Social Change **1**
Introduction 1
Defining and Measuring Social Change 2
Theories of Change 4
Development and Evolution 4
Cyclical Change and the Functionalist Perspective 8
Ideas and the Social Psychological Approach 10
Stress and Resistance to Change 12
A Framework 15
Rapid, Direct Change 16
Indirect, Gradual Change 18
Mediating and Moderating Variables 19
Directionality and Social Change 26
Summary 28

2 The Myth of Modernisation? **29**
Individualisation 33
Globalisation 35
Critiques of Modernisation and Related Theories 36
Summary 42

3 More Beautiful than a Monkey: The Achievement of Intimacy **43**
The Formation of Intimacy in a Modern World 43
Choosing a Partner: Evidence from across the Globe 47
Becoming Attached or Staying Single 52

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84204-4 - Changing Relations: Achieving Intimacy in a Time of Social Transition
Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

Social Networks, Dating, and the Internet "Revolution" 56
Summary 61

4 Friends and Social Networks 63
Patterns of Friendship over Time 63
Friendship during Times of Rapid Change 66
Social Capital 68
Changing Social Capital in Communist Societies 73
Trust 75
Changing Social Capital? A Critique 78
Social Support and Social Change 83
Migrants, Social Capital, and Social Support 89
Support Following Terrorist Attacks 92
Summary 94

5 Sex and the Modern City 95
Homosexuality 103
Contraception and Abortion 104
Sexual Disease 106
Summary 113

6 Marriage and the Family 114
The Family and Marriage 114
Debating the Changes 115
Historical Interpretations 119
Marital Sentiment over Time 122
Gender Roles and the Role of Fathers 126
The Role of Fathers 131
Gender Roles and Fertility Rates 132
The Rise of Cohabitation 134
Technology and the Family 136
Rapid Change: Some Examples 137
Eastern Europe 138
Asia 144
The Middle East 152
War and Migration 157
Resilience 164
Patterns of Adaptation 167
Simply Adapting? 173
Summary 175

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84204-4 - Changing Relations: Achieving Intimacy in a Time of Social Transition
Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

7 **Modelling Social Change and Relationships** **176**
On Changing and Nonchanging Relationships 177
Looking Forward 183

References 187
Index 217

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84204-4 - Changing Relations: Achieving Intimacy in a Time of Social Transition
Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

Foreword

As author Robin Goodwin writes, "This book is an attempt to deal with one big question: what happens to people's everyday relationships when there are significant changes in their society?" This is a very important question because relationships have differed substantially across both time and cultures. Take love. Members of many contemporary societies value love, consider it the basis for marriage, think it should be sexual, and seek opposite sex romantic partners. This hasn't always and everywhere been the case. In ancient Greece, for example, members of that society valued platonic forms of love. In their milieu, love wasn't linked with marriage, an institution that was then typically motivated by economic and political reasons. The ultimate in relationships for early Athenians was the nonsexual adoration of another, best exemplified in the bonds between two men. More recently, societies such as China have seen dramatic changes in the bases on which marriages are formed, going from predominantly arranged marriages to love matches. With shifts such as this occurring, it is crucial to know how sociocultural contexts and changes in societies affect the way we relate to others.

Research on relationships has thrived in the past 25 to 30 years. But research on how societal change influences relationships has not been a major focus. A few writers (e.g., Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), often from a sociological perspective, have written on this. Their analyses are largely scattered in diverse publications and have been neither integrated nor compared. The current volume fills a gap by bringing together this line of scholarship.

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Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

STRENGTHS OF THE VOLUME

Goodwin addresses in a superb way the intertwined nature of personal relationships and societal change. A few of his strengths as an author are that

- he writes in an engaging manner that I think you will enjoy reading;
- he offers a rich mosaic of ideas – asking and insightfully elaborating crucial questions;
- he brings a good appreciation of conceptual views on social change, succinctly explaining them, critically evaluating them, and showing their similarities and differences;
- he articulates his own fresh model of change that helps organise the book;
- he has a wealth of information about both (a) how relationships have varied across time and culture and (b) the social changes associated with those variations.

I have studied relationships throughout my professional career. Robin Goodwin's book has given me a world tour that has taught me new information and expanded my thinking. He has answered numerous questions, often in a more complex way that befits the complexity of social reality. I am grateful to him.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELATIONSHIP RESEARCH SPONSORSHIP

This volume is sponsored by the International Association for Relationship Research. It is an exemplary addition to their *Advances in Personal Relationship Series*. The series includes integrative reviews and conceptual pieces. This volume is an integrative review but with a fresh conceptual framework. It admirably achieves the standards and orientation of the series in presenting

> first-rate scholarship that is both provocative and theoretically grounded. The theoretical and empirical work described by authors will stimulate readers and advance the field by offering new ideas and retooling old ones. The series will be of interest to upper division undergraduate students, graduate students, researchers, and practitioners.

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Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

TWO IMPLICATIONS OF STUDYING SOCIAL CHANGE FOR THE STUDY OF RELATIONSHIPS AS A FIELD

Goodwin's key lesson that relationships aren't always the same across time and culture is related to a couple of issues for the study of relationships as a field. First, most knowledge about relationships comes from specific disciplines. The field as a whole has been described as multidisciplinary in the sense that scholars from psychology, sociology, communication, and other disciplines study relationships and are interested in one another's work. Nonetheless, research is still done largely from each investigator's own intellectual tradition. Investigators typically don't go beyond the classes of variables of concern to their discipline. Researchers working within their own discipline may briefly acknowledge the need to test their ideas cross-culturally, but for the most part principles are offered without careful identification of macro conditions when they don't hold. By showing the variety and plasticity of the forms that relationships take, Goodwin is issuing a strong reminder that we must attend to how principles studied by many relationship scholars may not be universal. All scholars, especially those examining the individual and interpersonal aspects of relationships, need to strive even more arduously to determine when phenomena can be found and when principles do and don't operate.

The second issue for the field that Goodwin's focus raises is related to the first. If many of the principles identified by relationship researchers are historically and/or culturally bound, can there be a science of relationships? Does the study of relationships become an historical and/or ethnographic activity without the rigor of a true science? My answer is that, despite historical and cultural variability, the study of relationships can qualify as a science. If there is cultural and historical variability, what I think is necessary for a science is that higher-order principles can be articulated about how basic principles may vary. For example, one belief found in societies such as England and the United States is that the more partners love each other, the more likely they are to marry. In collectivist societies this belief is much less prevalent (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995). Thus scholars initially working in the West might advance the basic principle that love increases the likelihood of marriage, and later scholars with a broader scope might advance the meta-principle that the degree of collectivism-individualism in a society will alter the association

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Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

between love and the likelihood of marriage. In this volume, Goodwin is taking steps to understand the principles underling how social change may alter relationship principles initially obtained in a given time and place. He is creatively advancing a path that others should extend and that would qualify the study of relationships as a science despite variability in findings.

A PREVIEW OF THE BOOK'S CONTENTS

The book has seven chapters. Chapters 1, 2, and 7 are at a broader conceptual level while the middle four chapters deal with particular aspects of relationships.

In Chapter 1, Goodwin defines social change ("any substantial shift in a political, economic, or social system") and discusses theoretical views of change. These theories deal with the various forms that social change takes and the causes or factors that shape social change. Goodwin notes that some see change as a linear progression with contemporary societies having achieved the highest level, whereas others see change as a more cyclical process of ups and downs. He describes a chicken-and-egg problem facing scholars of social change: which comes first, changes in people's ideas and values or changes in the social structure? He notes that change often involves both movement and resistance. Finally, he advances his own model of change, dividing it into two types: gradual, indirect change such as industrialisation, which occurs over a protracted time frame vs. rapid, direct change such as China's introduction of the one-child policy that had an immediate, abrupt impact. Goodwin's model takes into consideration the factors that mediate and moderate change. Illustrative of mediation, gradual social changes often lead to changes in general beliefs and values (an intervening process or mediator) that then lead to changes in relationships. Illustrative of moderators are factors (e.g., individual, group, or cultural) that influence the extent to which social change leads to transformation of relationships.

I especially admire three aspects of this model. First, the model illuminates different types of change. Second, I appreciate the analysis of mediating and moderating factors. This focuses attention on processes involved in change and times when change is or is not likely. The concern with how social change impacts relationships and the identification of various mediating and moderating factors lead to my third kudo. Social change is a decidedly macro level variable. Yet the model

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incorporates variables across a spectrum of levels from individual difference factors through group and cultural forces. It gives a more complete picture.

Chapter 2 deals with views of modernisation. Writers concerned with modernisation generally believe that industrialisation is associated with cultural values and leads to predictable social and cultural consequences. Linked to modernisation are the notions of globalisation of industries, markets, communication, values, and so on – and of people being individualistically (rather than more collectively) oriented. Goodwin first describes views of modernisation including modernisation's presumed consequences for personal relationships. He next discusses individualisation and globalisation. He then critiques views of modernisation asking such questions as "Is industrialisation really producing homogeneity around the world?" and "Is a dichotomous view of a traditional vs. a modern world too simplistic?"

With Chapter 3, Goodwin begins his treatment of specific aspects of relationships. In this chapter he addresses issues of whether people get attached to a partner and, if and when they do so, how partners are selected and how intimacy is achieved. He notes a trend away from marriages arranged by elders toward individuals selecting their own partners. Goodwin describes the role of new technologies, especially the Internet, in relationship formation and the ways these technologies influence the role social networks (e.g., individuals and the social ties between them) play in the development of long-term relationships. His answer here may surprise some readers. Implicit at multiple points in this chapter is a question asked by many: Is the current nature of society undermining people's capacity to form and/or sustain intimate bonds?

In Chapter 4, Goodwin turns to friendships and the interrelated concepts of social networks, social capital, and social support (the resources others provide to us). Social capital is anchored in one's social network but the notion of social capital is broader than just the idea of a social network of relationships. Social capital implies we get resources from our networks, that we experience interpersonal trust, and that our social relationships involve normative regulation. This chapter begins with the debate between those arguing that the "modern world" undermines friendships vs. those who posit that friendships and social networks assume new importance as the role of the family fades and the challenges of daily life mount. A major section of the chapter deals with the thesis, advanced by Robert Putnam and others, that social

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Frontmatter
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capital and trust are declining. They depict this as being largely due to the detriment of society. In considering social support, Goodwin looks at factors that enhance or diminish the amount of support provided. The chapter ends with discussion of the social support and social capital among immigrants (again with a focus on what enhances or diminishes these) and finally, based on theories and some of Goodwin's own research, how terrorist attacks might influence support.

Next up is sex (Chapter 5) – how social change is influencing sexual standards (e.g., premarital sexual relations), homosexuality, contraception/abortion, and the transmission of sexual diseases. Many see a general loosening of sexual conduct. Although evidence of this can be found, Goodwin also notes some of the resistance to such a trend and qualifications that should be added to such a simple, broad generalisation.

In the book's longest chapter, Chapter 6, Goodwin addresses marriage and the family. In rough terms, this chapter is divided into an initial section dealing mostly with gradual change, a second section dealing with rapid change, and a shorter final section on adaptation. The first part of the chapter looks at ways the family might be changing along several dimensions (e.g., extended vs. nuclear composition, the role of the family in elder care, family size, parental roles, parent-child relations, childcare, division of labor, gender roles, cohabitation, single parenthood, the importance assigned to marriage). Underlying this depiction is the question: has the family declined? The second section of the chapter looks at rapid change in three regions of the world (Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East) and the impact of two major events (war and immigration). In the third section, Goodwin reviews evidence on the variability in the adaptations to social change. He cites authors calling into question modernisation theory's view that workplace modernisation will inevitably lead to a corresponding linear type modernisation of family behavior. Goodwin discusses an alternative ecocultural model of change. In this model, people adapt to their ecological situation. In one version of this model, ecological conditions influence family structure and values, which, in turn, have an effect on family interaction and socialisation patterns, which, in turn, impact on children's development of self and their relations with others.

In the final chapter, Goodwin briefly summarises a few of the key conclusions of the volume. He then presents an analysis of the extent to which social change might impact on eight classes of variables that in turn influence relationships. In this framework, social change is apt to

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Frontmatter
More information

have little or no impact on evolutionary and physiological variables, a small to moderate influence on individual values and personality, and a moderate to large impact on role relationships and work structure. Goodwin ends his volume using his analysis to reflect on prospects for personal relationships in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the literature on relationships and social change, as well as throughout this book, there is an underlying question of whether contemporary societies are undermining relationships. Some authors see contemporary society as enhancing relationships. What seems to be a more widespread worry is that contemporary social change is causing a decline in social life. Still other scholars such as Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995) claimed that humans have a fundamental need to belong, perhaps implying that regardless of the social system people will seek ways to satisfy their need for interpersonal connection.

Goodwin's analysis leads him to conclude, "It is too simple to portray social change and its implications for close relationships as simply positive or negative. Change is likely to have differential impacts on different individuals, groups and cultures." His analysis and marshalling of evidence in getting to this conclusion is a major accomplishment of his book. To Professor Goodwin I say "Bravo!" To you as a reader I say "If you are interested in how social changes are associated with people's everyday relationships, read this book." Like me, you will be glad you did.

Daniel Perlman
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Publication Committee Chair, International Association
for Relationship Research, 2006–08

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Robin Goodwin
Frontmatter
More information

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