

**Western University**  
**Social Science**  
**PSYCHOL 9723A**  
**Social Topics – Romantic Relationships**  
**Winter 2023**  
**Wednesdays 1-4pm (location TBA)**

**Enrollment Restrictions**

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Psychology, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

**Instructor and Teaching Assistant Information**

Instructor: Samantha Joel

Office: SSC 6314

Office Hours: Please book on calendly: <https://calendly.com/samantha-joel/rd-lab-member-meetings>

Email: [sjoel2@uwo.ca](mailto:sjoel2@uwo.ca)

**Course Description**

Romantic relationships are central to many people's lives, such that they can strongly shape health and well-being for better or worse. But how are these relationships built and maintained? Science has only just begun to scratch the surface of how and why humans become romantically attached to one another, and as such, reasonable people disagree on just about every facet of the process. In this graduate seminar, we will consider competing perspectives on how close relationships function (or not).

The class will generally take on a debate structure, with assigned readings that provide evidence for various positions on unanswered questions within the field. We will discuss and build on each week's readings, and brainstorm where the research on that topic should go next. How could future research advance the conversation, and what methodological or conceptual challenges might need to be addressed before we can do so?

**Course Format**

This is an in-person discussion-based course.

**Course Learning Outcomes/Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Generate and communicate novel scholarly ideas within in the field of relationship science.

2. Discuss current methodological, empirical, and theoretical challenges in the field of relationship science.
3. Lead insightful, nuanced, and respectful discussions in a group.

## **Methods of Evaluation**

### **Discussion Leading (20%)**

One student will be tasked each week with leading the discussion. The discussion leader should begin with a roughly 15-20 minute presentation outlining that week's topic. You are free to integrate any supplementary literature that you think will help to situate the topic for the class. Then, lead the class in a discussion about the key issues raised. Your presentation should demonstrate your knowledge of the literature on the chosen topic, and your ability to think deeply (and get others to think deeply) about the work.

### **Weekly Idea Generation (30%)**

After completing the readings, please write a 1-page single-spaced piece on where you think the research should go next. If the assigned articles conflict with one another, how might we be able to reconcile the conflicting evidence? If they put forth a challenge facing the field, how might we begin to tackle that challenge? What additional evidence do you think could be collected that would move the field forward? Perhaps you think we're asking the wrong questions entirely, and that the whole discussion should be shifted in some way. Maybe you think there's another field or discipline that could be brought in to inform the research. Or, maybe you think that the area of research is plagued by an important methodological problem that needs to be dealt with before the relevant questions can be answered. Your ideas do not need to be fully formed in this write-up; they will merely serve as a jumping-off point for our discussions. Please submit your idea generation piece on OWL by midnight the day before class each week. Submissions received after class will not be graded. Your final grade for this section will be based on the average of your best six submissions.

### **Class Participation (20%).**

All students are expected to participate actively and respectfully. If you're not very comfortable speaking in group settings, this class is a great opportunity to work on that. Your perspectives are worth sharing! If you are very comfortable speaking in group settings: we love your energy, but be sure to pull back sometimes to make room for other voices. Everyone: consider how you would like others to engage with your thoughts and ideas, and please do the same for your colleagues.

## **Final Project (30%)**

Your final project in the course can take one of several different forms (worth 30% of grade). You will be tasked with writing an 8-12 page paper in the field of relationship formation and development, which could take the form of a) a theoretical review paper, b) a proposal, c) a methodological paper, or d) something else that advances your scholarly goals. Please schedule a meeting with me in the first 4 weeks of the semester to explore what type of project would be most useful to you in your graduate work.

## **Course Materials and Timeline**

**January 12**

**INTRODUCTION (NO READINGS)**

**January 19**

**WHERE WE'VE BEEN AND WHERE WE'RE GOING**

Berscheid, E. (1999). The greening of relationship science. *American psychologist*, 54(4), 260.

Reis, H. T. (2007). Steps toward the ripening of relationship science. *Personal Relationships*, 14(1), 1-23.

Finkel, E. J., Simpson, J. A., & Eastwick, P. W. (2017). The psychology of close relationships: Fourteen core principles. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 68, 383-411.

**January 26**

**WHAT IS LOVE? (FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES)**

### **Love is attachment**

Hazan, C. & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 511-524.

### **Love is commitment**

Rusbult, C. E., & Buunk, B. P. (1993). Commitment processes in close relationships: An interdependence analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 10, 175-204.

## **Love is responsiveness**

Reis, H. T. (2012). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing theme for the study of relationships and well-being. In L. Campbell & T. J. Loving (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary research on close relationships: The case for integration* (pp. 27–52). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13486-002>

## **Honestly, it's all pretty correlated**

Fletcher, G. J., Simpson, J. A., & Thomas, G. (2000). The measurement of perceived relationship quality components: A confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(3), 340-354.

## **February 2**

### **CHALLENGING CLAIMS OF GENERALIZABILITY**

## **Our samples broadly lack diversity**

Williamson, H. C., Bornstein, J. X., Cantu, V., Ciftci, O., Farnish, K. A., & Schouweiler, M. T. (2022). How diverse are the samples used to study intimate relationships? A systematic review. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 39(4), 1087-1109.

## **Our findings may not generalize to less affluent couples**

Karney, B. R., Bradbury, T. N., & Lavner, J. A. (2018). Supporting healthy relationships in low-income couples: Lessons learned and policy implications. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 5(1), 33-39.

## **Our findings may not generalize across cultures**

Fonseca, A. L., Ye, T., Koyama, J., Curran, M., & Butler, E. A. (2020). A theoretical model for understanding relationship functioning in intercultural romantic couples. *Personal Relationships*, 27(4), 760-784.

## **Our field is pretty diverse and generalizable, actually**

JK no one makes that claim.

**February 9**  
**CHALLENGING BIASES**

**Dating is a different experience if you're not... straight**

Thorne, S. R., Hegarty, P., & Hepper, E. G. (2019). Equality in theory: From a heteronormative to an inclusive psychology of romantic love. *Theory & Psychology, 29*(2), 240-257.

**White**

Chopik, W. J., & Johnson, D. J. (2021). Modeling dating decisions in a mock swiping paradigm: An examination of participant and target characteristics. *Journal of Research in Personality, 92*, 104076.

**Cisgender**

Blair, K. L., & Hoskin, R. A. (2019). Transgender exclusion from the world of dating: Patterns of acceptance and rejection of hypothetical trans dating partners as a function of sexual and gender identity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 36*(7), 2074-2095.

**Interested in marriage**

DePaulo, B. M., & Morris, W. L. (2005). Singles in society and in science. *Psychological Inquiry, 16*(2-3), 57-83.

**February 16**  
**HOW DO ROMANTIC PARTNERS TYPICALLY MEET?**

**On Tinder, of course**

Timmermans, E., & Courtois, C. (2018). From swiping to casual sex and/or committed relationships: Exploring the experiences of Tinder users. *Information Society, 34*, 59-70.

**Actually, many are friends first**

Stinson, D. A., Cameron, J. J., & Hoplock, L. B. (2021). The Friends-to-Lovers pathway to romance: Prevalent, preferred, and overlooked by science. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 19485506211026992*.

## **Actually—globally and historically—most marriages are arranged**

Walker, R. S., Hill, K. R., Flinn, M. V., & Ellsworth, R. M. (2011). Evolutionary history of hunter-gatherer marriage practices. *PloS One*, 6, Article e19066.

Imamoğlu, E.O., Ads, M.M., & Weisfeld, C.C. (2019). What is the impact of choosing one's spouse on marital satisfaction of wives and husbands? The case of arranged and self-choice Turkish marriages. *Journal of Family Issues*, 40, 1270 - 1298.

**February 23**

**NO CLASS: WINTER BREAK**

**March 2**

**DOES OVULATION INFLUENCE MATE PREFERENCES?**

### **In important ways, yes**

Gildersleeve, K., Haselton, M. G., & Fales, M. R. (2014). Do women's mate preferences change across the ovulatory cycle? A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140, 1205-1259.

### **No, that's just p-hacking and publication bias**

Wood, W., Kressel, L., & Joshi, P. D. (2014). Meta-analysis of menstrual cycle effects on women's mate preferences. *Emotion Review*, 6, 229-249.

### **We don't know because our methods are bad**

Blake, K. R., Dixson, B. J. W., O'Dean, S. M., & Denson, T. F. (2016). Standardized protocols for characterizing women's fertility: A data-driven approach. *Hormones and Behavior*, 81, 74-83.

### **With better methods, some effects are indeed still there**

Arslan, R. C., Schilling, K. M., Gerlach, T. M., & Penke, L. (2021). Using 26,000 diary entries to show ovulatory changes in sexual desire and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 121(2), 410-431.

## March 9

### ARE SOME PAIRS OF INDIVIDUALS MORE COMPATIBLE THAN OTHERS?

#### Not in terms of similarity on the big five dimensions

Gattis, K. S., Berns, S., Simpsin, L. E., & Christensen, A. (2004). Birds of a feather or strange birds? Ties among personality dimensions, similarity, and marital quality. *Journal of Family Psychology, 18*, 564-574.

#### Similarity doesn't matter, but complementarity *does* matter

Markey, P. M., & Markey, C. N. (2007). Romantic ideals, romantic obtainment, and relationship experiences. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 24*, 517-533.

#### Complementarity doesn't matter

Cundiff, J. M., Smith, T. W., Butner, J., Critchfield, K. L., & Nealey-Moore, J. (2015). Affiliation and control in marital interaction: Interpersonal complementarity is present but is not associated with affect or relationship quality. *Personal and Social Psychology Bulletin, 4*, 35-51.

#### Compatibility may not mean what we think it means

Eastwick, P. W., Finkel, E. J., & Joel, S. (2022). Mate evaluation theory. *Psychological Review*.

## March 16

### HOW PREDICTIVE ARE OUR MODELS?

#### We're not very good at predicting relationship outcomes

Joel, S., Eastwick, P. W., Allison, C. J., Arriaga, X. B., Baker, Z. G., Bar-Kalifa, E., ... & Wolf, S. (2020). Machine learning uncovers the most robust self-report predictors of relationship quality across 43 longitudinal couples studies. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 117*(32), 19061-19071.

#### We *can* predict relationship outcomes with the right variables

McNulty, J. K., Meltzer, A. L., Neff, L. A., & Karney, B. R. (2021). How both partners' individual differences, stress, and behavior predict change in relationship satisfaction: Extending the VSA model. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 118*(27).

## **Wait: what even are these variables?**

Ribotta, B., Silan, M. A., Dujols, O., Bellemin, R., & IJzerman, H. (2021, December 15). *Lack of Construct Validity and Item-Content Overlap in the Assessment of Romantic Relationship Quality*. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/w32dc>

## **March 23**

### **HOW DO SOCIAL NETWORKS SHAPE RELATIONSHIPS?**

#### **Social network approval is good for your relationship**

Agnew, C. R., Loving, T. J., & Drigotas, S. M. (2001). Substituting the forest for the trees: Social networks and the prediction of romantic relationship state and fate. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *81*(6), 1042.

#### **Social network disapproval is bad for your relationship**

Lehmiller, J. J., & Agnew, C. R. (2006). Marginalized relationships: The impact of social disapproval on romantic relationship commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*(1), 40-51.

#### **Social networks that fulfill your basic needs are... also bad for your relationship**

Machia, L. V., & Proulx, M. L. (2020). The diverging effects of need fulfillment obtained from within and outside of a romantic relationship. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *46*(5), 781-793.

## **March 30**

### **CAN PEOPLE BE ATTACHED TO MULTIPLE PARTNERS AT ONCE?**

#### **No, attachment to romantic partners is hydraulic**

Maner, J. K., Rouby, D. A., & Gonzaga, G. C. (2008). Automatic inattention to attractive alternatives: The evolved psychology of relationship maintenance. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *29*, 343-349.

#### **Yes, multiple romantic relationships can co-exist independently**

Mitchell, M. E., Bartholemew, K., & Cobb, R. J. (2014). Need fulfillment in polyamorous relationships. *Journal of Sex Research*, *51*, 329-339.

## **Yes, and open relationships may confer unique benefits**

Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Schechinger, H. A. (2017). Unique and shared relationship benefits of consensually non-monogamous and monogamous relationships. *European Psychologist*.

## **Opening up a relationship has little impact on wellbeing either way**

Murphy, A. P., Joel, S., & Muise, A. (2021). A prospective investigation of the decision to open up a romantic relationship. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 12(2), 194-201.

**April 6**

## **HOW DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE *NOT* BEING IN A RELATIONSHIP?**

### **Single individuals are not as happy as coupled people**

Diener, E., Gohm, C. L., Suh, E., & Oishi, S. (2000). Similarity of the relations between marital status and subjective well-being across cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 31(4), 419-436.

### **...because singles are discriminated against**

Girme, Y. U., Sibley, C. G., Hadden, B. W., Schmitt, M. T., & Hunger, J. M. (2022). Unsupported and Stigmatized? The Association Between Relationship Status and Well-Being Is Mediated by Social Support and Social Discrimination. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 13(2), 425-435.

### **... and unless their sex lives are satisfying**

Park, Y., Impett, E. A., & MacDonald, G. (2021). Singles' sexual satisfaction is associated with more satisfaction with singlehood and less interest in marriage. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 47(5), 741-752.

### **There's a lot of within-group variability, really**

Girme, Y. U., Park, Y., & MacDonald, G. (2022). *Coping or Thriving? A Review of Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Societal Factors Associated with Well-Being in Singlehood*

### **Statement on Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

Additionally, if written work will be assigned in the course and plagiarism-checking software might be used, the following statement to this effect must be included in the course outline:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

If computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams will be given, and software might be used to check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating, the following statement must be added to course outlines:

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

### **Health/Wellness Services**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Accessible Education Western (AEW)**

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and

undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.