

# What's Love Got to Do With it? Romantic Relationships and Well-Being

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## Abstract:

Social relationships are one of the most important facets of well-being and one of the strongest links with both physical and psychological health. Romantic relationships specifically may have a particularly intense impact on well-being due to heightened emotions and cognitions within these close relationships. Prior research has identified the importance of romantic relationships and relationship status for well-being and psychological adjustment, yet less has considered the specific qualities that play a role in this link. I will consider the specific relationship qualities that may particularly benefit or damage well-being. Intimate relationships become increasingly important as individuals transition from dating in adolescence, cohabitating in emerging adulthood, and ultimately marriage in adulthood. I review the extensive literature on the benefits of healthy romantic relationships on well-being, highlighting how each influences the other during different developmental stages of relationships from initiation to dissolution adjustment. I also point to the increasing diversity of understudied romantic experiences (i.e., online, casual, polyamory, arranged versus self-selecting marriages, sexual minority) and highlight important unanswered questions this proliferation leaves open. Future directions for further understanding the unique role of romantic experiences in its association with well-being will be discussed.

**Keywords: Romantic relationships, relationship quality, well-being**

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One of the strongest links to subjective well-being is the quality of one's social relationships (Frisch, 2005; Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2007). The happiest people report having the most satisfying social lives. Specifically, people with high positive affect and life satisfaction are more likely to engage in more social activities including spending more time talking to others, have more friends, and feel closer to their friends (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Mehl, Cazire, Holleran, & Clark, 2010). Those with strong social ties reap myriad benefits beyond its critical link to well-being. For example, those with healthy social relationships tend to live longer and have better physical health (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010), have greater job satisfaction and work performance, academic competence (Resnick et al., 1997; Chambel & Curren, 2005; Cotton, Dollard, & de Jonge, 2002), and are more creative (Perry-Smith, 2006). Psychological health including depression, anxiety, substance use, and feelings of self worth and self esteem has been strongly tied to social relationships (Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Richards, Hardy, & Wadsworth, 1997; Taylor, Doane, & Eisenberg, 2013).

There are several theories as to *why* happy individuals benefit from having strong ties with others. Developing social resources has evolutionarily been beneficial for survival (Buss, 2000). Those in a supportive group have been able to live longer and provide for their offspring in ways that living in solitude could not provide. Humans at their core have needs to belong and to develop close social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, it is unsurprising that meeting these needs and having close social ties is linked to well-being. An alternate perspective is that happy people attract social resources and can also build relationships with others when in positive moods. This is most similar to Fredrickson's broaden-and-build model (1998, 2001), which proposes that positivity allows one to expand resources including

one's social network and relationships because they already have a strong foundation of met needs (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Being in a positive mood allows individuals the flexibility and freedom to explore and invest in social relationships because they do not have concern over immediate or imminent survival. Happy individuals can devote more time towards building close social relationships increasing their social capital that is especially useful in future times of stress.

Yet another perspective lies in a functional account of emotions, which proposes that affect guides behaviors through a series of rewards and punishments, and that social relationships and interactions can be especially important influences in generating informative and evocative functions (Keltner & Haidt, 2001; Keltner & Kring, 1998). Positive emotions indicate that a particular interaction or behavior is going well and sends a reward signal to the individual to reinforce that behavior. This in turn leads to a greater likelihood of repeating the behavior in the future. Rather than simply providing feedback as information, positive feelings can also evoke positive feedback from others through pleasant conversations, activities, or games which all serve to continue building healthy relationships.

Rather than simply having a large social network, social relationship *quality* may contribute to well-being in important ways. Social support specifically refers to the sense of being taken care of, listened to, loved, and appreciated. Social support has been identified as a critical driver of both physical and mental health benefits (Cohen, 2004). Not only is the presence of social relationships important for well-being, but the quality, especially the perceived satisfaction and level of support, from these relationships influences our psychological health as well.

## **Romantic Relationships:**

### **Similarities and Differences with Other Relationships**

While social relationships in general have been extensively studied and linked to well-being, the focus for this chapter will be on one specific type of relationship. In particular, *romantic relationships* may be uniquely and powerfully related to subjective well-being. Romantic relationships differ from general social relationships in important ways, yet researchers have acknowledged the difficulty in defining a romantic relationship. One primary feature distinct between friendships and romantic relationships is a marked difference in intimacy (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). While close friends share intimate details of their lives, the role of intimacy involved in romantic relationships is typically deeper and more pervasive. Combined with intimacy, passion and commitment are two additional features central to romantic relationships (Sternberg, 1986). Ultimately, Sternberg proposes that the total amount of love depends on the overall sum of the three components, and the *type* of love depends on the strength of each component relative to each other. Depending on the relative strength of each feature, a relationship may be classified by different types of love including romantic, companionate, empty, infatuation, and consummate.

Further, all three components (i.e., intimacy, passion, and commitment) are associated with relationship satisfaction and their links to satisfaction vary over time as relationships evolve. All three components increase over time as couples transition from casual dating to monogamous dating to engagement (Gao, 2001). However, passion and intimacy tend to decline while commitment increases for married couples over time (Acker & Davis, 1992). Although all three components are associated with relationship satisfaction, commitment has the strongest association (Acker & Davis, 1992). Greater mismatches among the three qualities within couples are associated with greater relationship dissatisfaction (Sternberg, 1986; 1988; Sternberg & Barnes, 1985).

In addition to Sternberg's triangular theory of love, many other researchers have attempted to define and conceptualize love in order to empirically study this important relational quality. Many theorists have identified two major types of love: passionate and companionate (Fehr, 1988; Fischer, Shaver, & Carnochan, 1990; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Hatfield, Rapson, & Martel, 2007). Passionate love is often referred to as infatuation, erotic love, or romantic love. It is usually characterized by sexual feelings and intense emotions such as jealousy, passion, and anxiety. Alternatively, companionate love typically involves less intense emotions and is characterized by attachment, intimacy, trust, closeness, and commitment. Companionate love has also been referred to as storgic love (Lee, 1988). While theorists have proposed that passionate love declines over time and companionate love remains stable, empirical work has generally found a small decline in both types over time for married couples (Sprecher, 1999; Hatfield, Pillemer, O'Brien, & Le, 2008). Each type of love has an important role in a successful marriage and may account for different relationship and well-being qualities. For example, passionate love more strongly predicts positive and negative affect, while companionate love more strongly predicts life satisfaction (Kim & Hatfield, 2004). Hendrick, Dicke, and Hendrick (1988) found that passionate and companionate love are both positively related to relationship satisfaction.

In addition to the two main types of love, Lee (1977) defined six types of love *styles*. The three main love styles are eros (i.e., rooted in strong physical attraction), ludus (i.e., viewing love as a game, noncommittal), and storge (i.e., friendship evolving into a romantic relationship). The next three styles are combinations of the three main love styles including mania (i.e., possessive, jealous, anxious attachment to a partner reflected via the combination of eros and ludus), pragma (i.e., practical approach reflected via the combination of ludus and storge), and agape (altruistic love reflected via the combination of eros and storge). Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) developed a 42-item Love Attitude Scale that categorizes individuals into one of these six love styles. Subsequent analyses have linked the eros and agape styles to higher commitment and relationship satisfaction, while ludus is negatively associated with satisfaction and commitment (Frazier & Esterly, 1990; Hendrick, Hendrick & Adler, 1988; Morrow, Clark, & Brock, 1995). Individuals within couples who have different love styles tend to report lower quality relationships and satisfaction (Davis & Latty-Mann, 1987). In a cross-cultural study, the storge love style predicted subjective well-being in the United States and Portugal while eros and mania predicted well-being in the Mozambican sample (Galinha, Oishi, Pereira, Wirtz, & Esteves, 2014). Cross-cultural interpretations of love styles and their impact on well-being remain a vastly understudied area, but early findings point to important potential differences. Overall findings suggest that although there are many different types of love for romantic partners, those with eros and agape styles and those who have similar love styles tend to report better relationship quality and higher satisfaction.

The many different definitions and conceptualizations of love complicate attempts to assess the role of love in romantic relationship stability, quality, and satisfaction. Yet, the intimacy and intense feelings of love continue to be cited as qualities that make romantic relationships from other types of social relationships. In addition to these potentially unique aspects, romantic relationships typically include a sexual component as well, which set this type of relationship apart from others. Indeed, romantic love includes passion, exclusiveness, sexual intimacy and physical attraction, all of which are typically absent in other forms of love such as platonic or companionate (Gooch, 1989, Kaplan & Keys, 1997; Monsour, Betty, & Kurzweil, 1993). Although sexual attraction may be present in platonic love, it is typically not acted upon compared to the frequent utility of sexual attraction and intimacy in romantic love (Davis & Todd, 1982; Monsour et al., 1993). However, more recently there has been a rise of nonromantic sexual relationships (i.e., hookups; friends with benefits) especially common among emerging adults, complicating attempts to define a romantic relationship (see Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012 for a review; Furman & Shaffer, 2011; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000).

A primary framework for understanding romantic relationships comes from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973; 1980). A crucial extension of Bowlby's attachment theory, which originally was proposed to explain parent-child relationships, is that adults may develop analogous attachment patterns to romantic partners. Similar to a mother being seen as the primary attachment figure in childhood, a romantic partner may be seen as the primary attachment figure in adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Prager, 1995). The quality of interactions with an attachment figure when in distress helps shape the attachment style one is likely to adopt. A secure base, proximity seeking, and safe haven, which are characteristics of a strong and secure attachment figure, are transferred from parents to romantic partners. Eventually, a romantic partner will replace a parental figure as the primary attachment figure (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). When an attachment figure is perceived as emotionally unavailable or unreliable, one may be more prone to feel insecure and have doubts about the relationship; when a close other is perceived as available, reliable, trustworthy, and willing to provide support when needed, one is more likely to feel a sense of secure attachment, intimacy, support, and nurturance (Cassidy, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). Thus, adults in romantic relationships form a unique attachment to their romantic partner as compared to their level of commitment and engagement with other social partners.

Beyond attachment style, romantic love, intimacy, and passion, there are myriad other characteristics that might define a romantic relationship. Researchers have disagreed about what constitutes a romantic relationship, especially for unmarried couples. This is in part due to the changing norms of how people are defining their own relationships in the gray area of dating prior to a committed marriage during an era of proliferation of dating terms. I also want to acknowledge that this chapter will mainly focus on heteronormative relationships – mainly heterosexual populations that hold the Westernized view of relationship development towards self-selecting marriages. This is partially due to a lack of well-being research on alternate forms of relationships as well as due to lack of space to consider all relationship forms in the scope of this chapter. I will very briefly describe an overview of the research, and lack thereof, on “nontraditional romantic relationships” such as polyamory, online dating, arranged marriages, and sexual minority groups. Therefore, for the purposes of *this chapter*, a romantic relationship will be considered to be one, monogamous, self-selecting, committed relationship between two individuals. In the sections that follow, I will expand on the idea of attachment, intimacy, commitment, passion, and others as

important characteristics of romantic relationships and how they may relate to individual well-being and relationship satisfaction.

## **The Basics: Are Romantic Relationships Linked to Well-Being?**

In general, research has identified romantic relationships specifically as being uniquely related to subjective well-being. Marriage has been cited as one of the leading sources of both support and stress for adults (Walen & Lachman, 2000). Specifically, marriage has been linked to lower psychological distress and higher well-being in adulthood as well (Diener, Gohm, Suh, & Oishi, 2000; Eklides, Kalaitzidou, & Chankin, 2003; Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Holder, 2012; Wu & Hart, 2002). Even prior to marriage, romantic relationships are linked to one's overall sense of subjective well-being (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Dush & Amato, 2005; Keyes & Waterman, 2003). It is not simply the involvement in a romantic relationship that may account for the link to well-being, but the quality of that relationship as well (Myers, 2000).

In late adolescence, teens report feeling the greatest levels of support but also perceiving the greatest amount of conflict from their romantic partners as compared to from their peers or parents (Furman & Shomaker, 2008). While social relationships across the lifespan are important for well-being, romantic relationships gain in importance and salience as a major aspect of one's identity steadily throughout late adolescence, young adulthood, and eventually adulthood (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2001; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003; Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010). It will be critical to discuss how romantic experiences influence well-being and vice versa as individuals' needs, goals, and values in a relationship developmentally change over time. Additionally, there are developmental differences in romantic relationships across the lifespan, which can also change the strength of the link between intimate relationships and well-being. The developmental differences of romantic experiences and their association with well-being will be discussed.

Given the developmental perspective of the centrality of maintaining intimacy within a romantic relationship in young adulthood, it is not surprising that one's relationship status and quality of their romantic partnership are linked to physical and mental health. Prior findings consistently point to the marriage benefit in terms of less mental illness, distress, substance abuse, physical health complaints, mortality, and morbidity (Gove, 1972; Horwitz, White, & Howell-White, 1996; Umberson, 1987; Waite, 1995). Romantic relationships generally are sources of high well-being, intimacy, companionship, and happiness for emerging adults prior to marriage as well (Berry & Willingham, 1997; Demir, 2010; Diener et al., 2000; Johnson, Kent, & Yale, 2012).

## **Let's Get Specific:**

### **What Qualities are Linked to Well-Being?**

We see growing evidence that it is not simply relationship status that accounts for the benefits for well-being. The *quality* of a romantic relationship as well as how *satisfied* one is with their relationship and partner are both essential to assess as well. Subjective well-being encompasses affect and global life satisfaction judgments; however, it can also include subjective evaluations of specific life domains including social relationships, work performance, or citizenship. Prior findings suggest that global subjective well-being and domain-specific relationship satisfaction are highly correlated, which one would expect given the strong link between well-being and relationships. Relationship quality has been found to positively correlate with well-being in terms of more satisfied individuals reporting higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect and lower levels of negative affect (Dush & Amato, 2005; Dyrda, Roysamb, Nes, & Vitterso 2011; Love & Holder, 2015). Importantly, relationship satisfaction is associated with higher levels of subjective well-being regardless of relationship status (Dush & Amato, 2005). Indeed, feeling satisfied with one's relationship status, regardless of what that relationship status is, predicts higher life satisfaction but is less tied to emotional and psychological well-being (Adamczyk, 2017). Interestingly, relationship satisfaction has been linked to idealistic, rather than realistic, views of a romantic partner (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996) pointing to a potential positivity bias towards partners among those high in relationship satisfaction.

Relatedly, sexual satisfaction has been another relationship domain that is linked to relationship quality, satisfaction, and well-being. In a review, Sprecher and Cate (2004) found that sexual satisfaction is significantly related to relationship stability and quality. Prior findings also indicate that changes in sexual satisfaction are linked to changes in relationship satisfaction, love, and commitment to a partner in unmarried couples (Sprecher, 2002). Key components of the link between sexual and relationship

satisfaction is likely communication and sexual expression (Sprecher, Metts, Burleson, Hatfield, & Thompson, 1995). Given the importance of intimacy that is a hallmark and defining feature of romantic relationships compared to its role in other social relationships, it is not surprising that sexual satisfaction is an important characteristic. Being able to communicate with a partner about sexual needs and to receive what one desires are both important aspects of high levels of sexual and relationship satisfaction, and this communication is likely highly linked to overall intimacy.

Many other important qualities beyond intimacy emerge as essential factors for overall well-being. Poor marital quality has been linked to poor immune and endocrine functioning, depression, anxiety, and problem behaviors (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Sampson, Laub, & Wimer, 2006; Umberson & Williams, 1999). High conflict and hostile relationships are linked to poor mental health reflected in greater rates of depression, anxiety, aggression, and substance abuse (Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Horwitz, McLaughlin, & White, 1998; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2006; Whisman, 2007). Demir (2008) found that for emerging adult couples, emotional security and companionship were the strongest predictors of happiness and when combined with the qualities of reliable alliance, help, self-validation, and intimacy, accounted for 13% of the variance in happiness. In adulthood, commitment, trust, and intimacy in romantic relationships emerge as being especially highly related to subjective well-being (Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Mehta, Walls, Scherer, Feldman, & Shrier, 2016; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012). We begin to see that while there are common qualities that are beneficial across developmental stages, it is worthwhile to assess which qualities may be more influential and important than others for unmarried versus married couples.

Another key mechanism that acts as a moderator between many relationship qualities and overall well-being is attachment style. A secure attachment style is strongly linked to high quality romantic relationships (Banse, 2004; Simpson, 1990) and securely attached individuals report relationships with greater commitment, trust, and satisfaction (Simpson, 1990) which are qualities that have previously been identified as critical to relationship satisfaction and well-being. Secure attachment has been linked to higher levels of subjective well-being, while insecure attachment styles (i.e., avoidant and anxious) are negatively related to well-being (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Li & Fung, 2014; Schiffrin, 2014; Van Buren & Cooley, 2002). Attachment security can also predict relationship stability, or whether unmarried couples tend to remain together or break up (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001) as well as whether one chooses to enter into a committed relationship (Schindler, Eagundes, & Murdock, 2010). Specifically, attachment anxiety is associated with a strong desire to commit while attachment avoidance is related to lower levels of commitment and willingness to enter a committed relationship (Morgan & Shaver, 1999; Schindler et al., 2010).

Those with secure attachment styles may feel most comfortable and confident in themselves and the relationship which allows the healthy qualities of trust, communication, intimacy, and others to foster more naturally and to a greater extent compared to individuals who are avoidant or anxious in their attachment styles. Indeed, Leak and Cooney (2001) found that secure attachment was positively related to self-determination and that together they both related to higher well-being and mental health. Further, the link between secure attachment and satisfaction was mediated by commitment and intimacy, again pointing to a strong link between attachment styles and other romantic qualities (Madey & Rodgers, 2009). Following from above, insecure attachment styles were related to lower levels of sexual satisfaction (Butzer & Campbell, 2008).

Finally, what many people may consider to be crucial in romantic relationships, in addition to support, sexual intimacy, and healthy conflict management, love is also a component of relationship and individual well-being and satisfaction. Married couples tend to identify love as being the most important quality that makes them feel close, connected, and committed to their spouse (Riehl-Emde, Thomas, & Willi, 2003). Even in unmarried couples, love emerges as strongly linked to satisfaction (Hendrick et al., 1988). Love, romance, and intimacy are all positively associated with well-being but this link may be stronger for females than males (Love & Holder, 2015). While beyond the scope of this chapter, gender differences in romantic experiences are important to consider in relationship research, which I will highlight in the concluding section on future directions.

Overall, it is clear that intimate partnerships greatly impact one's physical and emotional health in both positive and negative ways depending on relationship status and quality. It is also evident that many of these relationships are bidirectional – higher quality relationships can benefit well-being while higher levels of well-being foster qualities that can enhance relationship satisfaction and functioning. Although many couples report love as being the most important aspect of their relationship satisfaction, findings also point to the qualities of attachment, support, intimacy, companionship, and sexual satisfaction as being critical to relationship satisfaction and well-being as well.

# The Mechanism: Why are Romantic Relationships

## Linked to Well-Being?

Romantic relationships may uniquely contribute to well-being for several reasons. First, successfully navigating romantic relationships is identified as a primary developmental task of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004). Happiness has been associated with success in different life domains, especially the domains that are most pertinent to the appropriate developmental stage (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Thus, failure to meet the goal of maintaining intimacy with a romantic partner during early adulthood may be linked to poorer well-being, self-esteem, and psychological health. Indeed, abstaining from dating until early adulthood has been linked to a host of negative outcomes including poor psychosocial functioning (Lehnart, Neyer, & Eccles, 2010; Rauer, Pettit, Lansford, Bates, & Dodge, 2013).

One possible mechanism for the link between relationship status and well-being is that maintaining a romantic relationship is seen as a socially appealing marker of success during early adulthood. Those unable to form close relationships with others by adulthood in the form of a committed, monogamous relationship may be more likely to experience lower well-being and greater levels of mental distress. Evidence for this mechanism is suggested by cultural findings on the link between marriage and well-being. Diener and colleagues (2000) found that the benefit of being married was smaller in collectivist nations and in nations where there was a high tolerance of divorce. They argue that in cultures where divorce is considered taboo, unmarried individuals' well-being may be impacted in a greater magnitude as compared to nations where divorce is more common and acceptable (Gibbs, 1969; Glenn & Weaver, 1988; Stack, 1990). Thus, in societies where committed romantic relationships are valued as a cultural norm, failing to meet this goal may lead to poor psychological health and well-being. Related to developmental goals, one's well-being may be more impacted by failing to meet the intimacy goal during young adulthood as compared to earlier in adolescence. Thus, the context and cultural expectations for romantic relationships are likely powerful influences on the link between intimate relationships and well-being.

Beyond the socially constructed need to find one committed romantic partner in adulthood, marriage may serve a more general and universal human need: social support. Recall that evolutionarily, developing social support and resources is beneficial for survival (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Buss, 2000). Prior researchers have suggested that marriage can fulfill this need via providing companionship and thus fighting against loneliness (Glenn, 1975; Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Rook, 1984). Indeed, Fromm (1956) suggested that the concept of love developed over time as a way to combat loneliness and emotional and social isolation. Thus, the evolutionary benefit of general social support may naturally extend to the positive outcomes associated with having a strong, supportive marital partner (for a review see Eastwick, 2016). Happy people may be more likely to attract and maintain a healthy romantic relationship while unhappy individuals struggle to find a suitable partner or to maintain a stable relationship over time (Diener & Diener McGavran, 2008). Further, mate selection theorists have identified a preference for pleasant personality characteristics (Buss & Barnes, 1986) indicating those with high well-being may be more desirable mates. Successful romantic relationships may have also provided the financial, emotional, and social support associated with greater likelihood of successful reproduction as well. Married individuals benefit from having a partner to share life's burdens, problems, and struggles with which can help boost trust and intimacy between partners and decrease the distress linked to life's hardships (Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990; Williams, 1988). Not only are partners beneficial for providing support when one is undergoing stress, but they also provide the opportunity to reciprocate with support as well. Providing care, love, and support for a spouse may boost one's self-esteem, provide greater purpose in one's life, and increase sense of mastery over a salient developmental task (Gove et al., 1990).

Providing instrumental support via division of labor in the home may also be beneficial for individuals as they share the burden of everyday tasks rather than solely providing everything for themselves. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found couples who agree on a suitable division of labor for financial and household responsibilities report the highest relationship satisfaction. Further, marital happiness and conflict were both related to satisfaction with division of labor (Suitor, 1991). One's own hours and perception of partner's hours spent on housework and paid work all seem to influence marital satisfaction (Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2001). Sharing of household and work tasks is an ongoing discussion and negotiation for many couples, highlighting the importance of communication. The perception of *why* partners provide help is also linked to well-being and satisfaction. For example, sacrifices and helping with approach motives (i.e., focusing on increasing positive outcomes) is associated with greater well-being and higher relationship quality, while those with avoidance motives (i.e., focusing on decreasing negative outcomes) is linked to lower well-being, relationship quality, and relationship stability (Gable & Reis,

2001; Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). Thus, agreeing on division of labor and interpretation of partner's motives are important for relationship and individual well-being. With more dual-income families becoming the common family dynamic, more research regarding division of labor and subsequent satisfaction for relationship and individual well-being is warranted.

Beyond the role of a romantic partner in providing social support when conflict, distress, or other negative events arise, the utility of sharing positive news and confiding in a romantic partner may also help explain the link between relationship status and well-being. While friends can also provide social outlets to share good news, a romantic partner is often someone of greater trust, intimacy, emotional connection, and importance. Thus, romantic partners may particularly benefit from sharing and responding to positive news. Gable, Gonzaga, and Strachman (2006) found that how partners respond to good news is more closely related to relationship stability and well-being than how they respond to bad news. In particular, responding in an active-constructive manner as compared to passive-constructive, passive-destructive, or active-destructive, is important for individual and relationship well-being and satisfaction (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Thus, capitalizing on the positive experiences and events a romantic partner discloses may boost relationship functioning and well-being.

Yet another potential mechanism that explains the well-being and romantic relationship link is felt understanding. Feeling understood by others generally is associated with higher well-being (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis, Lemay, & Finkenauer, 2017). Related to capitalizing on sharing positive news with a romantic partner, perhaps feeling heard and understood also helps boost well-being between individuals in a relationship. The impact of feeling understood by a romantic partner may be particularly salient for well-being, relationship satisfaction, and conflict management between partners (Gordon & Chen, 2016). In general, knowing a partner well is linked to greater intimacy and relationship satisfaction (Gottman, 1994; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Swann, De la Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Knowing a partner's attitudes and well-being is associated with greater relationship satisfaction, perceived support from partner, and life satisfaction and lower negative affect and depression (Moore & Diener, in press; Moore, Uchino, Baucom, Behrends, & Sanbonmatsu, 2017). Thus, feeling understood by a partner may provide greater emotional support, intimacy, and other important mental health and relationship benefits that lead to greater well-being overall. A romantic partner may be the closest, most intimate relationship someone has in his or her adult life. The felt understanding one perceives from this romantic partner may thus especially impact well-being, as feeling understood by the person one is closest to seems to carry more weight than felt understanding from strangers, friends, or other social relationships. A successful, healthy romantic relationship in which both partners perceive great understanding and familiarity with each other is likely to have psychological and relationship benefits.

Alternative explanations exist that may account for the link between romantic involvement and well-being that focus on the quality of these partnerships. Happy individuals may be able to provide for their partner in terms of support, intimacy, and emotional expressivity compared to individuals lower in well-being. Positive affect has been linked to greater feelings of intimacy and warmth toward a partner while negative affect is linked to decreased feelings of intimacy (Berry, Willingham, & Thayer, 2000; Demir, 2008; Gleason, Iida, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008; Prager, 1995; Sprecher, 1999; Williams, Connolly, & Segal, 2001). While intimacy is one example, it is likely that affect may play a role in the development of trust, sexual satisfaction, support, communication, and companionship which have all been identified as important relationship qualities linked to well-being.

## **Romantic Developmental Differences:**

### **Adolescence, Emerging Adulthood, and Adulthood**

#### **Adolescence**

Although research on romantic relationships and well-being have largely focused on marriage in adulthood, it is widely recognized that romantic experiences come online much earlier and that these experiences are influential to concurrent well-being and romantic development over time. Adolescents begin experimenting with dating as early as 12 years old when about 25% report involvement in some type of romantic relationship with an average relationship duration of 5 months (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). Nearly half of adolescents report being involved in a romantic relationship by the age of 15; by age 18, more than three quarters of adolescents report engaging in romantic involvement and on average, these relationships last much longer – on average 20 months (Carver et al., 2003).

Per a review of romantic development theories by Meier and Allen (2014), normative romantic exploration begins in early adolescence, which typically involves group dating and is relatively short in

duration. In mid-adolescence, multiple short-term relationships with an increased emphasis on sexual and emotional intimacy become common. By late adolescence and into adulthood, one exclusive, sexual, committed relationship becomes the normative experience. Early adolescent romantic experiences are characterized as being more affiliative and companionate as compared to late adolescent romantic relationships which tend to be more committed, supportive, and loving (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001; Shulman & Scharf, 2000).

While maintaining intimacy within romantic relationships is not considered a primary developmental goal until emerging adulthood, teens personally consider navigating intimate relationships as important for their psychosocial lives. The majority of teenagers report at least one exclusive relationship experience by the end of adolescence and the prevalence and importance of engaging in intimate relationships increases during the transition into young adulthood (Carver et al., 2003; Furman & Shomaker, 2008; Giordano, Manning, Longmore, & Flanigan, 2012; Reis, Lin, Bennett, & Nezelek, 1993). Romantic relationships have been linked to both negative behaviors and poor psychological health and well-being (Davies & Windle, 2000; Furman & Collins, 2009; Neemann, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995; Thomas & Hsiu, 1993; van Dulmen, Gony, Haydon, & Collins, 2008; Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins, 2004).

However, romantic exploration is common and normative among adolescents, and thus teen dating also been linked to positive developmental outcomes as well in terms of later well-being and future romantic relationships. Evidence suggests that while romantic experiences in *early* adolescence are more strongly linked to problematic behaviors, the link decreases in magnitude for romantic experiences that occur in late adolescence (Neemann et al., 1995). Instead, adolescents who were involved in romantic relationships by the end of high school were more likely to marry and cohabitate in early adulthood (Raley, Crissey, & Muller, 2007). High quality adolescent romantic relationships have been linked to positive relationships and a range of psychosocial benefits including positive commitment in relationships in early adulthood, fewer externalizing problems, higher levels of social support, and greater social competence, self-worth, and self-esteem (Collibee & Furman, 2015; Collins, 2003; Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 1999; Connolly & Konarski, 1994; Furman, Low, & Ho, 2009; Masten et al., 1995; Raley et al., 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003; van Dulmen et al., 2008). Specifically, support and self-disclosure have been identified as essential predictors of successful adolescent relationships (Hansen, Christopher, & Nangle, 1992). Overall, we see that romantic relationships begin during adolescence and that these early experiences can have important links to well-being and romantic trajectories over time.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

Successfully navigating intimate relationships is recognized as a primary developmental task of early and emerging adulthood (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009; Clark & Beck, 2010; Erikson, 1982; Roisman et al., 2004). Indeed, recent societal changes have delayed the age of first marriage for young adults, which has led to the relatively new conceptualization of emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental stage ranging from ages 18 through 29 (Arnett, 1998, 2000). Especially common during this time is a period of exploration as individuals aim to blend romantic, personal, and career lives together which partially accounts for the delayed entrance into long-term stable relationships (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Thus, emerging adulthood can be characterized by a series of romantic relationships that vary in the extent of commitment, intensity, and intimacy (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark, & Gordon, 2003).

However, the trend for emerging adults to explore several romantic options during the 20-something years does not necessarily mean that these romantic experiences are not as important or influential for development and well-being. Remaining single or engaging in a series of various types of non-committal romantic relationships (i.e., hooking up, friends with benefits, casual dating) is often a conscious, intentional decision for these young adults (Katz & Schneider, 2013; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000; Puentes, Knox, & Zusman, 2008; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Emerging adults may place career, travel, or friendship priorities ahead of finding “the one” and as such the characteristic romantic exploration is a choice rather than due to a deficit in connecting with a partner for a monogamous relationship. Shulman and Connolly (2013) argue that young adults may deliberately choose to pursue work or school goals rather than continue or initiate a long-term, monogamous, committed romantic relationship. Other researchers have an optimistic view of this romantic exploratory period. For example, Marcia (2002) suggests that it is healthy to explore available options prior to making a decision and this can extend to romantic exploration for a marriage partner as well.

Perhaps paradoxically, emerging adults are still placing a high value on romantic relationships during this time frame. Schulenberg, Bryant, and O'Malley (2004) found that emerging adults report stronger ties between their well-being and successfully meeting the goal of romantic exploration and intimacy, than between well-being and progress in reaching other developmentally-salient goals such as

avoiding substance use, maintaining close friendships, reaching educational achievements, or achieving financial independence. For those in a romantic relationship, their partner is often identified as a greater influence on well-being compared to parents or friends (Demir, 2010; Meeus, Branie, van der Valk, & De Wied, 2007). Compared to in adolescence, high quality romantic relationships in emerging adulthood are more strongly linked to well-being and relationship satisfaction, indicating a developmental shift in centrality of intimate relationships to well-being (Collibee & Furman, 2015; Meeus et al., 2007). There is some evidence suggesting that college students who are in committed relationships report higher levels of well-being compared to their single peers (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010) and that those young adults who get and stay married report higher levels of well-being compared to their single peers (Horwitz, White, & Howell-White, 1996). Further, college students often report their romantic relationship as the closest and most meaningful type of relationship they have (Snyder, Berscheid, & Omoto, 1989). However, others have found little to no difference in long-term impacts on well-being between those who have casual hook up relationships and those in committed romantic relationships (Furman & Collibee, 2014; Vrangalova, 2014).

Given that emerging adulthood is a relatively new developmental stage, it is not surprising that we see mixed findings for whether and to what extent the characteristic romantic exploration is related to concurrent or long-term well-being. One particularly interesting area of open research will be to further assess whether different types of romantic relationships (casual relationships, open relationships, friends with benefits, hooking up) impact individual and interpersonal development and well-being to different degrees.

### **Adulthood**

Historically, research on romantic relationships has focused on married couples. As outlined above, prior findings consistently point to what may be referred to as the marriage benefit. Namely, that being married serves a positive function in general such that those who are married tend to reap benefits in terms of both physical and mental health (Dush & Amato, 2005; Wu & Hart, 2002). However, even in adulthood, we see varying relationship stages and transitions taking place that are each related to well-being in different ways. Those who are married are happier than those who are cohabitating, casually dating, monogamously dating, or rarely date (Dush & Amato, 2005). Even after controlling for relationship satisfaction, relationship status in adulthood was found to remain linked to well-being. Further, with each increase in relationship commitment level, there was an increase in subjective well-being. It is hypothesized that it is this growing level of commitment and stability that accounts for the differences in well-being (Brown, 2000; Dush & Amato, 2005)

In addition, married adults report greater levels of happiness compared to those who are single, divorced, separated, or cohabitating (Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008; Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Gove et al., 1990; Mastekaasa, 1994; Myers, 2000; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Stack & Eshleman 1998). Helliwell (2003) found that being married is associated with the highest subjective well-being while being separated is linked to the lowest ratings of well-being with the divorced and widowed falling in between. In a meta-analysis, Proulx and colleagues (2007) found a moderate link ( $r = .37$ ) between marital quality and well-being.

The relationship between high quality romantic relationships and well-being becomes stronger with age (Segrin, Powell, Givertz, & Brackin, 2003; Simon & Barrett, 2010). Interestingly, married couples tend to experience a decrease in life satisfaction over the course of their marriage; however those couples with high marital happiness reported the smallest declines (Dush et al., 2008). Whether individuals report high general life satisfaction and happiness was strongly linked to whether the marriage was classified as high, middle, or low in marital happiness indicating that individuals who have a high baseline well-being carry over their happiness into their marriage with potential lasting effects. While it was well documented that married individuals are happier, more recent research calls for attention to be shifted from relationship status to relationship quality in explaining the potential for a marriage benefit to exist.

## **Romantic Dissolution and Divorce: Implications on Well-Being**

Thus far, I have presented research suggesting the benefits of having a healthy marriage, yet there are many societal changes that complicate the “simple,” Westernized notion of choosing a marriage partner for life and assuming that this choice would relate to high levels of well-being. In emerging adulthood, romantic exploration is key, which brings along a series of relationships including breakups. In adulthood, the divorce rate is steadily climbing adding to the challenge of redefining romantic relationships in mid to late adulthood as well. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider the opposing situation and its impact on well-being. It seems obvious that divorce or a breakup would be stressful, but how much of an impact does dissolution have on well-being?

A romantic breakup has been cited as one of the worst types of traumatic experiences (Frazier & Hurliman, 2001). Yet, it is relatively common during emerging adulthood such that nearly 40% of young adults report at least one breakup over a 20-month period (Rhoades, Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011). Romantic dissolutions have been linked to serious negative outcomes including anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress, substance abuse, self esteem, poor physical health, and finally low life satisfaction (Chung et al., 2002; Fine & Harvey, 2006; Fleming, White, Oesterle, Haggerty, & Catalano, 2010; Lewandowski, Aron, Bassis, & Kunak, 2006; Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999; Rhoades et al., 2011). Given the normative process of romantic exploration during young adulthood, researchers have begun exploring the possible benefits of nonmarital dissolutions. The scarce findings begin supporting the idea that individuals can experience post-traumatic growth, personal growth, and positive emotions following a breakup (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Further, they may report increased satisfaction and higher relationship quality in their next romantic relationship (Kansky & Allen, 2017).

While in emerging adulthood, dissolutions are considered to be common and there are mixed findings regarding their detriment to psychological well-being, breakups in adulthood in the form of divorce may have more significant negative impacts. Indeed, adults cite divorce as one of the most stressful events they may encounter in their lifetime (Kitson & Morgan, 1990). Compared to those married, individuals who are divorced or separated report lower levels of psychological well-being, greater alcohol abuse, and greater use of psychological treatment (Fine & Harvey, 2006; Gove & Shin, 1989; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Waite, 1995). Further, individuals who had previously divorced report lower levels of well-being even if they remarry indicating the potential for long-term negative impacts on psychological health (Richards et al., 1997). Interestingly, individuals report similar decreases in well-being following dissolution whether they were married or only cohabitating in adulthood (Wu & Hart, 2002). This indicates that dissolution of adult committed relationships even outside the context of marriage may impact well-being similarly, even though the benefits of being in a marriage compared to cohabitating have differential impacts on well-being.

However, other findings indicate that divorce may not alone account for the lower reports of well-being. Rather, individuals tend to report greater distress and lower well-being over several years *prior* to the divorce compared to those in happy, stable relationships (Mastekaasa, 1995). This indicates that prior to filing for divorce, there may be a difference between those who stay married and those who part ways in terms of their pre-transition stress and well-being levels. Rather than individuals suffering from divorce or separation, their well-being may be negatively impacted from conflict, poor communication, and distress related to a low quality relationship prior to the actual event of a divorce.

Attachment is an important moderator of many relationship qualities and satisfaction, and again we see evidence for its role as a moderator in post divorce adjustment. Divorced individuals report greater distress compared to their married counterparts, but only if the divorced report insecure attachment styles (Birbaum, Orr, Mikulincer, & Florian, 1997). Another dimension that moderates the relationship between divorce status and well-being may be how quickly one finds a new, fulfilling, committed relationship. For example, those who cohabit with a new partner during the first year following the initial separation report higher well-being compared to those who choose to live alone (Mastekaasa, 1994). Yet another moderator may be cultural acceptance of divorce. As mentioned earlier, the impact of being unmarried or divorced on well-being may be greater in cultures where divorce is less socially acceptable (Diener et al., 2000; Glenn & Weaver, 1988). While in general it has been accepted that married individuals are happier than divorced adults, many qualities and adjustment behaviors may paint a more complex picture.

## **The New Normal? Diverse**

### **Romantic Relationships and Well-Being**

As indicated previously, most research on romantic relationships and well-being has focused on Western, heteronormative relationships. In particular, adult married populations are often the focus of research in this realm. However, romantic experiences exist in many alternate forms, and recent empirical attention has attempted to capture the range of romantic relationships and how it relates to well-being.

#### **Sexual Minority Status**

For example, sexual minority relationships have increasingly gained empirical support to understand their similarities and differences with heterosexual romantic relationships. Given the finding of a marriage benefit for heterosexual couples, it is important to consider whether this exists for sexual minority couples as well. Because legal recognition of homosexual couples is not uniform, whether

relationship status (i.e., committed versus married) for homosexual, as compared to heterosexual, individuals impacts well-being differently is important to consider.

In a study of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, those in committed or legally recognized relationships reported higher well-being and less psychological distress as compared to single participants (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010). Further, those in legally-recognized relationships reported higher well-being compared to those in committed relationships pointing to a possible marriage benefit for non-heterosexual couples as well. Lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals experience a higher prevalence of mental disorders and distress compared to heterosexuals (Gilman et al., 2001; Meyer, 2003; Sandfort, de Graaf, Bijl, & Schnabel, 2001). Findings also suggest that sexual minority youth report greater negative affect and concern over romantic relationships and friendships compared to their heterosexual peers (Diamon & Lucas, 2004).

### **Nonmonogamy and Polyamory**

Beyond sexual orientation as a defining feature of “nontraditional” relationships, we are seeing an increasing diversity of types of relationships based on other features as well. Individuals are increasingly engaging in alternative relationship categories such as polyamory or open relationships. In a recent review of nonmonogamous relationships and well-being, Rubel and Bogaert (2014) found little evidence for differences in well-being based on monogamist or nonmonogamist status. Relationship qualities, not overall well-being, based on this status may differ. For example, polyamorous individuals reported greater levels of intimacy compared to monogamous participants (Morrison, Beaulieu, Brockman, & O’Beaglaioich, 2013). Because polyamorous relationships are characterized by emotional intimacy, openness, and honesty rather than sexual intimacy, it is not surprising that higher levels of general intimacy are reported (Barker, 2005; Fierman & Poulsen, 2014; Klesse, 2006). Overall, there is still little research identifying how nonmonogamous, compared to monogamous, relationships may differentially relate to well-being, and whether these unique relationship types differ in terms of qualities or experiences from the traditional, committed marital relationship that has been the focus of romantic relationship research historically.

### **Online Dating**

Now that the Internet is almost constantly at one’s fingertips, the invention of online dating websites and mobile dating applications together are an increasingly important facet of romantic experiences that has yet to be fully tapped by researchers. A Pew Research Center study found that 38% of “single and looking” American adults have used online dating sites themselves and almost 50% report knowing someone who has been an online user (Smith & Duggan, 2016). One recent study found that one-third of marriages from 2005 to 2012 began online such as through online dating websites (45%), social networking platforms (21%), chat rooms (10%), online community forums (6%), and other avenues as compared to meeting offline through work (22%), friends (19%), school (11%), social gatherings (10%), bars (9%), family (7%) or other conventional means (Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Gonzaga, Ogburn, & VanderWeele, 2013). There is also some evidence suggesting that those couples who begin their relationship online report higher relationship quality, higher marital satisfaction, and were less likely to experience a marital breakup as compared to those who met offline (Cacioppo et al., 2013; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012), yet other studies find few differences (see Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012 for a review). Thus, there is continued debate as to whether online dating is beneficial or detrimental to relationship formation, stability, and satisfaction.

Research identifying who may be more likely to use online avenues to find a romantic partner is also limited but begins pointing to older adults and sexual minority individuals as being especially likely candidates to take their dating efforts online (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Deveau, 2009). Yet, other studies identified the mid-20s through mid 40’s group as being most likely to use online dating tools (Smith & Duggan, 2016). Given the proliferation of online dating avenues (i.e., general and niche dating websites, mobile dating applications, chat rooms, gaming websites), lumping online dating into one single category may neglect the heterogeneity of this recent trend. For example, older adults are more likely to use email to meet potential spouses online while younger adults prefer mobile applications and social networking sites (Cacioppo et al., 2013). The increased utility of online means for individuals looking to connect with potential partners who may otherwise not form romantic relationships through more conventional means highlights the significant potential impact online avenues may have for boosting well-being. Despite the challenges the quickly changing online dating scene poses for researchers, evidence begins pointing to similarities and differences between online versus offline relationships especially how the access point of individuals meeting may influence relationship satisfaction and stability. Given the continued increase in reported online dating use (Smith & Anderson, 2016), it is essential to more clearly understand how romantic relationship quality, satisfaction, and well-being may be affected by this virtual

trend.

### **Arranged Marriages**

Yet another category of relationships that we did not extensively review thus far is that of non-Western traditional forms of marriage. In non-Western cultures, such as India and areas of China, marriages of choice are considered risky and frowned upon as they may detract from family obligations (Medora, Larson, Hortacsu, & Dave, 2002). Instead, an estimated 90% of all Indian marriages are arranged (Gautam, 2002). Even within westernized societies, subcultures exist that favor arranged marriages. For example, in orthodox Judaism, it is relatively common to use a matchmaker, a Shadchan, to assist in bringing couples together (Rockman, 1994). The traditionalist view on marriage suggests that free choice marriages start off with high satisfaction which decreases over time, while arranged marriages have the opposite pattern in which initial satisfaction is low but increases with time (see Xiaohe & Whyte, 1990 for a discussion). However, in a pivotal study Blood and Wolfe (1960) found that for both self-selecting and arranged marriages in Tokyo, satisfaction and love expression decreased over time. Husbands in arranged marriages showed a more gradual decline than self-selecting husbands, while wives in arranged marriages reported more dissatisfaction and lower love expression compared to self-selecting wives. In a partial replication study in Chengdu, China, Xiaohu and Whyte (1990) found that wives in self-selecting marriages reported greater relationship satisfaction compared to women in arranged marriages.

More research on these diverse marriage typologies has compared arranged marriages in Indian cultures to self-selecting, or love, marriages in the United States. Findings suggest that there are differences in the importance that arranged versus love or self-selecting married individuals place on relationship characteristics that may ultimately influence marital satisfaction. For example, Yelsma and Athappilly (1988) found that communication was less tied to marital satisfaction for arranged marriages as compared to love marriages; yet those in arranged marriages reported higher marital satisfaction than those in self-selecting marriages. Others have found differences in importance of qualities such as love and loyalty between arranged versus love marriages but failed to find that this ultimately led to differences in relationship satisfaction (Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005). In a recent comparison, Madathil and Benshoff (2008) found that arranged Indian married individuals place greater importance on finance and shared values, while self-selecting American married individuals consider loyalty to be more important and tend to report higher satisfaction overall.

## **Where Do We Go From Here?**

### **Future Research Directions and Literature Gaps**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the broad physical and mental health benefits stemming from social relationships and highlighted how romantic relationships specifically are related to well-being. I want to again acknowledge that the chapter focuses on heteronormative relationships – mainly heterosexual populations that hold the Western traditional view of relationship development and marriage. As noted previously, the choice to focus on this working definition of relationships was partially due to the majority of relationship research focusing on this traditional relationship type. In addition, space limitations for this chapter prevented discussion of *all* relationship forms, many of which accordingly fall outside the scope of this chapter.

Again, most research on romantic relationships and well-being has focused on Western, heteronormative relationships, especially adult married couples. Thus, more research should consider the unique influences of diverse romantic relationships on psychological well-being and mental health. In recent years, there has been an increase in research on sexual minority relationships, but this is still a relatively open area for future research as it relates to well-being. More research regarding the unique stressors for sexual minority individuals on their relationship satisfaction and experiences as well as their well-being is needed.

Beyond sexual orientation, the diversity in romantic experiences based on commitment (polyamory and nonmonogamy versus monogamy), avenue of meeting potential partners (online versus offline), and freedom in selecting a marriage partner (arranged versus self-selecting) provides a plethora of alternative relationships that may relate to well-being differently as compared to the link between well-being and Western, monogamous, self-selecting married relationships. In particular, long-term outcomes for psychological health and well-being associated with nonmonogamous relationships is needed, as only recently have these alternative lifestyles been the subject of empirical attention. Further research on whether well-being and other individual characteristics are related to the use of technology-assisted dating will add to our limited understanding of this societal trend. In addition, whether online versus offline dating

differentially impacts relationship satisfaction and well-being is a challenging open area of research yet to discover. The quickly changing online dating scene complicates efforts to assess long-term outcomes linked to this relatively recent trend. Further, longitudinal studies of couples who met online compared to offline, or who engage in online-only romantic relationships are needed to more clearly understand the unique impacts of these alternative relationships on well-being. Finally, just as there is heterogeneity within committed, self-selecting marriages that leads to different impacts on well-being, there also exists a broad range of arranged marriages in which many factors influence a couple's marriage decision and trajectory including family and cultural influences or perceived input on the decision making process. Given such discrepant and scarce findings of well-being and love versus arranged marriages, future research on the differences between marriage types for relationship satisfaction and well-being is needed.

While I discussed love as an important characteristic of Western romantic relationships, this may not apply cross-culturally, especially in societies in which traditional, arranged marriages are more common. Indeed, college students in Western nations report love as being more important to a successful marriage compared to students in Eastern nations (Levin, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995). Further, love may be defined or expressed differently in various cultures (de Munck, Korotayev, de Munck, & Khaltourina, 2011; Karandashev, 2015; Nadal, 2012). Different qualities may be tied to relationship investment and satisfaction cross-culturally as well (Karandashev, 2015; Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008; Schmitt, 2006; Schmitt et al., 2009; Yelsma & Athappilly, 1988). I reviewed evidence suggesting that there are cultural differences regarding which love styles are related to well-being and satisfaction, yet this remains a relatively understudied area. Because the concept and definition of love may vary cross-culturally, more research on universal and culture-specific relationship qualities (including love) for well-being is warranted.

Another complication for assessing romantic relationships and well-being is that the definition of what constitutes a romantic relationship is ever changing. While there is a wealth of research of marital relationships, there is a societal trend in creating different categories of a relationship based on commitment and intimacy levels. This is especially common among emerging adults who are exploring romantically and delaying making "the one" decision for much longer than in the past. In addition to an increase in nonmonogamous relationship subtypes in Western society, sociosexuality is another relationship dimension that has recently received empirical attention. Sociosexuality is defined as one's willingness to engage in sexual encounters and experiences with others without the commitment, intimacy, emotional connection, and closeness that traditionally accompanied sexual engagement (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Sociosexuality exists on a continuum ranging from restricted (sex is accompanied by commitment and closeness) to unrestricted (sex in the absence of emotional connection or commitment). Because up to 80% of college students report casual sexual experiences and hooking up may replace traditional dating development (Garcia & Reiber, 2008; Bogle, 2008), assessing whether unrestricted sociosexuality impacts well-being or romantic satisfaction is warranted. Research regarding hook up culture and positive versus negative impacts on well-being has thus far been mixed (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Grello, Welsh, Harper, & Dickson, 2003; Owen, Quirk, & Fincham, 2013; Vrangalova, 2015). Thus, considering how sociosexuality and each distinct category of nonmarital dating (casual, monogamous, cohabitating, hooking up, friends with benefits, etc.) relates to well-being is an important area of future study.

Another area lacking in sufficient research is identifying the beneficial aspects of early teen dating and the possible benefits associated with the normal process of romantic exploration during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Historically, research on adolescent romantic relationships has focused on its negative correlates and risky behavior. More recently, researchers have begun to identify its utility for overall mental health and successful future relationships, but there is much more that can be uncovered. While there has been an uptick in research that looks at teen and young adult romantic involvement, this is an area that deserves more attention especially given how potentially formative our early relationships can be for future individual and interpersonal functioning.

Relatedly, I reviewed potential mechanisms that account for the strong link between romantic relationships and well-being. Specifically, the social, emotional, and instrumental support a romantic partner can offer in healthy relationships has been commonly cited as a key mechanism of this link. Providing and receiving support in both distressing and positive events with a romantic partner may be a crucial factor in predicting overall well-being. Beyond the general support hypothesis, others have attempted to identify additional explanations for the relationship benefit. Feeling understood by others, and in particular by romantic partners, is linked to higher well-being and relationship satisfaction (Gordon & Chen, 2016; Reis, Lemay, & Finkenauer, 2017). Open communication to convey what one needs from a partner and, in turn, understanding a partner's needs and perspective may boost relationship benefits for well-being. The familiarity, trust, understanding, and support romantic partners can provide all seem to

benefit individual well-being. Research on qualities unique to romantic relationships as compared to social relationships and their impact on well-being continues to be limited. Further, more research on the specific mechanisms that account for the link between romantic experiences and overall well-being is needed.

Finally, gender differences are often considered when discussing romantic relationships. Prior research concerning the impact of romantic relationship transitions and experiences suggest that there may be different implications for men and women. Early research on potential gender differences found that males tend to benefit more from marriage and suffer more from divorce compared to women (Bloom, White, & Asher, 1979; Gove, 1972). However, more recent findings suggest relatively few to no gender differences in the marriage benefit for physical health or well-being (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Simon, 2002; Strohschein, McDonough, Monette, & Shao, 2005; Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, & Slaten, 1996; Williams, 2003). Future research that addresses the conflicting findings regarding potential gender differences would be beneficial.

Overall, there has been a wealth of research considering the link between romantic relationships and well-being, but the vast majority has focused on the idea of identifying the marriage benefit and its mechanisms. Many prior findings also linked well-being solely to relationship status without considering more discrete qualities of those relationships. Moving forward, it will be critical to assess the characteristics of romantic relationships that are most closely linked to well-being and relationship satisfaction. It is evident that there are many more relationship qualities that impact well-being in addition to love and that the concept of love varies across cultures, time, and development. Given the changing definition of a romantic relationship and importance of different relationship qualities over time, more research focusing on a greater variety of relationship types – whether it be varying degrees of commitment, number of partners, or gender – and their link to well-being and relationship satisfaction is warranted.

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