

Introduction

This course is designed as an overview to the field of close relationships. We will utilize major theories of close relationships, including evolutionary, attachment, interdependence, and cognitive approaches, as well as perspectives from neighboring fields (such as sociology and clinical psychology). We will survey work on the needs for close relationships, their development, their adaptive and maladaptive consequences, and the motivations, cognitions, and behaviors of individuals in close relationships. Among the topics we will discuss are attraction, jealousy and infidelity; communication; relationship development, maintenance and trajectories; and individual differences in relationship styles. Methodological issues will be discussed within the context of each topic.

This course should help answer both description and process questions about close relationships. A central concern of this seminar will be identifying the social and psychological factors that govern relationships. The first segment of this course will be devoted to identifying the nature and functions of relationships, from several theoretical perspectives; it will also introduce major dimensions of individual differences in relational styles. Next, we will examine several domains of relational processes, including behaviors (e.g., support vs. hindrance, conflict) and cognitions (e.g., representation, attribution, empathy). We will then touch on the interface between relationships and both physical and psychological well-being. We will conclude by considering relationships within the broader context of family and of society.

Course overview

A preliminary list of topics is below. The readings will be posted on CourseWorks at least a week in advance. All members of the seminar will read the required articles listed, and will write a reaction paper (described below) which will be brought to class. The reaction papers will include a response to 2-3 of the discussion questions listed at the end of this syllabus. Reaction papers should be 1 page in length (not longer), single-spaced. Students should bring two copies of their reaction papers to class: one to be handed in at the beginning of class, and one to refer to during the class discussion. Responses should be succinct, but thoughtful.

Each meeting will be led by two or three members of the seminar, who will begin with a brief summary of the articles assigned, and then present to the group a set of questions designed to facilitate a discussion of the central issues in the readings. They will then post a summary of the class discussion to the bulletin board before the next class meeting. Each member is expected to take at least one turn as discussion leader.

Class participation and reaction papers

Students should be familiar with all required readings each week, and come to class prepared to discuss their thoughts on each of that week's readings; to facilitate that, each reading should be addressed in at least one of the 2-3 reaction questions (and obviously, some readings may be referred to in all of the questions).

Class participation is a very important part of the learning process in this course. You're allowed one

un-excused absence during the semester; but if you are absent, be sure to read the papers and submit a reaction paper on them by the next week, at the latest.

You will be evaluated on the quality of your contributions. Here are some ideas of what high quality comments may involve:

- Considering issues addressed in assigned readings and in 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. That is, making arguments that include some evidence or that rely on broader theoretical positions.

Discussions and leading them

Each week, two or three students will be responsible for leading class discussion. This will entail several responsibilities: (a) First, you should read the assigned material very carefully, with an eye toward discussion topics you might introduce in the event that our discussion wanes; (b) Second, you should select (and run by me) and then read a couple of additional articles that are relevant for that week and come to class prepared to describe them to the rest of us. I do not expect your presentation to be rehearsed (though feel free to use power-point if you find it helpful). I do expect it to be well organized and thorough. You may come discuss your presentation with me during my office hours, which are on Wednesday morning (10:30-12:00). (c) Third, you will meet again after class, and combine your notes into a unified summary of the class discussion, to be posted to the class bulletin board before the next class.

Final paper

A central goal of this course is to give you a running start on becoming relationship researchers. For that purpose, I will expect you to identify areas in which the current state of theory and research leaves important issues unresolved. Our discussions will be geared toward identifying fruitful avenues for research which addresses these limitations. You will write a final paper in which a topic relevant to this class is reviewed, a problem is identified, and a study is proposed which addresses this problem. Think of this as a grant proposal (ideally one that you will actually set out to pursue). Write it in APA style, including an abstract, followed by an introduction, method section, proposed analyses, and references. Imagine reasonable budgetary constraints (i.e., be practical about this, but assume you will have some resources). Attach an excel sheet specifying the budget, and note where you would submit this grant.

Graduate students will be expected to propose more ambitious, multi-study programs investigating their topic of choice. Undergraduate students will be expected to develop a single-study proposal, commensurate with their statistical and methodological background.

During two or three weeks in the middle of the semester, we will workshop the topics you chose for your final paper. Use these workshops as a chance to get feedback on your read of the theory and on the design of your proposed study or studies.

A draft of the proposal will be due before your mid-semester presentation. The draft, along with my and the class's comments on your oral presentation will count as 10% of your grade. The final paper

(due December 4th) will count as an additional 30% of your grade; I will want to see that you have incorporated the reviews on the draft and the workshop presentation of the paper.

Grades will be computed according to this breakdown

- 35% Reaction papers
- 25% Participation in discussions and leading discussions
- 10% Draft and workshop of proposal (i.e., meeting with me, a brief presentation in class)
- 30% Final paper (research proposal):
 - Style, formatting, spelling, organization, and Abstract: 15%
 - Introduction (and theoretical review): 40%
 - Method and budget: 30%
 - Proposed analyses: 15%

Prerequisites

As an upper-level seminar, this class requires the student to have taken courses on Research Methods, Statistics, and Social Psychology.

Tentative list of topics, by week

The up-to-date reading list (and the readings themselves) will be on CourseWorks, and will invariably change (though with at least a week’s warning).

Week	Topic	Tasks
Sept. 4	Introduction to relationship science	
Sept. 11	Introduction to relationship science	Start thinking of topic to propose
Sept. 18	Evolution	
Sept. 25	Attachment	
Oct. 2	Interdependence	
Oct. 9	Cognitive factors	Workshops for proposals
Oct. 16	Development and maintenance	Workshops for proposals
Oct. 23	Sex	Workshops for proposals
Oct. 30	Regulation and representation	
Nov. 6	Dyadic behavior (support, hindrance, conflict)	
Nov. 13	Empathy and forgiveness	
Nov. 20	Relationships and health	
Nov. 27	--	Thanksgiving
Dec. 4	Summary	Final paper (proposal) due.

Weekly reaction papers - questions

Choose 2-3 questions from the following list to answer in your weekly reaction paper for each class.

1. How do the authors define close relationships?
2. What is the function of close relationships? What basic assumptions do the authors make about *why* people form close relationships or what needs are fulfilled by close relationships?
3. What relationship outcomes do the authors consider to be important and why?
4. What relationship outcomes are omitted and why might the authors have omitted them?
5. Compare the relative theoretical strengths and weaknesses (generalizability, practical usefulness, etc.) of two of the readings for this topic.
6. Compare the relative methodological strengths and weakness (external validity, experimental control, etc.) of two of the readings for this topic.
7. According to the authors, what benefits do close relationships offer?
8. According to the authors, are there any costs to being in a close relationship?
9. Based on their theory and findings, what predictions can the authors make about how a relationship might progress over time?
10. According to the authors, how much control do people have over their close relationships?
11. According to the authors, why do people form relationships or stay in relationships with particular individuals?
12. According to the authors, what leads to relationship dissolution?