

## Book reviews

Brehm, Sharon S. (1992) *Intimate Relationships*, 2nd edn. McGraw-Hill: New York; pp. 507.

Reviewed by Michele Acker, University of Michigan.

Written as a textbook for undergraduate psychology classes, this book will stimulate interest in the field among young scholars of social science and will also serve as a valuable resource for the more advanced researcher who 'just needs to find that particular study or reference'. The book is organized topically and could be used for just particular chapters or for the entire book. It would be a good primary text for an undergraduate course in personal relationships, if supplemented with additional readings, and could serve as a good reference text for a graduate level class where the primary readings were journal articles.

The second edition of *Intimate Relationships* provides an extensive overview of the field of interpersonal relationships, both historically and currently. Brehm has achieved a good balance between the classic studies of the field and the most recent research in progress. It is useful for students to read about the first typologies of love, such as Rubin's and Berscheid & Hatfield's (Walster's), and about Dutton & Aron's 'shaking bridge', and of the application of Equity Theory to personal relationships. At the same time, the book helps the reader to realize that the field has evolved to cover many other topics, in a variety of disciplines which I think this book represents well.

The book is organized in a progressive manner such that the course of the book follows what one might consider to be the natural course of an intimate relationship. In early chapters the reader learns about the current state of relationships, particularly marriage, cohabitation and divorce. There is then a brief exploration of the type of research methods that researchers of intimate relationships use. This is followed by several chapters on interpersonal attraction, love and romance, and sexuality. The author then turns to relationship development and maintenance, and also to problems in relationships, such as communication, power and jealousy. The next group of chapters discusses what happens after the problems increase, namely conflict, relationship dissolution, loneliness and single parenting among others. Finally, so as not to end anyone's study of personal relationships on an unhappy note, Brehm discusses methods of improving intimate relationships, such as therapy. This book does include some discussion of friendship and homosexual relationships, but the majority of its emphasis is on heterosexual, romantic relationships.

One of the strengths of the book is that it is quite up-to-date in its coverage of the material. Indeed it is clear that there were extensive revisions to the first edition, which was an often used text, based on recent research in the area of personal relationships. In a field that is growing rapidly, this is of paramount importance in any new texts that are written or old texts that are revised. Another strength is in the breadth of research the author covers. She draws from the fields of psychology, communication and sociology and still includes many of the classic studies, even with the addition of new research. Although there is a psychological bent to the book, it is written in a way that makes it accessible to a variety of social science

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disciplines. As far as using the book for teaching, one strength is its chapter summaries and clear sub-headings. This is a real boon to the student who is attempting to assimilate the material in a meaningful framework. This also makes it easier for the researcher attempting to find something within the text quickly.

The book does, however, seem to oversimplify and over-explain certain concepts. For this reason, the social science graduate student would find it frustrating to use as a text. Also, its discussion of relationships other than heterosexual relationships is limited. This is an area which could use more discussion and most students, as well as faculty, would like greater coverage of these issues. Also, the discussion of some other alternative areas of intimate relationships, such as sibling relationships and friendships, could be extended.

The book will be particularly valuable for use with undergraduate students because it will really hold their attention. Relationships are something that are very important to the college population and the author has capitalized on this fact. There are plenty of examples which will seem both real and pertinent to students and will aid in their understanding of the material. At the same time, the examples are balanced with enough research to remind students that they cannot take this knowledge as 'something they knew all along'. Relationship research is an excellent way to teach social science methodology and interest students in the social sciences and the author really helps to accomplish that task with this book. It may also serve to remind some of us how many interesting and divergent areas of relationship research there are as the field continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

**M.A.**

Cowan, P.A. & Hetherington, M. (eds) (1991) *Family Transitions*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; pp. xi + 319.

*Reviewed by* Thomas M. Bohman, University of Texas, Austin.

This volume represents a collection of papers (originally presented at the Family Research Consortium's second summer institute, *Understanding Normative and Non-normative Family Transitions* held in 1987 in Santa Fe, New Mexico) along with an introductory chapter by Cowan. As a group, the chapters present a superior balance of theoretical and empirical presentations that illuminate some of the key issues in studying developmental change in families. In addition, most authors present directions for future research using their own comprehensive, well-executed research programs that answer important questions about transitions in our society.

The book is broken into three sections. Part 1 involves psychological, sociological and physiological conceptualizations of family transitions. Cowan begins by providing a framework that defines transitions in the context of processes (versus states), differences in adult and family development, and normative versus non-normative transitions. He describes transitions as long-term processes that result in a qualitative reorganization of both inner life and external behavior. Cowan emphasizes that studying the disorganized and subsequent reorganization phases of transitions illuminates how families and individuals adapt to change.

Following this point, Elder argues that studying family transitions shows individuals out of their normal situation, highlights the processes of growth (and implicitly deterioration), and can point to areas of potential change. He sounds a similar