

What is a Relationship?

What constitutes a relationship? The answer, many relationship researchers will say, is simple. A relationship exists between two people when each person influences the other's thoughts, feelings, and or behavior. In other words, a relationship exists when people are at least minimally interdependent (Kelley et al. 1983). As the frequency, diversity, impact, and or time span over which people influence one another increase, the relationship becomes increasingly interdependent or, according to Berscheid.

Types of Relationships

Interdependence takes many forms, a fact reflected in the diversity of terms we use to refer to relationships—friends, romantic partners, sibling relationships, business partners, and physician–patient relationships. Most past, and many current, relationship researchers have chosen one of these types of relationships to describe in detail. This has resulted in separate literatures on friendships, romantic relationships, marriages, and sibling relationships, and these literatures continue to expand.

Increasingly, however, researchers are focusing upon conceptual differences between relationships. Some have identified conceptual dimensions along which relationships vary. For instance, Wish et al. (1976) find evidence for four dimensions underlying people's ratings of

relationships: cooperative friendly versus competitive/hostile; equal versus unequal; intense versus superficial; and socioemotional/informal versus task-oriented/formal. Blumstein and Kollock (1988) suggest that relationships vary according to whether they do or do not involve kin, sexual/romantic aspects, cohabitation, differences in status, and cross-sex participants.

In social science, a social relation or social interaction is any relationship between two or more individuals. Social relations derived from individual agency form the basis of social structure and the basic object for analysis by social scientists. Fundamental inquiries into the nature of social relations feature in the work of sociologists such as Max Weber in his theory of social action. Social relationships are a special case of social relations that can exist without any communication taking place between the actors involved.