

## The Science of Romantic Relationships

Why do people fall in love? Does passion fade with time? What makes for a happy, healthy relationship? This introduction to relationship science follows the lifecycle of a relationship – from attraction and initiation, to the hard work of relationship maintenance, to dissolution and ways to strengthen a relationship. Designed for advanced undergraduates studying psychology, communication, or family studies, this textbook presents a fresh, diversity-infused approach to relationship science. It includes real-world examples and critical-thinking questions, callout boxes that challenge students to make connections, and researcher interviews that showcase the many career paths of relationship scientists. Article Spotlights reveal cutting-edge methods, while Diversity and Inclusion boxes celebrate the variety found in human love and connection. Throughout the book, students see the application of theory and come to recognize universal themes in relationships as well as the nuances of many findings. Instructors can access lecture slides, an instructor manual, and test banks.

**Theresa DiDonato** is a professor of psychology at Loyola University Maryland, where she has served as the Director of the Undergraduate Program in Psychology. She volunteers on the Teaching Committee of the International Association of Relationship Research (IARR) and is a long-time member of SPSP. Her research focuses on humor, attraction, and self-authenticity in relationships, and she is the author of the Psychology Today blog, “Meet, Catch, and Keep,” which has accrued over 30 million views.

**Brett Jakubiak** is an associate professor of psychology at Syracuse University and won the Syracuse University Meredith Early Performance Award for exemplary teaching. Brett also maintains an active program of research focused on the interpersonal support processes that regulate stress, encourage autonomous goal pursuit, and enhance relationship quality across the lifespan. This research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

“What is really fabulous about this book are the many real-world examples of people’s lives that help us situate these concepts into diverse contexts. DiDonato and Jakubiak give us a textbook that expertly explains the foundational theories of relationship science while providing critical updates in line with contemporary thinking. It is a book that multidisciplinary learners, as well as established experts, will truly find valuable for their lives and work.”

**Joan K. Monin, Yale University**

“In addition to being a thorough examination of the literature, *The Science of Romantic Relationships* is an engaging and enjoyable-to-read textbook that will connect with students. I particularly liked the thought-provoking questions that open each chapter, the spotlights on empirical articles that emphasize the importance of research, and the focus on diversity and inclusion.”

**Kevin P. McIntyre, Trinity University**

“DiDonato and Jakubiak have produced a truly remarkable resource for relationship scientists. The centerpiece of this masterful text is its careful and methodical approach to understanding diversity, equity, and inclusion. This book will be a game changer for the field!”

**Brian G. Ogolsky, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

“This textbook breathes new life into relationship research by providing a diverse array of fresh perspectives on everything from romantic attraction and relationship initiation to relationship maintenance and dissolution. Their commitment to diversity and inclusion is especially laudable. In addition to covering all aspects of modern relationship science, the authors provide a strong chapter on state-of-the-art research methods. This is an ideal textbook for students or anyone seeking an up-to-date, comprehensive overview of scientific research on relationships and the theories that guide it.”

**Gregory D. Webster, University of Florida**

# The Science of Romantic Relationships

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**THERESA DIDONATO**

Loyola University Maryland

**BRETT JAKUBIAK**

Syracuse University



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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**For Patrick**

**For Emily**



# BRIEF CONTENTS

About This Book: For Instructors	<i>page xv</i>
About This Book: For Students	xx
Acknowledgements	xxii

## **PART I FOUNDATIONAL IDEAS OF RELATIONSHIP SCIENCE**

---

<b>1 The Scientific Study of Relationships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Guiding Theories of Relationship Science</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3 Conducting and Evaluating Research</b>	<b>81</b>

## **PART II RELATIONSHIP FORMATION**

---

<b>4 Romantic Attraction</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>5 Relationship Initiation</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>6 From Fledgling to Established Relationships</b>	<b>197</b>

## **PART III RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE**

---

<b>7 Biases and Illusions</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>8 Navigating the Challenges of Interdependence</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>9 Managing Stress and Supporting Growth</b>	<b>308</b>
<b>10 Enhancing Relationships through Positive Interpersonal Processes</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>11 Enhancing Relationships through Sexual Intimacy</b>	<b>378</b>

## **PART IV DISSOLUTION AND INTERVENTIONS**

---

<b>12 Relationship Dissolution</b>	<b>417</b>
<b>13 Interventions to Repair and Strengthen Relationships</b>	<b>453</b>

Glossary	488
References	503
Index	597





# DETAILED CONTENTS

About This Book: For Instructors	page xv		
About This Book: For Students	xx		
Acknowledgements	xxii		
<b>PART I FOUNDATIONAL IDEAS OF RELATIONSHIP SCIENCE</b>			
<b>1 The Scientific Study of Relationships</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Opening Vignette: The Uniqueness and Universality of Relationships</b>	3		
Guiding Questions	4		
<b>Relationship Science</b>	4		
Early Attempts to Study Relationships Scientifically	4		
Researcher Spotlight: Elaine Hatfield, PhD	5		
Relationship Science Today	6		
Current Directions in Relationship Science	7		
<b>The Need to Belong</b>	7		
The Damaging Effects of Social Isolation and Exclusion	8		
In the News: Social Distancing and COVID-19	9		
The Importance of Social Acceptance	10		
Is This True for You? Seeking a Social Surrogate	14		
<b>How Scientists Define a Relationship</b>	15		
Close Relationships Involve Interdependence	15		
Close Relationships Involve Intimate Knowledge	17		
Close Relationships Involve Commitment	18		
Casual Relationships	19		
Focusing on Romantic Relationships	19		
<b>The Biological Basis for Relationships</b>	21		
The Biological Basis for Relationships in Non-human Animals	22		
The Biological Basis for Relationships in Humans	23		
<b>What Makes Each Romantic Relationship Unique?</b>	24		
Demographic Variables	25		
Diversity and Inclusion: Applying an Intersectional Lens to Romantic Relationships	30		
Personality	30		
Culture	31		
Other Key Individual Differences	32		
<b>Why We Study Romantic Relationships</b>	32		
Consequences for the Self-Concept	32		
Consequences for Psychological Well-Being and Physical Health	33		
		Article Spotlight: Does Technology Make the iGen Lonely?	37
		Consequences for Families and Society	39
		<b>Conclusion</b>	40
		<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	40
		<b>Further Readings</b>	41
		<b>2 Guiding Theories of Relationship Science</b>	<b>42</b>
		<b>Opening Vignette: Why Do We Love the Way We Do?</b>	42
		Guiding Questions	43
		<b>The Three Main Theories in Relationship Science</b>	43
		<b>Evolutionary Theories: Solving Problems of Survival and Reproduction</b>	44
		Evolutionary Theories: The Basics	44
		Sexual Selection Theory	45
		Is This True for You? Flaunting your Feathers	46
		Parental Investment Theory	47
		Sexual Strategies Theory	48
		Researcher Spotlight: Norman Li, MBA, PhD	49
		Life History Theory	50
		Critiques of Evolutionary Theories	51
		<b>Attachment Theory: Solving the Problem of Support Availability</b>	52
		Normative Processes of Attachment	53
		In the News: Parent–Child Separations at the Mexican–American Border	53
		Diversity and Inclusion: How Does Attachment Work in Consensually Non-Monogamous Relationships?	57
		Individual Differences in Attachment	59
		Critiques of Attachment Theory	66
		Article Spotlight: Staying Together for You, Not for Me: A Theory Extension	73
		<b>Interdependence Theory: Solving Situation-Based Problems</b>	66
		Social Exchange Theory	67
		Interdependence Theory	68
		The Investment Model of Commitment	72
		Critiques of Interdependence Theory	74
		<b>Social Context and Relationships</b>	75
		Social Ecological Theories	75
		Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model	76
		<b>Conclusion</b>	77
		<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	79
		<b>Further Readings</b>	80

x	DETAILED CONTENTS		
<hr/>			
<b>3 Conducting and Evaluating Research</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>Physical Attractiveness and Vitality</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Opening Vignette: Love in the Time of Technology</b>	81	Physical Attractiveness: Signaling Domain	
Guiding Questions	83	General Rewards	128
<b>Asking Questions and Finding Answers with Research</b>	83	Diversity and Inclusion: Love Is Not Blind: Colorism in Romantic Attraction	129
Is This True for You? Are Phones a Problem in Your Relationships?	84	Physical Attractiveness: Signaling Good Genes and Good Partner Traits	130
<b>Selecting a Study Design</b>	86	In the News: The Golden Ratio and Beauty	132
Correlational Designs	86	Sex Differences in Desiring Physical Attractiveness	135
Experimental Designs	91	Article Spotlight: Measuring Attraction	135
Researcher Spotlight: Sarah Stanton, PhD	94	Physical Attraction in Everyday Life	136
<b>Measuring Variables</b>	95	<b>Social Status, Education, and Intelligence</b>	137
Self-Report Measures	95	Social Status	137
Implicit Measures	97	Sex Differences in Desiring Status	137
Observational Measures	100	Desiring Intelligence and Education	138
Physiological Measures	101	<b>Warmth, Kindness, and Trustworthiness</b>	139
Comparing Measurement Strategies	103	Sex Differences in Desiring Warmth/Kindness	140
<b>Sampling</b>	103	Altruism and Heroism	140
Diversity and Inclusion: Who's Sampled and Who Isn't?	104	Do We Always Prioritize Warm and Kind Traits?	141
"Research, Meet the Internet"	105	<b>Other Key Partner Preferences</b>	142
"Data, You've Gotten So Big"	106	Desiring a Partner of a Particular Gender	142
Individual Samples Versus Dyadic Samples	106	Desiring a Partner of an Ideal Age	142
Article Spotlight: In Defense of Individual Samples	108	Researcher Spotlight: Peter (PK) Jonason, PhD	145
<b>Analysis and Interpretation</b>	109	Knowing What We Don't Want in a Partner	145
Moderation: "It Depends on ..."	109	<b>From Hypothetical Preferences to the Real World</b>	146
Mediation: "It's Because of ..."	111	Preferences in Face-to-Face Attraction	146
<b>Research Ethics</b>	112	Social and Situational Factors	148
Ethics of Conducting Research with Human Subjects (and Their Human Partners)	112	<b>Attraction in Context</b>	153
Reproducibility	113	Attraction in the Context of Physiological Arousal	153
In the News: Are Most Scientific Research Findings False?	113	Attraction within the Context of Women's Reproductive Cycles	154
<b>How to Read Empirical Articles</b>	116	<b>Conclusion</b>	156
<b>Conclusion</b>	118	<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	156
<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	118	<b>Further Readings</b>	156
<b>Further Readings</b>	119		
<hr/>			
<b>PART II RELATIONSHIP FORMATION</b>		<b>5 Relationship Initiation</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>4 Romantic Attraction</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>Opening Vignette: How Do Relationships     Begin?</b>	158
<b>Opening Vignette: Is Attraction Predictable?</b>	123	Guiding Questions	159
Guiding Questions	124	<b>Why People Initiate: Timing and     Romantic Motivations</b>	159
<b>Partner Preferences as a Means to an End</b>	124	Relationship Readiness	159
Goal-Directed Models of Attraction	125	Romantic Motivations	160
Traits as Indicators	126	Sociosexuality	164
Is This True for You? The Pull of Fatal Attractions	127		

<b>Barriers to Relationship Initiation</b>	167	Intimacy	208
Accessing Partners	167	Building Intimacy in Context	210
Is This True for You? Can There Be Too Many Fish in the Sea?	170	In the News: Thirty-Six Questions to Fall in Love	211
Traditional Gender Roles	171	Self-Concept Change in New Relationships	213
Uncertainty in Relationship Initiation	172	<b>Building Commitment</b>	217
Shyness and Social Anxiety	174	Contemplating and Communicating Commitment	217
Diversity and Inclusion: Initiating Romantic Relationships and Autism Spectrum Disorder	175	Commitment and the Social Network Effect	218
<b>The Relationship Initiation Process</b>	176	<b>Common Transitions in Established Relationships</b>	220
Stage 1: Appraisal of Initial Attraction	177	Cohabitation	221
Stage 2: Decision to Make an Overture	177	Researcher Spotlight: Fenaba Addo, PhD	223
Stage 3: Self-Presentation	182	Marriage	226
In the News: Online Deception: The Harmless and the Harmful	182	Diversity and Inclusion: Living Apart Together	228
Stage 4: Rapport Building	183	Parenthood	229
Researcher Spotlight: T. Joel Wade, PhD	186	<b>Conclusion</b>	233
Critiques of Stage Models	188	<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	233
Divergent Paths to Relationships	188	<b>Further Readings</b>	234
<b>Relationship Initiation in Context</b>	191	<b>PART III RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE</b>	
<b>Failure to Launch: Initiation Gone Wrong</b>	191	<b>7 Biases and Illusions</b>	<b>237</b>
Article Spotlight: How Often Are Relationships Successfully Initiated?	192	<b>Opening Vignette: What Does She See in Him?</b>	237
Rejection	193	Guiding Questions	238
Unrequited Love	194	<b>Motivated Cognition as a Relationship Maintenance Strategy</b>	239
Preferring Singlehood to a Relationship	195	Relationship Maintenance Strategies:	
<b>Conclusion</b>	195	An Overview	239
<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	195	Rose-Colored Glasses: Truth and Bias	240
<b>Further Readings</b>	196	<b>Staying Committed through Biased Perceptions of the Partner</b>	242
<b>6 From Fledgling to Established Relationships</b>	<b>197</b>	Positive Illusions	243
<b>Opening Vignette: How Do Relationships Become Relationships?</b>	197	Researcher Spotlight: Sandra Murray, PhD	247
Guiding Questions	198	The Consequences of Seeing through Rose-Colored Glasses	248
<b>Relationship Trajectories</b>	198	The Importance of Being Seen Accurately	250
Plotting Romantic Evaluations over Time	198	Diversity and Inclusion: Mental Health and Self-Verification in Relationships	252
Trajectories as Insight into Relationships and Relationship Diversity	200	Dealing with Unfortunate Truths	253
Article Spotlight: Are You Texting Your Way to Love?	201	<b>Staying Committed through Biased Perceptions of the Relationship</b>	256
<b>Building Love</b>	202	Biased Memory of the Past	256
Differentiating and Defining Love	203	Biased Perceptions of the Present	258
Is This True for You? Does Passion Fade, or Can It Be Sustained?	206	In the News: Are #CoupleGoals Damaging Your Relationship?	259
Falling in Love	207	Biased Expectations for the Future	261
<b>Building Closeness</b>	208	<b>Staying Committed through Biased Perceptions of Alternatives</b>	262

Inattention to Attractive Alternatives	262	Apologies and Forgiveness	304
Devaluation of Attractive Alternatives	264	Diversity and Inclusion: Forgiveness and Religiosity	305
Consequences of Biased Perceptions of One's Alternatives	265	<b>Conclusion</b>	306
<b>Article Spotlight: Why Do Biased Perceptions of Alternatives Protect Relationships?</b>	265	<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	306
Biased Perceptions of One's Partner's Alternatives	267	<b>Further Readings</b>	307
<b>Is This True for You? Partner Surveillance, Monitoring, and Snooping</b>	268	<b>9 Managing Stress and Supporting Growth</b>	<b>308</b>
Perceived Alternatives in Non-monogamous Relationships	269	<b>Opening Vignette: A Social Support Double Play</b>	308
<b>Bias and Illusion in Context</b>	269	Guiding Questions	308
Who Engages in Biased Cognition?	269	<b>Social Support and Responsiveness</b>	309
Who Benefits from Biased Cognition?	270	<b>Managing Stress and Adversity</b>	311
<b>Conclusion</b>	271	Consequences of Stress for Individuals	316
<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	271	Consequences of Stress for Close Relationships	317
<b>Further Readings</b>	272	The Role of Social Support During Adversity	323
<b>8 Navigating the Challenges of Interdependence</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>Is This True for You? Do You Seek Support When You Are Stressed?</b>	327
<b>Opening Vignette: Even the Smoothest Roads Have Some Bumps</b>	273	<b>In the News: Emotional Support Animals</b>	332
Guiding Questions	274	<b>Exploring, Growing, and Developing</b>	333
<b>The Challenge of Interdependence</b>	275	Motivated to Explore	333
Conflicts as Diagnostic Situations	276	<b>Article Spotlight: Supportive Relationships Promote Personal Growth Cross-Culturally</b>	334
What Topics Do Couples Disagree About?	277	Responsive Support for Exploration	336
<b>Researcher Spotlight: Lauren Papp, PhD</b>	280	<b>Researcher Spotlight: Yuthika Girme, PhD</b>	338
How Do People Typically Experience Relationship Conflicts?	280	<b>Being Responsive: The Support- Provider's Perspective</b>	339
How Prevalent Are Conflicts?	282	Diversity and Inclusion: Support for Chronic Illness	339
<b>Is This True for You? Power in Relationship Conflicts</b>	284	<b>Conclusion</b>	341
What Are the Consequences of Having Frequent Conflicts?	286	<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	341
<b>Managing Relational Conflict</b>	286	<b>Further Readings</b>	342
Characterizing Conflict Discussion Behaviors	287	<b>10 Enhancing Relationships through Positive Interpersonal Processes</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>In the News: The "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" and the "Magic Ratio"</b>	288	<b>Opening Vignette: The Good Stuff</b>	343
Consequences of Hostility	291	Guiding Questions	344
Consequences of Intimacy and Problem Solving	295	<b>The Shift toward Positive Processes</b>	345
Consequences of Withdrawal	296	The Uniqueness of Positive and Negative Experiences	345
<b>Article Spotlight: The Demand-Withdraw Pattern in High and Low SES Contexts</b>	298	The Interplay of Positive and Negative Experiences	346
Sacrifice	300	<b>Spending and Leveraging Time Together</b>	347
Recovery Following Conflict	301	Prevalence of Shared Time in Close Relationships	348
<b>Recovery from Partner Transgressions</b>	302	How Partners Spend Shared Time	350
Responses to Partner Transgressions	304		

Leveraging Shared Time with Self-Expanding Activities	352	<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	413
<i>In the News: The Gift of Time Apart</i>	355	<b>Further Readings</b>	413
<b>Co-Experiencing Positive Emotions</b>	355	<b>PART IV DISSOLUTION AND INTERVENTIONS</b>	
<i>Article Spotlight: Sharing a Laugh</i>	357	<b>12 Relationship Dissolution</b>	<b>417</b>
Sharing Good News	358	<b>Opening Vignette: Different People, Different Relationships, Different Endings</b>	417
Expressing Gratitude	361	<i>Guiding Questions</i>	418
<b>Communicating Affection</b>	362	<b>How Common Is Relationship Dissolution?</b>	419
<i>Researcher Spotlight: Kory Floyd, PhD</i>	363	Marital Dissolution	420
How We Communicate Affection	363	Diversity and Inclusion: The Rise of the Grey Divorce	421
Is This True for You? Do You Have a “Love Language”?	365	Nonmarital Relationship Dissolution	423
Who Expresses Affection?	367	<i>Researcher Spotlight: Philip N. Cohen, PhD</i>	423
Diversity and Inclusion: Expressing Affection in Stigmatized Relationships	370	<b>Predictors of Relationship Dissolution</b>	424
Consequences of Affectionate Communication	371	Problems with “Me” or “You”	424
<b>The Role of Approach Motivation</b>	374	Problems with “Us”	427
<b>Conclusion</b>	376	Problems with Context	432
<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	376	Is This True for You? Long Distance Love: What Is the Role of Your Social Network?	434
<b>Further Readings</b>	376	<b>The Experience of Relationship Dissolution</b>	435
<b>11 Enhancing Relationships through Sexual Intimacy</b>	<b>378</b>	How Relationships End	436
<b>Opening Vignette: What Makes for a Satisfying Sex Life?</b>	378	<i>Article Spotlight: From “We” to “Me”: Changes in Online Language Use Reveal the Breakup Process</i>	437
<i>Guiding Questions</i>	379	Consequences of Relationship Dissolution	441
<b>Dimensions of and Variations in Sexuality</b>	379	<i>In the News: Are Children of Divorced Parents More Likely to Divorce?</i>	445
Sexual Desire	380	<b>Life after Relationship Dissolution</b>	447
Diversity and Inclusion: Asexuality and Romantic Relationships	384	Post-Dissolution Relationships with Ex-Partners	447
Sexual Attitudes	385	Forging a New Self Separate from an Ex-Partner	449
Sexual Motives	387	New Romantic Relationships	450
<i>Article Spotlight: Latent Profile Analysis: Understanding Variation in Sexual Motives</i>	392	<b>Conclusion</b>	451
Sexual Behaviors	395	<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	451
Is This True for You? Hookup Behavior	396	<b>Further Readings</b>	452
<b>Sexuality in Relationship Development and Maintenance</b>	400	<b>13 Interventions to Repair and Strengthen Relationships</b>	<b>453</b>
Attraction and Partner Selection	400	<b>Opening Vignette: Listening in on Couple Therapy</b>	453
Initiation and Assessment of Compatibility	401	<i>Guiding Questions</i>	454
Stability	402	<b>Therapeutic Interventions to Reduce Distress</b>	454
<i>Researcher Spotlight: Allen Mallory, PhD</i>	406	Who Seeks Couple Therapy?	455
<b>Making It Happen: Initiating Sex</b>	406	Therapeutic Approaches	457
Initiating Sexual Activity in Casual Contexts	407	Is This True for You? Do You Believe in Destiny?	463
<i>In the News: Consent in the Era of #MeToo</i>	409	<i>Article Spotlight: A Qualitative Investigation of IBCT in Intercultural Partners</i>	467
Initiating Sexual Activity in Committed Relationships	410		
<b>Conclusion</b>	412		

How Effective Are Therapeutic Interventions to Reduce Distress?	472	<b>Enhancing Interventions</b>	481
<b>Educational Interventions to Prevent Distress</b>	475	Increasing Accessibility of Relationship Interventions	481
Research-Based Couple Relationship Education Programs	475	Interventions for Sexual Minority Partners	482
<a href="#">In the News: Mindfulness as a Relationship Intervention</a>	477	<a href="#">Researcher Spotlight: Sarah Whitton, PhD</a>	485
How Effective Are Relationship Education Interventions?	479	<b>Conclusion</b>	485
<a href="#">Diversity and Inclusion: Relationship Education Interventions for Low-Income Couples</a>	480	<b>Major Take-Aways</b>	486
		<b>Further Readings</b>	486
		Glossary	488
		References	503
		Index	597

## ABOUT THIS BOOK: FOR INSTRUCTORS

In this book, we use students' curiosity as a springboard to provide a fresh and focused introduction to the guiding theories, key concepts, and recent findings that shape the interdisciplinary field of relationship science. We frame the textbook by first introducing foundational relationship concepts, highlighting prominent relationship theories, and reviewing research methods particular to relationship science. We then proceed step by step through the life course of a relationship. This intuitive organization provides a natural progression to your course syllabus over a semester. Throughout the text, we use relatable language, vivid examples, and thought-provoking questions so that students can acknowledge their current beliefs and see them anew given the current evidence. We pay attention to diverse representations of relationships and infuse modern topics and trends throughout (e.g., the role of technology in building, sustaining, and undermining relationships). By addressing contemporary topics and questions while emphasizing critical thinking, this textbook encourages sustained engagement with the material, which translates into more interesting classroom discussions, more compelling term paper topic proposals, and more insightful questions asked during lectures.

### Who Is This Book for?

This book is appropriate for advanced undergraduate students. We ask little of our reader, other than a basic understanding of psychology (experience with research methods is a bonus). The book engages generalists in thinking about relationships, while providing sufficient rigor and depth for those students who are seeking specialized expertise in romantic relationships. We accomplish this goal by inserting engaging pedagogical features throughout the book (see list below), as well as appropriate scaffolding for students' first exploration into relationship science. By meeting students where they are, this textbook teaches students more than knowledge about relationship science: it gives students the tools to think critically about relationship information relayed to them in the news, media, online, or in their social circles.

### Guiding Teaching Philosophy

From its first pages until the end, this book energizes students' critical thinking about relationships. Students progress away from the idea that love is mysterious and toward the notion that relationships are predictable (if complex), logical, and capable of being understood through the lens of science. In writing this textbook, we drew on years of experience teaching the science of romantic relationships, our contagious passion for relationship science, and a pedagogical philosophy grounded on these four principles:

1. Students are innately curious about relationships and variations in the human experience.

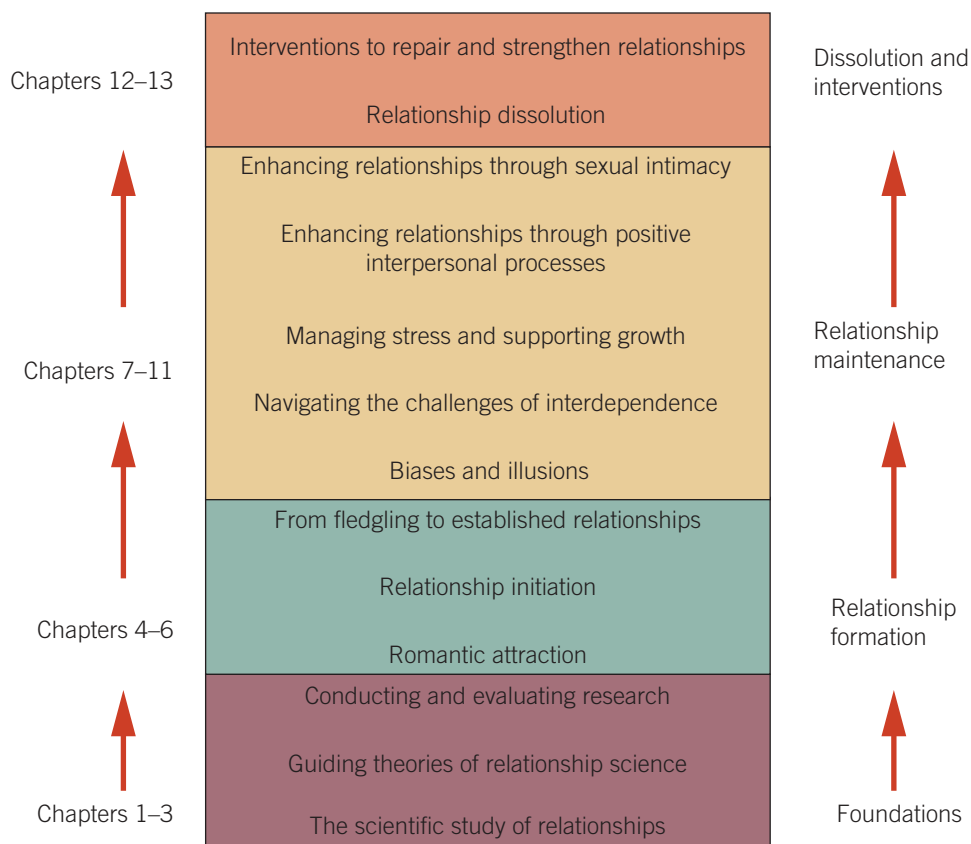


2. Students retain knowledge when they connect the material they are learning to their own lives.
3. Students develop sophisticated habits of thinking when they are challenged to question simple answers to complex questions.
4. Students become life-long learners when they discover the value of research and gain skills in critically evaluating research.

## Chapter Organization and Content Highlights

This book supports student learning through its overarching organization and the key ideas that it highlights throughout the text.

- **Intuitive Organization.** We often form, maintain, and dissolve relationships: why not have a book that follows this trajectory? As shown in Figure P.1, we organized this book along the life course of a relationship. Our students love this organization because they have a ready framework on which to map their growing knowledge. As instructors, we value having an intuitive organization for a semester-long syllabus on relationships.



**Figure P.1** Foundations are first, then chapters follow a typical relationship trajectory.



- **Honoring Human Diversity.** We embed human diversity throughout this book, featuring discussions of gender, sexual orientation, race, and culture in each chapter. This celebrates the natural variety in relationship representations and experiences.
- **Emphasizing Context.** Contextual factors can come in many forms, including culture, socioeconomic status, and social networks (e.g., friends, family), and these factors contribute to relationship experiences in profound ways. As much as we attend to person and relationship factors, this book also highlights the role of context in shaping our relationships – a quiet force that is easy to overlook, but one that students benefit from attending to as they think about relationships.
- **Noting Contemporary Issues.** This textbook grapples with the most pressing issues facing modern-day relationships and relationship scientists. To mention a few, we discuss consensually non-monogamous relationships, singlehood as an alternative to partnering, changing marriage and divorce rates, and ways the Internet continues to affect dating (e.g., technofence, catfishing). Along with many other current topics, we also provide a contemporary consideration of the science of relationships, including consideration of questionable research practices and the benefits of Open Science.
- **Valuing Social Support.** All relationship textbooks touch upon social support, but ours provides a special emphasis on the topic, dedicating Chapter 9 to developing students' understanding of support.
- **Paying Attention to Relationship Transitions.** Typically, students – who are often in a period of heightened transition – love to think about turning points and pivotal moments in a relationship's trajectory. We do, too. Accordingly, this book discusses significant relationship transitions (e.g., cohabitation, marriage, parenthood), and how transitions alter interdependence.
- **Highlighting Self-Concept Change.** How relationships shape the self-concept, and how the self-concept shapes relationships, is gaining attention in the field for good reason: so much of who we are is tied to our relationship experiences. In discussing how relationships form, persist, or end, this textbook elevates the interplay between self and relationships. Doing so is appreciated by our students, many of whom are deeply engaged in identity development.

## Key Features

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We include a set of pedagogical features to enhance engagement, connect relationship science with students' experience, and offer paths for furthering knowledge on specific topics.

- **Opening Vignettes.** Each chapter begins with a compelling story about a person or relationship designed to prime students' interest in the chapter's focus. These vignettes represent people with different backgrounds, relationships structures, goals, and sociocultural contexts, showing diversity in how relationships are experienced.
- **Guiding Questions and Major Take-Aways.** We capture and focus students' curiosity at the beginning of each chapter with a set of focal questions. These questions represent learning aims for the students; a successful read of the chapter yields sophisticated

answers to these questions. At the end of each chapter, brief statements summarize important lessons covered. These serve as important learning checks for students.

- **Diversity and Inclusion Boxes.** These segments foster awareness and critical thinking by directing students' attention to research on under-studied populations, minority relationship structures, and/or issues related to the generalizability of specific findings. Examples include:
  - the need to apply an intersectional lens in the study of relationships (Chapter 1);
  - the problem of White supremacist beauty ideals and the negative effects of colorism (Chapter 4);
  - mental health and positive relationship illusions (Chapter 7); and
  - asexuality and living-apart-together relationships (Chapters 11 and 6).
- **Researcher Spotlights.** How does someone end up studying relationships as their profession? In these boxes, students can read first-hand accounts of the diverse career paths of several of today's influential relationship researchers. Researchers from varied disciplines and in various stages of their careers share their perspective on the field, explain why they study romantic relationships, and discuss the inspirations and challenges they encounter as researchers.
- **In-the-News Boxes.** Helping students make connections is a key goal of this textbook. Accordingly, we include callout boxes that reinforce specific concepts through discussion of real-world events (e.g., COVID-19, #MeToo). Students see the relevance of relationship science through these highlights and gain skills in using relationship science to understand current events.
- **Article Spotlights.** Each spotlight focuses on one research study carefully selected because it both (1) extends students' understanding of an aspect of relationships and (2) showcases an interesting method, design, or analytic procedure. This value-added feature provides helpful depth to our introduction of relationship science and promotes skill development by supporting research literacy.
- **"Is This True for You?"** In each chapter, we present current research and invite students to reflect on whether the results match their intuition or experiences. When they do not, students can consider explanations for why their individual experiences might differ.
- **Further Readings.** We offer a curated list of accessible review and empirical papers at the end of each chapter. Each article can serve as a jumping-off point for independent research into specific topics, and we offer an "If you are interested in . . ." guide to help students pursue their curiosities.

## Instructor Resources

There is no one "right" way to teach a course on relationships. Accordingly, we provide a set of tools that can be flexibly applied to meet the diverse needs of our instructors.

- **Lecture slides.** These PowerPoint slides will accompany and extend the material from the textbook, serving as a wonderful resource for novice and experienced instructors alike. They correspond with each chapter's material, while also offering discussion points, classroom activity opportunities, and conversation starters.

- **Instructor Manual.** Instructors can customize their relationship course using the high-impact practices and experiential learning opportunities presented in this Instructor Manual. In addition to classroom activities and discussion ideas, this manual provides instructors with an expanded outline that maps to the lecture slides to facilitate lecture presentations. It also contains essay questions for each chapter, as well as assignment ideas and paper writing prompts.
- **Sample syllabus.** Instructors step into teaching from this book with all they might need to hit the ground running. A sample syllabus offers a plan for a typical semester, which includes pacing as well as assigned reading, assignments, and assessments.
- **Test bank.** We offer instructors a carefully developed test bank that includes auto-graded multiple-choice questions – an MCQ test bank. These tests will be available as LMS-ready cartridges. Emphasis is on assessing students’ concept understanding, critical thinking, and concept application.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK: FOR STUDENTS

Why do people fall in love? Is passion only for new relationships, or can it last? What, in fact, makes for a happy, healthy relationship? If you have ever pondered these, or similar, questions, then you're in the right place, and we're glad you're here. Welcome to the exciting world of relationship science!

Relationship science is an interdisciplinary field that submits our beliefs and questions about relationships to rigorous empirical scrutiny. It is a field that relies on theory-driven hypothesis testing, systematic data collection, and careful analysis in order to build a reliable body of evidence that we can use as our basis for understanding relationships. Study after study, relationship scientists are at the frontlines: observing marital conflicts and measuring physiological reactivity, analyzing flirting behavior on Tinder, querying volunteers about their feelings toward their ex-partners . . . the list goes on and on. An initial study might provide tentative insight, but when multiple studies point to a consistent view of relationship factors or dynamics, the findings warrant attention. Knowledge grows, allowing scholars to ask new, more nuanced questions. This cycle keeps relationship science moving forward, and we gain an increasingly more complete and accurate understanding of relationships.

### **This Book Will Help You Rely on Science to Understand Relationships**

As scholars and scientists, we – your authors – are passionate about the research process underlying relationship science. Accordingly, we designed this book to highlight the field's scientific foundations and many of its cutting-edge frontiers. We lean on meta-analyses, well-powered studies, well-established (i.e., reproduced) findings, and research using diverse samples, to do so. At the same time, as much as we are scientists, we – like you – are also ordinary people living our daily lives in our own romantic relationships, with friends and loved ones doing the same. From this perspective, we know it can be challenging to suspend intuition when it runs counter to empirical findings. This text will meet you where you are and help you grow in your appreciation for the importance of basing relationship knowledge on scientific evidence.

### **You Will Discover How Critical Diversity and Context Are for Relationships**

Relationship science is concerned with all types of relationships, but this book focuses specifically on romantic relationships, which are generally regarded as our closest and most influential relationships. Romantic relationships often play a critical role in our health and well-being, shape our decisions and emotions, and tie into our sense of self. These typical features of romantic relationships emerge even as each relationship is beautifully original, emerging from unique partners and their unique partnership. Indeed, diversity is a key feature of romantic relationships. Asking when particular theories and findings do and do not apply is a critical task for a relationship scientist (even a novice relationship scientist). We

encourage this questioning and point out known boundaries to existing findings whenever possible. We also recognize that every relationship occurs within a specific context that can either support or inhibit the relationship. Accordingly, this textbook introduces romantic relationships by emphasizing human diversity and context (which often go hand in hand). We infuse diversity and contextual factors throughout each chapter so that these considerations stay at the forefront as you learn.

## The Journey Begins

A college course on relationships is your chance to gain insight into what many people think is a mysterious phenomenon. You will discover that relationships are not so much mysterious as just complex outcomes of situational, personal, and relational factors, which in turn play a major role in shaping our lives. As your companion on this journey, this textbook offers the theoretical tools and empirical insights to form a nuanced understanding of a fundamental component of the human experience. Some of what you will learn will confirm your intuitions, and other material may challenge long-held ideas about attraction, attachment, or why relationships end. We ask that you approach this book with an open mind. Get ready for some fun!

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Theresa

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Brett

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