THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

PSY 424

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

COURSE OUTLINE FALL 2021

| **Instructor:** | Dr Geoff MacDonald | email: gmacdonald@psych.utoronto.ca |

Instructor: Dr Geoff MacDonald   email: gmacdonald@psych.utoronto.ca
Office hour: Thursdays 4-5 pm Eastern Time
(https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/87467037556)
password: sidsmith

Teaching Assistants: Yoobin Park   email: yoobin.park@mail.utoronto.ca

Lectures: Live: Wednesdays 6-9 pm Eastern Time
(https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/92408395486)
password: sidsmith
Recordings of lectures will be posted on Quercus
If we move to in person: Sidney Smith room 1086

Required Text: Miller, R. *Intimate Relationships, any edition including used ones*. McGraw Hill.

Course Overview: The objective of this course is to review what relationship science can tell us about close relationships, with a particular focus on romantic relationships. We will explore questions such as: Why do we want to be in relationships, what informs our choice of relationship partners, what predicts satisfaction and stability in relationships, and what is the role of sexuality in relationships? These and other questions will be examined from a variety of theoretical perspectives and will be applied to better understand real-world relationship functioning.

Prerequisite courses: PSY201H1 (or equivalent); PSY220H1. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have met *all* prerequisites listed in the Psychology section of the A&S Calendar for this course. If you lack any prerequisites you WILL BE REMOVED. No waivers will be granted.

Assessment: There are four pieces of assessment for this course—four assignments each worth 25%. All assignments are submitted via Quercus.

1. **Media Report**. The first assignment asks you to check the accuracy of one study cited in popular media. You are to select one media story based on a relationship study and look up the journal article it references. In your paper, you will summarize the media's description of the research, and provide your own more detailed description of the work. Then, you will critically analyse the fit between the media's description of the research and the message the authors of the paper wished to convey. The assignment is due at **6:00 pm October 6**. See below for specifics. **(25%)**

2. **Evaluating Relationship Events Part 1**. You will be presented a story about a relationship and be asked to provide analysis and advice using course material from the first half of the course. The assignment is due at **6:00 pm October 27**. **(25%)**

3. **Applying Research Findings.** The third assignment asks you to find counter-examples for findings in relationship research and use these to generate new research ideas. The paper is due at **6:00 pm November 24**. See below for specifics. **(25%)**

4. **Evaluating Relationship Events Part 2**. You will be presented a story about a relationship and be asked to provide analysis and advice using course material from the second half of the course. The assignment is due at **6 pm December 8**. Late penalties will not be applied until **December 13. (25%)**

Late assignments: Assignments are due at the specified time on the due date. **The late penalty is 5% per day**.

Course website on Quercus: This course uses the University's learning management system, Quercus, to post information about the course, including materials required to complete class activities and course assignments, share important announcements and updates, and foster academic discussion between learners. The site is dynamic and new information and resources will be posted regularly as we move through the term. The principal source of information about all course-related work will be the course site in Quercus, so please make it a habit to log in to the site on a regular if not daily basis. SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT GRADES POSTED ONLINE: Please note that any grades posted within the Quercus Grade Centre are posted for your information only, so you can view and track your progress through the course. No grades are considered official, included any posted in Quercus at any point in the term, until they have been formally approved by the Course Instructor at the end of the course.

Email policy: I will respond as quickly as possible to email inquiries. Do not expect responses on weekends.

Accessibility Needs: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) (accessibility.utoronto.ca) at the beginning of the academic year. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will then assess your medical situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

Writing: As a student here at the University of Toronto, you are expected to write well. The university provides its students with a number of resources to help them achieve this. For more information on campus writing centres and writing courses, please visit http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/.

Re-Marking policy: Faculty of Arts and Science policy on re-mark requests for term work specifies that students have two weeks from when the work was returned to make such a request.

Sharing Course Materials Including Recorded Lectures: Course materials are provided for the exclusive use of enrolled students. Do not share them with others. Please do not put any of materials into the public domain, sell any materials, or give any materials to a person or company that is using them to earn money. The University will support me in asserting and pursuing my rights, and my copyrights, in such matters.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments, citing and using source material appropriately, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism - representing someone else's words as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program - is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Speak to me or your TA for advice on anything that you find unclear. Also, see the U of T writing support website at www.utoronto.ca/writing. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations.

Religious Accommodation: As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (like a test, or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

Specific Medical Circumstances: If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Please use the illness self-declaration tool on ACORN to provide documentation for your illness.

Accommodation for Personal Reasons: There may be times when you are unable to complete course work on time due to non-medical reasons. If you have concerns, speak to me. It is also a very good idea to speak with an advisor in your College Registrar's office; they can support you in requesting extensions or accommodations, and importantly, connect you with other resources on campus for help with your situation.

Mental health and well-being: As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These factors may affect your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate fully in daily activities. All of us benefit from support and guidance during times of struggle. There are many helpful resources available through your college Registrar or through Student Life (studentlife.utoronto.ca). An important part of the University experience is learning how and when to ask for help. Please take the time as early as possible to inform yourself of available resources and do not hesitate to seek assistance from your Teaching Assistant or the Course Instructor to help learn what supports are available.

Lecture Timetable:

Week	Date	Lecture Topic	Reading
1	**September 15**	**Animal instinct: The deep roots of the desire for intimate connection**	**Ch. 1 & 2**
2	September 22	The mating marketplace: Gender, evolution, and socialization	Ch. 3
3	**September 29**	**Lose yourself or find yourself? Merging self and other**	**Ch. 4**
4	October 6	Is monogamy natural? The dynamics of commitment (assignment 1 due)	Ch. 6
5	**October 13**	**Attachment: From the cradle to the grave (Assignment 2 question made available)**	**Ch. 8**
6	October 20	No lecture	
7	**October 27**	**Love, tradition, and family: Relationships across cultures (Assignment 2 due)**	
8	November 3	Sexuality: Naked truths	none
9	**November 10**	**Reading week!**	**Ch. 9**
10	November 17	Communication and conflict: The imperfect means of accommodation	Ch. 5, 11, & 12
11	**November 24**	**Survival through growth: Maintaining relationships (Assignment 3 due)**	**Ch. 10, 13 & 14**
12	December 1	Relationships and Therapy (guest lecturer) (Assignment 4 question made available)	
13	**December 8**	**No lecture: Assignment 4 "due"**	

Assignment 1: Media Report

Objectives: The main objective is to examine the accuracy of research reported in media stories of relationship research **published in the media during or after July 2021**. The media have taken a heightened interest in relationship research in recent years. In this assignment, you will determine for yourself whether a news story that you select has accurately portrayed the original research.

Due date: The paper is due at the **6:00 pm Eastern Time** on **October 6**.

General requirements: You are to select one story from a media outlet about relationship research and look up the corresponding journal article (if the story cites more than one article, select one to focus on). You should summarize the media's description of the research, and provide your own more detailed description of the work. Then, critically analyse the fit between the media's description of the research and your own independent reading of the paper. Finally, conclude with reflection on what this specific case might reveal more broadly about when you should and should not trust media reports about research.

Specific requirements: The paper should be a maximum of **8 double-spaced pages**, not including title page and references (most papers should only require 2 references, the paper you are examining and the media article). There is a 5% penalty for each page over the limit. Papers must be in **12-point Times font**.

Required sections:

- **opening thesis**
- **media story description**: discuss the media report about the study (if the story is online, include a link to the original media story)
- **research article**: provide a description of the logic behind the research, how the study was conducted, the research results, and the authors' interpretation of their results
- **synthesis**: compare the interpretations of the research provided by the media and the original article
- **conclusion**: what does this case suggest about when media reports are likely to be more or less accurate in presenting relationship research

Suggestion: Better papers will incorporate a competent analysis of the research results, so you should select a paper that uses statistics you understand.

Assignment 1 Marking Scheme

- first paragraph: your thesis (10%)
    – foreshadow your conclusion (be specific)

- description of study in media outlet (10%)
    – overview of how the media story describes the study, if the story is online provide a link

- description of research paper (15%)
    – demonstrate you understand the research - clear and coherent description that is free of jargon
    – describe it verbally, do not use numbers (e.g., statistical tests, number of participants) unless it is relevant to your argument

- synthesis: comparison of media report and journal article (35%)
    – how fully and fairly did the media report depict the study?

- conclusion section (30%)
    – what broader conclusions can you draw about when media reports about relationship research should and should not be trusted?

Assignment 2 & 4: Evaluating Relationship Events Parts 1 & 2

Objectives: The objective of this assignment is to demonstrate understanding of the course material by appropriately applying that material to real-world relationship events.

Due date: Assignment 2 is due **October 27 at 6:00 pm**. Assignment 4 is due **December 8 at 6:00pm.**

General requirements: You will be provided with a description of a relationship situation phrased in terms of a request for advice. The relationship story for Assignment 2 will be made available October 13 and the story for assignment 4 will be made available December 1. You will be asked to apply course material (from the first half of the course for Assignment 2 and the second half of the course for Assignment 4) to assess the relationship. Specifically, you should present a piece of course material, describe that piece of course material to demonstrate your understanding, show what part of the story it applies to, and how it applies to that part of the story. You should then summarize the evidence you generate in producing an answer to the request for advice.

Specific requirements: The paper should be a maximum of **8 double-spaced pages**, not including title page and references. There is a 5% penalty for each page over the limit. Papers must be in **12-point Times font**.

Assignment 2 & 4 Marking Scheme

- first paragraph: your thesis (10%)
    – foreshadow your conclusion (be specific – what are you advising?)

- accurately conveying course material (25%)
    – do you accurately describe and define material from the course?

- appropriate application of course material (40%)
    – does the course material you highlight apply to the aspects of the story you apply it to? are the concepts you choose to apply the best available concepts for understanding that part of the story? are all central and important concepts covered?

- synthesis (25%)
    – does your relationship advice follow fully and logically from your application of course material??

Assignment 3: Applying Research Findings

Objectives: The main objective is to help develop your ability to use real-world experiences to inform your development of research ideas. One way to advance research and theory is to think of situations in which a particular phenomenon may operate differently. By generating counter-examples to existing research, you should be able to uncover variables that may influence a psychological phenomenon that researchers in that area have not previously considered.

Due date: The paper is due at the **6:00pm on November 24**.

General requirements: The second assignment asks you to find counter-examples for findings in relationship research and use these to generate new research ideas. You are to select one citation from lectures or the textbook readings and read the paper cited. The paper must be an empirical study and not a review paper. In your paper, you should first describe the research. You should then provide one example of a relationship or relationship event that is counter to the phenomenon described by the researchers. These examples can be taken from your own experiences with relationships, the experiences of others who you know, or from popular culture (e.g., books, tv, movies). Using the counter-example to illuminate under what conditions the phenomenon may not apply, propose how the research could be improved to better test the applicability of the findings to real-world relationships.

Specific requirements: The paper should be a maximum of **8 double-spaced pages**, not including title page and references. There is a 5% penalty for each page over the limit. Papers must be in **12-point Times font**.

Required sections:
- **article description**: provide a description of the logic behind the research, how the study was conducted, the research results, and the authors' interpretation of their results
- **contradictory example:** provide an example from a relationship that is inconsistent with the research findings, and use the example to comment on the limitations to the applicability of the research. Be specific about what aspects of this relationship or what conditions may have led the research not to apply in this case
- **research ideas:** using the variables identified in the previous section as influencing the phenomenon of interest, suggest improvements to the research conducted in the target article that could improve its applicability
- **references**

Suggestion: Better papers will include references from the academic literature that examine the variables you identify in the contradictory example section. By examining what research has shown about these variables in past research, you should be able to better refine your research ideas.

Assignment 3 Marking Scheme

- first paragraph: your thesis (5%)
  - foreshadow your conclusion (be specific)
- description of research paper (15%)
  - so a naïve reader can understand what the researchers did (avoid jargon)
  - describe it verbally, do not use numbers (e.g., statistical tests, number of participants)
- contradictory example (40%)
  - identify 1-3 specific variables that can account for the counter-example
  - do not simply speculate what those variables may be, but provide an evidence-based argument as to why those variables can account for the anomaly you've identified
- research ideas (40%)
  - describe what is known about those variables in existing literature
  - describe how the researchers could alter their study to test those variables
  - say specifically what results you would predict (i.e., don't just say it would be interesting to examine X….say what effect you think X would have)