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

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


January 26
WHAT IS LOVE? (FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES)

Love is attachment


Love is commitment

Love is responsiveness


Honestly, it’s all pretty correlated


February 2

CHALLENGING CLAIMS OF GENERALIZABILITY

Our samples broadly lack diversity


Our findings may not generalize to less affluent couples


Our findings may not generalize across cultures


Our field is pretty diverse and generalizable, actually

JK no one makes that claim.
Dating is a different experience if you’re not... straight


White


Cisgender


Interested in marriage


On Tinder, of course


Actually, many are friends first

Actually—globally and historically—most marriages are arranged


February 23
NO CLASS: WINTER BREAK

March 2
DOES OVULATION INFLUENCE MATE PREFERENCES?

In important ways, yes


No, that’s just p-hacking and publication bias


We don’t know because our methods are bad


With better methods, some effects are indeed still there

March 9

**Are some pairs of individuals more compatible than others?**

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


**Similarity doesn’t matter, but complementarity *does* matter**


**Complementarity doesn’t matter**


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


March 16

**How predictive are our models?**

**We’re not very good at predicting relationship outcomes**


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

Wait: what even are these variables?


March 23

How do social networks shape relationships?

Social network approval is good for your relationship


Social network disapproval is bad for your relationship


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


March 30

Can people be attached to multiple partners at once?

No, attachment to romantic partners is hydraulic


Yes, multiple romantic relationships can co-exist independently

Yes, and open relationships may confer unique benefits


Opening up a relationship has little impact on wellbeing either way


April 6

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

Single individuals are not as happy as coupled people


...because singles are discriminated against


... and unless their sex lives are satisfying


There’s a lot of within-group variability, really

**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

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.