

# RELATIONSHIP RESEARCH NEWS

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

### 2014 Report

by Jeff Simpson  
University of Minnesota

For those of you who were not able to attend our 2014 Conference in Melbourne, you missed a truly wonderful event! Gery Karantzas and his team organized and ran a superb conference at the Melbourne Convention Center in the heart of downtown, with approximately 235 attendees. The conference program, overseen by Rebecca Pinkus and her Program committee, was equally outstanding, showcasing a wide variety of the best relationship research conducted by members of our organization. In fact, several people told me that the quality and breadth of the program was among the best they had ever seen at any conference, IARR or otherwise. Congratulations to Gery, Rebecca, their committees, and everyone who participated for making Melbourne 2014 a most memorable success!

Several awards were given at the Melbourne Conference. They included:

- **Distinguished Career Award** - Margaret S. Clark
- **Berscheid-Hatfield Award for Distinguished Mid-Career Achievement** – Jason S. Carroll
- **Gerald R. Miller Award for Early Career Achievement** - Emily A. Impett
- **Mentoring Award** – Adrienne D. Kunkel
- **Teaching Award** – Jimmie Manning
- **Steve Duck New Scholar Awards** – Brian P. Don & Samantha Joel

- **Dissertation Award** - Francesca Righetti
- **Article Award** – Lambert, N. M., Gwinn, A. M., Baumeister, R. F., Strachman, A., Washburn, I. J., Gable, S. L., & Fincham, F. D. (2013). A boost of positive affect: The perks of sharing positive experiences. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 30, 24-43.
- **Book Award** - Ogolsky, B. G., Lloyd, S. A., & Cate, R. M. (2013). *The Developmental Course of Romantic Relationships*. New York: Routledge.

Sincere congratulations to all of these award winners on your fine accomplishments!

Our next conference, which will be hosted by Geoff MacDonald, Emily Impett, and Sisi Tran, will be held in the lovely city of Toronto, Canada in July 2016. Planning for this major event is underway and more information about the conference will be disseminated via email announcements and the IARR website as the date of the conference draws near. IARR is delighted to have an opportunity to spend time in one of the finest and most vibrant cities in North America.

Before Toronto, however, there will be two mini-conferences in 2015 focusing on important and timely themes in relationship science. The first mini-conference, which is being organized by Jen Theiss on the topic of Relationship Health and Wellness, will take place June 19-21 near the campus of Rutgers University in New Jersey. The second mini-conference, which is being arranged by Catrin Finkenauer on the topic of Self-Regulation and Relationships, will be held July 9-11 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Further information about each mini-conference is posted on the IARR website. If you have additional questions about either conference, please contact Jen or Catrin. Both events are likely to draw a lot of interest, so register early!

IARR held its 2014 Board of Directors' Meeting on July 10 at the Deakin University City Center in Melbourne. The Board discussed a number of items and issues. Here are some of the highlights of that meeting:

- Former President Dan Perlman reported on the financial status of IARR, indicating that our organization remains in sound fiscal shape.
- The Board welcomed the incoming editor of *The Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (JSPR)*, Geoff MacDonald of the University of Toronto. Geoff has assembled an excellent team of associate editors and editorial board members. IARR and its members look forward to working with Geoff and his new team in the coming years.
- IARR thanks Mario Mikulincer and his outgoing editorial team for the fine job they did running *JSPR* the past few years. The increased citation impact factor of *JSPR* is just one of many indicators of their highly successful stewardship.
- IARR also thanks Ben Le for the many years of service he devoted as IARR webmaster. We are delighted to welcome our new webmaster, Dylan Selterman, who is developing new plans and goals for our website. Please contact Dylan if you have questions or suggestions regarding the website.
- Susan Boon has spent the last 2 years archiving some of the history of our organization. Much of this material can now be found on the IARR website. If you have important IARR documents from years past, please contact Susan.
- Our secretary-treasurer, Leah Bryant, reported that IARR had 546 members as of July, 2014. These numbers are likely to rise as we approach the Toronto conference (just as they did prior to our Chicago conference in 2012).
- The Board approved a motion to discontinue the print version of *Relationship Research News (RRN)* and send it out electronically to all members instead. This transition will save IARR a substantial sum of money each year. Current and prior *RRN* issues will be posted on the IARR website.
- Kelly Campbell, chair of the Teaching Committee, reported that new teaching materials have been added to the IARR website. Please take advantage of these materials in your courses, and contact Kelly if you have additional teaching-related materials that could be added to those we currently have.
- Rozzana Sanchez Aragon, outgoing chair of the Membership Committee, reported that portions of the IARR website have now been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese, and Chinese to facilitate our outreach to non-English speaking relationship scholars. Other outreach initiatives are also being planned by the incoming Membership Committee.
- Jennifer Harman, incoming chair of the Media Relations Committee, reported that her committee is preparing a "Media Kit" to help IARR members learn how to interact with the media to disseminate their research findings more widely and accurately.
- John Caughlin, outgoing Publication Committee chair, led a discussion about whether IARR should consider publishing *Personal Relationships (PR)* and *JSPR* as "on-line only" journals with no printed copies. This is the wave of the future for most scientific journals, and such a move could save IARR several thousands of dollars in the coming years. No action was taken on this matter, but this issue is likely to arise in future Board discussions.
- John Caughlin also previewed the next contracted book in our *Advances* book series: *Positive Approaches to Optimal Relationship Development* (C. Raymond Knee & Harry T. Reis, editors).
- The Board acknowledged the many important contributions of its 2012-14 members and committee chairs and also extended gratitude to the incoming (2014-16) Board members and committee chairs, all of whom are listed on the final page of this issue of *RRN*.

In closing, I very much look forward to working with the Board and the new committees as we move IARR and the science of relationships forward in the coming years.

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*Relationship Research News* is published twice a year. Contributions are very welcome and will be published as space permits. Announcements, letters to the editors, cartoons/humor, teaching tips, and other information relevant to IARR members are all appropriate. If you would like to contribute a feature article or personal commentary, please submit a brief (one paragraph) description to the editor first (please do not send manuscripts). Submit all materials to Justin Lehmiller via [justin.lehmiller@gmail.com](mailto:justin.lehmiller@gmail.com). The deadlines for final copy are October 1 and April 1. Inquiries regarding Feature Articles are welcome at any time.

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

by **Justin Lehmillier**  
**Purdue University**

On behalf of the entire editorial team at *Relationship Research News*, I am pleased to present our final issue of 2014. My sincere thanks to my wonderful Associate Editors, Jessica Eckstein, Deb Mashek, and Amy Muise, who never cease to impress me with their incredible contributions. I would also like to extend a special thank you to everyone else who contributed to our news journal this year.

As Jeff mentioned in his President's column, *RRN* will now be delivered in a completely electronic fashion starting with this issue. The IARR Board's vote to discontinue the print version was based, in part, on the reader survey I conducted last spring, which revealed an overwhelming preference for electronic delivery and suggested that there would be little change in readership habits with such a move.

Electronic delivery offers our association a number of benefits beyond simple cost savings. For one thing, we have the ability to reach members much faster (there was often a lag of up to six weeks from the time an issue reached the publisher until delivery to readers), which helps to ensure that the contents of *RRN* are more timely. Of course, electronic delivery of *RRN* is also more environmentally friendly.

The current issue has been produced in the same format as previous issues; however, next year, we will explore other layout options. An e-newsletter gives us the possibility of generating issues that are more colorful, interactive, and visually appealing than they were in the past.

Going forward, each issue of *RRN* will be announced and archived on the IARR website (previous and future issues will be available for download [here](#)). In addition, members will receive an email with a link for direct download of each issue as it is released.

With that said, please be sure to check out the contents of this issue. Deb Mashek collaborated with Dylan Selterman, Rhonda Balzarini, and Bjarne Holmes to author an article on teaching about consensual non-monogamy. This article is a must-read for anyone who teaches college relationships and/or sexuality courses because it offers a lot of practical information and advice on teaching an important topic that is all too often neglected.

Amy Muise solicited an interesting and thought-provoking read from Samantha Joel that considers what a judgment and decision-making perspective can offer to relationship scientists.

Jessica Eckstein coordinated reviews of two recent books authored by IARR members: *Experiencing Same-Sex Marriage: Individuals, Couples, and Social Networks* by Pamela Lannutti, and *The Dark Side of Relationship Pursuit: From Attraction to Obsession and Stalking* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) by Brian Spitzberg and Bill Cupach. As you will see, each of these are worthy additions to any relationship scientist's shelf.

You will also find Dave Kenny's (dark) humor column, practical tips for navigating the challenges of graduate school by our newest New Professional Representative Ashley Randall, as well as tributes to two recent IARR members who have passed.

Thank you again to everyone who contributed to this issue of *RRN*.

-Justin

**Submission deadline for the  
Next issue of RRN**

**April 1, 2015**

**Submit all materials  
to Justin Lehmillier**

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## FEATURE ARTICLES

### **Teaching About Consensual Non-Monogamy in Relationship Science and Sexuality Courses**

**by Dylan F. Selterman,<sup>1</sup> Debra J. Mashek,<sup>2</sup> Rhonda Balzarini,<sup>3</sup> & Bjarne M. Holmes<sup>4</sup>**

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In recent years, relationship science has produced innovative and provocative research focusing on *consensual non-monogamy* (CNM)—that is, an explicit agreement between two partners that one or both of them can have other sexual and/or romantic relationships (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013; Moors, Edelstein, & Conley, 2012). Examples of CNM include “open relationships,” “swinging,” “polyamory,” “polygamy,” and “friends with benefits.”

Research about CNM is of great importance and interest to the field, given the prevalence of consensual non-monogamous relationships (estimated between 4.3-10.5% of relationships) and the negative stereotypes people hold about those who engage in these relationships. Researchers from the University of Michigan’s Stigmatized Sexuality Lab explain that the bias in favor of monogamy is so pervasive that assumptions about monogamy as a superior relational style are axiomatic, even in empirical psychological literature (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2012). Thus, while research about CNM aims to describe a largely misunderstood and often stigmatized array of relationship styles, it also offers a novel arena in which to test hypotheses derived from theories that were developed with the assumption of monogamy as the ideal form of romantic relationships. Despite CNM’s relevance to the field, college-level instructors may be slow to

integrate information about CNM into their courses on relationships or human sexuality, especially in contemporary Western societies where monogamy is perceived as the normative, optimal relationship style (Conley et al., 2013) and has served as the basis for the overwhelming majority of scholarship. With this context in mind, the purpose of this article is to discuss approaches to teaching about consensual non-monogamy in the classroom.

We recognize that some instructors may be reluctant to teach about consensual non-monogamy in their relationship courses for one or more of the following reasons: feeling they lack time to devote to the topic, feeling inadequately prepared to cover it effectively, personal biases (e.g., strong personal preference for monogamy), or not even being unaware that this line of research exists in the first place. Perusing three contemporary textbooks for interpersonal relationships courses (Bradbury & Karney, 2013; Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2013; Miller, 2011), there is scant discussion of consensual emotionally and/or sexually non-exclusive relationships other than brief discussions of polygamy, which is not necessarily even the most common type of CNM in Western cultures. There is no discussion of other mutual non-monogamous arrangements, such as polyamory. Although the absence of textbook coverage of CNM is noteworthy, there are other, mostly colloquial readings that can offer instructors and students valuable perspectives about the diversity of human relationship experiences (see for example, Anderson, 2012; Easton & Hardy, 2009; Ryan & Jetha, 2010; Sheff, 2014).

#### ***Framing the Topic for Our Students***

Before delving into a classroom discussion about consensual non-monogamous relationships it is useful to remind students that, while monogamy seems the most practiced relationship arrangement, it certainly isn’t the only model out there. In addition, people practice different varieties of non-monogamy, and not everyone defines monogamy in the same way. As instructors, we need to remind ourselves and our students that respectful engagement of the topic is essential. Beyond being good scholarly practice, such tone-setting helps maintain a safe environment for all class participants—especially those who themselves identify as polyamorous, for example, or those who were raised in poly households. In our experience, many students (regardless of personal background)

are eager to participate in discussions of monogamy and alternatives to monogamy.

It's also important for instructors to make clear that they realize this topic may be totally foreign to some students. We can encourage productive engagement with the topic by emphasizing course goals related to understanding the diversity of human relationship experiences. Tying the topic back to key course objectives can help side-step negative emotional reactions on the part of more reticent students. Many students, simply by virtue of being raised in cultures where monogamy is the norm, may not even realize that alternatives to monogamy exist. Furthermore, some students may, through discussion of the actual behaviors people engage in, start identifying their own behaviors as falling outside the traditional ideas of monogamy (for example, the "friends with benefits" model of relationships is common among our students).

A final piece of tone-setting that we have found useful for promoting discussion is to invite intellectual risk-taking. The many different words and labels alone can feel overwhelming to some students. For example, we regularly hear students confuse the term "polygamy" with "polyamory" (see Conley et al., 2013 for definitions of different types of CNM relationships). In our classrooms, we simply ask students to do their best and provide resources (like a simple glossary) to arm students with the correct language. We also remind the students to be patient with each other as they try out ideas, ask questions, etc.

### ***Theoretical Perspectives***

Once instructors opt to include consensual non-monogamy in a course, they will need to decide whether the topic will be integrated into existing topics or whether it will be treated as a stand-alone topic. For example, during a unit about sexual norms, an instructor might wish to talk about the rise in sex outside of marriage, as well as people's desires for sexual variety, and then use that topic as a segue into talking about consensual non-monogamy. If treated as a stand-alone topic, it can be useful to explain to students that all the other topics of the course are absolutely relevant to CNM relationships to ensure that they do not come to perceive CNM relationships as entirely different from dyadic, monogamous relationships.

Consider that while this area of research--though certainly not the practice of CNM--is new, there are existing theories that may facilitate teaching students why and how people engage in consensual non-monogamy. For example, though no study has examined this idea directly (at least not yet), multiple romantic/sexual relationships could offer additional opportunities for *self-expansion*, self-concept growth and exploration (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013), as well as additional avenues for emotional/romantic fulfillment and/or sexual satisfaction, that would not be possible with only one partner. The *deficit model* of romantic infidelity (Thompson, 1983) suggests that people seek extra-dyadic partners in large part because of dissatisfaction or low fulfillment with their primary partner/s, however, this may be limited to *non-consensual* extra-dyadic sex. New research on polyamorous relationships suggests that need fulfillment is largely independent across consensually non-monogamous partners (Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014). Having needs fulfilled with multiple partners was associated with increased satisfaction with primary partners.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982) contributes nicely to this area. Attachment theory is often presented as a core unit in relationship science courses, thus making it easy to incorporate information on non-monogamy into this theoretical framework. Some new evidence indicates that people high in *avoidant attachment* are more likely to have positive attitudes toward consensual non-monogamy and stronger desire to engage in such relationships, but this was only true among individuals who had never been in a consensually non-monogamous relationship. People who were lower in avoidance were more likely to report actually being in a consensually non-monogamous relationship, relative to those high in avoidance (Moors, Conley, Edelstein, & Chopik, 2014). Similar results have been found in other subpopulations; for example, one study of same-sex couples found that monogamy status (whether people identified as monogamous or not) was unrelated to relationship satisfaction and commitment for people low in anxious attachment. For people who scored high in anxious attachment, monogamy status was associated with lower relationship satisfaction and commitment (Mohr, Selterman, & Fassinger, 2013).

Evolutionary psychology may provide thoughtful, though perhaps mixed and equivocal, perspectives on monogamy. It may be best to frame this information to students in terms of the debate rather than a consensus from one research camp. Monogamy, though prevalent in human populations, is quite rare in the animal kingdom (Barash & Lipton, 2002), and there is disagreement and debate among biological scientists regarding how and under what set of conditions monogamy develops in nature (Lukas & Clutton-Brock, 2013; Opie, Atkinson, Dunbar, & Shultz, 2013). Some intriguing perspectives on human monogamy exist in popular books such as *Sex at Dawn* (Ryan & Jetha, 2010; see also Christopher Ryan's [TED talk here](#)) and its counterpoint *Sex at Dusk*, various commentaries (Ellsworth, 2011), as well as anthropological work (Hrdy, 1980).

Consensual non-monogamies are certainly more prevalent in a variety of cultures across the world, and the mere existence of cross-cultural variability in monogamous tendencies suggests that monogamy is not a biological human universal. Even the way we frame this issue (monogamy as the norm) is culturally biased through our lens of Western/North American reality.

Consensual non-monogamy may offer evolutionary advantages including genetic diversity and egalitarian sharing of resources in small groups. Part of this evolutionary debate also centers around how to properly define "monogamy," which could mean sexual/emotional exclusivity or something more general. Consider that biologists refer to "social monogamy" as when a pair of individuals builds a committed, long-term relationship that is mostly (but not completely) exclusive (Reichard, 2003). All of these queries and ongoing debates (see two recent articles [here](#) and [here](#)) about the nature of monogamy and how it manifests in human sexuality make it a topic that is especially fruitful for the purpose of teaching students how to critically examine divergent theoretical evidence in psychology, biology, anthropology, and related fields.

There are many scientific approaches to understanding jealousy, with some evolutionary psychologists identifying it as a painful yet perhaps necessary emotion that triggers vigilance about one's reproductive success (Buss, 2011). However, developmental psychologists have also identified

jealousy as a non-romantic phenomenon in children (Hart & Legerstee, 2010). Thus, when teaching jealousy, it cannot be conceptualized as solely a mechanism for enhancing reproductive success; it is a complex cognitive and emotional state that is also driven by socio-cultural norms and idiosyncratic personal experiences. A myriad of variables, including attachment style (Selterman & Maier, 2013), neuroticism and agreeableness (Buunk & Jijkstra, 2006), and traditional gender roles (Hansen, 1985) contribute to the experience of jealousy. The link between jealousy and romantic rivalry makes this an excellent topic to merge with the study of consensual non-monogamy, especially because those who engage in consensual non-monogamies are actively pursuing the type of relationship that ordinarily elicits jealousy in other adults. Research shows that people who practice consensual non-monogamy experience lower levels of jealousy than the rest of the population (e.g., de Visser & McDonald, 2007). When discussing jealousy in relationships, instructors may also bring up the idea of *compersion* (coined by laypeople in polyamorous relationships), which concerns feeling positive emotions when one's partner experiences pleasure from having an emotional or sexual experience or relationship with another person. Compersion is said to be analogous to when people in monogamous relationships experience positive emotions over their partner's positive non-relational experiences (e.g., a job promotion or winning an award). Holmes (2013) presented preliminary findings showing that some people in polyamorous relationships may experience high amounts of positive emotions (e.g., joy, happy, love for partner, loved by partner) and low amounts of negative emotions (e.g., sad, angry, jealous, scared) when their romantic partner has a sexual or emotional encounter or relationship with another person.

Research on prejudice and stigma also applies to this discussion, especially within a social-psychological framework where students are also exposed to research regarding conformity to cultural norms and research on stigmatization of non-mainstream sexual practices (e.g., fetishes) and promiscuity. It is worth mentioning that people may be swayed toward monogamy as a practice not because they believe it is intrinsically better but because of external stress/pressure stemming from stigmas associated with non-monogamous arrangements (see Conley,

Moors, Matsick, & Siegler, 2013; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013). In addition, some forms of consensual non-monogamy (such as polyamory) may be viewed more favorably than other forms (such as swinging; see Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moors, & Rubin, 2013). Course instructors may juxtapose research on prejudice against individuals who practice consensual non-monogamy with research on prejudice against LGBTQ individuals, or other forms of prejudice based on sexual identities (e.g., BDSM, kink) or relationship statuses (e.g., singlism).

In conclusion, it is clear that the science of consensual non-monogamy dovetails nicely with several overarching theoretical perspectives in relationship science.

#### *Activities/Exercises:*

The activities and exercises below provide instructors with concrete ideas for engaging these topics, though certainly the effectiveness of any given strategy will depend on the size, level, and nature of the class.

- **Discuss definitions and descriptions of monogamy.** As Conley et al. (2013) note, “Despite widespread endorsement of monogamy as the ideal type of romantic relationship, the construct of monogamy lacks a consistent definition” (p. 125). Ask students to free-write for a couple minutes in response to the prompt, “What is monogamy?” or invite small pods of students to write and then post to a Google Doc a definition of monogamy. Ensuing discussion will likely reveal that, while most students may agree that monogamy constitutes sexual exclusivity, they may not agree about what type of contact is permitted under such an arrangement (e.g., hugging/kissing, flirting, intimate conversation, cybersex, provocative dancing, exchanging gifts). Instructors might follow up on this with information from recent papers demonstrating the ambiguity associated with these behaviors (see Wilson, Mattingly, Clark, Wiedler, & Bequette, 2011), and to explain that there is substantial variability in what couples consider “cheating.” It is also worth noting that some people may define themselves individually or dyadically as monogamous (as part of their identity) but have preferential attitudes or desires that are more in line with a consensually non-monogamous

arrangement. And, couples can define their relationship as “open,” yet behaviorally look identical to a couple that identifies as monogamous (in other words, just because a relationship is open doesn’t mean those individuals have sex with other people).

- **Discuss what students find appealing vs. not about different models.** In addition to teaching information on what these relationship styles are and how they operate, instructors can also ask students to consider *why* they would choose one or another of these varieties for their own relationships. Here, a staged debate (in which students are assigned positions) can be a useful tactic for surfacing reactions and revealing assumptions about relationship functioning.
- **Survey students about the meaning of other relationship statuses.** Instructors can solicit feedback from students about what constitutes an “official” relationship. What expectations, emotions, behaviors, and identities correspond with different relationship statuses (e.g., “Facebook official,” dating, friends with benefits)? Encourage students to think about when and how the issue of monogamy/non-monogamy comes up in discussions of relationship status. Also consider asking students whether there is a different expectation for monogamy in committed relationships depending on the environment/culture, or immediate situation. For example, some may admit that, while they have made monogamous agreements with partners, there was an implicit or explicit expectation that extra-dyadic sex would be allowed if partners were physically separated (e.g., long-distance relationships), which may be especially prevalent during the transition from high school to college. Furthermore, norms in the college atmosphere may promote a greater acceptance of extra-dyadic behavior compared to post-college life and marriage. It may be the case that, while many students disapprove of romantic infidelity, they would be more forgiving of such behavior in a context of “casual” dating compared to a decades-long marriage. The goal here is to encourage students to consider how environments and situations shape their attitudes and expectations about monogamy.



- **Survey students about their attitudes toward extra-dyadic sex.** In an informal survey one of the authors conducted in their spring 2014 relationships course, 80-85% of students agreed that it was “wrong” for them or their partners to have sex with another person, and approximately 50% agreed that this behavior was grounds to terminate the relationship. After asking students to explain their attitudes, there was a productive free-response discussion about the consequences of such behavior (e.g., harm caused, fear of abandonment). Some students voiced counter opinions that were more accepting of consensual non-monogamy and expressed the view that others may consider it wrong only because of contemporary social norms and personal insecurities. In sum, there may be great variability in students’ attitudes/responses. It may be beneficial for students to hear and openly discuss these views with each other in the classroom setting.
- **Ask students to define other relationship constructs without implying monogamy.** Ask students to articulate definitions of other relationship constructs—like love, trust, loyalty, commitment. Challenge them to create definitions that do not include monogamy-assumed phrases like “one and only,” “one’s partner,” etc. Once students are satisfied with their definitions, ask how those constructs might look in monogamous vs. non-monogamous relationships. Suggest that perhaps trust, loyalty, commitment, etc. need not be centered around social or sexual monogamy.
- **Ask students to think about all the qualities they desire in a short term and/or long-term romantic partner.** Then, ask students to reflect on the people they know, as well as people they’ve dated, who possess *all* of these qualities. The point of this exercise is to show the low probability of finding a long-term partner who contains all the desirable traits that students would want in a partner. Following this, prompt students to discuss the prospect of finding multiple partners to fulfill all of their needs/desires/fantasies.
- **Survey students (anonymously) about whether they have ever actively fantasized about the idea of sexually engaging with an extra-dyadic partner, either with or without their partner, while in an exclusive relationship.** It is likely that most students will (anonymously) admit this, and it would lead nicely into a broader discussion about the motivations to pursue multiple partners (e.g., excitement, novelty). Along the same lines, ask students why they believe people engage in extra-dyadic sex (in monogamous relationships). In other words, ask students to offer possible explanations for people’s motivations for romantic infidelity. Students may identify perceived (stereotypical or actual) differences between men and women in their motivations for extra-dyadic sex. This conversation could segue nicely into a discussion of recent research findings. [Live Science](#) reports that “middle-age women who cheat on their husbands are looking for passion and sex, but don’t want to divorce their husbands over it. About two-thirds of the women said they were seeking more romantic passion, which always involved sex. And none of the women wanted to leave their spouses, with many even talking up their husbands.” Given these findings, ask students to consider whether monogamy is obviously the “optimal” arrangement for long-term romantic relationships. Ask students to consider whether divorce rates would potentially decrease if married partners were permitted to pursue extra-dyadic sex.
- **Ask the students to brainstorm the perceived risks—emotional, physical, social—of extradyadic relationships for all parties involved.** Then, ask about the ways people involved in monogamous and CNMs could mitigate those risks. At this point in her class, one of the authors shares [an example of a relationship agreement](#) and invites students to discuss their reactions to the agreement vis a vis perceived risks. She eventually opens into broader questions about the role of explicit vs. implicit assumptions about relationships. If, when, and how often do students anticipate they’d like to talk about these assumptions in their own relationships (including in dyadic exclusive relationships)? After reading a relationship agreement, students will have a much better understanding of what it means to set expectations and establish norms in relationships.

Some students may have reactions along the lines of, “Oh wow! THAT’S what I need to do to make my expectations clear in a dyadic monogamous relationship.”

- **Ask students to brainstorm about the pros and cons of the different varieties of monogamy status** (e.g., “What are the pros/cons of consensual non-monogamy,” “What are the pros/cons of monogamy?”). It may also be useful to follow this brainstorming session with empirical research on popular misconceptions about monogamy/non-monogamy (see Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, & Valentine, 2013). Similarly, survey students about their attitudes toward consensually non-monogamous relationships. While students may view these relationships as more liberating or exciting, they may also view such relationships as riskier (specifically with regard to contracting a sexually transmitted infection), to be less stable over time, and to be less healthy (or even overtly damaging) to children raised by people in such relationships. However, many of these beliefs are unfounded and can be addressed by empirical research examining the behaviors of people in these relationships compared to the rest of the population. For example, people in consensually non-monogamous relationships are more likely to practice safe sex with their extra-dyadic partners compared to “monogamous” cheaters (Conley, Moors, Ziegler, & Karathanasis, 2012). Strict monogamy is an effective way to curb the spread of STIs but it is only effective if people adhere to it, which does not always happen given the high rate of infidelity in the population.
- **Invite guest speakers who are in CNMs to share their perspectives on the lived experience.**

### **Additional Resources**

There are some excellent teaching resources available, thanks to some excellent popular science writers who are also active relationship/sexuality researchers. Moors, Chopik, Edelstein, and Conley (2014) offer a [comprehensive overview of consensual non-monogamy](#) in *In-Mind Magazine*, including some basic definitions, examples, and up-to-date research examples. Justin Lehmillier’s blog contains some articles on this topic, including a [Q&A about](#)

[polyamory stereotypes](#), finding [potential partners for non-monogamous](#) relationships, [survey data on American’s attitudes](#) toward morality and relationships, and a study summary focusing on [attachment styles and satisfaction/commitment in non-monogamous](#) relationships. Finally, the award-winning website *Science of Relationships* contains several articles on this topic as well, including a [summary of consensual non-monogamy](#) research, [addressing and clarifying myths about consensual non-monogamy](#), non-monogamous relationships [in Tanzania](#), showing variety in global perspectives, and an article that questions [what infidelity really constitutes](#) in light of consensual non-monogamy. Finally, the *JSPR* podcast series has a discussion with researchers in this field; you can listen [here](#) or read the transcript [here](#).

### **Conclusion**

As the field of relationship science evolves, the teaching of relationships follows suit. We strongly encourage college-level course instructors who teach relationship science and/or human sexuality courses to incorporate scientific information and discussion about consensual non-monogamy. We believe that this stands to benefit all students who enroll in such courses, irrespective of how they approach their own relationships.

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## How a Decision-Making Perspective Can Inform Relationship Research

by Samantha Joel  
University of Toronto

*"Don't date a man for over two years. You've already spent more than a year waiting for him to propose; do you have another year to wait?"*

- From Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider's *The Rules*

*"There is a part of the brain that helps us to interpret time and space. That part of the brain is much bigger in a man than a woman. This means men have a much bigger awareness for their need for space and time to themselves."*

- John Gray, author of *Men are From Mars, Women are from Venus*

Many people want to build healthy, satisfying partnerships that will enhance their lives rather than detract from them. In other words, people want to make good relationship choices. There is an enormous demand for information about which relationship decisions are the right decisions, and how one should go about making them. All too often, this knowledge gap is filled by worn-out relationship stereotypes perpetuated by the media and by pop psychology books. As relationship researchers, we know that much of this advice is completely

unsubstantiated, and some of it is flat-out wrong and potentially even damaging. Yet, this advice is packaged and sold as fact. For example, John Gray's *Men are From Mars, Women are from Venus* (a popular book which is not grounded in scientific research) has sold over 50 million copies and shows no signs of declining in popularity.

Magazines are another common source of bad relationship advice. One recently published article in [Men's Health](#) offers men a helpful list of signs that their partner is thinking about cheating on them, including gems such as "She's been promoted," and "She's moving in with you." Meanwhile, [Cosmo](#) offers up a number of the most common long-term romantic relationship challenges – such as declines in passion and novelty – as signs that it is time to break-up.

For the more frugal relationship advice-seekers, there are plenty of ostensible relationship experts willing to dole out relationship advice for free. On the incredibly popular internet forum Reddit, there are two relationship forums, or "subreddits": [/r/relationships](#) and [/r/relationship-advice](#). Combined, these thriving internet communities have over 300,000 users from around the world. In these forums, people seek advice on relationship decisions of all kinds, such as whether to snoop on a romantic partner, to cut contact with a toxic family member, or to make a career sacrifice for one's family. Apparently, people are so hungry for guidance on these decisions that they are willing to solicit advice on these topics – many of which represent potentially life-changing relationship turning points – from anonymous online strangers whose only qualification is internet access.

The ubiquity of relationship advice is a testament to how deeply people care about making good relationship decisions that will help them to achieve positive relationship outcomes. It is clear that scientific answers to these questions would be of broad interest to the public, as well as to relationship therapists and clinicians. Yet a perusal of the scientific literature suggests that, in stark contrast to pop psychology writers, researchers have traditionally steered clear of studying major relationship decisions. There is little in the way of evidence-based information that people can use to help them navigate dilemmas such as whether to

move in with a romantic partner, whether to get married, or whether to break up. We know little about how people typically arrive at these decisions, and even less about how relationship decision strategies can be improved. Overall, relationship decisions represent a new research avenue that holds tremendous potential to make a difference in people's lives.

### ***What the Field of Judgment and Decision Making (JDM) has to Offer Relationship Science***

As a relationship researcher, if you are interested in studying relationship decisions, the field of judgment and decision-making (JDM) has insights to offer. JDM researchers have constructed and honed a wide range of research techniques and paradigms that can be used to capture decision-making processes. Typically, these techniques are used to uncover decision strategies for use in domains such as finances, consumerism, and health. My colleagues and I recently published a paper in which we suggested that relationship decisions share important overlap with other types of decisions, meaning that we may be able to harness JDM concepts and techniques in order to better understand relationship decisions (Joel, MacDonald, & Plaks, 2013). The following are some examples of ways in which the field of JDM may be applicable to romantic relationships.

### ***Descriptive Techniques***

Before trying to identify the *best* way of making a particular decision, it is generally a good idea to get a handle of how people *typically* make that decision, and how different decision strategies might lead people to arrive at different choices. This is known in the field of JDM as taking a descriptive approach. However, this initial step of uncovering typical decision processes can require some creative methodology. Retrospective accounts are of little help, because memory is fallible and people are notorious for constructing post-hoc rationalizations for their choices. Instead, JDM researchers have developed process tracing techniques to more accurately capture decision processes. For example, the "think-aloud protocol" is a technique for capturing people's thought processes *as they occur*, rather than retrospectively. In a typical think-aloud study, participants are asked to describe their thoughts as they make a particular decision (e.g., Will you message the creator of this online dating

profile?). Critically, they are not encouraged to explain or introspect about their thoughts. Rather, their task is simply to relay their thoughts verbally as they arrive, or to “think aloud.” To make sure that the thinking aloud process has not affected the participants’ decisions, it is common practice to include a warm-up session for participants to practice thinking aloud, as well as a “silent” control group who completes the same tasks without the thinking aloud component. Altogether, when this technique is implemented properly, it can be a powerful tool for capturing internal cognitive processes. However, with the exception of a single study on videodating (Woll, 1986), relationship researchers have yet to utilize the think-aloud protocol for the purposes of understanding romantic relationship choices. The think-aloud protocol might be particularly useful for studying future relationship decisions: real decisions about real romantic partners that haven’t been made yet. For example, participants in new dating relationships could be asked to “think aloud” about whether and/or when they would ideally like to make certain investments in their new relationship (e.g., introducing a new partner to one’s parents, giving a new partner the key to one’s place, moving in with one’s partner). This might be a useful tool for capturing and examining how people make major relationship choices that ultimately shape their relationship outcomes.

Another way to uncover relationship decision-making processes would be to examine what types of information are considered relevant for different choices. Decision-making researchers have gradually honed a number of information search techniques, which, as with the think-aloud protocol, have rarely if ever been applied to the interpersonal domain. For example, MouseLabWEB is an online computer program that takes advantage of computer mouse movements to observe how participants acquire information. In a typical MouseLabWEB experiment, participants would be presented with a choice, as well as a number of boxes containing information that may be pertinent to that choice. An example of the choice would be “Would you purchase this car?” and the boxes would have labels such as “make,” “model,” and “fuel efficiency.” The participant must move his or her mouse over each box to reveal the information that the boxes contain (e.g., “Honda,” “Civic”). The computer program then tracks which boxes the participant places his or her mouse over,

and for how long, before the participant makes his or her choice. Thus, the MouseLabWEB program allows researchers to assess precisely which pieces of information the participant considered relevant for the decision. Our lab has already adapted this research technique for studying scenarios with hypothetical romantic partners, and we find it to be a particularly useful method for studying mate preferences. Information about potential dating partners can be presented inside the boxes (e.g., hair color, education level, movie preferences) and the researcher can measure which boxes participants look at, in what order and for how long.

Schulte-Mecklenbeck, Kuhberger, and Ranyard (2010) provide a “critical review and user’s guide” to process tracing for decision-making researchers. In this book, they delineate the most established methods for examining the mental processes behind decisions, the majority of which have never been applied to an interpersonal context. I recommend this book as a reference for anyone who is interested in using these techniques in their own research.

### *Normative Techniques*

A second goal of JDM research is to understand which decision-making strategies are *ideal*. How could people improve their decision-making strategies to obtain better outcomes? Romantic relationships present some unique logistical and ethical challenges here, which may be part of the reason relationship decisions have received considerably less empirical attention than other, more traditional JDM topics. Taking a normative approach to decision making requires the researcher to examine how different decision strategies affect real-world relationship outcomes. For other kinds of decisions (e.g., consumer purchases, financial investments), researchers can include real-world outcomes without giving up experimental control. For example, researchers can include tangible bonuses or incentives in their studies. However, major decisions about established relationships typically cannot be manipulated in the lab while still having real-world consequences. It may be possible to do this for smaller relationship decisions (i.e., deciding to text a partner about a bad day, allocating money to a partner in a game setting, or deciding to take a gift for yourself vs. your partner). To study major relationship decisions, however, we recommend the following steps:

- 1) Recruit individuals who are currently in the midst of making a decision about their relationships.
- 2) Measure the decision strategies that they are using to make this decision (e.g., with interview techniques or self-report scales).
- 3) Follow up with them some time after the decision has been made to examine which decision they made, as well as which decision strategies led to the most positive real-world outcomes.

Our lab has been using this strategy with success so far. For example, we have an ongoing study examining cohabitation decisions. We recruit people who are currently thinking about moving in with their romantic partners and interview them about their motives and rationale for wanting to move in (e.g., pros and cons). We then code the interviews on a variety of decision- and motivation-related dimensions. Finally, we follow up with them six months later to see what decision they made, and what the outcomes of that decision were. This seems to us to be a useful approach for examining which relational decision strategies lead to the most positive outcomes.

Another unique challenge to studying relationship decisions is that relationship decisions, by definition, involve another person. Thus, in order to properly study relationship decisions, it is important to carefully consider who is the “agent”, or the person actually making the decision. If a researcher measures the decision strategy followed by the relationship outcomes of a person who is *not* the agent (i.e., a person who did not ultimately get to make the decision), then the researcher could easily draw some erroneous conclusions about the impact of a particular decision strategy. For example, consider major investment decisions (e.g., merging finances, buying a house together). In reasonably healthy relationships, both partners have veto power over investment decisions such as these, meaning that each member of the couple has to agree to the decision in order for the investment to occur. So, imagine that Fred and Wilma are deciding whether to get married. If Fred and Wilma end up getting married, then it is reasonably safe to say that both Fred and Wilma were agents in this situation, as they must have both agreed to marriage. However, it is less clear who the

decision maker is if Fred and Wilma end up not getting married. Perhaps Fred wanted to get married, but Wilma did not. In this case, Wilma is a decision agent (she chose not to marry, and so they didn't), but Fred is not (he chose to marry, but they didn't). If a researcher were studying Fred and Wilma to gain some insight into how couples choose to marry, it would be imperative that they had measured and accounted for each member of the couple's level of agency in the situation. Otherwise, they may erroneously conclude that Fred's decision-making strategy for choosing to marry led to significantly lower well-being. In reality, Fred's dejection likely has nothing to do with his decision-making strategy; Fred is just disappointed that he did not get to marry Wilma.

In research samples that only include one member of each couple, one way of addressing this problem statistically may be to identify participants who were *not* agents in the decision in question and exclude those individuals from the decision-related analyses. This would allow the researcher to examine only decisions that participants actually made. For example, when examining the strategies and consequences of relationship investment decisions, I recommend excluding participants whose decision to invest in the relationship was vetoed by their partners. This leaves only a sample of agents: people who chose to invest in their relationships, and people who chose not to. Similarly, when examining breakup decisions, I recommend excluding participants who were broken up *with*. Again, this leaves a sample only of agents: people who either chose to end their relationships, and people who chose to keep their relationships intact. Clearly, the excluded individuals are still highly valuable for exploring other research questions. However, for the purposes of examining the impact of relationship decisions and decision strategies, restricting samples in this way would allow researchers to draw cleaner, stronger conclusions.

A second way of dealing with the joint nature of relationship decisions would be to use dyadic samples and dyadic analyses. By measuring the perspectives of both members of the couple, we could examine how couples negotiate and ultimately arrive at these major relationship choices. These joint decision processes seem like they ought to have important implications; indeed, I would not be

surprised to learn that the *way* in which couples work together to arrive at important decisions is ultimately more predictive of meaningful outcomes than *which* decisions they arrive at. Our field is at the forefront of developing and applying sophisticated dyadic research techniques that will give us the tools to start uncovering how couples work through life-changing decisions such as whether to move in together, whether to get married, whether to have children together, or get divorced. This seems like a promising avenue for future research.

### **Conclusions**

People care deeply about making good relationship decisions that will help them to achieve relationship fulfillment. Indeed, decisions about romantic relationships are the most common source of life regrets (Morrison & Roesse, 2011). Taking a JDM approach to relationships will help us to begin to answer questions about how people make these decisions, as well as how people could make *better* decisions for improved relationship outcomes. This avenue of research is in its infancy, and we are only just beginning to figure out how to integrate traditional JDM approaches with the unique challenges and complexities of close relationships. I have offered some methodological suggestions for capturing these relational decision processes. It is my hope that this article will inspire scholars in our field to further consider ways in which we can better capture relationship decision strategies and decision outcomes, which have so much potential for helping people to improve their own relational outcomes.

### **About the Author**

*Samantha Joel is a Ph.D. candidate in the Psychology Department at the University of Toronto. Her research examines how people make decisions about their romantic relationships. She writes a blog for Psychology Today entitled [Dating Decisions](#) and is a frequent contributor to [Science of Relationships](#).*

## NEW PROFESSIONAL'S COLUMN

### **The Truth Behind *PhD Comics*: Do's and Don'ts for Graduate School Survival**

**Ashley K. Randall  
Arizona State University**

Many of us are familiar with *PhD Comics*, a comic strip about the trials and tribulations of life in graduate school. Topics include, but are not limited to, cultivating research ideas, productivity, TAing, and navigating interactions with the illustrious mentor. While we all can relate to *PhD Comics* on some level, how can we avoid the doom and gloom that many strips portray? To help me answer this question I solicited the help of my colleagues who serve on the Mentoring Committee (Fred Clavel, Brian Don, Lisa Hoplock, Samantha Joel, and Valerie Young).

Below are some of our “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for graduate school survival:

#### **DO**

##### ***Advisor(s)/Mentoring:***

- **WORK WITH OTHERS:** In addition to your primary advisor, try to work with different faculty who share similar interests. Realize that working outside of your own department will help you gain the interdisciplinary perspective that many grant agencies (and future employers) are looking for!
- **SEEK FEEDBACK:** Actively seek feedback from your advisor and committee members. Also, seek advice from peers and students who are in more senior positions in your graduate program. Ask them for all the information you possibly can. *Do you have any advice for submitting a successful IRB proposal? Where do I go for research participants? Should I take Professor X's*

*class? How should I tackle qualifying exams? Who should I talk to if I want or need counseling?*

### **Professional Development:**

- **PRESENT:** Volunteer to share your research ideas at Brown Bags or Lab meetings – this is a great way to get feedback from trusted and supportive peers and faculty!
- **ATTEND:** Career workshops, including TA workshops. These can be invaluable in helping you learn the skills you'll need throughout grad school and once you graduate. Of course you should also attend IARR, especially the New Scholars activities. This is a great way to get to know others and to have fun!
- **GET INVOLVED:** Get involved with your department and university. Serving on committees at the graduate level can help you to understand the role service might play in a future faculty position.
- **NETWORK:** Attend interdisciplinary university events, such as colloquiums on campus, and think about creating a brown-bag series for faculty and students that have similar interests. This will help to establish contacts in other departments on campus, at other universities, etc. Doing so can only increase your chances of fruitful collaboration, which in turn amplifies your output during these critical years. Not to mention, proper networking is a great predictor of success in job hunting. It's not just what you know, it's *who* you know. That old adage is still around for a reason.

### **Coursework:**

- **PACE YOURSELF:** Many courses offer rich opportunities to learn new things, which we can apply to our ongoing scholarly activities. However, many courses also carry substantial amounts of busywork, which can be a real detractor from building up a line of research with sufficient momentum. Try to pace yourself and take courses that are relevant to your interests and needs. For example, if you have a project that requires a certain

statistical technique, like structural equation modeling, perhaps this is the time to take that course. Similarly, if you have a number of obligations to complete for the semester (e.g., thesis proposal or comps), try to lighten your course load, if possible.

### **Health/Sanity:**

- **EAT HEALTHY:** Finding time to cook can be hard – I know I am especially appreciative of Trader Joe's microwavable pastas. Be sure to stock the kitchen staples and keep track of what you need when you go to the grocery store, which can help save time and frustration (check out the app *Grocery IQ*).
- **RELAX:** Go out with friends, read a book, catch a movie.
- **EXERCISE:** Go for a walk, bike ride or a run – something to release those endorphins.
- **TEND AND BEFRIEND:** We are all aware of the importance social relationships have for our physical and mental health. Be sure to take advantage of this, but also to offer social support to others as well!

### **Additional Tips:**

- Try to have multiple projects going, and at different stages, in case one doesn't work out as planned – of course, that *never* happens.
- Read, write, read, write – do it often!
- Keep a notebook of research ideas. While you're out watching a movie, at home watching Bravo TV, or eating dinner with friends, take a mental note of interesting phenomena that keep popping up. It's a great way to develop new, interesting lines of research.
- Subscribe to listservs and RSS feeds, such as:
  - [Science of Relationships](#)
  - [Tomorrow's Professor](#)
  - [Science Daily](#)



**DON'T*****Advisor(s)/Mentoring:***

- **DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP!** You're in graduate school for a reason – to learn. You're not expected to know all the answers.
- **DON'T TAKE FEEDBACK PERSONALLY:** Learn how to benefit from constructive criticism instead of responding to it defensively. Feedback means that your advisor/colleagues value you enough to try to share their expertise with you and help you improve.
- **DON'T FORGET TO SAY “THANK YOU!”:** Many times we get so wrapped up with the outcome, that we forget all the work that has gone into the process. Say “Thank you” to those who have helped you along the way.

***Professional Development:***

- **DON'T BE AFRAID OF FAILURE:** Some hypotheses won't pan out and some papers will get rejected. That's okay – it's all part of the process. Even the best scholars in the field get rejections from journals and grant agencies; it's only through persistence and not taking it personally that manuscripts eventually get published and grants get funded.
- **DON'T SAY YES TO EVERYTHING:** While many of us suffer from the “Eager-to-Please Syndrome” (not a current diagnosis in the DSM-5), we need to recognize our own limitations and tailor our experiences accordingly. It's better to say “no, thank you” than to say “yes” and do a poor job, which could negatively affect future opportunities. Others will understand - chances are, they're just as busy as you.

***Coursework:***

- **DON'T IGNORE YOUR INTERESTS:** When possible, complete course assignments keeping your research in mind. If you have to do a research proposal for a course, then propose research that you would actually run.

You will get valuable feedback and it can help you make progress on your own research at the same time.

***Health/Sanity:***

- **DON'T FORGET TO EAT:** Many a grad student considers working nonstop from 9AM to 6PM without a single morsel of sustenance in between as a “great idea” for getting work done. I find that Snickers is amazingly helpful in refueling the body to get through the next couple of hours of meetings; however, it's not entirely healthy (shocking, I know). However, taking 20 minutes out of your day to step away from your desk and eat will not catastrophically derail your productivity. In fact, it is only likely to improve it in the long run.
- **DON'T BURN THE CANDLE AT BOTH ENDS:** Avoid sleep deprivation. Sleep is easily one of the first things that students forgo in the hopes of maximizing their productivity. It is also easily one of the worst things you could possibly do for a plethora of reasons. Not only will your work suffer, but you'll end up introducing yourself to long-term mental and physical health risks that are quite avoidable. Depending on your current time zone, go take a nap or go to bed (after you finish reading *RRN*, of course)!

Most importantly, **don't forget why you're doing this in the first place.** Grad school has lulls (as depicted daily by *PhD Comics*) – it's easy to get dragged into the nitty-gritty day-to-day and forget the big picture. When you get down and feel like you're a part of Les (Really) Miserables, remember the research questions that excited you in the first place, and look towards your sources of social support for a quick pick-me-up.

I hope that the “Do's and Don'ts” in this column help you to have a successful academic year!

## HUMOR COLUMN

### *Tolstoy was Right*

**by David A. Kenny**  
**University of Connecticut**

In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, there is the quote that "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The way to think about the quote is that for a family to be happy, everything has to be right. But if in a family, just one little thing is askew, the family will experience difficulties. We can rephrase the Tolstoy quote in 21<sup>st</sup> century vernacular: "Pretty much all families are bleeped up." No doubt this was true of Tolstoy's own family, where his wife and children bitterly quarreled with him about the future rights to his writings after his death. At least, that is what happened to Christopher Plummer and Helen Mirren in the movie *The Last Station*. Although Tolstoy wrote fiction, based on the research of many of those who read this newsletter, he had a great insight into family dynamics and so spoke a great truth.

For most normal people, the veracity of the Tolstoy quote is a very unsettling thought. For those of us who are parents, it makes us realize that no matter how hard we try, it is almost certain that we shall be unable to create a family environment that is completely functional. And for all of us who are children, it saddens us to recall all too painfully that we grew up in a less than optimal environment that, at times, was highly toxic for many of us. My wife is fond of the poem "This Be the Verse" by Philip Larkin that starts with "They \*\*\*\* you up, your mum and dad." (Hint: The word "\*\*\*\*\*" rhymes with the name of a very famous relationship researcher, Steve D\*\*\*)

However, for us relationship researchers, the Tolstoy quote brings joy to our hearts. All of this family dysfunction creates a veritable goldmine for both relationship researchers and clinicians. We lick our chops, when we think of insecure attachment styles, walking on eggshells, dependence, and enabling.

Emulating Brian Spitzberg and William Cupach, we take relish in looking at "The Dark Side of Close Relationships." Without all this dysfunction what would we study, how would we get funding, and who would be our clients?

Even when we talk about the good things in relationships, we cannot resist conjuring how they can lead to bad things. For instance, we enjoy explaining in our classes the Art and Elaine Aron concept of "inclusion of the self in the other." When we show the graphics of overlapping circles, it creates a warm and fuzzy feeling, much like holding a puppy. But then we cannot resist saying that if the relationship ends, then the person's self is destroyed and what might result is a murder-suicide. One minute we are holding the puppy and the next minute we are bludgeoning it.

There are other examples of our perverse thinking. I have talked to several researchers who have conducted longitudinal studies of married couples. They were ecstatic when they found out that some of their study couples were getting divorced. (Granted we are not as perverse as epidemiologists who feel joy when people get sick or die.) I think it very strange that these researchers pop the champagne when they get a 50 percent divorce rate because that is optimal in terms of statistical power. If somehow, all of the couples in the study were madly in love and still together, these researchers would no doubt be extraordinarily unhappy. But Tolstoy makes sure that this never happens.

I must confess that we methodologists are even more perverse. We love to see people screw up in their research. That way we can write papers about what they have done wrong and how we know how to do it right. There is, however, a dark side of the especially acute ability of methodologists to see what is wrong with research. We are so good at seeing what is wrong that we are no good at doing our own research because we see all its flaws. I eventually learned with my own students that I needed to enlist a non-methodologist to evaluate their studies, because if I did the evaluation, my students would never undertake a study.

Of course, researchers are the most perverse when they are reviewers. They diligently search the paper to locate "a fatal flaw" in a study that they are

reviewing. No doubt a major reason for this happiness is that once they find the fatal flaw, they can stop reviewing the paper because “all that follows is based on faulty presumption.” That allows them to say, “I am not going to comment on the rest of the paper because of the egregious thinking earlier in the paper.” Sometimes we are negative, because we are lazy.

These days, especially within psychology, there is a movement to be more “positive.” They call on us to study happiness, gratification, well-being, resilience, and virtue. These people are certainly well-intentioned. But even if family negativity has led to people like Hitler and serial killers like Jeffrey Dahmer, it may also have been a wellspring of creativity, not only for artists and writers like Tolstoy, but even for us researchers. We relationship researchers need to stand up and defend the great joy of negativity!

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Review of *Experiencing Same-Sex Marriage: Individuals, Couples, and Social Networks***

**by Laura E. Brown  
University of Texas at Austin**

Synthesizing more than a decade’s worth of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) relationship research, Pamela J. Lannutti skillfully argues that same-sex marriage is a “new relational context” by drawing upon fundamental tenets of communication studies. Lannutti’s text is grounded in three key ideas: Communication is central to relationships; communication and perceptions shape one another; and communication occurs within a context. If you have wondered how “all of the same-sex marriage hoopla” (p. 2) affects individuals and their relationships, this text is for you. It serves as a concise, yet dynamic and multidimensional survey of the study of communication in same-sex romantic relationships. The book is organized into seven

chapters (first is also introduction; seventh is also conclusion). Lannutti’s expertise on the subject is immediately clear. Indeed, she has been researching same-sex relationships since shortly after the 2003 Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court’s landmark decision to legalize same-sex marriage.

Broadly, she argues that “the complexities of the battles for and against same-sex marriage experienced by GLBT people, same-sex couples, and their social networks form a new and influential context for their relational lives” (p. 7). Lannutti outlines this argument in the second chapter by including an abundance of verbatim participant quotations, which offer richness and texture to explanations grounded in theory. The nearly 50 quotations offer insight into how people with same-sex attractions create meaning for marriage. She argues that time is an important factor, such that for some couples in the U.S., legally recognized marriage is in the past, and for others, it is in the future. While relationship researchers have long suspected that policy changes influence perceptions of and communication about romantic relationships, Lannutti is here to provide ample evidence.

In “Should We Get Hitched?” and “Same-Sex Marriage, Couples, and Families,” Lannutti reviews and extends her qualitative research findings, some of which have been previously published as journal articles. The overview of the empirical similarities and differences between same-sex couples and different-sex couples is useful for scholars new to the subject matter, and she concludes that while there are many sites of overlap, differences in policy translate to differences in structural commitment experiences. One site of difference is captured in what Lannutti identifies as an “obstacle” to marriage. That is, some couples – who have the option of marriage available to them, but have decided not to marry – report that getting married would mean a loss of control over their level of outness to others. Midway through the book, the focus shifts from the dyad to the broader social network, including families of origin, and families created by same-sex couples.

The fifth chapter is perhaps the most innovative in the volume; its focus is “Same-Sex Marriage Experiences of Understudied Members of the GLBT Community.” Specifically, Lannutti describes the relationships and experiences of bisexual-lesbian

couples and older same-sex couples. Indeed, Lannutti is filling an important research gap. This is another quote-heavy chapter, and lifespan development researchers will be especially interested in the section on older adults. Still, the reader is left wondering about couples in which there is a large age gap, transgender same-sex marriage experiences, and other understudied members of the GLBT community.

While the majority of the book's focus is on marriage experiences in states where same-sex marriage is legal, Chapter 6 offers an analysis of the experiences of same-sex marriage prohibitions and amendments, and how couples cope with policy change. Lannutti highlights the silver lining of these stressful situations, including bonding with others, and exchanging socially supportive messages. While she certainly does not promote same-sex marriage bans, she does acknowledge that there are some positive social consequences for GLBT individuals and their social networks even in challenging times.

In the concluding chapter, Lannutti identifies limitations of the body of research, including frequent utilization of the snowball sampling technique and online surveys. Future directions for research include more diversity among samples, and a call for longitudinal research as policy evolves. Some state's policies have changed even since the book's publication earlier this year, and more changes are sure to come, perhaps even before this review is published. I agree that more diversity among samples is desirable, as the reader is left wondering about Lannutti's use of "GLBT" rather than the perhaps more accurate "GLB" or the more inclusive "GLBTQ." One can imagine that she excludes "Q" (queer or questioning) because the term can describe gender identity *or* sexual orientation, and sexual orientations that Lannutti does not address (e.g., pansexual). To her credit, she does address the contestability of the term "GLBT community" and gestures toward some transgender-specific issues. Importantly, it is clear that Lannutti recognizes the unique situations of cisgender folks who identify solely as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Overall, this volume provides the reader with a deeper understanding of why it is that same-sex marriage matters—to individuals, to couples, to social networks, and to scholars. It is a comprehensive

introduction for researchers who are considering GLBT projects, and would be appropriate for advanced undergraduate or graduate survey courses in communication studies, psychology, sociology, and public policy. Those studying end of life care, the transition to parenthood, commitment, political expression, divorce, and other topics will benefit from this book. Lannutti makes it easy for readers to get excited about analyzing GLBT-related data and generating socially meaningful programs of relationship research.

Lannutti, P. J. (2014). *Experiencing same-sex marriage: Individuals couples, and social networks*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.  
130 pages, Hardcover, \$80.10 USD (Amazon)

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### **Review of *The Dark Side of Relationship Pursuit: From Attraction to Obsession and Stalking* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)**

**by Jessica J. Eckstein  
Western Connecticut State University**

Second editions of texts too often fail to offer something new, often relying on a few updated references. In contrast, Brian Spitzberg and William Cupach's recent "dark side" work is a significant contribution in its own right. Although the text focuses solely on obsessive relational intrusion (ORI) and stalking constructs, making part of the subtitle "from attraction..." somewhat misleading, it is nonetheless one of the most comprehensive *and* useful texts to be found on these constructs. In addition to extremely thorough and organized representation of all major stalking/ORI issues to date, there are several original contributions in this text worth noting, along with some caveats for the reader unfamiliar with the nuances of "dark side" research.

If for no other reason, this text is worth obtaining merely for the authors' inclusion of full measures of stalking and ORI perpetration and victimization (in varied forms and effect outcomes) modified and updated for current researchers. But there are myriad reasons to not only read it, but to add it to one's library. The authors have given particular attention to

all stalking/ORI research (although not up-to-date on other concurrent topics, a fact to be discussed subsequently) right up to the 2014 publication date, which makes it truly useful-for-researchers and advanced students of “relational dark side” literature. The authors’ many previous publications could be obtained independently for much of the background overview they present to contextualize/historicize research on these issues. But the text also contains “new” compilations for readers in the form of multiple, comprehensive typologies (e.g., victims’ symptoms, motives of stalkers, “adapted” stalker typologies, tactic summaries, threat-types, and coping). Additionally, readers are presented with an extremely detailed “descriptive meta-analysis” study forming the basis of many of these typologies. This particular text shows the authors excel – more so than many who write on these topics – in presenting almost all of the pertinent information a stalking/ORI literature-novice needs to understand the subfield, while simultaneously avoiding mere repetition of information they compile. Overall, I found this text to be an impressive contribution to the area/s of ORI/stalking.

Readers unfamiliar with the many controversies and complexities found in relational dark-side scholarship may internalize the authors’ perspectives as *the* truth (as opposed to *a* truth); as a result, some of the sections may warrant further explanation or a deeper reading into the relational dark-side arena. For example, this text both explicitly and implicitly repeatedly interchanges sex and gender. Statements like “gender, and its biological manifestation, sex” (p. 26) can be alienating (also see pp. 69, 88, 95, 97, 109, 126-7, 151, 168...) and reflect a dated viewpoint in light of clear conceptual distinctions currently made by relational scholars. Most readers may not find this problematic; but because so much of the debate around general dark-side research centers on embodied sex (e.g., victim/perpetrator-parity, as in “family-violence” or conflict-approaches versus feminist perspectives) as well as gender identity and/or performance (e.g., femininity versus masculinity in masochism in psychodynamic perspectives), equating sex and gender as done in this text may confuse the issues for the less-informed reader. Additionally, where the authors discuss women’s vulnerabilities (clearly established from past and ongoing research), they do not include the reasons (e.g., causal mechanisms and interpretations

with potential to address root problems) for these findings. Thus, this text gives little attention to the cultural dynamics that form/shape sex, gender, violence, and disparities contingent on those factors. Because they are central to discussions of stalking/ORI (and to most dark-side scholarship), these key areas – sex versus gender role/identity, nonverbal communication, intimate violence – would benefit from the otherwise-impressive inclusion of interdisciplinary, *current* studies that the authors provide for stalking/ORI.

The authors cast such a broad yet detailed net over their topic that I was able to immediately begin using the text in my own works on intimate partner violence, relationship intrusion, and former-partner stalking, both technological (a work-in-progress on their assessment measure which I am eager to follow) and in-person. I also plan to incorporate various sections of this text into my undergraduate interpersonal, abuse, gender, family, and sex courses. Spitzberg and Cupach comprehensively present ORI/stalking and then contextualize and apply their discussions in ways that victims, practitioners, scholars, and students will easily understand, and more importantly, can *use*.

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2014). *The dark side of relationship pursuit: From attraction to obsession and stalking* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge.

466 pages, Paperback \$61.30 USD (Amazon)

## JOURNALS UPDATE

### Update on *Personal Relationships*

by Julie Fitness  
Macquarie University

It has now been two years since Lorne Campbell’s editorial team handed over the reins to our current team, and they left the journal in very good shape. The 2-year impact factor for *Personal Relationships* has risen to 1.41, with a 5-year impact factor of 1.84. Currently, the journal’s impact factor rankings are

29/60 for Social Psychology and 15/74 for Communication, and these figures reflect a very positive trend for the expanded reach and influence of the journal. Further evidence of its international reach is reflected in the 5% increase in the number of full-text downloads of *PR* articles in 2013, taking the total to an impressive 171,292.

We were delighted to see our first issue published in March, 2014, and have filled issues until mid-next year. Articles also appear on the *Personal Relationships* website via Early View ahead of hard-copy publication, and this helps to get authors' work 'out there' as quickly as possible, given the constraints of (affordable) journal size and quarterly publishing. In fact, we have increased the size of the journal from around 160 pages to 190 pages per issue in order to accommodate the ever-increasing number of submissions. Our overall acceptance rate is around 20%, which we believe is reasonable, given our emphasis on high quality research that is of direct relevance to personal relationship scholars.

Since beginning our term, we have received well over 200 original submissions a year, predominantly from the USA and Canada, but also from a truly diverse range of countries, including the Middle East (Israel; Iran; Turkey), Europe, Scandinavia, Asia and Australasia. Overall, the standard of submissions is good, with most authors complying with journal requirements (handy hints – when submitting a paper to *PR* that has been rejected elsewhere, scholars should ensure that they have made any necessary changes to the referencing and formatting style of the paper, and address the cover letter to the right editor of the right journal!) A very small number of submissions are desk-rejected without being sent out for review, either because they are inappropriate to the journal or because they require the kinds of fundamental or far-reaching revisions that would require a whole new paper to be written (or research to be conducted). Not many submissions fall into this category but of those that do, two or three each year, might have reached the threshold for review had the author(s) been able to consult with native English speakers for assistance in more clearly communicating their theories and findings. Our editorial team is committed to helping authors clarify and improve their manuscripts, but there is also a need for English-speaking scholars more generally to assist non-English-speaking scholars with preparing

their valuable relationship research for submission and potential publication.

This is particularly the case for cross-cultural research, which I would particularly like to encourage (after all, undergraduate student populations from relatively affluent Western societies have been fairly well studied over the last few decades). However, there is an important caveat here. Some of the cross-cultural papers that we receive lack any kind of strong, theoretical rationale for studying a particular phenomenon or research question within a particular cultural context. It is so important to understand *why* a relatively well-established relationship construct such as attachment, or commitment, might work differently within a different context: it is not sufficient to simply demonstrate that it does or doesn't. This principle also applies more generally to papers that display sophisticated structural equation models that make beautiful statistical sense, but that are theoretically puzzling, trivial, or even demonstrably wrong.

In short, the papers that fare the best in our review system have something original and interesting to say, are underpinned by coherent, integrative theorizing, demonstrate methodological rigor, and make a substantive contribution to our understanding of important, relationship-related issues. They also demonstrate awareness of the work that has come before (including that which has been conducted in different disciplines) and they strive to communicate effectively across disciplines, using carefully defined constructs, clearly argued theoretical positions, and eschewing jargon that impedes our understanding of what is fast becoming a unique discipline in its own right: the science of personal relationships.

#### ***Associate Editors***

My Associate Editor team has been working very hard over the last 2 years, and I would like to acknowledge and thank each of them for their dedication and commitment: Ashley Duggan (US); Omri Gillath (US); Ed LeMay (US); Marian Morry (Canada); Elaine Scharfe (Canada) and Megan Dillow (US). Sadly, we lost an Associate Editor, Nickola Overall, who took up an Associate Editorial position with Social Psychological and Personality Science (SPPS). However, we have recently taken on board another Communication Studies scholar,

Megan Dillow, who will make an invaluable contribution to the team. Taking on an Associate Editorship demands time and commitment, and I am very aware that my current AEs must sometimes feel stressed as they juggle their reviewing commitments with their other academic roles. As noted above, I am truly grateful to them for their hard work and grace under pressure. I would also like to thank Rachel Harvey, my editorial assistant, who provides expertise and support in all aspects of the editorial process. Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the members of the *Personal Relationships* Editorial Board, along with hundreds of ad hoc reviewers, who consistently do such an outstanding job of reviewing (frequently in painstaking detail) the manuscripts that we send out to them. Without their generosity, expertise and willingness to advise, critique, encourage and evaluate, the Journal simply could not function.

In conclusion, these last two years have been hard but rewarding work for myself and the editorial team, and we are looking forward to the challenges of the next couple of years. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, advice, comments or suggestions for the journal at [julie.fitness@mq.edu.au](mailto:julie.fitness@mq.edu.au)

## OBITUARIES

### Barry J. Fallon, Ph.D.



Barry Fallon, PhD, died on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2013, aged 69 years.

Barry's funeral service celebrated a life lived fully, both personally and professionally. His life, interests and achievements were characterized by a commitment to his family, friends, colleagues, students and his profession, and underpinned by a strong faith.

Barry completed his PhD at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1974, and this is where he began his professional life in psychology. Upon returning to Melbourne, Barry held a number of academic roles across the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, the Melbourne College of Adult Education, and the School of Psychology at the University of Melbourne. His final academic appointment was as Professor, the Foundation Chair of the School of Psychology at Australian Catholic University, a position he held from 2001 until 2011.

Barry's main academic areas of interest were interpersonal relationships and organizational psychology. He published widely across areas as diverse as interpersonal relationships, sports psychology, gender and men's issues, adaptive change, volunteering, spirituality, mentoring, job satisfaction and commitment, work/life issues, family functioning, and was always open to the research interests of his students. He was awarded many competitive research grants and was well respected as a researcher. Barry also sat on various editorial boards of international journals.

Barry was actively involved in psychology in Australia for almost 40 years, and was committed to supporting its development as a profession as well as the standards for professional psychologists, and was often a committee member or chairperson. He spent many years in office bearing roles for the Australian Psychological Society (APS), including those of President and Treasurer. He was also heavily involved in the formal accreditation of training courses in psychology for the APS. In the early 2000s he became involved with the Victorian Psychologist's Registration Board, and his contribution to the issues around registration supported improvements in supervision standards and a move to a national registration scheme for psychologists. As a result, there are likely very few areas that Barry has not influenced in some way through his contributions.

The development of relationship research in Australia is another area that Barry supported. He was involved with the Psychology of Relationships Interest Group (PORIG) of the APS since its inception, and was one of the early regular Australian attendees at the international relationships conferences. He was integral in helping to bring the ISSPR and INPR joint international conference on personal relationships to Brisbane in 2000, which many of you may remember. He was one of a handful of Aussies that attended these conferences over the years, which is how you may remember him. He believed in the importance of attending international events and connecting with other professionals, and would often attend with a student or two in tow, such as myself!

Barry was passionate about helping and supporting those early in their careers, but in particular his students, and his generosity as a mentor was well known. He took his role in the development and support of the profession of psychology seriously and firmly believed it was his responsibility to help his students develop networks, build relationships, and establish themselves as professionals, and he encouraged and guided them in participating fully in their profession. Professional awards such as the Australian Catholic University Excellence in Postgraduate Supervision Award, and APS College of Organisational Psychologists Elton Mayo award for Contribution to Teaching and Research in Organisational Psychology reflect his commitment to his students.

As a student I experienced firsthand his dedication and support, and I would not be where I am today without his influence. I often find myself wondering what Barry would say, or what advice he would give me. Barry first introduced me to IARR in 2002 at the Halifax conference, telling me what a great group of people they were, and encouraging me to present and share my research. He was right – IARR is full of accepting and welcoming people who always welcomed us Aussies. We went on to attend many more IARR conferences together, bringing more Aussies with us!

It is fitting for the IARR newsletter that one of Barry's legacies was his relationships, and the personal impact he had on others. He was a living example of someone who valued his relationships in

all their forms, and participated fully in them. He leaves a lasting legacy to the profession of psychology in Australia, and a more personal legacy to those who knew and worked with him. In the 12 months since his death, it has been gratifying to see various scholarships and student awards set up in his name, both in Australia and overseas, which truly reflect and recognize this legacy.

Barry is survived by his wife Felicity, children James and Tanya, and his grandchildren.

*by Dr. Alexandra West*

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### **Suzanne Kurth, Ph.D.**



Suzanne Kurth, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology Emeritus at The University of Tennessee, died on November 18, 2013 in Chicago after a brief illness. She was 69 years old. She earned her PhD from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, where she studied with George McCall. She spent her academic career at The University of Tennessee, where she served as the first chair of Women's Studies (1974-79), the Ombuds Officer (1987-1996), Head of Sociology (1998-2003), and a long-time member of the Commission on Women.

Suzanne's scholarship spanned many topics, but she focused mainly on social relationships, most recently on how new technological developments have affected relationships. Her first publication, "Friendships and Friendly Relations," an important chapter in a volume edited by George McCall and others in 1970, was recently republished in 2011 in a



volume called *Friendship as a Social Institution*. So ironically her first publication was also her last even though she published much in between. I cited this publication in my dissertation on older women's friendships and was therefore delighted when I saw that Suzanne was organizing a session on "Friendship" at my first Southern Sociological Society meeting in the spring of 1984. She was a true pioneer in this area—when I started my own research on the topic in the late 70s, only Suzanne a few others had studied it. When we met she told me about the International Conference on Personal Relationships—a precursor to the International Association for Relationship Research—which met in Madison for the second time that year. Subsequently in 1986 we traveled to Israel together to attend the third meeting of the group, which is where I met most of my other life-long collaborators and professional friends for the first time. My career would have unfolded in an entirely different way if it had not been for Suzanne!

She served the profession in a variety of ways. She was President of Sociologists for Women in Society-South (1978-80), chaired the Southern Sociological Society Local Arrangements Committee (1983-84) and Committee on Sociological Practice (1995-97), and served on many other SSS committees including

the Committee on the Status of Women. In addition to the professional organizations already mentioned, she belonged to the American Sociological Association, the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction.

When I think of Suzanne, I will remember her as a mentor. She served on more than 90 dissertation and thesis committees, chairing many of them. But it was not just students she mentored; she mentored her colleagues as well. I always had a fresh perspective after an informal mentoring session with Suzanne and, more important, she always left me with an action plan. I am still working on implementing the last one we discussed.

Suzanne was preceded in death by her parents, Wesley Kurth and Ann Redmond Kurth. She is survived by her sister, Nancy, of Glen Ellyn, Illinois and a close family of cousins. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests a donation to a charity of your choice. IARR might be a good option!

*by Rebecca G. Adams*

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