Introduction: partnering across the life course

Dimitri Mortelmans, Laura Bernardi, Brienna Perelli-Harris

What's love got to do with it?
Tina Turner

Cleopatra and Marcus Antonius, Romeo and Juliet, Franklin D., and Eleanor Roosevelt. History has had its share of famous couples. Music history has produced countless tributes to loved ones (and probably twice as many to heartbreak). Partnerships are at the heart of everyone's everyday life. Yet we seem to know less about them than we do about subatomic particles. One thing we do know is that both partnerships and particles are mysterious entities whose behaviour and interactions are difficult to predict.

This volume is a *research handbook on partnering across the life course*. It brings together scientific insights, both empirical and theoretical, on partnerships around the globe. In doing so, we go beyond the general story of the recent and largely documented demographic accounts of union dynamics (Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). Such an account reads as follows: In the late 1960s, demographic behaviour started to shift as people started to marry later and postponed childbearing (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010). Couples also had fewer children than before, leading to below replacement fertility in many countries (Billari et al., 2007; Frejka & Sobotka, 2008). At the same time, divorce rates began to rise to unprecedented levels (Mortelmans, 2020; Wagner, 2020). The next step was the slow reduction of marriage, the rise of unmarried cohabitation and the subsequent rise in out-of-wedlock births (Kiernan, 2001; Perelli-Harris & Lyons-Amos, 2015) and more recently the increase in union dissolution, repartnering and LAT relationships (Thomson 2014). However, at the same time, partnership, whatever its form, remains a highly desired status among men and women (Smartand Shipman 2004, Bergström and Moulin 2022).

The consequences of these developments are what we have called the family kaleidoscope (Mortelmans et al., 2016). The word 'kaleidoscope' comes from the Greek words *kalos* (beauty), eidos (form) and *skopos* (to examine). The kaleidoscope looks, therefore, at the beauty of different forms. This colourful lens is what we need to provide a comprehensive landscape of partnership diversity. This book aims to go beyond a classic review of the state of the art of academic knowledge. When starting this book project, we, the editors, chose an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond (Western) high-income countries. We have brought together the world's expertise on arranged partnerships, young starters and life-long unions, online dating, and LGBTQ relationships, to name just a few. Although we are unable to capture the true complexity of the world's families, we aimed to include contexts often missing from such compendia, for example, the Middle Eastern and African families. Only such a broad range of experts can provide a glimpse of the plethora of perspectives that the partner kaleidoscope offers.

The concept of *partnership* does not have a strict and uniform definition but depends on time, context, family linkages, and individual proclivities. The kaleidoscopic lens that is adopted to view partnerships differs dramatically between disciplines and even between researchers within disciplines. This book grapples with these different perspectives, providing an interdisciplinary view across psychology, bio-

evolution, history, anthropology, sociology, and demography. By contrasting and synthesizing these perspectives, we gain a holistic picture of the definition and role of society partnerships today.

1 Defining partnership

This book is about partnerships, couples, and romantic relationships between two or more people, but also about the breakdown of partnerships, the loss of a partner, and remaining single. Historically, partnerships have been embedded in the social and economic structure of society, a keyway to organise families and kin. For millennia, the social institution of marriage has governed the relations between two individuals, and in most of the world continues to do so (see Pauli, Chapter 5). Thus, partnerships cannot be seen solely as a relationship between two individuals, but as a link that binds familial networks and households, and a way to regulate wealth, transfers, inheritances, and welfare.

Nonetheless, as societies have changed, so has the role of partnerships. Increasingly, heterosexual marriage no longer defines partnerships but is instead one partnership form among many. Relationships have become fluid and more likely to end. Singlehood and same-sex partnerships have become recognised and acceptable options, at least in some parts of the world. As these trends continue to increase globally, it becomes imperative to consider not only spouses whose relationships are officially recognised through law, but also alternative arrangements, agreements, and associations. However, this makes defining a partnership even more difficult. We decided to begin our journey by attempting to define partnerships. First, we examine one of the most basic features that in many contexts identify personal relationship(s) and partnerships – love and commitment.

Defining Partnerships through Love and Commitment

A starting point can be found in social psychology. It was only in the Seventies of the last century that psychology began to take an academic interest in emotions and the concept of love (see Kluwer&Trillingsgaard, Chapter 4). Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) were among the first to formulate a theoretical basis for the concept of love, distinguishing between passionate and companionate love. Companionate love is a friendly affection and deep attachment to someone whereas passionate love is defined as a state of intense longing for union with another (Hatfield & Walster, 1978). Later, Sternberg (1986) developed the triangular theory of love[1] in which love is a construct consisting of three dimensions (metaphorically represented as the vertices of a triangle): intimacy, passion and commitment. The intimacy dimension refers to feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness – like companionship. Passion relates to the sexual dimension of a relationship and physical attraction. Finally, the commitment dimension refers to the desire to stay with someone and to commit to that person in the future (Sternberg, 2006).

Commitment is one of the grounds of a partnership that developed into a full-blown research area. It is defined as the intention of couples to remain in their relationship over time (Stanley et al., 2010). Two main theories have developed a complementary framework on why partners develop a long term relationship: *interdependence theory* (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and *social exchange theory* (Levinger, 1965). Both theories identify three forces that keep relationships together: personal (the desire to stay in the relationship), moral (one's values and beliefs) and structural (the attractiveness of the relationship; the costs of breaking up; and the inverse relation between the attractiveness of the relationship and the cost of the alternative (being single or entering another relationship)) (Johnson et al., 1999). These dimensions of commitment determine relationship quality as elaborated on in Kanter, et al., Chapter 18.

[1] Similar theoretical models are also developed in the attachment theoretical framework. For an overview, see: Berscheid, 2010; Sternberg & Weis, 2006 and Kluwer&Trillingsgaard, Chapter 4.

The commitment dimension points to the shared path two (or more) partners walk to invest in the long-term survival of the partnership. Aside from commitment, also *intimacy* within couples has received a lot of (empirical) attention. Here the emphasis lies on the individual in a relationship having feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness. Jamieson (2011), paraphrasing Morgan's concept of *doing family*, prefers the term 'intimacy practices' or 'disclosing intimacy' transforming the static concept of intimacy into a continuously negotiated and renewed process between partners.

In sum, a romantic partnership is a multidimensional concept based on a combination of intimacy, passion and commitment that are constantly negotiated between two or more partners (more in Beckes, chapter 15). Most of the chapters in this book assume a dyad when discussing partnerships.

Defining Partnerships through Institutions and Living Arrangements

Although love, intimacy, and commitment may be a keyway of defining partnerships, this definition does not always line up with the official form of partnership – marriage – which has dominated living arrangements across the globe for centuries. Marriage has been the primary means for states and religious institutions to regulate families, manage property and inheritance, tax households, provide welfare and protection, and ensure the maintenance of religious values (Coontz 2005) (see Probert, Chapter 2). Although alternative partnership arrangements have been increasing, marriage is still the only state-recognised legal bond between two individuals, except in a few European countries (Perelli-Harris and Sanchez Gassen 2012). Note that over the past few decades, the right to marry has been extended to same-sex couples in more and more countries. Marriage is also the only relationship which is officially registered (except civil partnerships in some countries, e.g. France, the Netherlands). Marriage tends to have a defined starting date, on the day of registration, and a legal end after the divorce process is over. Hence, marriage is the only form of partnership widely available in official statistics.

Today, couples in high-income countries usually enter legal marriage to signify their love and commitment, or potentially to gain rights and benefits only available to married couples (Perelli-Harris et al 2014). Thus, marriage often overlaps with the psychological concept of partnership discussed above. However, in many contexts, the decision to marry is not made exclusively by the couple, but instead strongly influenced by families. In many African countries, marriage is an arrangement between kin networks, often formalized with an exchange of bride wealth that could include livestock, household items, or money (see Somefun, et al., Chapter 23). In much of India and South Asia, marriages are solely arranged by parents or other senior family members with little or no input from the couple (see Allendorf, Chapter 10). In parts of the Middle East, especially in Muslim countries, consanguineous marriage, or marriage between cousins, continues to be common (see Abbasi-Shavazi & Hosseini-Chavoshi, Chapter 24). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that for billions of people, the choice of partnership is still not completely voluntary.

Nonetheless, although traditional marriage has been maintained throughout much of the world, many regions have experienced a decline in marriage, with nonmarital cohabitation becoming more and more popular. In Europe and North America, marriage rates have declined dramatically, with cohabitation becoming the normative route to starting partnerships in most countries (see Hiekel, Chapter 6). Childbearing within cohabitation has become common throughout Europe (see Mikolai, Chapter 17) and Latin America (see Wiegand-Cruz, Chapter 26). In East Asia, the prevalence of cohabitation has also been rising steadily in Taiwan, Japan, and China, although cohabiting couples rarely have children (see Cheng & Hsu, Chapter 25).

Cohabitation is more difficult to define than marriage, as the process of moving in together is often gradual, without a clear or remembered starting or ending date. The meaning of cohabitation is also ambiguous, since the level of commitment varies across couples and over time within relationships.

Couples often first live together to test whether their relationship is solid enough for marriage. Sometimes their living arrangement is a matter of convenience, and they have little intention to ever marry. In other cases, their commitment is strong, but they simply never get around to marrying, due to other, often financial, priorities. Couples may also reject the institution of marriage altogether, living in a long-term relationship indistinguishable from marriage (see Perelli-Harris & Sassler, Chapter 3). Thus, while cohabitation is now more often included in surveys and registers, this partnership type can still be difficult to define, measure, and examine.

Flexibility in the Definition of Partnerships

As social norms and values have shifted, particularly in high-income countries, the concept of a single, life-long, monogamous partnership has become less normative. The rise of individualization has transformed interpersonal relationships, leading to an increase in relationship churning. With a focus on self-actualisation, individuals are more likely to leave an unsatisfactory relationship to pursue their next romance (see Perelli-Harris & Sassler, Chapter 3). Online dating has made it even easier to seek new relationships outside of one's immediate personal networks (see Potarca, Chapter 19). Thus, when marriages break down, or cohabiting partners separate (see Kreyenfeld&Schmauk, Chapter 20), individuals often seek new partners, leading to repartnering (see Ivanova, Chapter 21).

Another new development has been the increase in Living Apart Together (LAT) Relationships (see Regnier-Lollier, Chapter 8). Although any new relationship starts with partners living separately, the rise of LATs refers to the emergence of long-term, committed partnerships in which partners choose to live apart or cannot move in together due to various constraints. LATs are becoming more common in young adulthood, when partners may live in separate locations for employment reasons, but also in later life, often after divorce or widowhood. At older ages, couples may want to live on their own to maintain independence or avoid conflict with children from previous relationships (see Dykstra, Chapter 22). Again, with the increase in individualization and both men and women pursuing careers, LATs are becoming an alternative to traditional marriage arrangements.

New configurations raise even more questions about the definition of partnership, especially concerning sex and intimacy. Short-term "hook-ups," serial and concurrent partnerships, and uncertain living arrangements raise questions about when couples consider themselves to be in a relationship. The answer to the commitment question depends on which partner is asked and how the relationship develops over time. In addition, the recognition and acceptance of LGBTQ+ relationships have broadened the possibilities even further. Gender diversity and sexual questioning raise unique challenges in understanding such partnerships, especially since hetero- and cisnormative societal expectations still prevail (see Van Acker, et al., Chapter 7). Polyamorous relationships fundamentally challenge the concept of the couple as a dyad. Although rare, these relationships defy any definition; for example, they can be a married heterosexual couple with secondary relationships, a triad in a long-term relationship, or an intimate group of all genders (see Aurel Chapter 9). This is when the kaleidoscope becomes even more necessary to view the plethora of partnership types.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that along with the increasing diversity of partnerships, the tendency to be partnerless has also increased. The trend in living alone has become a world-wide phenomenon, partially due to the postponement of partnership formation in the earlier part of the life course, and remaining single after widowhood and divorce, but also because singlehood is becoming more of a lifestyle choice (see Kislev Chapter 11). No longer a taboo, and increasingly accepted, remaining single is now being embraced by a larger minority. Thus, although finding a partner is still the aim for most individuals in most societies, some are now recognising that they are just as happy being on their own.

2 Partnerships across the life-course

A second key principle of this volume is that the kaleidoscope of partnerships can change over time and depending on context. At the individual level, it is a biographical process, with people potentially moving in and out of partnerships of various kinds as they age. At the level of each partnership, it is a process of reciprocal adjustment, in which each person's role changes and commitment can wax and wane. At the societal level, it is a process through which the prevalence of partnership forms as well as their social and legal recognition, and the expectations attached to them vary.

As for all processes, individual time is a key dimension in the study of partnership. This is why, underlying this volume and the choice of its sections, we employ a life course perspective. The notion of biographical time is central to the life course research tradition. Developed in the social sciences in the 1960s, life course research became a major step in the study of human development (Elder 1998). By examining the unfolding of events and transitions over the life course, we gain insights into the developmental trajectories of individuals and couples. This long-term view is essential for capturing the complexities of relationship dynamics, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how experiences at different life stages shape and influence the quality and trajectory of a couple's relationship. The multidimensional and longitudinal approach of the life course and their interdependencies (Bernardi et al 2019), despite its complexity, offers an important interdisciplinary theoretical frame for the study of partnership.

Partnership Trajectories and Timing

First, a life course perspective facilitates an exploration of the link *between individual life trajectories and the dynamics of a partner's relationship as well as the timing of events* such as childbearing, buying a home, and retirement. The unique life histories, experiences, and expectations with which an individual enters an intimate relationship, and the interplay between these and their partners' shared experiences is what makes their partnership biography. An individual relational trajectory is made of the sequence of relationships, including partnerships, for a long time. This is where the study of union formations and dissolutions as well as their causes and consequences inform us about partnerships as individuals age.

The increasing dynamics in union trajectories have brought new attention to re-partnering (or entering a higher-order partnership after a divorce or separation). Repartnering has consequences for the socio-economic well-being of the adults and children involved, for the changing the meaning of biological and social intergenerational ties, and for fertility behaviour (see Ivanova, Chapter 21). Repartnering is a rich empirical example of the principle of linked lives in the life course paradigm, for which the trajectory of one individual (in this case the partnership trajectory) produces cross-over effects on that of related others) and spill-over effects on other life domains (economic well-being and fertility).

This volume also addresses the increasing phenomena of digital partners' market and re-partnering. Online partnership formation has attracted attention to the potential consequences on the partners' market and their family behaviour. Compared to non-digital spaces of mate selection, online partner markets seem to have decreased social homogamy, produced unions with more similar gender roles, and somewhat reduced age at marriage in some contexts (see Potarca, Chapter 19).

Spillover and Crossover Mechanisms

The life course perspective also *points to the interdependencies between partnership and other life domains* like migration, education, childbearing, employment, and health. Migration and partnership trajectories are interrelated even when migration occurs in the parents' generation. The role of socialization in a family with different origins, and family members' influences throughout youth and

young adulthood, partially explains the relatively low rate of mixed partnerships (between individuals with a migration background and those without it, see Milewski, Chapter 14). Partnership and education also are strongly intertwined: strong evidence indicates that partnering dynamics are still largely socially stratified, by educational level and earnings, potentially due to opportunities on the marriage market, individual preferences matching, or social norms favouring status homogamy (see Boertien, Chapter 27). Last, but not least, are positive spill-overs between being in a partner relationship and mental as well as physical health. While historically this was evident for married partnerships, more recently with the growing acceptance of cohabitation and same-sex partnerships, comparable spill-over effects are observed in these partnership types as well. This indicates that the social recognition of a form of partnership largely conditions its effect on health (Nowak&Liu, Chapter 13).

Just like individuals, each partnership is embedded in a wider relational context which necessarily exerts direct and indirect influences on the partnership. Among the closest and most durable relational contexts is the partner's own family, and in particular parents. By passing on genes, socialization, and defining educational opportunities, as well as supporting young adult children, parents influence their children's partnership in various ways. In Chapter 12 (Liefbroer) three mechanisms are discussed: active value socialization, role modelling, and both positive and negative social and material support. These mechanisms function with different degrees of strength depending on the relational quality between parents and children over time and the family structure.

Understanding how early life experiences, such as childhood attachment patterns or family-of-origin dynamics, influence adult romantic relationships provide valuable insights into the origins of certain relational patterns and challenges. The experience of norms and practices at younger ages seems to be influential on later partnership behaviour and preferences. For instance, when we look at the relationship between partnership and childbearing, evidence shows that growing up with half-siblings raises the probability of experiencing multi-partner fertility (see Mikolai, Chapter 17). Similarly, the division of labour and the gender roles observed in partnerships, particularly within marriages with children, are related to internalised social norms around the nurturing role of women and the role of men as the economic providers (see Kapelle, Chapter 16).

Relational Development

By providing material support, companionship, and guidance, as well as emotional bonding, intimate relationships contribute to healthy ageing, despite the increasing diversity of older adults' biographies (see Dykstra, Chapter 22). The extent to which people benefit from having a partner depends on the quality of their unions. High-quality relationships regulate emotions and favour stress management during life challenges. Yet, unsupportive, or uncertain relationships heighten stress and endanger well-being and health. This is where we enter the research field of life-long relationship development research. The theory of physiological regulation that distinguishes the physiological production of good and bad stresses is useful for understanding how partnership affects well-being. Provided that relationship quality is crucial for health, what makes a relationship of quality? The numerous scales used in the literature refer to the partner's assessment of both broad concepts (e.g. having a good relationship) as well as more specific aspects of the relationship (e.g. satisfaction about various life domains or agreement on various topics). Over time, despite some stability of initial quality levels, observed changes in relational quality can reflect changes in coping with life challenges. While individual partners' attributes and, to a certain extent, their cognitions, attitudes, and perspectives are associated with relational quality, key factors are relational characteristics like communication, sexual intimacy an emotional work as well as partners' embedment into a larger social network (see Kanter, et al., Chapter 18).

The comparison of grey divorce and widowhood above age 50 shows interesting variation in relational quality in mid and late adulthood ages according to the cause of partnership dissolution. For instance, unlike widowhood, separation and divorce are preceded by some degree of conflict or at least low-quality relationships. In addition, they are also more commonly anticipated and often the result of a decision initiated by at least one if not two partners (see Kreyenfeld & Schmauk, Chapter 20).

Historical and Geographical Context

Finally, partnerships develop across historical time and cohorts. When taking a cohort approach to partnerships, we can see that each new cohort enters its relationship pathways differently, with different perspectives and practices. The life course perspective *considers the impact of social, cultural, and historical contexts on couple relationships.* Societal norms, economic conditions, and cultural expectations can shape the opportunities and constraints that partners face at different points in their lives. The meaning and the forms of partnerships evolve historically as the social and legal context in which romantic relationships are formed and dissolved changes, as well as the larger family ties in which they are embedded in.

In historical Europe, given the legal and normative context, the study of partnership is usually confined to the study of marriage (and remarriage of widows), the changing age of marriage, and the gradual liberalisation of divorce and remarriage. Informal - and at the time "illegal" - intimate relationships were not documented in a way that can be systematically studied at the population level (see Probert, Chapter 2). As ideational change occurred hand in hand with the increasing economic and legal independence of women, unmarried cohabitation acquired a new status in the Western world and diffused widely as a precursor or an alternative to marriage. Consequently, research on unmarried unions and married cohabitation are examined together (see Hiekel, Chapter 6).

Besides the normative and legal context, objective and perceived economic conditions affect partnership trajectories (Chapter 28, Vignoli&Guetto). Individual employment and financial conditions still largely affect an individual's probability of entering a partnership in the Western world. However, when economic insecurity is contextual, union formation may be delayed or foregone, particularly so by the most vulnerable populations. In addition, in less egalitarian gender regimes, men are more affected than women by economic uncertainty.

Last, cultural expectations and values are important dimensions affecting partnership form, dynamics, and consequences. Rising personal preferences for freedom and flexibility in an age of post-materialism (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Van de Kaa, 1994) are associated with trends in voluntary singlehood and LAT partnerships, as well as how unpartnered adults are perceived. The revalorization of singlehood, in turn, affects singles' social relations, sexuality, and ultimately their well-being (see Van Acker, et al., Chapter 7 and Kislev, Chapter 11). Similarly, a life course perspective that embeds individual trajectories in their relational and socio-cultural context is key to understanding the changing face of LGBTQ+ partnerships. LGBTQ+ relationships and individual partners within them face the challenging task of redefining their sexual intimacy and engaging in positive dyadic coping to avoid stress spill-overs related to their minority status (see Van Acker, et al., Chapter 7). Polyamory relationships (consensual non-monogamous relationships) participate in the redefinition of intimacy in former marriage-based societies. Despite these forms have existed under different names in different times and places (communities, open marriages, polygamy), the current debate on their definition shows that a new need for legitimisation. In the global north such legitimisation needs to be constructed around the level of intimacy experienced on the one hand and, on the other hand, around the valorisation of consensus, integrity, honesty, appreciation, self-knowledge, and self-control.

3 Conclusion

And just like one volume could not have brought you all the knowledge about subatomic particles, so couldn't we bring all dimensions and insights on the partnership kaleidoscope.

One limitation of this volume is its inevitably incomplete geographical and historical coverage. Despite including chapters on partnerships in non-western areas of the world like Latin America, East Asia, the Middle East and Africa, we could only provide a general overview of their major features. Coverage of all regions across the globe would entail a volume in its own and would still miss cultural nuances. However, the regions we do cover at least provide a glimpse of different cultural and structural aspects of the family kaleidoscope.

This volume also did not exhaustively cover legal regulations around intimate relationships. Relationship dynamics and norms are inextricably shaped by legal regulations and partners' obligations and rights towards each other and their offspring. Laws vary in time and space and define the domain of possible and legitimate relationships. Laws change under social pressure or anticipate and stimulate change in a dynamic and sometimes tense relationship. But legal arrangements also go beyond the mere defining aspect of relationships. Laws regulate how property is shared or divided and the rights of children vis-a-vis their parents. In our increasingly globalized world, international relationships face additional complexities as different countries' laws may conflict, particularly in matters of divorce, child custody, and citizenship. On a global scale, from a human rights perspective, there is an increasing awareness that family law should not discriminate based on gender or sexual orientation, and that it should promote equality and respect for individual rights.

We are also aware that our volume does not directly address rapidly changing partnership dynamics in adolescence and emerging adulthood. The age difference that separates experts from the lived experiences, cultural contexts, and societal norms of younger generations undoubtedly impacts our understanding and interpretation. Some studies have indicated that young people are having less sex than previously (Burghardt et al., 2020; Lei and South, 2021; Twenge et al., 2017; Wellings et al., 2019), and indeed relationships seem to be starting and persisting through texting rather than "in real life." Young adults' relationships with each other may have fundamentally shifted because of Covid isolation, social media, and online lives.

On a related note, we have no chapter that explicitly defines relationships only through sexual intimacy and hook-ups. Our focus has primarily been on partnerships defined by love and commitment, or, alternatively, institutions and social structures. However, sexual intimacy is very important for relationships and may even be at the core of most. Yet as social mores have relaxed, sex can occur outside of a long-term committed partnership and have very little to do with love and romance, again challenging the definition of partnership. Thus, the role of sex remains unclear in a Venn diagram of partnerships which only focuses on love and commitment, institutions, and living arrangements.

The same applies to virtual relationships. The 2013 movie "Her", directed by Jonze (2013), brings the story of Theodore Twombly, a sensitive and introverted writer, who purchased an advanced artificial intelligence operating system designed to adapt and evolve like a human being. The AI, Samantha, evolves in the film from a helpful assistant to a close friend and eventually Theodore's romantic interest. Their relationship grows deeper and more intimate, challenging Theodore's notions of love and connection. What was science fiction in 2013, might slowly becoming reality with the 2023 release of Large Language Models like ChatGPT (OpenAi, 2023). In this volume, we consider partnerships to be human based. But younger generations already show that you can have "texting relationships", long before you meet your partner in real life (Sharabi et al., 2019). And even though today these virtual relationships are still between two humans, our current-day theories may be challenged tomorrow when people are bonding with virtual AI-systems.

When viewing the future of partnerships within an ever-evolving society, the editors of this volume see a field of study that is not only rapidly evolving but also at an academic crossroad. The dynamic nature of partnerships raises critical questions about classification and the methodologies currently employed. As human (and maybe non-human) partnerships transform at an unseen pace, influenced by technological advances and cultural transformations, our field is subject to both challenges and opportunities in data collection and analysis. Will relationships still be classifiable? What type of data will we need to unravel the details of the family kaleidoscope?

The role of the State in supporting these evolving forms of partnerships, each with its unique characteristics and needs, is a journey where social scientists from multiple disciplines will need to collaborate. In the legal sphere, the question of whether and how the law should adapt to the fluid nature of relationships is paramount. The traditional legal frameworks governing partnerships are being tested by the emergence of relationship forms never seen before. To solve the fundamental question of whether laws should differentiate based on the nature of partnerships or the individuals within them. Crucial in the protection of partnership diversity is the question what terminology will be used to address the heterogeneity of future relationships. Already today, we often lack words to describe family relationships in blended families, reminding us of the power of language to define and "label" relationships. Yet the language that describes the lived experiences of partnerships will shape broader societal perceptions and policy approaches. One of the major instruments of data collection for sociological inquiries, the survey, will face further challenges measuring “a partnership” given the fluidity of lived experiences. While adolescents define their (sexual) relationship as “talking”, surveys still ask “for the last three months, did you have a stable romantic relationship?”. In the academic pursuit of understanding partnerships, their rapid transformation is akin to the elusive behavior of particles in high-energy physics. Like you can only grasp particles through high tech instruments, you can only grasp the multifaceted nature of partnerships with complex datasets. Our goal with this book is to bring you a spectrum of these state-of-the art views, varied and vibrant from the inner beauty of the family kaleidoscope. While our exploration does not present a final, nor a perfect picture, it certainly will give an insight on current and evolving dynamics of human bonding.

4 References

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