



The Science of Intimate Relationships

Garth Fletcher, Jeffry A. Simpson, Lorne Campbell, and Nickola C. Overall



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0020-3193



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A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2013

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Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fletcher, Garth J. O.

The science of intimate relationships / Garth Fletcher, Jeffry A. Simpson, Lorne Campbell, and Nickola C. Overall
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-7919-5 (pbk.) – ISBN 978-1-118-35516-9 (epub) – ISBN 978-1-118-37870-0 1. Intimacy (Psychology) 2. Sex (Psychology) 3. Interpersonal relations. I. Title.
BF575.I5F543 2013
158.2–dc23

2012042775

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Cupid and Psyche, 1986. © Calum Colvin.

Cover design by Simon Levy Associates

Set in 10.5/13 pt Minion by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited

The Science of Intimate Relationships

About the Authors

Garth Fletcher is professor of psychology at Victoria University Wellington. He is a fellow of five societies including the Royal Society of New Zealand, the Association for Psychological Science, and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and has been associate editor of both *Personal Relationships* and the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Fletcher has published over 100 articles and book chapters, and has authored and edited six books.

Jeffrey A. Simpson is professor of psychology and director of the doctoral minor in interpersonal relationships (IREL) at the University of Minnesota. He has been the editor of the journal *Personal Relationships* and is currently the editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes* (JPSP-IRGP). Simpson is the incoming president of the International Association for Relationship Research, and has published nearly 200 articles and chapters along with several edited books.

Lorne Campbell is associate professor of psychology at the University of Western Ontario. He has published over 40 articles and book chapters, serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, and has been the editor of the journal *Personal Relationships*.

Nickola C. Overall is senior lecturer of psychology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She has published over 40 articles and book chapters, serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, and is currently associate editor for *Personal Relationships*.

Preface: The Science of Intimate Relationships

The front cover of this textbook is by the noted artist Calum Colvin, who is professor of fine art photography at the University of Dundee in Scotland, UK. The picture is a contemporary reading of a classic statue from the eighteenth century depicting Cupid and Psyche by Canova (currently in the Musée du Louvre). The Greek legend of Cupid and Psyche can be traced to the second century AD. It starts with Cupid being sent by Venus (Cupid's mother) to pierce Psyche with his arrow so she would fall in love with a vile creature (placed there by Venus) when she awoke. Venus was jealous of Psyche because of her renowned beauty. The plan goes awry when Cupid accidentally pricks himself with his own arrow and falls head over heels in love with Psyche. The legend, as legends do, goes through many twists and turns before they finally get together and live happily ever after (literally, as Psyche was rendered immortal like Cupid).

If you look closely at the picture on the cover, you can see that it is not quite what it seems at first glance. It was created in a rather complicated fashion by arranging a collage of material from an ordinary lounge (a radio, a couch, a light bulb, a book, and so forth), then partly painting and photographing the arrangement from a certain angle. The image is finally printed as a large-scale photograph. This picture illustrates a major theme in this textbook; namely, that love, passion, and intimacy are powerful forces that can seem exotic, yet at the same time are woven through the fabric of ordinary life, forming part, as they do, of the bedrock in human nature.

When teaching courses on intimate relationships, we (the authors) sometimes ask our students to what extent personal experiences in relationships might help or hinder the scientific study of relationships. We typically find that students are divided in their views. Some point out that personal experiences of love, jealousy, intimacy, interpersonal conflict, sex, and so forth, all too readily blind the perceiver to the variability across individuals in how such phenomena are experienced, and such experiences are not especially informative about the causes for such phenomena. Others argue, again quite reasonably, that personal experiences can lead to insights and should not be thought of as existing outside the science of intimate relationships. Most agree that experiencing emotions like love, jealousy, and grief (illustrated in the legend of Cupid and Psyche) are, if nothing else, convincing demonstrations of their power.

We suspect that many scientists who study intimate relationships are initially motivated one way or another by their own personal experiences, but scientists also understand the severe limitations of relying on such personal experiences to build a scientific

understanding of intimate relationships. The problem is that personal experiences typically come seamlessly packaged with implicit beliefs, causal attributions, scripts, and predictions. As we emphasize throughout the book, taking a scientific approach requires the suspension, or at least a critical examination, of such personal views and beliefs (difficult though that may be).

This book is aimed at university courses on relationships taught at an upper-level undergraduate or postgraduate level. We had several goals in mind when writing the book. We wanted to write a rigorous book that was true to the science, but was also intriguing and at times provocative. Thus, we attempt to strike a lively and enthusiastic tone that accurately represents the excitement in the field. We also wanted to write a genuinely interdisciplinary but accessible book – challenging aims indeed! We leave it to you, the reader, to decide how successful we have been.

Science can be a harsh environment because of the often forceful public criticism and scrutiny of ideas and research. However, a spirit of generosity and collegial support also prevails. We thank our colleagues who reviewed and read chapters, including Gina Grimshaw and Alan Dixon. We also thank Chelsea Rose, Janet Craig, Kim Nathan, and five anonymous reviewers who read the whole book, providing thoughtful and constructive suggestions and criticisms.

We thank the team at Wiley-Blackwell for their support, patience, and enthusiasm for the project, especially Julia Kirk, Karen Shield, and Matt Bennett. We also owe a great debt of gratitude to the untiring and expert help of Chelsea Rose in creating the PowerPoint slides for the book, sorting out the flood of copyright issues involved, and preparing and coordinating the ancillary materials. We could not have written the book without her considerable help.

Finally we give grateful thanks to our respective partners and families for their understanding and support, especially when working on the book during countless evenings and weekends.

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