

The Psychology of Close Relationships (G4695y), Spring 2012

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Office hours: Tuesdays at 11:30AM and Wednesdays at 9:00AM

Class time: Thursdays from 12:10-2pm

Class location: 405 Schermerhorn Hall

Introduction

This course is designed as an overview of the study of close relationships from a social psychological perspective. The course will focus on adult romantic relationships, although many topics will generalize more broadly. We will review major theoretical perspectives (e.g., evolution, attachment, interdependence) as well as specific relationship topics (e.g., attraction, commitment, maintenance, dissolution). Methodological issues will be discussed within the context of each topic.

Objectives

Students will develop an understanding of:

- The importance of close relationships for individual functioning
- The motivations, cognitions, and behaviors of individuals in close relationships
- The individual, dyadic, and social factors that influence close relationships
- The varied methodologies used to study close relationships
- The challenges and rewards of studying close relationships.

Grading

Thought papers (best 10 of a possible 13)	20%
Participation in class discussions	10%
Leading class discussions	20%
Annotated outline and workshop of proposal (i.e., meeting with the instructor, a brief presentation in class)	15%
Research proposal final paper	35%

Class Participation

Students should be familiar with all assigned readings each week, and come to class prepared to discuss their thoughts on the material. Class participation is a very important part of the learning process in this course. Students will be evaluated on the quality of their contributions. Here are some ideas of what high quality comments might involve:

- Considering issues addressed in assigned readings and previous class discussions
- Offering a unique, but relevant, perspective
- Making a contribution to moving the discussion and analysis forward
- Providing some increment to others' comments
- Transcending the "I feel..." syndrome (i.e. making arguments that include some evidence or that rely on broader theoretical positions)

Thought Papers

Each week, students will have the opportunity to submit a thought paper based on the readings for the upcoming class. Students will post their thought papers to the instructor's Drop Box (Melissa McClure) on CourseWorks by the **Monday night** preceding each class. For the first class **ONLY**, thought papers may be posted on the Monday following the class.

The thought paper could present an idea for further research, a new way of applying one of the readings, a criticism, an integration or comparison between two or more readings on the current or previous topics, etc. **DO NOT** summarize. **DO** make it a complete thought, with a beginning, middle, and end. Thought papers should be one single-sided, double-spaced page in 12-point font. **IF** students are feeling both highly inspired **AND** highly brilliant, they may write another page, but they should **NOT** go over two pages.

Each student's 10 best of their possible 13 papers will count towards their grade. The papers will be graded for clarity, logic, and thoughtfulness on a 5 point scale. Loosely speaking, the scale is:

D = You turned in something that bears no relation to the reading.

C = You demonstrated some understanding of the reading.

B = You understood the reading, and made an original comment.

A = You understood the reading and contributed an idea that extends existing thinking in some way.

A+ = You contributed an outstanding, original, complete new idea.

Leading Discussion

Following the first two topics, which will be led by the instructor, two or three students will be responsible for leading class discussion each week. This will entail several responsibilities: First, the group should read the assigned material very carefully, with an eye toward discussion topics they might introduce in the event that the class discussion wanes. Second, the group should select two to three additional articles (one per each group member) that are relevant for that week and come to class prepared to describe them to the other members of the seminar. The group should get these articles approved by the instructor ahead of time. The group's presentation need not be rehearsed or power-pointed, but it should be well organized and thorough. The group should complete their preparation before their designated class period, so that they may refer any questions to the instructor during her office hours (noted above). Finally, the group will meet again after class, and combine their notes into a unified summary of the class discussion, to be posted to the class bulletin board on CourseWorks before the next class. Students will be expected to lead discussion on two topics over the course of the semester; topic preferences will be collected during the first two weeks of classes.

Research Proposal

A central goal of this course is to give students a running start on becoming a relationship researcher, which includes being able to identify areas in which the

current state of theory and research leaves important issues unresolved. Students will write a paper (10-12 pages plus abstract and references) in which some area of the research relevant to this class is reviewed, a problem is identified, and a study is proposed which addresses this problem. Students can think of this as a research proposal (ideally one that they might actually set out to pursue). It should be written in APA style, including an abstract, introduction, method section, proposed analyses, discussion of expected/unexpected results, and references. Undergraduate students will be expected to develop a single-study proposal, commensurate with their statistical and methodological background. Graduate students will be expected to propose more ambitious, multi-study programs investigating their topic of choice, with proposed methods and analyses reflecting their training.

During two or three weeks in later in the semester, we will workshop the research proposals (a 5 minute presentation plus questions/feedback). These workshops are a chance for students to get feedback on their understanding of the theory and on the design of their proposed study or studies. Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor before their workshop date to discuss their proposal. An annotated outline of the proposal (2-3 pages) will be due before the workshop presentation. The outline and your presentation will count as 15% of your grade. The final paper (due on the last day of class) will count as 35% of your grade; the feedback on the outline and the workshop presentation should be incorporated into the final version of the paper.

Absences

Absences from class should be justified with appropriate documentation (e.g., a doctor's note, a note from a coach or boss, etc.). If a student anticipates being absent, he or she should be sure to do the readings and submit a thought paper if possible. Alternatively, a missed thought paper could simply be one of the three not counted towards the grade.

Prerequisites

Instructor's permission. As an upper-level seminar, this class requires the student to have taken courses in research methods, statistics, and social psychology.

Tentative Schedule

NOTE: The up-to-date reading list will be posted to CourseWorks in early January. It is subject to change (but with warning of at least 1 week).

Date	Topic	Activities
January 18	Introduction	Choose topic for leading discussion
January 26	<i>No class</i>	Submit thought paper based on previous week's class by Monday the 23rd, preferences for discussion leading topics by Thursday the 26th
February 2	Evolution	Start thinking about topic for research proposal
February 9	Attraction	Start thinking about topic for research proposal

Date	Topic	Activities
February 16	Attachment	Prepare outline for research proposal
February 23	Interdependence	Prepare outline for research proposal
March 1	Commitment	Individual meetings
March 8	Sex	Individual meetings
March 15	<i>No class</i>	Prepare for workshops
March 22	Cognitive biases in relationships	Workshops
March 29	Relationship maintenance	Workshops
April 5	Support	Workshops
April 12	Positive Processes	Complete research proposal
April 19	Relationship dissolution	Complete research proposal
April 26	Relationships and health	Research proposal due