

Studying Personal Relationships across the Lifespan.

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Abstract:

This issue represents a celebration of the study of personal relationships across the lifespan. Whether using a sociological framework to study how the variation of social structural opportunities and constraints across the life course shapes social relationships or a psychological one to examine how personal development and close relationships are intertwined, studying the personal relationships of people of various ages contributes to an understanding of how universally applicable our findings are, how experiences at one age are related to experiences at another age, and of course, how social structure and human development shape the structure and process of personal relationships and consequently their trajectory and the various dimensions of individual well-being.

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Article:

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The articles in this issue, which are published in the order in which they were originally submitted for review, examine personal relationships in samples of participants ranging from young adulthood to old age. Three of these articles examine various aspects of romantic relationships of undergraduate college students. In their article, “Am ‘I’ More Important than

‘We’? Couples’ Word Use in Instant Messages,” Richard B. Slatcher, Simine Vazire, and James W. Pennebaker investigated couples’ word use in their daily Instant Messages and found that pronoun use and emotion word use both were associated with satisfaction and stability of dating relationships. Research reported by Jeffrey K. Snyder, Lee A. Kirkpatrick, and H. Clark Barrett (“The Dominance Dilemma: Do Women Really Prefer Dominant Mates?”) reveals that women prefer mates who are prestigious, as opposed to mates who are dominant. In addition, the women studied preferred high dominance only in the context of a male-male athletic competition. In a study examining how distance affects relationships, Benjamin Le, Timothy J. Loving, Gary W. Lewandowski, Jr., Emily G. Feinberg, Katherine C. Johnson, Remy Fiorentino, and Jennifer Ing (“Missing a Romantic Partner: A Prototype Analysis”) report that the prototype-based measure of the experience of missing a romantic partner that they used correlated weakly with loneliness and modestly with relationship commitment and the attachment dimensions anxiety and avoidance. In addition, they found that participants in long-distance relationships reported missing their partners more than those in geographically proximal relationships.

Other articles published in this issue examine a variety of types of relationships of participants who can broadly be described as midlife adults. For example, in a study of adults between the ages of 18 and 55 years (“Partner Support and Marital Satisfaction: Support Amount, Adequacy, Provision, and Solicitation”), Erika Lawrence, Mali Bunde, Robin A. Barry, Rebecca L. Brock, Kieran T. Sullivan, Lauri A. Pasch, Grace A. White, Christina E. Dowd, and Erin E. Adams report that husbands’ perceptions of support adequacy predicted marital satisfaction more than their perceptions of support amount, whereas the results were generally the opposite for wives. They also found that husbands’ provision and wives’ solicitation behaviors predicted marital satisfaction. In their study of adults between the ages of 25 and 55 years, Dory A. Schachner, Phillip R. Shaver, and Omri Gillath (“Attachment Style and Long-Term Singlehood”) compared people who had been single for a long time to those in couples. They found that single participants were as likely as those in couples to exhibit attachment security and rely on attachment figures, although compared to participants in couples, single participants reported higher levels of loneliness, depression, anxiety, sexual dissatisfaction, and troubled childhood relationships with parents. In a co-authored piece, Stacey L. Williams and Kristin D. Mickelson report findings from a study of adults ranging in age from 17 to 54 years. In their article, “A Paradox of Support Seeking and Rejection among the Stigmatized,” they conclude that individuals perceiving stigma may be unwilling to seek support directly and instead may use indirect strategies due to fear of rejection. Ironically, they found that indirect seeking led to unsupportive network responses (i.e., rejection). In their comparison of the married and cohabiting romantic relationships of adults between the ages of 20 and 59 years (“Women’s Weekly Relationship Functioning and Depressive Symptoms”), Sarah W. Whitton, Scott M. Stanley, Howard J. Markman, and Brian R. Baucom report findings that suggest women low in stereotypical masculinity and in relationships of shorter duration are particularly likely to show increased depressive symptoms during weeks when they experience poorer relationship functioning than usual.

Two of the articles in this issue report findings from longitudinal studies of samples of adults who are older than the participants in the projects previously described. The authors of one of these two longitudinal studies examined a sample of adults who, at the last time of measurement, were between the ages of 52 and 59 years. In this study, Mark I. Weinberger, Yariv Hofstein, and Susan Krauss Whitbourne (“Intimacy in Young Adulthood as a Predictor of Divorce in Midlife”) found that women, but not men, with low intimacy in college had higher risk of divorce in midlife. The older adults Brigitte Bloem, Theo van Tilburg, and Fleur Thomése studied before and after the participants had relocated ranged in age from 55 through 86 years. In their article, “Changes in Older Dutch Adults’ Role Networks after Moving,” the authors report that of the various types of networks, those with neighbors changed the most after relocation. Long-distance movers discontinued relationships with fellow club members most frequently, and as expected, moving did not affect co-worker networks. The findings show that, consistent with the convoy model, role networks are unstable. Older adults, however, restored their partial networks to their original levels at the second observation by starting new relationships.

As Distinguished Scholar Rosemary Blieszner discussed a few years ago in her *Personal Relationships* article, “A Lifetime of Caring: Dimensions and Dynamics in Late-Life Close Relationships” (Volume 13, Issue 1, March 2006, pp. 1-18), examining the intersection of the literatures on personal development, the life course, and close relationships suggests new directions for research such as the sociohistorical milieu of life course influences on relationships, the connections between personal development and caring relationships, and relationships and well-being over time. It is encouraging to note that the articles included in this issue report on findings from samples of a wide variety of age groups. It is especially exciting that two of them include results of studies designed to examine relationships longitudinally. The range of the ages of the participants in the studies featured in this issue and the inclusion of two articles examining relationships across the lifespan longitudinally bodes well for the future of our field and for the possibility that personal relationships scholarship will eventually address some of the topics Blieszner suggested for future research.

This issue is the last of four in volume 15 of *Personal Relationships*, the second of three volumes my editorial team and I will produce. I would like to thank all of the authors who contributed to this volume. Not only do these 91 authors represent a variety of disciplines (psychology; communication studies; human development and family studies or sciences; sociology; anthropology; psychiatry; counseling, rehabilitation, and student development; education; and human ecology) and reside in many different countries (The United States, the Netherlands, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Australia, Israel, and New Zealand), like the participants they studied, they also are a variety of ages and therefore face different developmental challenges and different opportunities for and constraints on their personal relationships. Although their ages affect the type of changes they are experiencing in their personal networks, the authors who contributed to this volume, like those they study, are experiencing new personal relationships and celebrating changes in their old ones. For example,

during the time they were working on the articles published in this volume, Bethany Butzer, Brian Baucom, Zoe Pearce, and Christina Dowd each became engaged; Jaye Derrick, Emily Impett, Dory Ann Schachner, and Kenneth Locke were each married; and other contributing authors became parents (e.g., Sarah Whitton gave birth to twin sons and Timothy J. Loving's partner gave birth to a daughter). Still others celebrated their children's birthdays (e.g., Anita Vangelisti), adoption anniversaries (e.g., Jill Kiecolt), college graduations (e.g., Howard Markman), and marriages (e.g., Susan Krauss Whitbourne). Some of them celebrated their own wedding anniversaries (e.g., Heidi Riggio-10 years, Kieran Sullivan-15 years, Verna M. Keith-25 years, and Kim Halford-30 years) or other personal relationship rites of passage such as becoming an aunt (i.e., Carla Mesquita Crespo) or a sister-in-law (i.e., Amy Strachman). So not only do the articles published in this issue remind us that personal relationships unfold across the lifespan, so do the lives of their authors.

In closing, I would also like to thank my associate editors and editorial board (who are listed on the inside cover of this issue) and the *ad hoc* and new scholar reviewers (who are listed at the back of this issue). They are a diverse lot. The Associate Editors and members of the Editorial Board represent 12 countries (i.e., the United States, Canada, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Australia, Israel, Mexico, Portugal, Greece, Austria, Brazil, and New Zealand) and six disciplines (i.e., Psychology, Communication Studies, Human Development and Family Studies or Sciences, Sociology, Philosophy, and Social Gerontology). The *ad hoc* and new scholar reviewers include people from many of the same countries as the members of the Editorial Board and also scholars from Germany, Italy, Hungary, Belgium, Austria, Japan, and Slovenia. In addition to the six disciplines represented on the Editorial Board, the *ad hoc* and new scholar reviewers represent Education, Social Work, Psychiatry, Anthropology, Management, Geriatrics, Counseling, and Survey Research. Notice that the trajectory of experience from new scholar, to *ad hoc* reviewer, to editorial board member, to member of the editorial team reflects a recognition by the International Association for Relationship Research that like personal relationships, careers develop over time, and it is important to provide structured opportunities for scholars to contribute to our field by participating in the editorial process throughout their careers.

On behalf of the editorial team of *Personal Relationships*,

Rebecca G. Adams