

# Couples Research & Therapy **NEWSLETTER**

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–  
SIG, Fall 2015

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### Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to compile the Fall 2015 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG newsletter jam-packed with lots of exciting updates and information!

Along with updates, we are pleased to share a shortened version of the recently published article “Fluctuations in Commitment Over Time and Relationship Outcomes” by Knopp et al. (pg. 5). Additionally, co-editor, Cherelle Carrington has provided a comprehensive review of the book *Reconcilable Differences: Rebuild Your Relationship by Discovering the Partner You Love—without Losing Yourself* written by Christensen, Doss, & Jacobson (pg. 8).

We are thrilled to receive lab updates from so many couples SIG labs. Everyone is doing great work and we’re happy to share your accomplishments with the SIG!

As Kim, Aleja, and I pass the torch on to the incoming editors, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the honor of serving in this role. It has been a pleasure to bring you the highlights of the Couples SIG over the last couple years. Thank you for this amazing opportunity! We wish each and every one of you continued health and happiness, and success in all your endeavors!

*Cherelle Carrington, Aleja Parsons, and Kim Pentel*

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## Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Katie Baucom & Brian Baucom  
*University of Utah*

Hi, Everyone. We're looking forward to seeing you all at the conference next month in Chicago, hearing stories from previous ABCT conferences (the most recent one in Chicago was in 2006, which, on a personal note, was the first ABCT that we went to together), and learning about all of the good work that the members of the SIG are doing. We want to share some details about SIG events at this year's conference as well as a couple of topics that we'd like to discuss at the SIG meeting.

### Pre-conference event

Dr. Megan Moran Santa-Maria has graciously agreed to give what promises to be great talk on incorporating neurobiological methods into couple research at our pre-conference event. Her talk will be from 5:00pm – 7:00pm on Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup> in Private Dining Room 3, which is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Hilton Chicago Hotel.

Merging Neurobiology with Couples Research and Treatment: Implications and Practical Approaches  
Megan Moran Santa-Maria, Ph.D.  
Medical University of South Carolina

Dysregulation in the neurobiologic mechanisms that regulate emotion has been associated with maladaptive behaviors. Studies exploring the neurobiologic mechanisms that underscore dyadic conflict could have a significant impact on treatment outcomes. This talk will provide an overview of neurobiologic stress systems and studies that have linked alterations in these systems with behavior. The talk will also include an overview of methodology and practical approaches to applying these methods to couples research.

### SIG Business Meeting

Our SIG Business Meeting is scheduled for Friday, November 13, from 10:00 - 11:00 AM in Conference Room 4D (apologies to all of you West Coasters...). We'll be updating membership lists, seeking volunteers for the program committee, distributing awards for the Robert L. Weiss Student Research Award, and having elections for the positions of student co-presidents, newsletter editors, and media coordinators. Many thanks to Christina Balderamma-Durbin and Shelby Scott for serving as student co-presidents, Kim Pentel, Cherelle Carrington, and Aleja Parsons for serving as newsletter editors, and Jenny Pink and Krystal Cashen for serving as media coordinators over the past two years and keeping the SIG active and running smoothly. If you're interested in serving on the program committee or being nominated for one of the SIG officer positions, please feel free to contact Brian ([brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu)).

In addition to these agenda items, we'd also like to discuss the possibility of making changes to the way that we hold SIG elections and that we select posters for the SIG poster exposition at the Cocktail Party.

With regard to the way that we hold SIG elections, we'd like to propose that we consider making two changes both of which are intended to increase the ability of all SIG members to be involved in SIG governance and voting. There are frequently a moderate to large number of SIG members who come to the conference but are unable to attend the SIG Business Meeting for a variety of reasons. Our concern is that by calling for nominations at the Business Meeting itself, we effectively make it difficult for SIG members who can't be at the meeting to be involved in nominations and impossible for them to be involved in voting. We currently allow SIG members to self-nominate or to be nominated by someone else prior to the conference, and the change that we'd like to propose is that we move to having all of the nominations be made prior to the conference. Our hope is that that would allow for increased participation in the voting process by letting SIG members who knew that they would be unable to attend the Business Meeting to vote in absentia.

The other change that we'd like to propose is that we change the way that we select posters for the SIG poster exposition at the Cocktail Party. We had a wonderful group of submissions for the SIG poster exposition this year, all of which would have made for really interesting posters. However, we received so many posters that we had to make difficult decisions about which posters to select. We have been aware that more and more posters are being submitted for presentation at the SIG poster exposition each year, but the number of posters that can be presented at the SIG poster exposition is not changing and does not appear likely to change in the future. The change that we'd like to propose is that we expand the criteria for selecting posters for the SIG exposition to include factors aimed at increasing the likelihood of early stage and first time presenters getting to present. More specifically, we would like to propose that we reserve one of the 12 poster slots for an undergraduate student and that we add the following criteria to the selection rubric:

- 1) Have you previously presented at ABCT?
- 2) Have you previously presented a poster at the SIG exposition as part of the Couples SIG? If so, was it in the past two years?
- 3) Are you an undergraduate student, graduate student, postdoctoral fellow, or faculty member?

We want to make sure that everyone's voice is heard in considering these changes so please email us, [brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu) and [katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu), if you have any questions, concerns, comments, etc. that you would like for us to know about whether or not you'll be able to attend this year's Business Meeting. Also, we want to make it clear that the changes we're proposing for officer elections would not impact the selection of officers at this year's conference but rather would start at the 2016 conference at the earliest if we decide to make that change.

Looking forward to seeing you all soon,  
Brian & Katie

## Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Christina Balderrama-Durbin<sup>1</sup> & Shelby Scott<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Binghamton University – SUNY; <sup>2</sup>University of Denver

Greetings from your outgoing Student Co-Presidents! It has been our honor to serve in this role. We are greatly anticipating the ABCT conference in Chicago and hope to see you all there! There are plenty of exciting SIG and student SIG member events at this year's ABCT conference:

This year's annual **Couples SIG Cocktail Party** will take place at Kroll's South Loop. Kroll's has a wide selection of craft brews and some light appetizers will be provided. Come enjoy great company, it is sure to be a fun evening!

When: Saturday, November 14<sup>th</sup> from 6:00-9:00pm.

Where: Kroll's South Loop, 1736 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL, 60616. <http://www.krolls-chicago.com/>

Transportation: The restaurant is about 1 mile directly south of the conference hotel. If you prefer to drive, there is limited street parking.

In accordance with tradition, the **Student Cocktail Party** will immediately follow the main event. All undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students are welcome to stay longer and have a chance to get to know each other better!

Finally, mark your itinerary for this year's **Couples SIG Student Symposium** entitled, "Mechanisms of Change in Relationship Interventions" on **Sunday, November 15<sup>th</sup>** from **10:45-11:45am** in the **Astoria room**. Papers will be presented by Dev Crasta (University of Rochester), Tatiana Gray (Clark University), Alexander Khaddouma (University of Tennessee – Knoxville), and Hannah Williamson (University of California – Los Angeles). Dr. Scott Stanley (University of Denver) will be our discussant. Hope to see you there!

Please contact us at any time with comments, questions, or suggestions. We would particularly like to encourage students to join the **SIG listserv** ([couples-sig@sfu.ca](mailto:couples-sig@sfu.ca)), **SIG Facebook group** (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/266082574771/>), **student-specific Facebook group**, (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/82988514892/>), and **student Google discussion group** (<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/couples-sig-students>).

We hope to see you soon!

Sincerely,

Christina Balderrama-Durbin ([cbalderr@binghamton.edu](mailto:cbalderr@binghamton.edu)) and Shelby Scott ([shelbybscott@gmail.com](mailto:shelbybscott@gmail.com))

## ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update

Dear SIG Members,

I hope that all of you are doing well and looking forward to an exciting conference! Here is an update of our membership status and dues:

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 215 (84 professional, 131 students). This includes 10 new members (9 of whom were students) since our last count. Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members!

The balance at the last update was \$1449. Since that time, we have paid \$250 for the party deposit, received \$95 in dues, and netted paying \$5 to the bank (fees vs. interest), leaving us with a balance of \$1290. We anticipate paying out \$300 for poster awards, \$300 for the preconference event, and another \$250 for the party at the upcoming conference, and hopefully we will bring in lots of dues! Thank you for your continued support!

As always, we will collect 2015 dues at the SIG business meeting during the upcoming conference! If you are not attending the conference or would like to pre-pay your 2015 dues, please pay electronically via PayPal (go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and send money to [cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com](mailto:cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com)) or by mailing a check to the address below. If you pay by PayPal, it is important to designate the payment as a "send to friends and family" to avoid processing fees. Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students and retired members.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership.

Many thanks for your support of the SIG!

Best,  
CJ Fleming

Send checks to:  
CJ Fleming  
111 Rosaline Ln  
Durham, NC 27713

## Media Coordinators Update

Jenny Pink, M.Sc. and Krystal Cashen, B.A.

To update your contact information, or have your name added to or removed from the listserve or website members' page, please email Jenny Pink ([jcpink@sfu.ca](mailto:jcpink@sfu.ca)) and Krystal Cashen ([krystal.cashen@gmail.com](mailto:krystal.cashen@gmail.com)). Please also let us know if you have any information you would like to share with your fellow SIG members through our website (e.g., job postings, study recruiting, or items you think may be of interest). We encourage you to browse the current website for examples of what can be posted.

Looking forward to Chicago!  
Krystal & Jenny



# Fluctuations in Commitment Over Time and Relationship Outcomes

Kayla Knopp, Galena K. Rhoades, Scott Stanley, Jesse Owen, Howard Markman

Full article citation: Knopp, K., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S., Owen, J., & Markman, H. (2014). Fluctuations in commitment over time and relationship outcomes. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 3(4), 220.

Commitment processes have long been a primary focus of research on romantic relationships. More recently, the focus has widened from understanding commitment as a stable factor influencing relationship development to emphasizing the importance of the temporal dynamics of commitment (Arriaga, 2001; Whitton, Rhoades, & Whisman, 2014). The current study focused on fluctuations in commitment – that is, ups and downs in the commitment to their relationship people report at different times. Variability in commitment to a relationship likely reflects uncertainty about commitment; sometimes an individual may be highly committed, while at other times he or she is less committed. Individuals who are certain about their commitment ought to demonstrate low variability in how committed they feel, while individuals who waver in commitment over time demonstrate uncertainty about that commitment. Fluctuations in relationship commitment may undermine confidence that the relationship will continue despite setbacks.

In the current study, we investigated the association between fluctuations in commitment (measured as dedication; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2011; Stanley & Markman, 1992) and three different measures of relationship outcomes. First, a varying sense of commitment to one's relationship ought to predict poorer overall relationship adjustment or quality; that is, fluctuations in commitment over time are likely to erode the quality of one's relationship (measured using the DAS-4; Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005; Spanier, 1976). Second, to the extent that fluctuations in commitment reflect uncertainty about an individual's desire for the relationship to continue, commitment fluctuations should also be positively linked to dissolution consideration (i.e., thoughts about and actions taken toward ending a relationship; Vanderdrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009). Third, such instability in commitment may threaten relationship stability, and may therefore lead to an increased likelihood of breaking up.

Importantly, fluctuations in commitment over time are distinct from the overall level of commitment or its linear trend over time. Fluctuations reflect the ups and downs in commitment after its level and slope have been taken into account. Consistent with previous research on fluctuations in relationships (Arriaga et al., 2006; Arriaga, 2001; Whitton et al., 2014), the current study used three parameters to characterize individuals' commitment over time: initial levels, linear slope, and the magnitude of deviations from the individual's regression line. In this way, we were able to focus on how well each parameter independently predicted relationship outcomes, as well as the three parameters' relations to one another and their unique or conditional associations with outcomes. We hypothesized that each parameter would uniquely predict later relationship adjustment, dissolution consideration, and likelihood of breaking up.

## Method

We used data from seven waves of a longitudinal study of relationship development that collected data from a nationally representative sample of young adults in unmarried relationships with someone of a different gender (see Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Participants provided data on relationship and individual functioning every four to six months for approximately three years (seven waves of data collection). A total of 616 participants remained together with the same partner throughout the study and provided relevant data about their relationship on at least three waves. This data set allowed us to model the initial level, linear change, and fluctuations (or variability) in individuals' reports of commitment to their relationships over six time points. Subsequently, we tested the relationship between these parameters and outcome measures, including measures of relationship quality and dissolution consideration at the seventh time point as well as the likelihood of the relationship ending within a year following the sixth time point.

## Results

### Analytic Strategy

We used a two-step procedure to test whether within-person fluctuations in commitment over six time points predicted relationship adjustment, dissolution consideration, and likelihood of breaking up (see Arriaga et al., 2006; Arriaga, 2001; Whitton et al., 2014). First, we estimated parameters of change in commitment scores across the first six time points using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses for each participant. We retained estimates of three parameters for each individual: the intercept or initial level of commitment, the slope or linear change in commitment over time, and the standard error of the estimate (SEE), which captures the extent to which an individual's commitment score at each time point deviate from his or her own linear regression line. In this way, the SEE can be used as a measure of fluctuations in commitment over time, independent of overall level or stable increases or decreases over time.

In the second step, we used the coefficients for these three individual-level parameters in separate analyses predicting relationship outcomes. We tested whether each parameter predicted relationship adjustment and dissolution consideration at the seventh time point, as well as the likelihood of breaking up within the next year. We also used multiple regression models to uniquely predict relationship outcomes from fluctuations in commitment, controlling for the initial level and slope. This tested whether fluctuations in commitment independently predicted the outcomes of interest, after accounting for participants' overall commitment level and its steady change over time. In addition, we tested the interactions between fluctuations in commitment and its initial level or slope, to investigate whether the effect of fluctuation in commitment was different for those had generally high (or increasing) levels of commitment compared to those with generally low (or decreasing) commitment.

### Results

Correlations among initial level, slope, and fluctuations in commitment parameters showed that participants with higher initial commitment tended to have smaller slopes and less fluctuation, and that participants with more negative slopes in commitment tended to also have greater fluctuation. Initial levels, slopes, and SEEs for commitment were each significantly associated with relationship adjustment and dissolution consideration scores, but only the slope of commitment was associated with the likelihood of breaking up. In multiple regression analyses controlling for initial level of commitment and its linear slope, fluctuations in commitment uniquely predicted dissolution consideration, but not relationship quality or the likelihood of breaking up. Finally, the interaction between fluctuations in commitment and its initial level was significant for predicting relationship adjustment and dissolution consideration, such that that participants who reported higher initial commitment levels showed a more detrimental effect of greater fluctuation than participants who reported lower initial commitment levels. None of the interactions between commitment fluctuations and commitment slope were significant.

### Discussion

The current study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of variability in key relationship variables, in addition to overall levels and linear change over time. Our findings showed that fluctuations in commitment, measured as the magnitude of variability around person-specific regression lines for reports of relationship dedication over six time points, were related to subsequent relationship outcomes in some important ways.

Commitment fluctuations uniquely predicted dissolution consideration, even after accounting for the effects of individuals' initial levels of commitment and its steady change over time. It appears that variability in reports of commitment over time relate to having more thoughts about and taking more action toward ending a relationship, even when people end up staying with their partners. VanderDrift et al. (2009) found that dissolution consideration partially mediated the association between commitment and leave behaviors (i.e., deciding on, suggesting, or initiating a break-up). These findings support our conceptualization of fluctuations in commitment over time as uncertainty: people who are uncertain about their commitment to their partner are likely to be considering breaking up as an alternative to continuing the relationship.

However, fluctuations in commitment over six waves were not significantly related to the likelihood of *actually* breaking up over the following year. Fluctuations in commitment were also not as important as the level and linear slope of commitment when it came to predicting relationship quality. One possible explanation

is that the current study focused on unmarried relationships that were fairly well-established; the mean relationship length at the time of the first assessment was almost 40 months, and we also examined relationships over a longer period of time (three years) than did prior research on fluctuations in commitment (Arriaga et al., 2006). Thus, the current sample had longer-lasting, more committed relationships, by definition. Accordingly, the mean level of commitment was high (5.67 out of 7), and the overall likelihood that couples broke up within a year after the sixth assessment was low (11.1%). Couples in more established relationships also tend to have greater constraints, which help to stabilize romantic relationships through ups and downs (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Research using less stable samples or a different study timeframe may find different results.

Fluctuations were more detrimental for those starting off with higher levels of commitment. It may be that individuals with low commitment are already relatively unhappy, so added variability in commitment over time does not seem any more problematic than a generally poor relationship. On the other hand, fluctuations in commitment may stand out more starkly against a backdrop of a higher-quality relationship. Uncertainty about commitment may be a fundamentally different process for those with generally higher commitment toward their relationships than for those starting out with lower commitment. For someone who is very committed overall, vacillation in a sense of commitment might reflect uncertainty about whether this relationship or partner is going to last permanently; it could represent the difference between “the one” and “maybe not.” Thus, fluctuations in commitment may be quite destructive for those who are highly committed. On the other hand, perhaps those with low commitment are already lacking confidence that the relationship will last, so commitment that wavers around a lower overall level has less of an impact.

This study supports previous research finding that low or declining commitment to a romantic relationship threatens relationship quality and stability (Adams & Jones, 1997; Le & Agnew, 2003; Rhoades et al., 2010; Rusbult, 1983; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002), and extends this line of research to include fluctuating commitment as a relationship risk factor. The current study is the first we know of to have focused on fluctuations in a person’s own commitment as the primary variable of interest. Results from this study suggest that fluctuations in commitment may be an important future target for relationship researchers. In particular, more research is needed to determine whether fluctuations in an individual’s sense of commitment over time are robust predictors of outcomes for relationships at other stages (e.g., newly-formed relationships, or marriages) and on different time frames (e.g., on a daily or weekly basis).

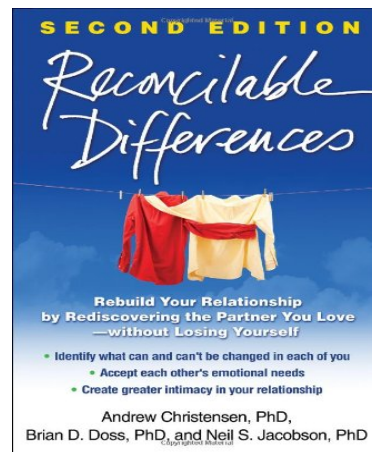
Our findings suggest several clinical implications as well. Fluctuations in commitment over time may be particularly important regarding how much individuals are considering leaving their relationships. Couple or relationship-focused clinicians may want to consider paying special attention to ups and downs in commitment that partners report across their relationship histories, and it may be worthwhile to explore with clients the degree to which uncertainty from these fluctuations is influencing their decisions about the future of their relationship. Future research may reveal that stabilizing commitment over time can be an important treatment goal for couples who want to stay together over the long term.

# Reconcilable Differences

Rebuild Your Relationship by Rediscovering the Partner You Love--without Losing Yourself

Book Review by:

Cherelle Carrington, LCSW  
Florida International University



*Reconcilable Differences*  
Second Edition by  
Andrew Christensen, Ph.D.,  
Brian D. Doss, Ph.D., and  
Neil S. Jacobson, Ph.D.  
Pages: 348  
ISBN: 978-1-4625-0243-1  
List Price: \$ 15.95  
Publication Date: 2014

Recognizing that therapy isn't for everyone, **Drs. Christensen, Doss, and Jacobson** wrote *Reconcilable Differences* to help empower couples to improve their relationships without having to meet with a therapist. Based on the evidenced-based principles of Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy, this book offers easy-to-follow guidelines to help couples create acceptance and change in their relationships. The authors ask readers to choose one core problem to focus on the entire book. Evidenced-based questionnaires with instructions on scoring and interpretation help couples evaluate how their relationship is functioning. Techniques help couples resolve conflict, create harmony, and enhance intimacy.

The book is divided into five parts. **Part I:** "The Conflicting Sides of Conflict." **Chapter one** presents three sides to a single conflict of a married couple: the husband's view, the wife's view, and a more unbiased view that incorporates the perspectives of both partners. **Chapter two** highlights four triggers for conflict: criticism, demands, cumulative annoyance, and rejection. When individuals are offended by the actions or inactions of their partners, rather than accessing their own responsibility, each partner typically focuses on their partner's culpability. In an attempt at resolution, that partner communicates their assessment of the problem as tactfully as possible. However, partners are not usually receptive to being blamed or criticized. More often than not, partners will retaliate by giving their own analysis of the problem that paints the other person as the culprit and themselves as the victim. The initial problem gets lost in the flurry of accusations that ensues. One's attempt to fix the problem actually thwarts reconciliation.

**Part II:** "A DEEP Understanding of Conflict: The Third Side of the Story." **Drs. Christensen, Doss, and Jacobson** generate a complete **DEEP** analysis of conflict. The authors use **DEEP** as an acronym for natural **Differences** between people; **Emotional** sensitivities; **External** circumstances that create stress; and **Patterns** of communication that act as roadblocks when trying to resolve conflict. **Chapter three** focuses on natural **Differences** between people. Our unique genes and social histories shape who we are. The partners we

pursue are unavoidably similar yet different from us. These differences can contribute to relationship problems. Problems with our partners may be easier to understand if seen as differences between us and not character flaws of our partner. **Chapter four** examines **Emotional** sensitivities. Our feelings are affected by what our partner does or does not do. They are also influenced by our sensitivities to these incidents. If we feel vulnerable, we might be more sensitive to our partner's behavior. Based on our personal histories we may be vulnerable to feeling abandoned, trapped, needing to be in control, or needing approval. We might not be aware of our vulnerabilities. When our vulnerabilities are aroused, in order to protect ourselves, we might respond overtly ("hard" surface emotion: irritated, angry, shut down, furious) in a manner that hides our underlying emotions ("soft" hidden emotions: anxious, worried, suffocated, walked on). Problems may be easier to understand if seen in the light of emotional sensitivities that we bring to the relationship. **Chapter five** indicates that **External** circumstances can create stress. Like emotional sensitivities, external circumstances can generate conflict. At times, these external circumstances may make differences between partners less of an issue. Other times external circumstances might accentuate the differences between partners, thus heightening conflict. Stressful circumstances may exacerbate emotional vulnerabilities especially if partners respond differently to stress. Problems may be easier to deal with if we understand that our partners may be going through a stressful situation. **Chapter six** reviews **Patterns** of communication. When attempting to resolve conflict couples get stuck in certain patterns of communication making the situations worse. Different techniques are employed to create change including accusation, blame, coercion, and defensiveness; avoidance, denial, and withdrawal; smothering one's partner with watchfulness, intrusion, and infringement; and fighting against one's partner by forming alliances and coalitions with outsiders. These patterns of communication may result in an escalation of the problem, and polarization and alienation from one's partner. Although these tactics may initially result in change, and may even be reinforced, the change is short-lived

and ultimately erodes loving feelings. Problems with our partners may be easier to deal with if we understand that our pattern of communication might be toxic to our relationship.

**Part III:** “From Argument to Acceptance.” Small steps toward acceptance can help partners feel more comfortable to relinquish their position which could facilitate being more willing to make requested changes. **Chapter seven** distinguishes between the meaning of acceptance and change. Acceptance: tolerate what you regard as unpleasant behavior, understand the deeper meaning of that behavior, see it in a larger context, appreciate its value and importance. Change: a decrease in frequency or intensity of an unpleasant action or inaction. **Chapter eight** suggests that a joint, agreed upon story about a core problem can facilitate acceptance and change. Such a story, based on the DEEP analysis, should emphasize for example, differences over deficits—a focus on incompatibilities between partners rather than faults in either partner. These stories help couples better understand their unique problems and facilitate acceptance and change. **Chapter nine** discusses how essential information is often withheld from one’s partner in the process of conflict and offers readers guidelines to detect and disclose critical unspoken information. **Chapter ten** offers suggestions to help couples view their differences from a larger perspective and to accept and live with conflict. One suggestion is to treat the problem as an “it” instead of a “you” – i.e., one’s partner. In so doing couples might see and discuss their differences with less voracity.

**Part IV:** “Deliberate Change through Acceptance.” **Chapter eleven** recommends four tips for making change: (1) use ultimatums only in rare circumstances; (2) request specific rather than general change; (3) be aware of difficult areas of change; and (4) make simple requests for a specific change. **Chapter twelve** proposes two sets of guidelines: (1) for in-the-moment awareness—**START**: If you realize you are getting upset during a conflict, **Stop** what you are doing, **Take** a deep breath, **Attend** to what is going on with you emotionally, **Reveal** your emotional state to your partner, and **Take** an interest in what is going on with your partner; and (2) for hindsight awareness: Recognize that you have been blaming your partner more than you realize. Remind yourself that your partner has a legitimate position and try to understand their position. **Chapter thirteen** offers instructions to enhance communication: (1) find a time and place where you both feel comfortable; (2) summarize your partner’s message without editorial comments; and (3) problem-solve when you both are calm. **Chapter fourteen** advises: (1) rather than complain, take some constructive action yourself; and (2) if discussing a certain topic usually results in an argument, try using a different setting or a different medium to communicate.

**Part V:** “When Acceptance Is Not Enough.” **Chapter fifteen** delineates mistreatment in relationships: (1) through violence, destructiveness, or physical coercion; (2) through verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse; and (3) through infidelity. Authors argue that abuse of any kind should never be tolerated. **Chapter sixteen** guides couples in determining whether professional help might be warranted, and when and how to seek treatment. Online relationship programs such as **OurRelationship.com**\* which is based on the principles of this book may also be beneficial.

Case examples, which include gay and lesbian couples, appear throughout the book, illustrating how conflicts play out between partners. To be even more inclusive I feel incorporating case examples which illustrate how low-income minority couples might deal with powerful life stressors for example, poverty and discrimination would make the book more applicable to an even wider audience.

In conclusion, although distressing, conflict provides a glimpse into your partner’s emotions. If you can perceive conflict as an opportunity to understand the emotions that motivate each of you, rather than as an occasion to criticize your partner, you might gain valuable insight that promotes greater tolerance and even inspires some humor. When partners feel accepted and embraced they are more willing to change. When partners feel forced to change they are more likely to resist change. When partners are able to distinguish what can and cannot be changed in their partner and genuinely accept each other’s emotional desires they facilitate change and enhance intimacy in their relationships.

\* **OurRelationship.com** is an online relationship program developed by Drs. Doss and Christensen, supported by a grant awarded to Dr. Doss from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. As part of the research on this program, they conducted a major clinical trial on it which is now under review. The clinical trial, involving a nationwide sample of 300 couples, clearly showed a benefit for couples using the program over a control group. **OurRelationship.com** was based in part on the first edition of this book and then influenced the second or current edition of the book. Even though the book **Reconcilable Differences** has no empirical evidence to support its use for couples, the research on the program provides indirect support for the book and the ideas in it. In part as a result of this clinical trial, Dr. Doss has received funding from the Administration for Children and Families to adapt the program for use with low-income couples; Dr. Christensen will be assisting him in this adaptation.

#### About the Authors:

**Andrew Christensen, PhD**, Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Christensen has spent more than 30 years studying intimate relationships and working with couples in therapy. He has conducted extensive research on the impact of couple therapy, including the approach on which this book is based, which he developed with the late Neil S. Jacobson. Dr. Christensen and his wife, who live in Los Angeles, have two grown children.

**Brian D. Doss, PhD**, is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Miami, where he teaches and conducts research on couple therapy and romantic relationships. Dr. Doss lives in Miami with his wife and two children.

**Neil S. Jacobson, PhD**, was a Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington until his death in 1999.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Hannah Williamson**, From Drs. Karney and Bradbury's UCLA Marriage Lab, was awarded a Family Scholars grant by the US Administration for Children and Families for her project, "Evaluating the Effect of Economic Interventions on Relationship Outcomes in the Building Strong Families Study."

☺ Drs. Karney and Bradbury's UCLA Marriage Lab has added three new graduate students to the lab: **V. Kaufman, J. Ross, and J. Hammet**.

☺ **Bethany Pester**, in Dr. Cano's lab, began the doctoral program in clinical psychology at WSU this fall (B.A. University of Michigan).

☺ **Dana May**, from Dr. Cano's lab at Wayne State University begins her internship year at Children's National this September.

☺ **Dr. Annmarie Cano** became Associate Dean of the Graduate School at Wayne State University. She oversees the Ph.D. and Master's offices, admissions, recruitment, and career services for graduate programs at the university.

☺ **Dr. Rebecca Cobb** at Simon Fraser University has received a Vice President Research Grant.

☺ Joining the Dr. Cobb's Close Relationships Lab at Simon Fraser University as a new MA student is **Marissa Bowsfield**.

☺ **Dr. Patrick Poyner-Del Vento**, a former PhD student of Dr. Cobb's at Simon Fraser University, started a new position as a clinical psychologist at Campbell and Fairweather Psychology Group in Nanaimo, BC. He practices the assessment and treatment of individuals with PTSD, depression, and chronic pain; his specialty is in couples and family therapy. Many of his clients are Canadian military veterans and police officers.

☺ **Roanne Millman**, from Dr. Cobb's Close Relationships Lab at Simon Fraser, received the Marilyn Bowman Graduate Scholarship in Psychology from SFU.

☺ **Marissa Bowsfield**, from Dr. Cobb's Close Relationships Lab at Simon Fraser, received a Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

☺ **Julia Sollenberger**, from Dr. Córdova's lab at Clark University, is completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the Kennedy Krieger Institute at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.



# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Ellen Darling**, from Dr. Córdova's lab at Clark University, is engaged in her dissertation research, a pilot study of a brief couples-based preventative intervention for perinatal depression and anxiety co-located in obstetric clinics. She started her internship at Suffolk University Counseling Center in August.

☺ **Tatiana Gray**, from Dr. Córdova's lab at Clark University, is applying to internships in the fall and is currently working on her dissertation investigating the therapeutic mechanisms of change at the heart of the Marriage Checkup.

☺ **Matt Hawrilenko**, from Dr. Córdova's lab at Clark University, moved to Seattle, where his wife recently accepted a faculty position. He is continuing his clinical practicum training in the family therapy program at the Seattle VA, and has just published papers on the effects of mediators and homework completion in the Marriage Checkup. He will miss seeing everyone at ABCT this year, as he has a baby girl due to arrive that weekend!

☺ **Liz Weber Ollen**, from Dr. Córdova's lab at Clark University, is currently on her fourth year clinical externship at the Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital. She was recently recognized at APA with Division 44's Outstanding Student Contribution Award for her dedication to LGBTQ issues through research, professional service, and community volunteer service. Liz is working on her dissertation proposal using qualitative methods to examine help-seeking for intimate partner violence among same-sex couples.

☺ **Justin Laplante**, from Dr. Córdova's lab at Clark University, is finishing his dissertation proposal on the influences of meditation and mindfulness on couple's relationships. He is also teaching two courses and advising undergraduates on their honor's theses.

☺ **Dr. CJ Fleming** is starting her new position as Assistant Professor of Psychology at Elon University.

☺ **Joanne Davila** from Stony Brook University has been named Incoming Editor for the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*

☺ **Vickie Bhatia**, from Dr. Davila's lab at Stony Brook University, is now an intern at MUSC

☺ Former lab member **Brian Feinstein**, from Dr. Davila's lab at Stony Brook University, is now a postdoc at the Department of Medical Social Sciences at Northwestern University, working on the IMPACT program

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

- ☉ **Emily Georgia**, a 5<sup>th</sup> year graduate student in Dr. Brian Doss' Couples Lab at University of Miami, married Chris Salivar this summer in Iowa.
- ☉ **Katie Lenger** joined Dr. Kristina Coop Cordon's lab at University of Tennessee. She recently completed her undergraduate degree at University of North Carolina – Wilmington.
- ☉ **Jessica Hughes**, from Dr. Kristina Coop Cordon's lab at University of Tennessee, proposed her dissertation this fall and also completed data collection. She is also currently applying to psychology predoctoral internship programs.
- ☉ **Dr. Kristina Coop Cordon** from the University of Tennessee received the university wide Chancellor's Citation for Excellence in Research/Creative Achievement. She is also completing her term as President of the Society for Couple and Family Psychology (APA Division 43). She also received an APA travel grant to travel to Colombia and participate in the first Latin American Regional Psychological conference.
- ☉ **Dr. Chris Pepping**, who competed a postdoctoral fellowship in t Dr. Halford's lab at University of Queensland, has moved to Melbourne to take up a position as Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at La Trobe University. Chris continues to collaborate with the lab on our Rainbow Couple CARE project, which is trailing relationship education for same sex couples.
- ☉ **Dr. Alice Hucker**, from Dr. Halford's lab at University of Queensland, took up a research position in Melbourne working with cancer suffered and families.
- ☉ **Adrienne McCullars, Keri Johns, and Candice Selwyn-** from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama, are away at internship this year and report having great experiences thus far!
- ☉ **Aimee Var**, from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama, recently joined the University of Mobile as a faculty member.
- ☉ **Kali**, from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama, is working on her honors thesis defense and UCUR project, which will examine how different schemas moderate the relationship between attachment styles and suicidal ideation. She was also selected to give an oral presentation on her project at the UCUR symposium.
- ☉ **Eric**, from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama, recently submitted an abstract to participate in next year's UCUR symposium.



# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Selena**, from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama, is preparing for her dissertation proposal, which will examine the impact of intimate partner violence on depression in female student veterans versus female student non-veterans. She is particularly interested in investigating how resilience and social experiences differentially impact the relationship.

☺ **Caitlin**, from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama, is preparing for her thesis proposal, which will examine the role of resilience on the physical and psychological health outcomes of African American women with, or at risk for, type II diabetes.

☺ **Stefanie LoSavio**, from Dr. Laurenceau's lab at University of Delaware, completed her internship at the Edward Hines, Jr., VA Hospital in Hines, IL, last year and is currently completing a postdoc at Duke University.

☺ **Lauren McManus and Elizabeth Pasipanodya**, from Dr. Laurenceau's lab at University of Delaware, are both completing their internships this year at the Baltimore VA Medical Center and Geisinger Medical Center, respectively.

☺ **Ingrid Solano** (from Dr. O'Leary's lab at Stony Brook University) successfully defended her master's thesis.

☺ **Dr. Daniel O'Leary** (at Stony Brook University) received TWO considerable awards this year, including the 2015 Couples and Family Therapist of the Year award from Division 43 (Society of Family and Couple Psychology) of APA. He was also selected as one of ten individuals from three disciplines (law, medicine, and psychology) to receive the E.H. Beckman award for mentorship and scholarship. Dan will receive his award, which comes with a cash prize, on November 14, 2015 in Atlanta.

☺ **Dr. Daniel O'Leary** was elected as President of the New York Chapter of the Association of Family & Conciliation Courts (AFCC NY). He also delivered a national presentation to representatives from the VA Trauma Centers this fall assessment and risk factors for IPV. He will be presenting at the AFCC in New York City: Beyond Power and Control and the Need to Emotional Dysregulation and Anger Issues.

☺ **Dr. Owen**, at University of Denver, received the 2015 Kuder Early Career Award from Division 17.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Christina Balderrama-Durbin**, from Dr. Snyder's lab at Texas A&M, recently began a tenure-track Assistant Professor position in Clinical Psychology at the State University of New York – Binghamton.

☺ **Caitlin L. Fissette**, Capt, USAF, BSC, from Dr. Snyder's lab at Texas A&M, is currently serving as the Mental Health Element Chief of the 19th Medical Group at Little Rock Air Force Base.

☺ **Laura Osborne**, from Dr. Snyder's lab at Texas A&M, will defend her master's thesis in October, which examines pain and somatic symptoms within the military.

☺ **Kimberley Stanton**, from Dr. Snyder's lab at Texas A&M, will defend her master's thesis in October, which explores gender differences in intimacy in romantic relationships.

## Lab Updates

Please take some time to read about what all of the wonderful  
Couples Labs are up to.

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start thinking  
about your updates for the Spring 2016 Newsletter.  
We'd love to hear from you!

### **Annmarie Cano, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationships and Health Lab  
Wayne State University

We continue to examine emotion regulation in couples facing chronic health conditions with an emphasis on emotional disclosure of health distress and partner responsiveness and empathic responses. We've just completed some experimental investigations examining these processes (see Leong, L.E.M., Cano, A., Wurm, L.H., Lumley, M.A., & Corley, A.M. [in press]. A perspective taking manipulation leads to greater empathy and less pain during the cold pressor task. *Journal of Pain*). We are also completing Phase 1 of our NIH/NCCIH study aimed at developing a couple-based mindfulness and acceptance intervention for chronic pain. Phase 1 consists of developing and testing the intervention manual in an open trial. Phase 2 begins early in 2016, when we will run a small comparison trial. A special thank you to lab members to graduate students Angelia Corley and Shannon Clark and lab manager Sarah Martinez for keeping the project running so smoothly. We look forward to sharing the results of our work with the SIG! We are also writing up the results from our NICHD and Mars-Waltham funded study of an animal-assisted intervention for youth residing in detention facilities.

### **Rebecca Cobb, Ph.D.**

Director: SFU Close Relationships Lab  
Simon Fraser University

We are excited to report that we are in the final stages of data collection for our one-year longitudinal study of communication and sexuality in cohabiting couples, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Our latest project, which is currently in the data collection phase, is a cross-sectional, multi-site replication study on forgiveness. Upcoming plans include a daily diary study on forgiveness in couples, which is funded by a Vice President Research Grant.

This year, the Close Relationships Lab organized and hosted Canada's first ever event for World Sexual Health Day (September, 4<sup>th</sup>). The event took place in Vancouver and included a series of informative and engaging talks by local experts on sexual health and justice related issues.

### **Kim Halford, Ph.D.**

University of Queensland Couples Lab  
University of Queensland

The last 12 months have been particularly busy at UQ. We have just completed a randomized controlled trial of adding motivational interviewing (MI) to family mediation for separated couples. Family mediation is widely used

in Australia, as it is in the US and Western Europe, to help separated parents resolve differences about how they should co-parent. We have two papers under review reporting our key findings, about which we are very excited. (Hint: MI makes a big difference in negotiating parenting agreement successfully). PhD student Megan Morris, who is an experienced mediator as well as psychologist, has led this project and is about to submit her PhD.

A second randomized controlled trial of family mediation is well under way. In that study we are comparing mediation as usual with mediation that include a co-parenting education program (CPP). The CPP is completed by parents at home using a DVD that introduces ideas and models skills, a guidebook of exercises to apply the ideas to their family, and a series of telephone based coaching call from a mediator. We should complete program delivery late October, and hope to have the results ready to present in mid-2016. Special thanks to Tulsia Achia who has bene coordinating this work.

We also completed a small scale randomized controlled trial of our Couple CARE program adapted for military couples. PhD student Melissa Bakhurst led this work, and has recently submitted her PhD for examination. Our work on intercultural couples has continued. We published three papers on our work with Chinese couples and Chinese-Western intercultural couples in the last 12 months. The original work was done by former PhD Student Dr. Danika Hiew. The cohort of couples she recruited we continue to follow up and now have 4 year longitudinal data. We also have been collecting data on couples in Hong Kong with Professor Patrick Leung of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Thai couples with Drs. Somboon Jarukasemthawee and Kullaya Pisitsungkagarn of Chulalongkorn University, and soon will start work with Pakistani couples with Dr. Sahhid Iqbal of federal Urdu University. In addition we are doing preliminary work on relationships standards in Muslim couples, working with couples residing in Australia (led by Riyad Rahimullah), Malaysia (led by new PhD student Noraththiah Nordin), and Pakistan (led by Dr. Iqbal).

A randomized controlled trial of our Couple CARE program is nearing completion as we gather the last of the 4 year follow up data. A report of the immediate effect of the programs was reported in *Behavior Therapy* earlier this year. Special thanks to Riyad Rahimullah who has been coordinating this work.

### **K. Daniel O'Leary, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology

Director: Relationships and Forensic Assessment Clinic (RFAC)

Department of Psychology

Stony Brook University

The Stony Brook Relationships and Forensic Assessment Clinic has been busy with multiple projects this fall semester. Our lab has continued collaboration with Dr. Nelly Alia-Klein at Mount Sinai Medical Center, in which we are investigating the neurobiological correlates of partner abuse among trait aggressive men and non-aggressive comparisons. In addition, we recently completed a multisite trial of a novel bystander intervention for sexual abuse in college students lead by Dr. Ernest Jouriles at Southern Methodist University.

Our lab has several collaborations underway on campus at SBU, including a study Katie Lee Salis recently completed concerning hormones and aggression in college males with Dr. Kristin Bernard. Ingrid Solano is conducting several studies investigating the role of individual personality characteristics and emotion dysregulation in Intermittent Explosive Disorder and predicting relationship variables such as pornography use and relationship satisfaction. In collaboration with Dr. Nicholas Eaton, Ingrid Solano and Sarah Bannon are investigating the role of personality correlates in the outcome of witnessing intimate partner violence (IPV) and the relationship between alcohol use and IPV. We are conducting these projects with national epidemiological surveys as well as our own nationally representative samples. As well, Sarah Bannon is conducting a study investigating the utility of referential communication paradigms in predicting couple outcomes under the partial mentorship of Dr. Susan Brennan, with support from the National Science Foundation. As an undergraduate honors project, Edward Liu is investigating the impact of parental conflict and divorce on romantic attitudes and academic performance in college students. Finally, a visiting student from Germany, Nina Schoeler, is evaluating relationship factors and disordered eating symptomatology among candidates for bariatric surgery.

In other exciting news, lab members Ingrid Solano and Sarah Bannon have created their own undergraduate course on intimate relationships using Bradbury and Karney's textbook and are preparing to teach the seminar in the coming winter semester.

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**Donald Baucom, Ph.D.**

Richard Lee Simpson Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
Director: UNC Couples Lab  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Dr. Baucom is on sabbatical this semester in Oxford, England where he is collaborating with the National Health Service to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner is depressed. This is part of England's nationwide IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) program to provide empirically supported interventions to the public. In addition to providing clinical services, these efforts will result in a large-scale effectiveness treatment study of couple-based treatment for depression in routine outpatient clinics around the country.

Our lab has continued our collaboration with Dr. Kevin Guskiewicz at the UNC Department of Exercise and Sport Science to develop and test a couple-based treatment for depression in couples where one member is a former NFL player. We are currently recruiting couples to pilot the treatment. Our lab is also collaborating with Dr. Jon Abramowitz's lab at UNC to develop a couple-based treatment for body dysmorphic disorder. Treatment manual development is currently underway.

We currently have two projects underway as part of our lab's broader effort, in collaboration with the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders, to develop psychological interventions for couples around eating disorders. First, our randomized clinical trial of our couple-based treatment for anorexia nervosa (Uniting Couples in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa - UCAN) is actively recruiting. In addition, we are actively recruiting for a pilot study called UNITE (UNiting couples In the Treatment of Eating disorders) which focuses on working with couples in which one partner has binge eating disorder.

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**Brian Baucom, Ph.D., and Katie Baucom, Ph.D.**

Couples Laboratory for Observational StudiEs (CLOSE)  
Department of Psychology  
University of Utah

We are in the beginning phases of two new projects in the lab. The first of these is a small scale psychotherapy process study where we are examining biobehavioral processes involved in the working alliance with the therapist and felt safety between partners during couple therapy. The second of these is a longitudinal study of behavioral and cognitive markers of risk for suicide amongst Soldiers in the Utah National Guard that was recently funded by the Department of Defense. The overall goal of this project is to improve our ability to recognize imminent risk for suicide in Soldiers who may not be involved in a health care system by developing methods that romantic partners can use to assess risk from home and facilitate their partner's entry into a health care system.

Related to the second project, we are currently seeking applicants for a postdoctoral fellow. The fellowship would last 12 months and is potentially renewable for an additional 12 to 24 months depending on performance and the availability of funding. The fellowship could begin as early as January, 2016 but the start date is very flexible because we are anticipating that most applicants would not be available to start until the summer of 2016 because of internship. Brian would be more than happy to answer any questions that you might have about the position; please feel free to be in-touch with him at [brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu).

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**Kristina Coop Gordon, PhD**

Professor of Psychology  
 Department of Psychology  
 University of Tennessee – Knoxville

The Gordon lab is busy with multiple projects including analyzing data from Relationship Rx, a large collaborative project with James Cordova's lab to implement the Marriage Checkup in community based integrative health-care facilities in Tennessee and with a low-income population. In particular, we are examining outcome data for the entire project, as well as couple communication about strengths (Katie Wischkaemper), the importance of therapeutic alliance (Jessica Hughes), couple typologies and their response to treatment (Patricia Roberson), and predictors of retention/drop out (DJ Garcia).

In addition, we have several ongoing projects utilizing data from Un Tiempo para Las Parejas - a collaborative project with the Duke University Medical Center that implemented a couples-based smoking intervention program for Latino families (studies using this data are headed by Jess Hughes and DJ Garcia). We are also analyzing data from the Mindfulness and Relationship Health Study – a small-scale longitudinal study that examines relationship changes in couples undergoing a mindfulness-skills training course at the University of Tennessee. Relatedly, Alex Khaddouma is currently piloting a longitudinal study of the relationships among mindfulness, sexual health, and relationship health in young adult dating couples.

In addition, Jerika Norona is currently analyzing data to examine emerging adults' motivations for participating in infidelity and how these romantic experiences are related to developmental tasks. She is also piloting a randomized controlled trial at Cornerstone of Recovery, an inpatient residential treatment center for chemical dependence, on the efficacy of group therapy for romantic partners of patients who struggle with the process of forgiveness. Lastly, Katie Lenger is preparing to propose her master's thesis where she is interested in researching how changes in acceptance are related changes in relationship satisfaction across the Relationship Rx intervention.

**James V. Córdoba, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology  
 Director: The Marriage Checkup Project  
 Department of Psychology  
 Clark University

Dr. Cordova and his lab are focusing their efforts on disseminating the Marriage Checkup to a broad diversity of couples. The lab is currently involved in multiple exciting collaborations. We have just completed a grant working with Kristina Coop Gordon's lab, implementing the Marriage Checkup (referred to as Relationship Rx) in a community based integrative health-care facility in Tennessee. We are continuing to work with Lt. Colonel Jeffrey Cigrang (Ret.), currently at Wright State University, and we recently received funding from the Department of Defense to complete a Randomized Control Trial of the Marriage Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. We are also collaborating with Tea Trillingsgaard, Hanne Norr, Mattias Due, Signe Steenberger, and Soeren Marcussen of Aarhus University and The Center for Familieudvikling on an RCT of the Marriage Checkup in Denmark (called Par-tjek). Dr. Cordova and several of his graduate students recently presented a workshop on the Marriage Checkup in Copenhagen, Denmark. In addition, we are currently beta testing our website for use by individuals, couples, and therapists, to make the Marriage Checkup more widely accessible.

Emily Maher is continuing work on her Master's thesis, which examines the effect of sustained meditation practice on relationship health and intimacy. We are thrilled to have welcomed Taylor Dovala into our lab Family this fall. Taylor is in the initial stages of developing a research project that applies positive psychology concepts in the context of intimate relationships.



*From the left: James Cordova, Taylor Dovala, Liz Ollen, Julia Sollenberger, Emily Maher, Tatiana Gray and Matt Hawrilenko*

**Joanne Davila, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship Development Center  
Stony Brook University

The Relationship Development Center continues its work on adolescent and adult romantic relationships and well-being. We are pleased to welcome two new PhD students, Jiaqi Zhou and Lauren Mize. Our lab has really grown in the past year, currently staffed by three PhD students, three MA students, and five undergrad RAs. We're involved in a number of projects and collaborations, including: (1) ongoing data collection on romantic competence among emerging adults, (2) the development and evaluation of a relationship education program for college students, (3) the study of LGB individuals' relationship experiences and (4) examining associations among mental health, relationship and sexual behavior, and their neural correlates.

**Brian Doss, Ph.D.**

Director: Doss Couple Lab  
Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
University of Miami

This summer/fall, we have been transitioning off our NIH grant, which allowed us to develop and test the OurRelationship online program for distressed couples (based on IBCT). We will be presenting the main results of this RCT at ABCT this year and have several manuscripts in preparation / under review. *Spoiler alert:* The results are encouraging!

This fall, our lab was fortunate to receive a new, 5-year "Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education" grant from the Administration for Children and Families. This grant will allow us to provide the OurRelationship program (for distressed couples) and the ePREP program (for happy couples) to approximately 2,500 low-income couples nationwide. Dr. Galena Rhoades will be collaborating with us as our external evaluator. We're really excited to be able to continue this line of work and make it available to underserved couples.

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**Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology

Director: Marriage and Family Resiliency Lab

University of South Alabama

Selena and Caitlin, with the assistance of Kali and Eric, have been continuing the “Murphy Family Study”. On December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012 a tornado touched down in Mobile, AL causing significant damage, particularly to Murphy High School. The students at this school were temporarily relocated to another school where they spent the majority of their time in portables and separated from the other students at the school. The aim of this study is to investigate the effects this natural disaster had on students and their families. We are especially interested in family resiliency and what methods and tactics they employ as a family to increase their resilience when faced with adversities.

With regards to the Murphy Family Study, Selena and Caitlin presented a poster at the 2015 American Psychological Association Annual Convention entitled “Can Your Family Weather the Storm?” Selena and Caitlin will be presenting a poster at the 2015 International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Annual Meeting in New Orleans, LA entitled “There’s No Place Like Home: Family Functioning and Resilience Following Natural Disaster:” Additionally, Eric, Kali, and Mallory have been working to transcribe the family interaction tasks and interviews, which will be a source of rich, qualitative data for future research. Dr. Jonathon Davis has joined us during his sabbatical and is assisting in the qualitative data process. Our lab goal for this coming year is to complete the transcription and coding process for all of the qualitative data collected during the Murphy Family Study.

We are also continuing to run our Is it “Facebook Official” study, an online survey study targeting college students and their experiences of romantic relationships in the context of Facebook. We are also interested in the relationship of adult empathy and attachment styles to the relationship behaviors individuals engage in via the internet, particularly after ending a romantic relationship. We are planning to expand this study over the course of the next year in order to encompass other social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram. Selena and Caitlin will be presenting a poster at the 2015 ABCT Couples SIG Exposition and Cocktail Party in Chicago, IL entitled “Facebook Stalking: You Know You Do It”.

Caitlin and Selena will also be presenting a poster at the 2015 ABCT Annual Convention entitled “The Struggle is Real: Stressors in Primary Care Patients” utilizing data collected by the Gulf Coast Behavioral Health and Resiliency Center.

We are excited to have two new graduate students with us, Mallory Schneider and Shannon Boone. We are also excited to welcome back a returning research assistant, Amanda Hackett.

Selena and Keri have been working on a publication entitled "Integrative Care: What Providers Really Want." The manuscript is based on an assessment that was developed and utilized to survey primary care providers perceived needs within two Federally Qualified Health Centers which service underserved populations in the community. The goal of the manuscript is to improve the integrative care process by addressing the perceived needs of providers to help provide holistic care to patients. The manuscript is currently in preparation.

Keri and Selena have been working on a publication entitled “Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Primary Care” examining the prevalence of PTSD symptomology within an underserved primary care population. The manuscript is currently in preparation.

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**Jean-Philippe Laurenceau, Ph.D.**

Director: Laboratory of Interpersonal Functioning and Experiences (LIFE)

University of Delaware

We have finished recruitment and are currently in final months of data collection for our current major project, which is an intensive longitudinal investigation into the temporal course, contextual influences, and consequences of fear of



recurrence in the everyday lives of breast cancer patients and their spouses/partners during their first year post-diagnosis. We are also excited to begin recruitment for a new intensive longitudinal study funded by the National Institute for Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases that involves type 2 diabetes mellitus patients and their non-diabetic spouses/partners. The purpose of this study is to evaluate factors that influence glycemic control, which will be measured by a continuous glucose monitor (CGM) worn by the patient. Specifically, we are interested in how stress and related psychosocial factors in the family affect patients' ability to control their daily blood glucose levels and maintain self-care behavior, such as adherence to medication regimen, healthy diet, and exercise.

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**Doug Snyder, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology  
Department of Psychology  
Texas A&M University

Doug Snyder, Kimberley Stanton, and Laura Osborne are continuing efforts toward the development and implementation of a couple-relationship resilience program for Aggie student veterans and their partners. Christina Balderamma-Durbin and Caitlin Fissette wrapped up their internship placements this summer and graduated from Texas A&M University with their doctoral degrees. Congratulations, Christina and Caitlin!

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**Dr. Jesse Owen, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship and Psychotherapy Lab - West  
Joanna Drinane, M.Ed. (Graduate Student Lab Leader)  
University of Denver

New to the University of Denver, the Relationship and Psychotherapy Lab – West is really starting to take off. We have begun weekly meetings that include a combination of doctoral and masters level students from the College of Education who are each contributing to research projects. These students include Russell Anderson, Geneva Polser, Brian King, Chris Bezzant, Gabrielle Kaminsky, June Brannon, Laura Browning, Launa LaPorta, Jeremy Coleman, and Morgan Swink. Deepta DasGupta, Kelly Lavin, Josh Craig, and Doris Zhang. Within the couple therapy domain, we are analyzing data looking at the relationship between commitment uncertainty, systemic alliance, and therapy outcomes. Other projects include a meta-analytic review of PREP program outcomes and an investigation of the short-term effects of relationship education.

# HOT off the Press

## In Press and Recently Published Literature

- Antonelli, P., Dettore, D., Lasagni, I., Snyder, D. K., & Balderrama-Durbin, C. (2014). Gay and lesbian couples in Italy: Comparisons with heterosexual couples. *Family Process*, 53, 702-716.
- Brodard, F., Charvoz, L., Antonietti, J. P., Rossier, J., Bodenmann, G., & Snyder, D. K. (2015). Validation de la version française de l'Inventaire de Satisfac on Conjugale MSI-R [Validation of the French version of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory]. *Revue Canadienne des Sciences du Comportement [Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science]*, 47, 113-122.
- Balderrama-Durbin, C., Cigrang, J., Osborne, L., Snyder, D., Talcott, G. W., Slep, A., Heyman, R., Tatum, J., Baker, M., Cassidy, D., & Sonnek, S. (2015). Coming home: A prospective study of family reintegration following deployment to a war zone. *Psychological Services*, 12, 213-221.
- Balderrama-Durbin, C., Snyder, D. K., & Balsis, S. (2015). Tailoring assessment of relationship distress using the Marital Satisfaction Inventory – Brief Form. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 4, 127-135.
- Bannon, S., Salis, K.L., O'Leary, K.D. (in press). Structural Brain Abnormalities in Aggression and Violent Behavior. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*
- Baucom, D.H. (2015, May). *Targeted Couple-Based Interventions: Evolving Directions for the Field*. Paper presented at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Symposium der Fachgruppe f r Klinische Psychologie und Psychotherapie der Deutschen Gesellschaft f r Psychologie, Dresden, Germany.
- Baucom, D.H., & Fischer, M.S. (2015, May). *How to Incorporate a Partner into the Treatment of Adults with Eating Disorders: Clinical Strategies and Research Findings*. Invited address for the Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, Germany.
- Bhatia, V., & Davila, J. (in press). Mental health disorders in couple relationships. In Fitzgerald, J. (Ed.). *Foundations for couples' therapy: Research for the real world*. NY: Routledge.
- Bodenmann, G., Meuwly, N., Germann, J., Nussbeck, F.W., Heinrichs, M., & Bradbury, T.N. (in press). Effects of stress on the social support provided by men and women in intimate relationships. *Psychological Science*.
- Busby, D. M., Larson, J. H., Holman, T. B., & Halford, W. K. (2015). Flexible delivery approaches to couple relationship education: predictors of initial engagement and retention of couples. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. doi: 10.1007/s10826014-0105-3.
- Calles, I. & Stanton, K. (2015, May). Culture-related diagnostic issues in therapy. Psychology and social justice: Why we do what we do. *Texas Psychological Association Student Division Newsletter*, 5(1), 8.
- Chambers, S. K., Occhipinti, S., Schover, L., Nielsen, L., Zajdlewicz, L., Clutton, S., Halford, W. K., Gardiner, R. A., Dunn, J. (2014). A randomised controlled trial of a couples-based sexuality intervention for men with localised prostate cancer and their female partners. *Psycho-Oncology*. doi: 10.1002/pon
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# Couples Research & Therapy

## *NEWSLETTER*

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Spring 2015

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### Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to bring you the Spring (or admittedly more Summer) 2015 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG newsletter. The newsletter is full of exciting updates and information for all of our SIG members.

Along with updates from our SIG officers, we are pleased to share a shortened version of the recently published article “Who's in our clients' bed? A case illustration of sex therapy with a polyamorous couple” by Megan Ann McCoy, Morgan Allan Stinson, D. Bruce Ross & Lyndsey Ryan Hjelmstad (pg. 5). Additionally, co-editor, Cherelle Carrington has provided an interesting review of the book *Love Me Slender: How Smart Couples Team Up to Lose Weight, Exercise More, and Stay Healthy Together* written by Bradbury & Karney (pg. 8).

We were thrilled to receive lab updates and reasons for celebrations from so many couples SIG labs. Everyone is doing incredible work and we're happy to share your accomplishments with the SIG!

We invite Couples SIG members to submit feedback and suggestions for article topics for future newsletters. Please contact us directly with your suggestions and to discuss article contributions.

**Thank you for making the Couples SIG Newsletter possible!**

*Cherelle Carrington, Aleja Parsons, and Kim Pentel*

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## Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Katie Baucom & Brian Baucom  
*University of Utah*

Hi from your new SIG Co-Presidents, Katie and Brian Baucom! We're excited to work with you all over the next 2 years. Brian is an Assistant Professor, and Katie an Assistant Professor (Clinical) in the Department of Psychology at the University of Utah. Please do not hesitate to contact us about all things Couples SIG. You can reach us at [brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu) and [katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu). We want to thank Robin Barry and Steffany Fredman for their service as Co-Presidents for an extended (3-year!) term.

In lieu of a traditional pre-conference event, at the 2014 Convention in Philadelphia we kicked off the conference with a celebration of Andy Christensen's retirement. Big thanks to Don Baucom, Howard Markman, Dave Atkins, Robin Barry, Steffany Fredman, and colleagues for organizing. The event was well attended and many fun facts were learned about Andy.

Our 2014 SIG meeting was also very well attended. The 1<sup>st</sup> (Dev Crast) and 2<sup>nd</sup> (Emily Georgia) place winners of the Robert L. Weiss Student Poster Award were announced, as well as the recipient of undergraduate honorable mention (Katherine Lenger). We'd like to thank the committee (Lorelei Simpson, Brian Doss, and Patti Fritz) for their service. We elected a new treasurer, CJ Eubanks Fleming, and thanked Rosaura Orengo-Aguayo for her service as treasurer for 2012-2014. We had nearly 20 members volunteer to be on the Program Committee for the 2015 convention – it is crucial that our SIG be well-represented on that committee and we are most appreciative to those who volunteered.

We heard more about some specific efforts SIG members are undertaking. Galena Rhoades and Kristi Coop Gordon updated us on their efforts to lobby for increased NIH funding for couples research (especially intervention). They have continued these efforts in collaboration with the Science Directorate office at APA. If you're interested in reaching out to your congressperson please be in touch with Galena at [grhoades@du.edu](mailto:grhoades@du.edu). Robin Barry is spearheading efforts to increase mentoring and networking within the SIG. If you're interested in joining this team you can contact Robin at [rbarry@umbc.edu](mailto:rbarry@umbc.edu).

Finally, we discussed potential preconference ideas for upcoming years – we are exploring these ideas and will keep you all posted. Also stay tuned on the listserv for requests for submissions for the SIG poster exposition at the Cocktail Party (July) and for the Weiss Student Poster Awards (late October/early November). Until then, hope you all have a wonderful summer!

## Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Shelby Scott<sup>1</sup> & Christina Balderrama-Durbin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Denver; <sup>2</sup>State University of New York – Binghamton

Hello from your Student Co-Presidents! It was wonderful to see everyone at this past year's conference in Philadelphia, and we are looking forward to seeing everyone again in Chicago! We have a few important announcements to share with everyone:

### Student Symposium:

- We are happy to announce that this year's student symposium, entitled "Understanding Mechanisms of Change in Relationship Interventions," was accepted for this year's conference! The symposium will include paper presentations that highlight core mechanisms of change in relationship interventions in order to enhance dissemination efforts. This will surely be an exciting and intellectually stimulating presentation! We encourage everyone to come support our wonderful group of student presenters!
- Thank you to Hannah C. Williamson (University of California, Los Angeles), Tatiana D. Gray (Clark University), Alexander Khaddouma (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), Dev Crasta (University of Rochester) and their colleagues for your paper contributions to this symposium. We are also fortunate to have Dr. Scott Stanley (University of Denver) serving as our esteemed discussant! Congratulations on a job well done!

### Plans for November:

- **SIG Cocktail Party:** Plans are in their beginning stages of identifying a location for this year's SIG Cocktail Party. As usual, we hope to find a location close to the conference hotel that will accommodate our growing SIG family. We look forward to another great night of food, fun, and excellent company!
- If you have any suggestions for locations in Chicago, we would appreciate you sending them along! You can email your suggestions to Christina (email below).
- More details regarding the location and time will follow in the Fall 2015 Newsletter.

### Students Applying for Graduate School or Internship:

- For student SIG members applying to graduate programs and predoctoral internships this coming application cycle (2016-2017), be sure to check out the couple-focused graduate programs and internships resource list on the SIG website ([www.abetcouple.org](http://www.abetcouple.org), click on "Training"). We will be soliciting SIG members for updates to these lists and posting the updated versions in the near future.

Please contact us at any time with comments, questions, or suggestions. We would particularly like to encourage students to join the **SIG listserv** ([couples-sig@sfu.ca](mailto:couples-sig@sfu.ca)), **SIG Facebook group** (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=266082574771>), and **student-specific Facebook group** (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=82988514892>).

Sincerely,

Christina ([christina.balderramadurbin@gmail.com](mailto:christina.balderramadurbin@gmail.com)) and Shelby ([Shelby.Scott@du.edu](mailto:Shelby.Scott@du.edu))



## ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update

Dear SIG Members,

I hope that all of you are doing well and looking forward to an exciting summer! Here is an update of our membership status and dues.

First I would like to thank Rosaura Orengo-Aguayo for her excellent work as our most recent treasurer. She kept everything in perfect working order. Thank you, Rosaura!

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 205 (83 professional, 122 students). Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members!

The balance transferred from Rosaura to me after the 2014 conference was \$1282.84. Since that time, we have received \$305 in dues, paid \$9 in fees (for checks), and paid out \$129 for our website hosting, leaving us with a balance of \$1449. Thank you for your continued support!

As always, we will collect 2015 dues at the SIG business meeting during the ABCT conference which will be in Chicago this year! If you are not attending the conference or would like to pre-pay your 2015 dues, please pay electronically via PayPal (go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and send money to [cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com](mailto:cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com)) or by mailing a check to the address below. If you pay by paypal, it is important to designate the payment as a "send to friends and family" to avoid processing fees. Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students and retired members.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership.

Many thanks for your support of the SIG!

Best,  
CJ

Send checks to:  
CJ Fleming, PhD  
111 Rosaline Ln  
Durham, NC 27713

## Media Coordinators Update

Jenny Pink, M.Sc. and Krystal Cashen, B.A.

Since the annual convention in November, we have updated the Couples SIG listserv and website. To update your contact information, or have your name removed from or added to the listserv or website members' page, please email Jenny Pink ([jcpink@sfu.ca](mailto:jcpink@sfu.ca)) and Krystal Cashen ([krystal.cashen@gmail.com](mailto:krystal.cashen@gmail.com)). Please also let us know if you have any information you would like to share with your fellow SIG members through our website (e.g., job postings, study recruiting, or things you think may be of interest). We encourage you to browse the current website for examples of what can be posted.

Krystal & Jenny

## **Who's in our clients' bed? A case illustration of sex therapy with a polyamorous couple\***

Megan Ann McCoy, Morgan Allan Stinson, D. Bruce Ross & Lyndsey Ryan Hjelmstad

*\*Full article published in Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*

Polyamory has been defined as “a relationship orientation that assumes that it is possible [and acceptable] to love many people and to maintain multiple intimate and sexual relationships” (Urel, Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2003, p. 126). Polyamorous people are not committing infidelity or lying. Instead, they are committed to being open about each of the relationships in their lives (Hymer & Rubin, 1982; Weitzman, 2006). Just as there are different forms of nonmonogamous relationships (e.g., same-sex relationships, heterosexual relationships, cohabitating relationships), there are also several types of polyamory relationships. The variety of polyamorous relationships account for approximately 15% of relationships (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Page, 2004; West, 1996). Unfortunately, there is little research in the field of couple and sexual therapy on how to support polyamorous relationships. This is disheartening as findings have disclosed that polyamorous individuals and couples has a history of being pathologized by some practitioners in the mental health profession (Buunk, 1980; Knapp, 1976; Rubin & Adams, 1976)

To illustrate the unique considerations related to sex therapy with polyamorous couples, a case example is provided of a polyamorous couple (Ellen, age 36 years and Thomas, age 40 years). When they came in to therapy, Thomas and Ellen had three additional female partners and Ellen had one additional male partner that was part of their polyamorous family. Thomas and Ellen referred to their partners outside of their primary relationship as “satellites.” Ellen and Thomas both reported that they enjoyed their polyamorous relationships. For example, Ellen described how much she liked having other women in her life who helped her with running the household, while Thomas admitted that he gained a lot of self-esteem and self-worth out of his relationship with the satellites. The couple reported that their presenting issue was separate from their polyamorous identity and wanted to make sure that the therapist that worked with them was supportive of their lifestyle. Once the therapist reassured them of her support for their polyamorous identity, the couple stated the presenting problem was related to the frequency of sexual intercourse between them.

The couple reported high satisfaction in all areas of their marriage except for their sexual relationship. Ellen reported that she was still having regular sexual interactions with her satellite partner, but sexual intimacy between her and Thomas had decreased over the past few years. She disclosed that she sometimes felt pressure to keep up with Thomas’s high level of sexual desire. The pressure she felt Thomas placed on her had begun to make her avoid any type of sexual intimacy in fear of being pressured to have sexual intercourse. The focus Ellen placed on the anxiety she was experiencing in relation to sex with Thomas made the therapist consider using sensate focus therapy as an intervention. Sensate focus therapy appeared to be appropriate because it was originally conceived as an anxiety reduction technique for sexual intimacy (Masters & Johnson, 1970). The therapist thought this intervention could help decrease the pressure Ellen felt to have intercourse with Thomas.

The therapist had used sensate focus with numerous monogamous couples in the past and had positive outcomes. However, the therapist was unsure how to implement the intervention with a polyamorous relationship. She considered three critical questions before treatment began. Would Ellen and Thomas agree to withhold sex from all their satellites? Would they follow the steps with their satellites, as well as, their partners? And would they wish to continue having sexual intercourse with their satellites while attempting to complete sensate focus with their partner? All three of these options could potentially affect the efficacy of sensate focus and caused the therapist anxiety around using sensate focus with Ellen and Thomas.

First, the therapist worried about the potential negative consequences for the couple. What if they decided to continue having unhindered sex with their partners, would sensate focus therapy be as powerful as an intervention? If they did do sensate focus with their partners, what if the sensate focus intervention worked better with the satellite partners than with the primary relationship? Or, what if Ellen or Thomas became so passionate with their satellite that they had sexual intercourse with their satellites but not each other before the assigned week? Or, what if Ellen and Thomas lied to each other about the progress their satellites were making with sensate focus?

Second, the therapist was also worried about how sensate focus therapy would affect their satellite relationships. Would it negatively affect the satellite relationship? Would the satellite partner's feel that their status in the relationship was decreased, as Ellen and Thomas's relationship was privileged? In other words, the therapist grappled with the potential effect of sensate focus on trust, boundaries, and hierarchy in the system and had no evidenced based research to help guide her on how to proceed. Fortunately, because it was a training clinic the therapist had worked closely with a supervisory team from the beginning of treatment. The supervisory team helped the therapist realize that the research available did state that trust and boundaries in relationships were as essential to polyamorous relationships as they are to monogamous relationships, but they are dependent on the couple's definition of trust infractions and ideal boundaries (Barker, 2005; Jamieson, 2004; McLean, 2004; Sartorius, 2004; Weitzman et al., 2009; Wolfe, 2003).

Therefore, the therapist decided that she would present the sensate focus intervention, explain the potential obstacles around trust and boundaries, and allow Ellen and Thomas to co-create a modified version of sensate focus therapy that would work for their polyamorous family on the basis of their definitions of trust infractions and ideal boundaries. The therapist did some basic psychoeducation on the sensate focus therapy intervention. However, most of the session was spent exploring potential obstacles that could arise and how to address them in advance. The therapist told the couple about her anxieties, how using sensate focus could potentially affect their relationship and their satellite relationships. The couple decided that they wanted sensate focus to work identically to the original Masters and Johnson's intervention, but they wanted to do it with all their partners concurrently, meaning that each week they would have the same limits on sexual activities with each other and their partners. They also decided that the process would occur in dyads to increase the focus on each person's satisfaction experienced during the process. Even though they were not symptomatic with their partners, they decided to do the process simultaneously with the satellites to ensure that they could maintain intimacy with their satellites while privileging their own sex life. They talked about how they wanted to communicate with each other about the progress with the satellites, what they would do if they did end up going too far with satellites (e.g., proceeding past the limits assigned for the week), and how to make sure they scheduled enough time to do the exercises with everyone. The initial focus was on protecting Ellen and Thomas's relationship; however, towards the end of the session, the focus shifted to ensuring their satellite relationships would also be protected. Ellen and Thomas decided that they had enjoyed the process of talking overtly about trust, boundaries, and healthy communication in this session and wanted to mirror the process with their satellites.

The clients reported in the next session that when they spoke to the satellites, almost all of their satellites were supportive of proceeding with sensate focus therapy. Their male partner came into the next therapy session and stated that he would not be happy in his relationship with Ellen unless Thomas and Ellen were happy together. Thus, he wanted to support their endeavor into sensate focus therapy. Furthermore, the majority of the satellite partners began to internalize the couple's happiness as their job to support. However, Ellen and Thomas stated one satellite (Jane) was not supportive of the process. Jane became frustrated and felt that issues between Ellen and Thomas had nothing to do with their (e.g., Jane and his) relationship. Thomas ended the relationship with Jane and stated that for him, being polyamorous was family oriented, focused on strengthening the entire family system. The couple stated that if their relationship was not strong, then the system would not be stable, so although it was difficult to lose Jane from their system, they both agreed it was essential.

Once the remaining satellites were educated on the steps of sensate focus, the intervention preceded as prescribed by Masters and Johnson (1970). Thomas and Ellen talked in the therapy sessions about how much more connected they felt and how they were enjoying their new repertoire for connecting intimately that did not always involve sexual intercourse. Thomas also realized that he had been under the false belief that the rate of sexual activity correlated with Ellen's love for him. As mentioned earlier, Ellen had higher rates of sexual intimacy with her satellite partner than Thomas. Thomas saw this discrepancy as evidence that Ellen did not love him as much as she loved her satellite, so he began to pressure her about sex as a result of this anxiety. With that false assumption on the table, Ellen and Thomas were able to reassure one another and find new ways of affirming their love. As Thomas began to feel more comfortable, Ellen stated that it was empowering to not feel as pressured to have physical intercourse and she began to become more responsive towards his advances. In summation, the couple reported that the rate of actual sexual intercourse had increased since therapy began

they also reported that all sexual intimacy between them felt more pleasurable. They also reported that they were surprised by how the relationships between Thomas, Ellen, and their satellites felt stronger since the meeting around sensate focus. In session, the therapist observed that Ellen and Thomas appeared to be communicating more openly with each other in general.

Toward the end of treatment, the therapist and her supervisory team did a reflection team with Thomas and Ellen. A reflecting team is an intervention where the therapist and clients switch places with a supervisory team that is observing the case behind a one-way mirror (Anderson, 1987). The reflection team discussed the strengths of the couple (e.g., their communication skills, their commitment to one another, and their openness to exploring their sexuality) and applauded their progress in regards to the sensate focus exercises. The couple reported in the post session that they found the experience moving and positive due to the fact they felt accepted by outsiders (e.g., non-polyamorous individuals). The couple also liked the chance to reflect on the positive changes that the sensate focus exercises had made within their sex life and their ability to communicate openly and honestly with one another about their needs on a whole. The case was closed as a successful termination. Therapist was able to keep in touch with the clients since couple therapy ended and the couple is still doing great over a year later.

The authors hypothesize that this case had a successful outcome for several reasons. First, the therapist's (and later the larger clinic's) acceptance and support of the couple's polyamory lifestyle created an open and respectful therapeutic environment. The clients reported that they were initially very nervous about disclosing their lifestyle to the therapist and wanted to ensure the therapist was supportive. Thus, the immediate acceptance and support of the clients' lifestyle may have led to a successful outcome in therapy. Second, the therapist conducted research on polyamory prior to treatment. This was beneficial to treatment because previous studies have shown that even when therapists were open-minded about polyamory, many clients had to use some of their paid session time to educate the therapist (Weitzman, 2006). Prior research helped her have a knowledge base to avoid unnecessary time in session spent reviewing basic information on the polyamory lifestyle. The research also had a secondary effect of challenging some of the therapist's potentially detrimental assumptions such as a preconceived notion that the polyamorous relationships were based on sex and that polyamory relationships were somehow inferior to monogamous relationships. Therapists working with polyamorous couples need to make sure that they do some preliminary research so that they uncover their own biases and assumptions. The research also highlighted the diversity within the polyamorous community. Acknowledging the diversity allowed the therapist to take the stance that Ellen and Thomas were the experts on their relationships. Other therapists working with polyamorous couples may need to take this not-knowing stance to tailor interventions that were created for monogamous couples to their clients. For example, it was important for this case to consider what type of polyamorous relationship The type of polyamory being practiced often dictates the role of satellites in the couple's life. Each polyamorous couple's view of boundaries and hierarchies may be different, so it is important for the therapist to not push their view of appropriate boundaries onto the couple.

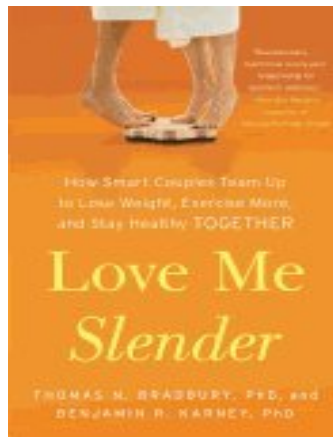
Working with polyamorous couples may present a challenge to therapists who are not familiar with the issues, perceptions, strengths, and unique needs facing this population. In order to effectively practice within the scope of mental health fields, more evidence-based research is needed on this population. The recommendations made in this article offer some considerations for working with polyamorous couples, but they are merely a starting point for future research and theory in this area. The extant literature suggests that therapists may be ill-equipped to treat these couples, either because of a lack of understanding of polyamory or rigidity in adhering to interventions that were created for monogamous couples. The case illustration demonstrates one way in which a therapist working with a polyamorous couple can be flexible and able to adapt interventions used for monogamous couples. This includes co-construction of intervention variations between the therapist and all partners in therapy to ensure that each unique situation is being addressed properly. Therapists should be aware that there is as much diversity within groups as between groups. Just as not all monogamous couples are identical, not all polyamorous couples will be identical. It is important to define their relationships and create boundaries around the couple and their satellites on the basis of each couple's preferred narrative about their polyamory type.

# Love Me Slender

How Smart Couples Team Up to Lose Weight, Exercise More,  
and Stay Healthy Together

*Book Review by:*

*Cherelle Carrington, MSW  
Florida International  
University*



*Love Me Slender*

*By: Thomas N. Bradbury,  
Ph.D., and Benjamin R.  
Karney, Ph.D.*

*Pages: 319*

*ISBN: 978-1-4516-7451-4*

*List Price: \$ 25.99*

*Publication Date: 2014*

Diet and exercise are elusive goals. We make New Year's resolutions to eat the right foods and exercise regularly only to falter in the months that follow. We know that proper diet and exercise lead to better health but we often struggle to do what is necessary to achieve these goals. Diet and exercise are known to be facilitated by group participation as the successful Overeaters Anonymous and Weight Watchers programs illustrate. Bradbury and Karney, co-authors of *Love Me Slender*, founders and co-directors of the Relationship Institute at UCLA, highlight how relationships can uniquely impact diet and exercise. They base their assertions on more than 1,000 videotaped conversations between couples. They put forth the novel idea that couples can use the power of love to improve diet, physical fitness and health.

The book is written in an accessible style. It holds that our closest relationships are the foundations on which we build healthy lives. Bradbury and Karney explain: "eating right and moving more—especially if we want to do these things on a regular basis and over a long span of time—are easier when we are inspired, cajoled, praised, and supported by the people who matter the most to us in our daily lives" (p. 8). They delineate three principles that make intimate relationships very powerful: (1) Mutual Influence: you and your partner inevitably affect each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; (2) Mutual Understanding: you and your partner have tremendous potential to understand—and misunderstand—each other's

needs, goals, and experiences; and (3) Long-Term Commitment: being committed to someone changes how you behave and allows you to forgo short-term rewards for long-term goals (p. 29). Understanding these principles can help couples mold social support into an agent of positive influence on their diet and exercise routines.

By employing the principle of mutual influence, partners can encourage healthy exercise and eating habits. However, the proper thing to say or do to encourage healthy behaviors is not always obvious. Couples bring to bear positive and negative influences on situations. Partners may deny influencing each other (Disengagers) or may exert undue influence on each other (Taskmasters). Others might feel paralyzed by the two opposing poles and opt to do nothing (All-or-Nothing Fallacy). Partners can be supportive of healthy behaviors without being nagging or controlling. Rather than being critical of vulnerabilities, partners should praise even minor accomplishments and model the behavior they want to support. Small changes made by one partner can result in big effects on both partners.

The principle of mutual understanding implies that if one partner appreciates what is motivating the other to pursue healthy habits, he or she could more accurately convey the kind of support needed to attain the desired goals. Bradbury and Karney observed that during taped conversations partners typically experienced three obstacles to proper dieting and exercise. When one partner (The Charmer) says: "Don't change a thing! I think you

look great!” he or she may be unwittingly invalidating the other partner’s desire to eat healthier and lose weight. When one partner (The One-Trick Pony) declares: “Here’s what works for me! Just do it my way!” he or she may be failing to recognize that the other partner has completely different needs. When one partner (The Waffler) states: “I really need your help to get my eating on the right track, but keep trying because every suggestion you offer will be inadequate!” he or she solicits the other partner’s support but then disregards it. Each partner should appreciate that incisive questions can promote an understanding of the challenges faced by the other. Partners should be aware of where they are in the change process and recognize that change takes time. Partners need to empathize with the emotional struggle entailed in changing one’s diet and should remind each other of past successes. One partner may ask herself: “How can I help my partner understand me better here?” The other partner may ask himself: “What am I not understanding here? Where is my partner in the process of making changes?”

By utilizing the principle of long-term commitment, partners can honestly but lovingly communicate the value of maintaining a lifetime of healthy habits. Since couples are usually committed to a long-term future together, they can realign their focus to long-term goals in the face of short-term temptations. Bradbury and Karney argue that we can use the long-term perspective to help our partners with three barriers to maintaining a healthy diet. With the *Now-or-Never Problem*, partners become frustrated because they don’t see immediate results. Progress can be made by reminding them of their long-term hopes for the relationship. With the *Dreamer Problem*, partners set unrealistic goals that leave them feeling helpless. Progress can be made by pointing out that incremental changes add up to substantial gains over a lifetime together. With the *Broken Egg Problem*, partners lapse into old eating habits. Progress can be made by encouraging them to work toward shared long-term health goals.

The authors’ use of recorded conversations provides firsthand glimpses of couples’ verbal interactions. Problematic areas in communication are brought authentically to the fore. Transcripts show how couples sometimes frustrate each other, making health goals harder to achieve. Opportunities for nuanced interventions are ever-

present. In order to help one’s partner make positive adjustments in eating and exercising, one needs to be both tactful and direct.

As acknowledged by the authors, a limitation of the book is that transcripts were obtained only from young, heterosexual couples starting their first marriages. Experiences of older couples, same sex couples, and couples in subsequent marriages were not included in the analyses, restricting the generalizability of the inferences.

In conclusion, while the mystery of maintaining proper diet and exercise habits is by no means solved, *Love Me Slender* offers fresh insights into how partners can work together to find ways to improve their health. Partners need to validate current concerns while encouraging effective pursuit of healthy habits. The authors note: “great support is like great sex—to do it right, both partners have to be constructively engaged, focused, and ‘in the moment’” (p. 56). The takeaway message is that couples can capitalize on the power of their intimate relationships to initiate and maintain a lifetime of excellent eating and exercise habits. Moreover, when partners team up to improve physical health, they improve their psychological health, become more constructively engaged in their relationship, and grow closer and more content with each other. *Love Me Slender* is a timely resource for couples and an important contribution to the field of couple therapy.

View video clips of couples discussing their health challenges:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/UCLARelationships>

About the authors:

Professors in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, THOMAS N. BRADBURY and BENJAMIN R. KARNEY are among the world’s leading scholars of social relationships, interpersonal communication, marriage, and well-being. Through in-depth interviews and detailed observations of thousands of couples, Dr. Bradbury, a clinical psychologist, and Dr. Karney, a social psychologist, have discovered the surprising ways in which personal histories, current life circumstances, and specific forms of interpersonal communication all combine to determine the quality and course of couples’ intimate lives. Their findings have been reported in more than 250 scientific articles and book chapters, and their 1995 review article is now the most widely-cited theoretical analysis of marriage published in the past century.



# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Lisa Betthausser**, from Dr. Beth Allen's Relationship Studies Lab at University of Colorado Denver, recently defended her dissertation focused on play for veteran couples and successfully matched to the Denver VA pre-doctoral psychology internship for 2015-2016.

☺ After being the first graduate of UCD's newly accredited clinical health psychology PhD program, **CJ (Kalinka) Bathgate** (from Dr. Beth Allen's Relationship Studies Lab at University of Colorado Denver) was recognized as the "Outstanding PhD Student of the Year" for the UCD College of Liberal Arts and Science, and is currently completing a post-doctoral fellowship at National Jewish Health with insomnia researcher Dr. Jack Edinger.

☺ This spring, **Melanie Fischer** (from Dr. Don Baucom's lab at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) successfully defended her dissertation on the coregulation of vocally encoded arousal in couples in which one member has anorexia nervosa or OCD. She received an APA Dissertation Award for her work and will begin her pre-doctoral internship at the Charleston Consortium (Medical University of South Carolina/R. H. Johnson VAMC) this summer.

☺ **Matthew Cohen** (from Dr. Don Baucom's lab at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) successfully defended his masters thesis on male benefit finding in the context of couples where one partner has breast cancer.

☺ **Jennifer Belus** (from Dr. Don Baucom's lab at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) successfully defended her masters thesis studying trajectories of relationship satisfaction in newlywed couples.

☺ **Christine Walsh** who is conducting a post doc in Dr. Don Baucom's lab at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill successfully defended her dissertation at University of Rochester under her advisor Dr. Ronald Rogge.

☺ **Alex Crenshaw** (from Drs. Katie and Brian Baucom's CLOSE lab at the University of Utah) received a Graduate Research Award grant from the Consortium for Families and Health Research to fund his Masters research

☺ **Jasara Hogan** (from Drs. Katie and Brian Baucom's CLOSE lab at the University of Utah) received travel and registration grants from the Society for Multivariate Experimental Psychology to attend a workshop on Bayesian Analysis at Texas Tech this summer and a Clayton Award for Excellence in Graduate Research to fund a follow-up study from her Masters

☺ **Drs. Katie Baucom (PI), Dr. Brian Baucom and colleagues** received a Consortium for Families and Health Research pilot grant to fund our pilot study of couple therapy for co-morbid Metabolic Syndrome and relationship distress

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Dr. Kristi Gordon** received the UT College of Arts and Sciences Senior Excellence in Research/Creative Achievement Award in December, 2014, and then also received the university level Chancellor's Citation for Excellence in Research/Creative Achievement in April, 2015. She is currently serving as President of the Society for Family Psychology, APA's Division 43, where she gets to work with Erika Lawrence as Past-President, Anthony Chambers as President-Elect, and Galena Rhoades as Vice-President for Science. She **STRONGLY** encourages all of you to consider being a part of this organization and she will be happy to talk to you about the benefits of being in the Society (and a low cost way to do so).

☺ **Katie Wischkaemper** (from Dr. Kristi Gordon's lab at University of Tennessee) will be defending her dissertation this summer and beginning internship at the Mountain Home VA in East Tennessee. Katie is also in the final year of her term as Student Representative of APA's Society for Family Psychology (Division 43).

☺ **Jessica Hughes** (from Dr. Kristi Gordon's lab at University of Tennessee) successfully defended her master's thesis, which examined the effects of relationship health and acculturation on postpartum depression in Latino couples. She presented these findings as well as other secondary analyses at a symposium at ABCT this last year. Jessica has also successfully completed her Practice Research Integration Project (PRIP), which examined the use of IBCT with a couple struggling with communication and satisfaction in the context of trauma and subsequent depression and anxiety.

☺ **Alexander Khaddouma** (from Dr. Kristi Gordon's lab at University of Tennessee) was the recipient of the James W. Maddock Student Award for Sex Research from the APA Division of Family Psychology (Division 43), the University of Tennessee Science Alliance Award for Clinical Research, the Sigma Xi 1<sup>st</sup> Place Award for Graduate Research Presentation, and an APA Student Travel Award.

☺ **Jerika Norona** (from Dr. Kristi Gordon's lab at University of Tennessee) was the recipient of the APA Early Graduate Student Researcher Award in 2014.

☺ **Dr. CJ Fleming** (from Dr. James Córdova's lab at Clark University) on received a new position as Assistant Professor of Psychology at Elon University.



# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

- ☺ Two new graduate students to Dr. Doss' Couple Lab at University of Miami, **Kate Nowlan** and **McKenzie Roddy**, have made fantastic additions to the group.
- ☺ Dr. Doss' Couple Lab at University of Miami says goodbye to graduate student **Larisa Cicila** as she heads off to begin her clinical internship at the Tampa VA.
- ☺ **Emily Georgia** (from Dr. Doss' Couple Lab at University of Miami) received a two-year dissertation fellowship from the Administration of Children and Families for her work in examining the OurRelationship.com outcomes for underserved couples.
- ☺ **Mona Mittal** (from Dr. Norm Epstein's lab at University of Maryland) has been completing her K01 award "HIV Risk Reduction for Women Reporting Intimate Partner Violence" from the National Institute of Mental Health. She recently won an ADVANCE Interdisciplinary and Engaged Research Seed Grants from the University of Maryland: "Maternal Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Immune Activation in Women and Children in Tanzania."
- ☺ This year **Jenni Young** (from Dr. Norm Epstein's lab at University of Maryland) has had the wonderful opportunity to have a pre-doctoral externship at the National Cancer Institute in Rockville, Maryland, working with Dr. Mark Greene on research regarding patient and family coping with identification of high genetic risk for cancer. She will continue in that position through her dissertation work.
- ☺ **Dr. Amy Holtzworth-Munroe** at Indiana University received a \$30,000 direct costs grant from The Indiana Judicial Branch, Division of State Court Administration, Family Court Project Grant. (PI: Jason Reyome, Magistrate, Marion County Court) for a study entitled, "A Comparative Effectiveness Study, among Unmarried Parents, of Three Online Parent Education Programs for Separating Couples"
- ☺ **Karen Aizaga** (from Dr. Matthew Johnson's lab at Binghamton University) is now Karen Aizaga, Ph.D., and she is working for Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences in Newark, NJ.
- ☺ **Lauren Fishbein** (from Dr. Matthew Johnson's lab at Binghamton University) is on internship and has tentatively accepted a post-doc position at Indiana University School of Medicine.
- ☺ **Hayley Fivecoat** (from Dr. Matthew Johnson's lab at Binghamton University) will be going on internship at the Syracuse VAMC this summer.
- ☺ **Dr. Sarah Whitton** (from University of Cincinnati) and her husband Josh welcomed their daughter Ava, who was born in March.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Jared McShall** (from Dr. Matthew Johnson's lab at Binghamton University) is now Jared McShall, Ph.D., and he is working with the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Montefiore in Bronx, NY.

☺ **Selena Jackson** (from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama) won 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the University of South Alabama's Three Minute Thesis Competition

☺ Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab is excited to announce that all of the lab's graduate students successfully matched for internship and wish them luck on their future endeavors: **Adrienne McCullars** (Kansas State Counseling Center), **Candice Selwyn** (Medical College of Georgia/Charlie Norwood VAMC), and **Keri Johns** (VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care Systems).

☺ **Aimee Var** (from Dr. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's lab at University of South Alabama), presently completing her internship at Georgia Southern Counseling Center, received an appointment as faculty at the University of Mobile in Mobile Alabama.

☺ **Ben Loew** (from Drs. Markman, Stanley, and Rhoades' lab at University of Denver) is starting a post-doc at the San Diego VA this summer.

☺ **Shelby Scott** (from Drs. Markman, Stanley, and Rhoades' lab at University of Denver) will defend her dissertation ("Understanding Unique Challenges and Communication in Lesbian Romantic Relationships") and start internship at the Palo Alto VA in August.

☺ **Lane Ritchie** (from Drs. Markman, Stanley, and Rhoades' lab at University of Denver) recently received the Family Process Institute's New Writer's Fellowship and attended the corresponding workshop and she successfully defended her Master's.

☺ **Aleja Parsons** (from Drs. Markman, Stanley, and Rhoades' lab at University of Denver) recently received funding for her dissertation on how African Americans talk about race in their relationships from the University of Denver Incubator for the Study of (In)Equality.

☺ **Kayla Knopp** (from Drs. Markman, Stanley, and Rhoades' lab at University of Denver) successfully proposed her dissertation on the "defining the relationship" talk in adolescents' romantic relationships and submitted an application for an NRSA predoctoral fellowship to complete the project.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

☺ **Dr. Galena Rhoades** (from University of Denver) recently received a grant to from the Administration for Children and Families under their "Secondary Analyses of Strengthening Families Datasets."

☺ **Rebecca Conrad** and **Mindy Wong** (from Dr. Richard Mattson's lab at Binghamton University) successfully defended their honors theses and presented their research at Binghamton University's Research Days.

☺ **Edwin Ortiz, Mindy Wong, and Rebecca Conrad** (from Dr. Richard Mattson's lab at Binghamton University) presented research about the measurement of relationship satisfaction at the 85<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association.

☺ **Rebecca Conrad, Jonathon Vayalumkal, and Kathryn Gianella** (from Dr. Richard Mattson's lab at Binghamton University) graduated with their bachelor's degrees and were accepted into graduate programs for psychology, medical school, and occupational therapy, respectively.

☺ **Edwin Ortiz** (from Dr. Richard Mattson's lab at Binghamton University) successfully defended his master's thesis.

☺ **Dr. Doug Snyder** (from Texas A&M) has been honored as recipient of the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Psychologist Award for Contributions to Psychology and Psychotherapy and will receive the award at the annual meeting of the APA in August in Toronto.

☺ **Christina Balderrama-Durbin** (from Dr. Douglas Snyder's lab at Texas A&M) is completing her predoctoral internship at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System with a focus on trauma- and stressor-related disorders. She has recently accepted a tenure-track Assistant Professor position in Clinical Psychology at the State University of New York – Binghamton.

☺ **Caitlin L. Fissette, Capt, USAF, BSC** (from Dr. Douglas Snyder's lab at Texas A&M) will complete her predoctoral internship at Andrews Air Force Base (just outside of Washington, D.C.) this summer. At that time, she will transition to Little Rock Air Force Base where she is slated to serve as the Mental Health Element Chief of the 19th Medical Group.

☺ **Laura Osborne** (from Dr. Douglas Snyder's lab at Texas A&M) was awarded the Texas A&M College of Liberal Arts Professional Development Support Award to attend the Summer Statistics Institute at the University of Texas. She will integrate the advanced statistical methodology acquired through these classes into her dissertation and other research endeavors.

## Lab Updates

Please take some time to read about what all of the wonderful  
Couples Labs are up to.

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start thinking  
about your updates for the Fall 2015 Newsletter.  
We'd love to hear from you!

### **Beth Allen, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship Studies Lab (RSL)  
Associate Professor in Department of Psychology  
University of Colorado Denver

The folks at the Relationship Studies Lab at the University of Colorado Denver have been continuing their focus on military couples and families. The DOD funded Relationships among Military Personnel (RAMP, [www.armycouples.com](http://www.armycouples.com)) project has completed recruitment and the first three waves of data collection with the last two waves well under way. Co-investigators/consultants on the project are Keith Renshaw, Steffany Fredman, Galena Rhoades, Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Brett Litz. Please look for our work at ABCT 2015—we have 7 posters and/or talks this year using RAMP data. Current graduate students in the lab are Lisa Betthausen, Jessica Kenny, and Arjun Bhalla. We are welcoming Kelly Soberay into the lab this fall. CJ Bathgate (formerly Kalinka) has graduated! Please see the kudos section for more news on students in the lab.

### **Donald Baucom, Ph.D.**

Richard Lee Simpson Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
Director: UNC Couples Lab  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Our lab has continued our collaboration with Dr. Kevin Guskiewicz at the UNC Department of Exercise and Sport Science to develop and test a couple-based treatment for depression in couples where one member is a former NFL player. We are currently preparing to pilot the treatment with a small number of couples.

In addition, our lab is collaborating with Dr. Jon Abramowitz's lab at UNC to develop a couple-based treatment for body dysmorphic disorder. Treatment manual development is currently underway.

We currently have two projects underway as part of our lab's broader effort, in collaboration with the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders, to develop psychological interventions for couples around eating disorders. First, our randomized clinical trial of our couple-based treatment for anorexia nervosa (Uniting Couples in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa - UCAN) is actively recruiting. In addition, we are actively recruiting for a pilot study called UNITE (UNiting couples In the Treatment of Eating disorders) which focuses on working with couples in which one partner has binge eating disorder.

We are continuing our collaboration with the National Health Service in England to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner is depressed.

### **Brian Baucom, Ph.D., and Katie Baucom, Ph.D.**

Couples Laboratory for Observational StudiEs (CLOSE)  
Department of Psychology

University of Utah

In contrast to our disappointing snow season, we have had a fun and exciting Spring in the CLOSE lab. We are currently working on several methodologically oriented projects related to how we collect and analyze data during couple interactions and the implications of those methods for how we understand behavioral and emotional processes. This work gives us the opportunity to team up with a number of wonderful colleagues within and outside of Psychology, and these interdisciplinary teams are an important and highly valued part of our current efforts. We are delighted to gaining a new team member, Karena Leo, who will join us as a graduate student next year.

**Kristina Coop Gordon, PhD**

Professor of Psychology  
Department of Psychology  
University of Tennessee – Knoxville

The Gordon lab is busy with multiple projects including analyzing data from Relationship Rx, a large collaborative project with James Cordova's lab to implement the Marriage Checkup in community based integrative health-care facilities in Tennessee and with a low-income population. In addition, we have several ongoing projects utilizing data from Un Tiempo para Las Parejas - a collaborative project with the Duke University Medical Center that implemented a couples-based smoking intervention program for Latino families.

We are also analyzing data from the Mindfulness and Relationship Health Study – a small-scale longitudinal study that examines relationship changes in couples undergoing a mindfulness-skills training course at the University of Tennessee. Relatedly, one of our graduate students is currently initiating a longitudinal study of the relationships among mindfulness, sexual health, and relationship health in young adult dating couples.

In addition, one of our graduate students is currently analyzing data to examine emerging adults' motivations for breaking up with a romantic partner and participating in infidelity and how these romantic experiences are related to developmental tasks. She is also piloting a randomized controlled trial at Cornerstone of Recovery, an inpatient residential treatment center for chemical dependence, on the efficacy of group therapy for romantic partners of patients who struggle with the process of forgiveness. Kristi Gordon is returning refreshed and full of new ideas from last semester's sabbatical and ready to hit the ground running and to welcome new student, Katie Lenger, who is coming to us from Cameron Gordon's lab.

**James V. Córdoba, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology  
Director: The Marriage Checkup Project  
Department of Psychology  
Clark University

Dr. Cordova and his lab are focusing their efforts on disseminating the Marriage Checkup to a broad diversity of couples. The lab is currently involved in multiple exciting collaborations. We are hoping to expand our work with Kristina Coop Gordon's lab, implementing the Marriage Checkup (referred to as Relationship Rx) in a community based integrative health-care facility in Tennessee. We are also continuing to work closely with Lt. Colonel Jeffrey Cigrang (Ret.), currently at Wright State University, and his Air Force team to implement the Marriage Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. We are also collaborating with Tea Trillingsgaard, Hanne Noer, Mattias Due, Signe Steenberger, and Soeren Marcussen of Aarhus University and The Center for Familieudvikling on an RCT of the Marriage Checkup in Denmark (called Par-tjek). In addition, we are currently beta testing our website for use by individuals, couples, and therapists, to make the Marriage Checkup more widely accessible.

Julia Sollenberger successfully defended her dissertation in April, and will be completing her predoctoral internship in August. She will be starting a postdoctoral fellowship in child and family therapy at the Kennedy Krieger Institute at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore in September. Ellen Darling is engaged in her dissertation research, a pilot study of a brief couples-based preventative intervention for perinatal depression and

anxiety co-located in obstetric clinics. She will be starting her internship at Suffolk University Counseling Center in August. Tatiana Gray is working on her dissertation, examining therapeutic mechanisms of change within the Marriage Checkup. She'll be applying for internship in the Fall. Matt Hawrilenko is finishing his clinical practicum at the Worcester VA and is starting a clinical externship next year in Seattle at the Puget Sound VA. He has recently completed several studies investigating change processes in the Marriage Checkup, and he is beginning to work on a new project developing novel methods for understanding how dynamic relationships evolve over time. Emily Maher is working on her Master's thesis, examining the effects of sustained meditation practice on relationship outcomes. Liz Weber-Ollen is working on her dissertation proposal exploring same-sex couples' attitudes towards couples therapy and how the role of minority stress may impact such attitudes. She is working on several manuscripts on same-sex parenting and will be beginning her clinical externship in July working with inpatient adolescents. Justin Laplante is working on his dissertation proposal on meditation and mindfulness among couples, and teaching classes this summer. He will start interviewing participants this Fall. Lastly, we would like to welcome Taylor Dovala to our lab family!

**Brian Doss, Ph.D.**

Director: Doss Couple Lab  
Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
University of Miami

The Doss Couple Lab has had a busy year. We have completed our NIH-funded study evaluating the efficacy of OurRelationship.com, and the manuscript detailing significant effects on relationship and individual functioning is under review. We recently learned that our symposium presenting these effects was accepted for ABCT in November, so please come join us to learn more. After our NIH-funded study, we conducted a second RCT comparing two doses of staff contact in 350 couples. Currently, we are conducting an open trial of the program (without any staff contact) while we apply for various grants to fund version 2.0.

**Norman B. Epstein, Ph.D.**

Professor, Family Science  
Director of the Couple and Family Therapy Program  
University of Maryland

Our lab is the Center for Healthy Families clinic that is housed within the Department of Family Science at the University of Maryland, College Park. The clinic has been in operation since the late 1970s and serves approximately 400 family, couple and individual cases each year. The grad students in our accredited Couple and Family Therapy (CFT) program serve as the therapists, supervised by full-time and adjunct clinical faculty members. Extensive data are collected from all clients at intake, with additional data collected over time for specific research projects.

We continue to collect data for our ongoing Couples Abuse Prevention Program (CAPP) that is a clinical trial comparing a CBT-based protocol with treatment as usual (various couple therapy theoretical models) for couples screened for psychological and mild to moderate physical aggression. In addition to publications regarding treatment outcomes, we have been conducting studies examining client characteristics at intake and therapist behaviors during sessions as predictors of outcomes. Manuscripts based on two dissertation studies by Laura Evans and Woochul Park currently are in preparation for submission to journals.

An exciting new direction involves a major 4-year funded clinical trial we will be conducting in collaboration with faculty from the Uniformed Services University, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and the National Intrepid Center of Excellence in Bethesda, investigating the effects of a treatment for PTSD among Service Members, through engaging the Service members in training service dogs for placement with physically disabled Wounded Warriors. Substantial anecdotal evidence has accumulated regarding positive effects on individual symptoms as well as improvement in the Service Members' relationships with spouses/partners and children, but this will be the first controlled clinical trial for the program. Our lab will be conducting the evaluations of couple

and parent-child relationships at five points in time during Service Members' participation. Jenni Young, who graduated from the CFT program last spring and is now a student in our Family Science Ph.D. program, and Haedong Kim, who just graduated from the CFT program and is entering the Ph.D. program, will be the RAs for the project. A bonus of the project is that we get to play with the dogs from time to time.

We are very pleased that we were able to hire a new CFT program faculty member in our department to add to our longstanding team of Norm Epstein, Carol Werlinich, and Leigh Leslie. Dr. Mona Mittal came to us from the University of Rochester and has a productive research program focused on HIV risk among women victimized by IPV. Mona is now collaborating on our partner aggression research as well, and two students in the CFT program, Shyneice Porter and Allison Brown, will be joining our efforts.

**Steffany J. Fredman, Ph.D.**

Director: Couples and Families Adaptation to Stress (CFAS) Lab  
Human Development and Family Studies  
Penn State

The Penn State CFAS Lab has been working on a number of basic and treatment outcome studies focused on improving the health and well-being of couples and families under stress. We're very excited to begin a grant jointly funded by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs through the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (CAP) to develop and test an accelerated, multi-couple weekend version of CBCT for PTSD (Monson & Fredman, 2012) for recently deployed Service Members with PTSD (PI: Fredman) in collaboration with Co-Is Candice Monson, Alexandra Macdonald, Galena Rhoades, Alan Peterson, and Terry Keane. Steffany has also received funding from the Penn State College of Health and Human Development Fran and Holly Soistman Faculty Endowment to examine the associations among PTSD symptoms, couple functioning, and parenting stress among first-time parents during the transition to parenthood in collaboration with Penn State colleagues Mark Feinberg and Amy Marshall. In partnership with Penn State colleagues Amy Marshall, Danny Perkins, and Keith Aronson, we are also examining the associations among PTSD symptoms, interpersonal adjustment, and academic functioning among partnered student Service Members and Veterans with the intention of adapting CBCT for PTSD for this population.

Yunying (Annie) Le is making great progress finishing up her masters thesis on the mediating role of parenting stress in the association between neuroticism and overreactive parenting in first-time parents during the transition from late toddlerhood to the early preschool years and looks forward to presenting this work at ABCT in November. Jenny Antle recently defended her honors thesis on predictors of expressed emotion in relatives of patients with bipolar disorder and presented this work at the University of Virginia's L. Starling Reid Undergraduate Psychology Conference in Charlottesville, VA.

**Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology  
Director: Marriage and Family Resiliency Lab  
University of South Alabama

The University of South Alabama Marriage and Family Resiliency Laboratory has been very active this past year! Current lab members include doctoral students: Adrienne McCullars, Candice Selwyn, Keri Johns, Selena Jackson, and Caitlin Anderson along with undergraduates Eric Smith, Tiffany Poole, and Kali Thompson. Ongoing studies range in topic from Adrienne's dissertation investigating schemas, humor styles, and resilience to Selena's master's thesis on proactive/reactive aggression, emotion regulation strategies, and perspective taking abilities in adjudicated youth dating relationships. We continue our focus on cyberstalking, dimensions of individual and family resilience, and the expression of mental health in primary care settings. Across the last year, our research has been presented at APA, APHA, ABCT, SEPA, and AAS among other venues.



We are excited to welcome entering graduate students, Mallory Schneider and Shannon Booth, to the lab this coming fall. Our lab is also excited to welcome Dr. Jonathon Davis, who will join us during his sabbatical. We look forward to collaborating closely with him over the next year.

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**Howard Markman, Ph.D., Scott Stanley, Ph.D., and Galena Rhoades, Ph.D.**

Center for Marital and Family Studies

University of Denver

Our research team continues to focus on three central projects, one on the impact of PREP among U.S. Army couples (in collaboration with Dr. Beth Allen at University of Colorado Denver), one on the long-term impact of premarital training for families, and another on unmarried couples and relationship development processes. We are also collecting genetic data in two of these projects to examine GxE interactions.

Howard has been traveling and gave a series of talks and workshops in Norway, Denmark and Sweden this spring on the current status of research on our PREP program. PREP is being used in all of these countries (as well as others).

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**Richard Mattson, Ph.D.**

Director: Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships

Binghamton University

We are entering the second and final year of data collection for the Individual and Marital Well-Being Study. Samantha Wagner accepted an offer to join the lab as a graduate student. Our new undergraduate research assistants are Leslie Apacible, Melissa Blankstein, Geancarlo Jordan, Marissa Moss, and Emily Stranger.

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**Doug Snyder, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology

Department of Psychology

Texas A&M University

Doug Snyder, Kimberley Stanton, and Laura Osborne are continuing efforts toward the development and implementation of a brief couple-relationship resilience program for Aggie student veterans. Other projects in progress include an examination of gender differences in physical and emotional intimacy using IRT, and an exploration of chronic pain in military populations.

Christina Balderamma-Durbin and Caitlin Fissette will be wrapping up their internship placements this summer and returning to Aggieland in August for graduation. Congrats!

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**Sarah Whitton, Ph.D.**

Director: The Today's Couples and Families Research Program

University of Cincinnati

We continue to work on projects in three main areas: 1) basic research exploring same-sex couple relationships, including predictors of couple outcomes and associations with mental health; 2) evaluation of our culturally-sensitive relationship education program for female and male same-sex couples; and 3) research on emerging adults' romantic and sexual relationships, including "hook-ups" and their prospective effects on health and mental health.

## ***HOT off the Press***

### In Press and Recently Published Literature

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# Couples Research & Therapy

## NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Fall 2016

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### Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to share the Fall 2016 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG Newsletter with you. The newsletter is full of exciting updates from fellow couples SIG labs and information about this year's ABCT convention!

Along with updates, we are pleased to share a shortened version of the recently published article, "A Randomized Waitlist-Controlled Trial of Culturally Sensitive Relationship Education for Male Same-Sex Couples" by Dr. Sarah Whitton and colleagues (pg. 6). Additionally, we are thrilled to include not just one, but two comprehensive book reviews in this edition. On page 11, Brianna Billotti provided a review of the book *The Dilemmas of Intimacy* by Dr. Karen Prager. Furthermore, on page 12, you will find Samantha Joseph's review of the *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy, Fifth Edition* edited by Drs. Alan Gurman, Jay Lebow, and Douglas Snyder. Moreover, we want to thank everyone who sent in lab updates and reasons for celebration. Everyone is doing incredible work and we are happy to share your accomplishments with the SIG!

Finally, we want to wish everyone a happy conference in New York. **For more SIG specific conference information**, please read the letters from your SIG Co-Presidents, Drs. Katie and Brian Baucom (pg. 2), and your Student Co-Presidents, Kayla Knopp and Dev Crasta (pg. 3). We've also included a quick summary of SIG related events and a list of symposia that might be of interest to you (pg. 5). We hope everyone has an enjoyable and productive conference (and that at least a few of you scored tickets to Hamilton!)

**Thank you for making the Couples SIG Newsletter possible! We'll see you in NYC!**

*Sarah Bannon, Annie Le, and Kate Nowlan*

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# Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Brian & Katie Baucom  
*University of Utah*

Hi, Everyone. We hope that this letter finds you all doing well. We are looking forward to this year's conference in NYC just a few days away. We're very much looking forward to our annual gathering and to seeing everyone who can make it this year and want to share some details about SIG events at this year's conference.

## **Pre-conference event**

We're going to be treated to a panel discussion on translational work on using basic science findings to inform clinical intervention with couples, and vice versa, moderated by Keith Renshaw with panelists Drs. Donald Baucom, Sarah Campbell, and Melanie Fischer. The panel will be on **Thursday evening from 7:00 to 8:00pm in the Liberty Room, which is on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of the Marriott Marquis Hotel.**

"Couples and psychopathology: Connecting basic and applied research"

This panel, which will include discussions from panelists and Q&A from the audience, will focus on research addressing psychopathology in the context of couples' relationships. Panelists will include Keith Renshaw (George Mason University), Sarah Campbell (VA Puget Sound HCS - Seattle), Donald Baucom (UNC - Chapel Hill), and Melanie Fischer (UNC - Chapel Hill). Drawing on their broad range of experience, panelists will discuss rationales for considering couple-based approaches to individual psychopathology and provide an overview of how couple processes and individual psychopathology can impact each other. Within this context, they will discuss common couple-level processes to consider in this type of research and intervention work. In addition, panelists will address the full circle of connections among basic and applied research, including: designing basic research studies with clinical implications in mind, building and then testing clinical interventions based on basic research findings, embedding basic research questions and designs in clinical interventions, and extending intervention study findings back to basic research questions. The panelists will also be able to speak about their experience conducting this type of research across multiple settings, including traditional academic departments, academic medical centers, and VA medical centers.

## **SIG Business Meeting**

Our SIG Business Meeting is scheduled for **Friday, October 28, from 1:30 - 2:30pm in the Wilder Room, which is on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.** We'll be updating membership lists, seeking volunteers for the program committee, distributing awards for the Robert L. Weiss Student Research Award, and announcing the results of our first ever on-line elections for SIG President(s) and treasurer. Many thanks to CJ Eubanks for serving as treasurer and keeping the SIG in the black while helping us figure out how to have fun events in two very expensive conference locations. We would also like to thank everyone who has helped us with SIG-related tasks while we've had the honor of serving as Co-Presidents, and that's especially true of anything that happened between late last December and mid-June; we don't really remember much from that period but know that we couldn't have done it without you.

As a reminder, we've moved to an on-line voting system for this year's elections. The web address for the election website is: [https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_4SZFHkeo3RPvFmR](https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_4SZFHkeo3RPvFmR)

The polls will be open from **Tuesday, October 25<sup>th</sup> until 12:00pm on Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>.** If you have any difficulty of any kind accessing or using the voting website, please let us know at your earliest convenience (Brian: [brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu); Katie: [Katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:Katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu)).

Lastly, before we sign off, we wanted to take this opportunity to thank you all for giving us the opportunity to serve as SIG presidents and to do so together. We'll spare you the sentimental gushing and instead just say that it was special for us for many reasons.

Looking forward to seeing you all soon,  
Brian & Katie

## Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Dev Crasta<sup>1</sup> & Kayla Knopp<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Rochester*; <sup>2</sup>*University of Denver*

Greetings from your Student Co-Presidents! We're excited for the ABCT conference in New York and hope to see you all there! There are plenty of exciting SIG and student SIG member events at this year's ABCT conference:

This year's annual **Couples SIG Cocktail Party** will take place at Réunion Bar. Réunion has a wide selection of craft brews and some light appetizers will be provided. Come enjoy great company - it is sure to be a fun evening!

When: Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup> from 7:00-9:30pm.

Where: Réunion Bar, 357 W. 44<sup>th</sup> St, NY, 10036.

Directions: The restaurant is a 7-minute walk from the Marriott Marquis, on the NE Corner of 44<sup>th</sup> St. & 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

In accordance with tradition, the **Student Cocktail Party** will immediately follow the main event. All undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students are welcome to stay longer and have a chance to get to know each other better!

Finally, mark your itinerary for this year's **Couples SIG Student Symposium** entitled, "State of the Art Couples Interventions: New Treatment Outcomes" on **Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup> from 8:00-9:30am in the Majestic & Music Box room on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor**. Papers will be presented by Kathryn Nowlan (University of Miami), McKenzie Roddy (University of Miami), Tara Guarino Fairbanks (Fuller Theological Seminary), and Hannah Williamson (University of California – Los Angeles). Dr. Galena Rhoades (University of Denver) will be our discussant. Hope to see you there!

We look forward to seeing you all soon!

Sincerely,

Dev ([dev.crasta@rochester.edu](mailto:dev.crasta@rochester.edu)) and Kayla ([kayla.knopp@du.edu](mailto:kayla.knopp@du.edu))

## ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update

*CJ Fleming*

Hello SIG Members!

I hope that all of you are doing well and looking forward to an exciting conference! Here is an update of our membership status and dues:

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 216 (81 professional, 134 students). This includes 6 new members (all students) since our last count. Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members!

The balance at the last update was \$1,312. Since that time, we have taken in \$80 in dues leaving us with a balance of \$1,392. We anticipate paying out \$300 for poster awards, \$500 for the party at the upcoming conference, and a \$300 honorarium for a preconference speaker. Hopefully, we will bring in lots of dues at the conference! Thank you for your continued support!

As always, we will collect 2016 dues at the SIG business meeting during the upcoming conference. If you are not attending the conference or would like to pre-pay your 2016 dues, please pay electronically via PayPal (go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and send money to [cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com](mailto:cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com)) or by mailing a check to the address below. If you pay by PayPal, it is important to designate the payment as a "send to friends and family" to avoid processing fees. Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students and retired members.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership.

Many thanks for your support of the SIG!

Best,  
CJ Fleming

Send checks to:  
CJ Fleming  
111 Rosaline Ln  
Durham, NC 27713

## Media Coordinators Update

*Marissa Bowsfield and Katie Lenger*

If you ever have any information you would like to share with fellow SIG members via the listserv or website (e.g. job postings, study recruitment, or anything you believe will be of interest), please don't hesitate to email us, Marissa Bowsfield ([mlb9@sfu.ca](mailto:mlb9@sfu.ca)) or Katie Lenger ([klenger@vols.utk.edu](mailto:klenger@vols.utk.edu)) – we will be happy to disseminate that information to the SIG. Furthermore, please be in touch if ever your contact information needs updating on the website or listserv.

Thanks so much everyone and we look forward to seeing you in New York soon!

Marissa and Katie

## SIG Related Events and Relevant Symposia

Here is a small list of relevant symposia, ticketed sessions, workshops, and other SIG related events that might be of interest to you. Please note that this list is not exhaustive! We hope you will consider attending some of the following talks/events to support others in the Couples SIG and learn more about the wonderful work our members are contributing to the field

### Symposia, ticketed sessions, and workshops that SIG members might enjoy:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Thursday | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>AMASS 1-</b> Dyadic Data Analysis: An Introduction to the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Thursday, 10/27/16, 8:30am- 12:30pm; Room: Lyceum &amp; Carnegie; Floor: 5)</li> <li>• <b>AMASS2-</b> Intensive Longitudinal Methods: An Introduction to Diary and Experience Sampling Research (Thursday, 10/27/16, 1:00- 5:00pm; Room: Lyceum &amp; Carnegie; Floor: 5)</li> </ul>  |
| Friday   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Student Symposium 3-</b> State of the Art of Couples Interventions: New Treatment Outcomes (Friday, 10/28/16, 8:00- 9:30am; Room: Majestic &amp; Music Box; Floor: 6)</li> <li>• <b>Symposium 15-</b> A Systems Approach to Modeling Intra- and Interpersonal Processes in Psychotherapy and Psychopathology (Friday, 10/28/16, 10:00- 11:30am; Room: O'Neill; Floor: 4)</li> <li>• <b>Symposium 33-</b> Two Heads are better than One: Novel Approaches to the Study and Treatment of Individual Psychopathology in a Couple Context (Friday, 10/28/16, 3:15- 4:45pm; Room: Columbia &amp; Duffy; Floor 7)</li> </ul> |
| Saturday | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Workshop 6-</b> Incorporating Significant Others to Maximize PTSD Treatment (Saturday, 10/29/16, 11:00am- 2:00pm; Room: Edison &amp; Booth; Floor: 5)</li> <li>• <b>Symposium 57-</b> Dissemination of Couple-based Treatments for Individual and Relationship Disorders: Challenges and Opportunities (Saturday, 10/29/16 11:45am- 1:15pm; Room Ziegfield; Floor: 4)</li> </ul>   |
| Sunday   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Symposium 86-</b> Partnering and Parenting in the Presence of <b>PTSD</b> (Sunday, 10/20/16, 8:00- 9:30am; Room: Columbia &amp; Duffy; Floor: 7)</li> <li>• <b>Symposium 106-</b> Do Traditional Models of Intimate Relationships and Couple Interventions Translate to Understudied Groups (Sunday, 10/30/16, 10:00- 11:30am; Room: Winter Garden &amp; Palace; Floor: 6)</li> <li>• <b>Symposium 121-</b> Minimizing Barriers and Maximizing Reach: The Dissemination of Online Relationship Interventions (Sunday, 10/30/16, 11:45am- 1:15pm; Room: Times Square; Floor: 7)</li> </ul>                              |

### SIG Events:

- **SIG Pre-conference Event-** Couples and psychopathology: Connecting basic and applied research (Thursday, 10/27/16, 7:00- 8:00pm; Room: Liberty; Floor: 8)
- **Couples SIG Business Meeting-** (Friday, 10/28/16, 1:30- 2:30pm; Room: Wilder; Floor: 4)
- **Friday Night SIG Poster Expo-** (Friday, 10/28/16, 6:30-8:00pm; Room: Broadway Ballroom; Floor: 6)
- **Couples SIG Cocktail Party-** (Saturday, 10/29/16, 7:00-9:30pm; Réunion Bar, 357 W. 44<sup>th</sup> St, NY, 10036)

## **A Randomized Waitlist-Controlled Trial of Culturally Sensitive Relationship Education for Male Same-Sex Couples**

Sarah W. Whitton, Eliza M. Weitbrecht; Amanda D. Kuryluk, David W. Hutsell  
*University of Cincinnati*

### **Full article citation and for full list of references:**

Whitton, S. W., Weitbrecht, E.M., Kuryluk, A. D., & Hutsell, D. W. (2016). A randomized waitlist-controlled trial of culturally sensitive relationship education for male same-sex couples. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*, 763-768.

Recent years have seen dramatic increases in the social acceptance and legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Recent estimates indicate that over a million same-sex couples live in the U.S., 45% of whom are legally married (Gates & Brown, 2015). Consequently, clinicians who provide relationship-focused services are increasingly likely to encounter same-sex couples. Relationship education (RE), effective in improving relationship quality among different-sex couples, represents a promising and non-stigmatizing approach to promoting the health and stability of same-sex couples. Although existing RE programs were designed for different-sex couples, the core relationship processes targeted (communication, conflict resolution skills, commitment) are similar across couple type (e.g., Kurdek, 2005) and are predictive of same-sex couple outcomes (e.g., Gottman et al., 2003; Khaddouma, Norona, & Whitton, 2015). Further, same-sex couples face unique challenges including social pressures to conceal or deny their relationships, lack of socially prescribed relationship norms, and low social support from family (Green, 2004). RE might empower same-sex couples to successfully meet these challenges by providing skills for coping with discrimination as a team, negotiating relationship roles and expectations, and building non-familial social support.

Despite the potential for RE to benefit same-sex couples, established evidence-based programs - which were developed for and evaluated on different-sex couples - may not be appropriate, relevant, or helpful for this population. Guidelines for culturally-competent psychological practice highlight the importance of ensuring that interventions developed in one cultural context are acceptable when offered in another and do not have unintended harmful effects because of differences in values, beliefs, or practices (e.g., APA, 2003). Gay affirmative approaches specifically (i.e., culturally competent interventions with LGB individuals; Johnson, 2012) must be sure to not explicitly or implicitly reinforce heterosexist biases, which might reduce program efficacy and increase minority stress among participants. Unfortunately, practitioners have described considerable heterosexist bias in existing RE programs (Whitton & Buzzella, 2012). Specifically, program materials (e.g., slides, workbooks, instructional videos) depict only different-sex couples, which can be alienating and interfere with same-sex couple's ability to learn the relationship skills. Further, some content is irrelevant to same-sex couples (e.g., gender differences), and several unique needs of same-sex couples (e.g., managing



discrimination, building gay-affirmative social support) are not addressed. Same-sex couples perceive multiple barriers to participation in RE, including concerns about heteronormative material and lack of acceptance by leaders or other group members (Scott & Rhoades, 2014).

Consistent with guidelines for culturally-sensitive program adaptation (APA, 2003;), the Strengthening Same-Sex Relationships (SSSR) program for male couples (Buzzella & Whitton, 2009) was developed by adapting evidence-based curriculum in ways suggested by the perspectives of same-sex couples and the clinicians who work with them. The program was designed for male couples specifically (vs. all same-sex couples) based on couples' preference for groups comprised only of men, materials depicting only male couples, and interest in content less relevant to lesbians (e.g., non-monogamy agreements). We sought to sufficiently adapt program content so that it was perceived as relevant, responsive, and culturally appealing to male same-sex couples – thereby improving participant engagement and program acceptability – while maintaining fidelity to the core content that leads to positive outcomes. All language is specific to male same-sex couples, no assumptions are made regarding access to marriage or social approval, and content is sensitive to behavioral diversity in same-sex relationships (e.g., flexible gender roles, negotiated non-monogamy). Program materials, including power point slides, vignettes, participant workbooks, and video demonstrations of skills, all depict male same-sex couples. An initial pilot study with 12 couples (Buzzella, Whitton, & Tompson, 2012) indicated program acceptability and aided in program refinement.

The SSSR program includes core content common to most skills-based CRE programs (protecting positives, reducing destructive conflict, effective communication skills, active listening; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003), plus new units designed to address the unique needs of same-sex couples: negotiating clear relationship expectations in areas that commonly hold ambiguity for male same-sex couples (e.g., if and how to have children, non-monogamous sexual agreements; coping with minority stress and discrimination, which helps couples identify and replace maladaptive individual and couple-level coping responses; and building supportive social networks SSSR is a 10-hour program delivered in a group format to groups of 3-8 couples. For each unit, facilitators present a short lecture with slides and, often, video demonstrations of the relationship skill. Couples then practice these skills with guidance and corrective feedback from group facilitators.

The present study was designed to evaluate the acceptability of the SSSR program for male couples and assess its efficacy in improving three risk factors (couple communication, perceived stress, social support) and two indices of global relationship quality (satisfaction and instability).

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants were 20 male same-sex couples in cohabiting, committed relationships of at least 6 months recruited via LGBT-focused publications, social networking websites, and LGBT organizations (83% White; Mean age = 40 years; Mean income = \$52,000; Mean years of education = 16). Relationship length ranged from 8 months - 29 years. Couples were then



randomized to either an immediate intervention condition (11 couples) or a waitlist condition with delayed treatment after a four-week wait period (9 couples). Conditions did not differ on any demographic or relationship variable.

Participants completed assessments at intake, post-waitlist (for the control condition), post-program, and 3-month follow-up. Each assessment included informed consent, self-report measures, and a 10-15 minute videotaped couple discussion of their top relationship problem.

### Measures

Objective ratings of negative ( $\alpha = .85$ ; ICC = .85) and positive communication ( $\alpha = .90$ ; ICC = .87) during the videotaped problem discussions were coded using the Interactional Dimensions Coding System (Kline et al., 2004). Participants self-reported on couple communication using the 8-item negative communication ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and positive communication ( $\alpha = .76$ ) subscales of the Communication Skills Test (CST; Jenkins & Saiz, 1995). Men also completed the Perceived Stress Scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ; Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein, 1983), the Social Support for the Relationship Measure ( $\alpha = .70$ ; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992), a 12-item measure of weekly relationship satisfaction (Whitton, Stanley, Markman, & Baucom, 2008) and the 4-item Relationship Instability Index ( $\alpha = .91$ ; Whitton, Kuryluk, & Khouddouma, 2015). Post-program, participants provided ratings of program satisfaction.

### Results

Analyses to assess program effects on targeted couple outcomes were conducted using SPSS version 21. Because the dataset included repeated measures nested within individuals, nested within indistinguishable dyads, we used a dyadic overtime multilevel modeling approach (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) with Restricted Maximum Likelihood Estimation (for small samples). For details, see our full article.

Within-person analyses from the full sample indicated positive within-person changes in communication ( $ds = .67-.71$  for observational data;  $ds = .39-.48$  for self-reports) and perceived stress  $d = .41$  that were maintained at follow-up. Social support, satisfaction, and instability did not improve from pre- to post-program, but did improve by 3-month follow-up ( $ds = .30, .18,$  and  $.31$ , respectively). Comparisons by condition (immediate treatment vs. waitlist controls) indicated positive program effects on negative and positive communication according to self-report and observational data (medium to large effect sizes), perceived stress (medium effect), and relationship (small effect). Social support and relationship instability did not differ by condition. Regarding program acceptability, men rated the overall program as very helpful in maintaining relationship satisfaction ( $M = 6.20$   $SD = 1.64$ ) and indicated they would be very confident recommending the program to a friend ( $M = 7.23$   $SD = 1.03$ ).

### Discussion

Overall, findings from this small trial were supportive of the feasibility, efficacy, and acceptability of the Strengthening Same Sex Relationships (SSSR) Program for Male couples. Participating couples reported high satisfaction with the program, which showed immediate,

sustained positive effects on two key risk factors -- couple communication behaviors and perceived stress-- as well as effects on social support, relationship satisfaction, and relationship instability that were evident by 3-month follow-up. Of note, effect sizes for communication were similar to or larger than those of standard RE programs with different-sex couples ( $d_s = .43-.45$ ; Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008), suggesting that adaptations to enhance cultural sensitivity did not reduce efficacy. The observed program effects on perceived stress and social support are particularly significant given that same-sex couples experience more stress (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010) and lower social support (particularly from family; Green, 2004) than different-sex couples.

Study limitations include the small sample size, lack of controlled comparisons at follow-up, and a non-diverse sample. Despite these limitations, study results support the feasibility, acceptability, and efficacy of the SSSR program for male couples. More broadly, the findings suggest that RE is a promising approach to promoting relationship health and stability among LGBT individuals. As such, they support initiatives to broaden the use of culturally-sensitive adaptations of healthy relationship programming with sexual minorities (Whitton, 2015), including programs for female same-sex couples (Whitton, Scott, & Buzzella, 2013) and LGBT youth (Mustanski et al., 2015). Further, they highlight the importance of disseminating evidence-based, culturally sensitive same-sex RE programs to practicing clinicians, given that demand will likely increase along with the legal and societal recognition of same-sex relationships.

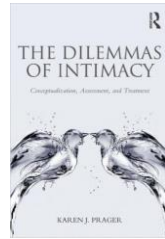
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# The Dilemmas of Intimacy

*Book Review by:*  
*Brianna Billotti, BA*  
*St. Joseph's College*



*The Dilemmas of Intimacy*

*By: Karen Prager, PhD*

*Pages: 292*

*ISBN: 978-0415816861*

*Publication Date: 2014*

*The Dilemmas of Intimacy* addresses the **risks and rewards** of intimacy based on a three-part **dilemma model**, as well as how to treat distressed couples from a cognitive-behavioral approach. Dr. Karen Prager explains the concept of an *Intimacy Signature*, or a unique configuration of individual and relational characteristics based on behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects. This Intimacy Signature affects couple satisfaction, harmony, stability, and individual mental health and well-being, making it a valuable clinical tool. The three intimacy dilemmas described include: “joy vs. protection from hurt”, “I vs. we”, and “the past lives in the present.” **Intimacy Issues** in the presenting problem ordinarily consist of one of the following: lack of intimacy, conflict over intimacy, repetitive or unresolved conflicts, or lost love. The objectives of determining an intimacy problem involve presenting the problem in a relationship in the context of individual and relational factors, identifying a couple’s potential for future or likelihood of separation, and, finally, suggesting treatment interventions.

During the assessment process, intimacy problems are evaluated at both the couple and individual level. **Initial couple interviews** consist of a series of structured questions to assess the broad environmental context of the couple and to gather a **relationship history** in order to identify events linked to relational stress or decline. Couples are then interviewed individually to assess individual needs and fears, and to foster individual trust with the therapist. **Current relationship functioning** is determined by analyzing the couple’s functioning in key areas outside of the presenting problem such as their social life, decision making process, relationships with extended family, sexual relationship, shared leisure activities/interests, and religious/spiritual life. In order to establish a safe environment, the therapist normalizes both the couple and the individual experience, and temporarily fulfills each partner’s need for acceptance, validation, and understanding. After a therapeutic alliance has been established, **couple-level goals** are implemented, along with **individual level**

**goals** that focus on each distressed individual’s specific intimacy issues.

**Behavioral interventions** are used to help couples change intimacy-sabotaging patterns of behavior, as well as teach new skills that can be beneficial for communication and problem solving. Expanded cognitive-behavioral therapy helps distressed couples break negative thinking patterns and interact in more constructive ways. **Behavioral contracting** ensures a mutual agreement to reduce anxiety about future commitments and gives the partners more freedom to comfortably try different approaches to the areas of conflict. For example, behavioral exchange involves identifying days for increased reciprocity of positive action. **Affective interventions** are appropriate for partners who have difficulty controlling the intensity of their negative emotions resulting from unclear thinking and poor coping strategies. The clinician can then teach self-soothing techniques, such as progressive relaxation, three-part breathing, and emotional regulation training. **Cognitive interventions** target schemas or building blocks of negative thinking patterns and emotions. Furthermore, automatic thoughts are evaluated during couple sessions and modified in order to develop realistic expectations and goals.

**Signs of success or improvement** are evaluated by a new way of thinking about themselves and their partner, not by personality of the individuals changing. Even if couples report increased intimacy by end of treatment, they are taught to utilize their newly learned skills to efficiently cope and resolve their problems. Behavioral, affective, and cognitive interventions vary slightly depending on which intimacy dilemma a couple is facing as well as the orientation of the clinician.

Overall, this book is a great tool for clinicians to help them organize and conceptualize treatment for clients and couples with intimacy issues.

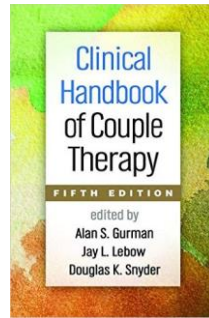
### About the Author:

**Karen J. Prager, PhD**, is a Professor of Psychology and program head for Gender Studies at The University of Texas at Dallas. She has years of experience working with couples and offers supervision and continuing education for therapists on couple therapy.

# Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy

*Book Review by:*

*Samantha Joseph, BA  
University of Miami*



*Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy  
Fifth Edition edited by:*

*Alan S. Gurman, PhD, Jay L. Lebow,  
PhD, and Douglas K. Snyder, PhD*

*Pages: 729*

*ISBN: 978-1462513925*

*Publication Date: 2015*

This handbook comes at a crucial moment in the field of couple therapy, when the environment for couples is changing and more and more diverse couples exist with unique treatment needs. In response to this need, this handbook describes key theoretical approaches to couple therapy, cutting-edge applications for all kinds of couples with unique presenting problems and needs such as blended families, LGBT couples, and separated couples. In addition, there are also applications for couples experiencing specific clinical problems, such as partner aggression, psychological disorders, and medical issues. The first chapter facilitates a broad understanding of the theory and practice of couple therapy. Following this initial chapter, the book is divided into two parts.

## **Part I: “Models of Couple Therapy”**

This section is organized by approach types. The more *behavioral approaches* include Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT) and Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (IBCT). While these treatments differ in some of their techniques and goals, they both highlight the importance of behavior in couple interactions. CBCT tends to be more focused on how partners can change their patterns and the cognitions that influences these interaction processes. On the other hand, IBCT focuses both on change and acceptance, such as promoting more understanding and acceptance of how natural differences between partners impact couples' interactions. The *emotion-centered approaches* include Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT) and Gottman Couple Narrative Therapy. These approaches emphasize the importance of emotions in relationships. A principle of EFT is that emotion is the key to organizing attachment

behaviors and how someone experiences interpersonal relationships. Gottman Narrative Couple Therapy focuses on emotion slightly different by emphasizing the down regulation of negative affect and the up regulation of positive affect. The *psychodynamic and multigenerational approaches* include Integrative Problem-Centered Metaframeworks Approach (IPCM), Functional Analytic Couple Therapy (FACT), Object Relations Couple Therapy, and Bowen Family Systems Couple Coaching. Each of these approaches shares its foundation with psychodynamic theory. These approaches delve further into how family systems and early relational experiences impact the members of the couple. In this way, these approaches look beyond current couple interactions and take into account external factors. IPCM's framework has couples hypothesize their issues at a personal, family, and community level. Similarly, FACT addresses how relationships are constantly changing with social, religious, and economic values. Object Relations Couple Therapy explores the idea that core aspects of self are formed through early relationships. Moreover, Bowen Family Systems looks not only at the individual and the couple, but the family as well. The *social constructionist approaches* include Narrative Couple Therapy and Solution-Focused Couple Therapy. These approaches focus on people finding new meaning through their lives in how they experience, tell, and circulate their story and how it relates to what the standardized norm may be. Solution-Focused Couple Therapy aims to have the clients design what they consider to be a solution or success. Both approaches view therapy as taking place in a social setting and

the couples have the power to construct their narrative or solution. The *systemic approaches* include Brief Strategic Couple Therapy and Structural Couple Therapy (SCT.) Brief Strategic Couple Therapy involves interrupting ironic processes, creating strategic objectives, and solidifying these changes. SCT looks at the couple as a system that has boundaries and involves complex interactions. SCT views change as affecting the system as a whole. These approaches inherently view and treat couples' interactions in a systematic way.

### **Part II: "Applications of Couple Therapy: Special Populations, Problems, and Issues"**

Part II is organized into four sections. The *first section* focuses on violence, affairs, and divorce. Violence and partner aggression negatively impact couples physically, mentally, and emotionally. Gender-specific treatment groups and conjoint couple therapies, primarily cognitive-behavioral therapy, are advocated as treatments for this subgroup. The chapter on affairs encourages integrative treatment for couples who are experiencing distress from infidelity. This treatment pulls from both cognitive-behavioral and insight-oriented approaches. Furthermore, using trauma and forgiveness frameworks makes it more effective for treating affairs. Lastly, this section looks at separation and divorce and addresses when an outcome of therapy is divorce or separation and how therapists can best aid in these situations. The *second section* focuses on couple therapy in diverse relationships. These diverse relationships include stepfamilies, intercultural, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual couples and the handbook addresses the issues they face. These diverse groups build their relationships on different foundations than other groups and face more unique struggles. For couples dealing with problems related to being a stepfamily, the architecture of the family unit is addressed. The chapter on gay, lesbian, and bisexual couples includes intervention techniques which address how to counter minority stress and relational ambiguity. The chapter also stresses effective ways to help build a social support network for these couples. For intercultural couples, the chapter discusses how therapists can be more adept at addressing the numerous ways intercultural couples differ from culturally

homogenous couples and how this impacts their relationships. The *third section* focuses on couple therapy and psychological disorders. This section includes chapters on post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol problems, depression, borderline personality disorder, and sexual problems. Each chapter addresses each unique issue within the context of a couple and ways therapists can treat these specific issues in therapy to ameliorate couple distress. Lastly the *fourth section* deals with the cross-section of couple therapy, medical issues, and interpersonal neurobiology. The chapter on medical illnesses explores how couples need to adapt to illness and how this can be accomplished through therapy. The chapter on interpersonal neurobiology discusses the human brain, how neurobiology impacts our relationships, and how "neuroeducation" is a critical for couples.

In conclusion, this handbook houses the most efficacious and widely studied approaches to couple therapy, most of which are described by the experts in that particular approach. I greatly enjoyed reading the case examples and conceptualization of "well-functioning vs. dysfunctional relationships" at the end of each treatment. These are effective at helping readers conceptualize couple interactions within each treatment approach. Furthermore, Part II underscores the importance of recognizing that certain couples present to treatment with unique needs and that different treatment approaches should be used to bolster couple dynamics. Overall, the handbook provides academics and clinicians an "all-in-one" reference book to working with couples, whether they are interested in learning about and comparing specific approaches to couple therapy or attempting to conceptualize and treat a specific couple issue.

#### **About the Editors:**

**Alan S. Gurman, PhD,** was Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health until his death in 2013.

**Jay L. Lebow, PhD,** is Clinical Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University and a therapist at The Family Institute. Dr. Lebow has over 30 years of experience in the practice and research of couple and family therapy.

**Douglas K. Snyder, PhD,** is a Professor of Psychology at Texas A&M University where he also served as Director of Clinical Training for 20 years. Dr. Snyder currently resides in College Station, Texas where he also holds a private practice.



# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Rebecca Cobb's SFU Close Relationships Lab

- ☺ PhD candidate, **Roanne Millman**, received the Marilyn Bowman Award in recognition of her research excellence.
- ☺ PhD candidate, **Jill Logan**, received the SFU President's PhD Scholarship in recognition of her excellent progress in her degree, demonstration of academic excellence, and substantial scholarly output and leadership.
- ☺ Master's student, **Marissa Bowsfield**, received the MD Angus & Associates Graduate Fellowship in Psychology to support the development of a measure of body image, which assesses perceptions of the self, the partner, and beliefs about the partner's satisfaction with the individual's body.

## Dr. Kristina Coop Gordon's Gordon Couples Research Lab

- ☺ **Alex Khaddouma** successfully defended his dissertation examining the role of mindfulness in the longitudinal relationship quality and stability of young adult dating couples.
- ☺ **Jerika Norona** successfully defended her dissertation examining emerging adults' motivations for breaking up and engaging in infidelity and how these romantic experiences are related to developmental tasks.

## Dr. Donald Baucom's UNC Couples Lab at UNC Chapel Hill

- ☺ **Dr. Melanie Fischer** received her Ph.D. in August, 2016-- congrats! After completing her internship at the Charleston Consortium Internship Program (Medical University of South Carolina/Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center), she has returned to the UNC campus as a Postdoctoral Fellow, working both within the UNC Department of Psychology & Neuroscience and at UNC Department of Psychiatry's Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders (CEED).
- ☺ **Danielle Weber** joined Dr. Don Baucom's lab at UNC as a new graduate student this fall, coming from American University with her Master's degree in psychology. We are very excited to have her join the lab!

## Dr. Christina Balderrama-Durbin's Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory at Binghamton University – SUNY

- ☺ The lab enthusiastically welcomed two talented doctoral-students – Seigie Butler and Alex Wang! We will also be welcoming the lab's newest and tiniest junior scientist in November – Christina Balderrama-Durbin and her husband are greatly anticipating the arrival of their second daughter!



# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

Dr. James V. Córdova's The Marriage Checkup Project at Clark University

☺ The lab would like to congratulate **James Cordova** on the release of his Children's Book, *The Story of Mu*, currently available from Wisdom Publications.

Dr. Keith Sanford's lab at Baylor University

- ☺ **Elizabeth Coe** began an internship at The Help Group
- ☺ **Cecily Anders** began a postdoctoral position at the SoHo CBT and Mindfulness center
- ☺ **Lindsey Backer-Fulghum** began a postdoctoral re-specialization program at Suffolk University
- ☺ **Priscilla Layman** (nee. Maranville) was married in May 2015.

Dr. Keith Renshaw's Anxiety, Stress, & Relationships Lab at George Mason

- ☺ **Sarah Campbell** and **Hilary Weingarden** both completed their NIMH-funded training grants and graduated this past year. Sarah is now a postdoctoral fellow at VA Puget Sound HCS – Seattle, and Hilary is a postdoctoral fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital.
- ☺ **Sarah Carter** was awarded an F31 National Research Service Award from NIMH last year, as well as additional awards from APA Division 19 (Military Psychology) and the Military Suicide Research Consortium to support her dissertation focused on the suicidal soldiers and their partners.
- ☺ **Jennifer DiMauro** received an award from the George Mason Provost's Office and the George Mason Psychology Department to support her dissertation focused on relationship processes in sexual assault survivors.

Dr. Anmarie Cano's Relationships and Health Lab at Wayne State University

- ☺ Welcome to **Hallie George**, who began the doctoral program in clinical psychology at WSU this fall (B.A., Rochester Institute of Technology).
- ☺ Congrats to **Dana May** as she begins a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan.
- ☺ **Dr. Cano** was PI of a 2016 APA Summer Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program at Wayne State University in Detroit.
- ☺ **Dr. Cano** completed the APA Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology in March 2016 and was recently elected a Fellow in Div. 38 (Health Psychology) and Div. 43 (Couple and Family Psychology).

## **Lab Updates**

Please take some time to read about what all of the wonderful  
Couples Labs are up to.

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start  
thinking about your updates for the Spring 2017 Newsletter.

We'd love to hear from you!

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### **Annmarie Cano, Ph.D.**

Relationships and Health Lab  
Professor of Psychology Department  
Wayne State University

We continue to examine emotion regulation in couples facing chronic health conditions with an emphasis on emotional disclosure of health distress and partner responsiveness and empathic responses. We have completed Phase 1 of our NIH/NCCIH study aimed at developing a couple-based mindfulness and acceptance intervention for chronic pain and are in the process of setting goals for Phase 2. New to our lab, we are also in the process of running studies examining predictors of graduate student success, including examining the role of implicit bias in graduate admissions.

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### **Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.**

Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory  
Assistant Professor of Psychology  
Binghamton University – SUNY

The CAST lab has been full speed ahead this fall with the support of a bright and energetic team! We have launched active recruitment for a multidimensional study examining acute stress reactivity and recovery in community couples. Our efforts are aimed at understanding and promoting couple resilience following acute stress and trauma.

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### **Donald Baucom, Ph.D.**

UNC Couples Lab  
Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
UNC Chapel Hill

Our lab is continuing to collaborate with the National Health Service in England to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner is depressed. This is part of England's nationwide IAPT program to provide empirically supported interventions to the public. In addition to providing clinical services, these efforts will result in a large scale effectiveness treatment study of couple-based treatment for depression in routine outpatient clinics around the country. Dr. Baucom and Dr. Melanie Fischer lead the US component of this effort. We also have established a network of some of our former lab members and UNC graduates in which we provide ongoing supervision to about 80 therapists in England through video conferencing, a unique and gratifying challenge.

We currently have two projects underway as part of our lab's broader effort, in collaboration with Dr. Cindy Bulik and the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders, to develop psychological interventions for couples around eating disorders. First, our randomized clinical trial of our couple-based treatment for anorexia nervosa (Uniting Couples in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa - UCAN) is in its fourth year of treatment. In addition, we have just completed a pilot study called UNITE (UNiting couples In the Treatment of Eating disorders) which focuses on working with couples in which one partner has binge eating disorder.

Our lab has continued our collaboration with Dr. Kevin Guskiewicz at the UNC Department of Exercise and Sport Science to pilot test a couple-based treatment which we have developed for couples where one member is a former NFL player with depression.

Our lab is collaborating with Dr. Jon Abramowitz's lab at UNC to develop and evaluate a couple-based treatment for body dysmorphic disorder under the leadership of Dr. Melanie Fischer and Lillian Reuman. Treatment development is completed and recruitment for our pilot study has begun this fall.

Our lab is collaborating with Dr. Sean Drummond in Australia and Dr. Melissa Jenkins, a former UNC doctoral student, on a randomized controlled trial to treat insomnia with a couple-based intervention, expanding our couples and psychopathology work to a new disorder.

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**James V. Córdoba, Ph.D.**

The Marriage Checkup Project

Professor of Psychology

Clark University

James Cordova is working on disseminating and implementing the Marriage Checkup for a wide range of couples. We are collaborating with Dr. Cigrang and his Air Force team on an RCT adapting the Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. Dr. Cordova is also in the process of testing an online platform for the Checkup, allowing couples in any geographical region easy access to a well-trained Marriage Checkup clinician. He recently published a children's book based on the famous Zen koan Mu, titled, "The Story of Mu", currently available from Wisdom Publications. Ellen Darling will be defending her dissertation: The Before Baby Relationship Checkup, a pilot study of a couples-based preventative intervention for perinatal depression co-located in obstetric clinics, this month. She then begins a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Brown University, where she'll work in student counseling and assist with suicide prevention research. Tatiana Gray successfully defended her dissertation on the therapeutic mechanisms within the Marriage Checkup in August, and started her internship at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial VA in Bedford Massachusetts in September. She continues to be involved in the dissemination and implementation of the Marriage Checkup for a wide range of couples. Matt Havril is preparing to defend his dissertation proposal, which explores heterogeneity in processes and outcomes of couples skills-based preventive interventions. He's also applying for internship. Liz Ollen is applying to internship this fall and is continuing to recruit for her dissertation on help seeking for relationship abuse among sexual minority women. Justin Laplante is working on his dissertation proposal on the effects of meditation on relationships throughout the lifespan. He is also working on other mindfulness and relationship related studies, as well as teaching cognitive psychology this fall. Emily Maher is continuing work on her Master's thesis project examining the link between meditation practice and relationship health. She is also working at UMass Medical School on a treatment study for Alcohol Behavioral Couples Therapy. Taylor Dovala is beginning to collect data on her Master's thesis project analyzing the connection between the implicit theories couples hold about relationships and the interaction patterns they use, in efforts to better understand the factors that lead couples to respond to conflict in the way they do. Nick Canby is a first year

doctoral student in the Cordova lab. He is currently working on research investigating the mediating effects of social relationships on depression outcomes and effects of the meditation teacher-student relationship. His long term interests are in the social contagion of the benefits from mindfulness practice.

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**Keith Sanford, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience  
Baylor University

We have been conducting studies investigating associations between couple resilience behavior and life wellbeing in people experiencing a range of stressful life effects, including samples of people experiencing a financial hardship, death of a family member, and serious medical condition in oneself and in a child. In addition, we are testing new methods for assessing interpersonal alliances and validating a measure of interactions between patients and medical practitioners. Finally, we recently developed a new measure assessing the concerns of parents who are going through a divorce and are investigating associations between concerns and outcomes in recently divorced families. This year, three new graduate students joined our lab: Kiley Hiatt, Shelby Rivers, and Brittany Sherrill.

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**Kristina Coop Gordon, Ph.D.**

Gordon Couples Research Lab  
Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology  
University of Tennessee

The Gordon lab is busy with multiple projects including analyzing data from Relationship Rx, a large collaborative project with James Cordova's lab to implement the Marriage Checkup in community based integrative health-care facilities in Tennessee and with a low-income population. In particular, we are examining (a) couple typologies and their response to treatment (Patricia Roberson), (b) relationship quality and individual health outcomes (Patricia Roberson), and (c) predictors of retention/drop out (DJ Garcia). In addition, we have several ongoing projects utilizing data from Un Tiempo para Las Parejas - a collaborative project with the Duke University Medical Center that implemented a couples-based smoking intervention program for Latino families (studies using this data are headed by DJ Garcia). Alex Khaddouma is currently analyzing data from his dissertation project - a longitudinal study of the relationships among mindfulness, sexual health, and relationship health in young adult dating couples. Jerika Norona is piloting a randomized controlled trial at Cornerstone of Recovery, an inpatient residential treatment center for chemical dependence, on the efficacy of group therapy for romantic partners of patients who struggle with the process of forgiveness. Katie Lenger is preparing to defend her master's thesis. Rebecca Shorter, a new addition to the lab, recently completed her master's thesis on relational and contextual family environment variables and adjustment outcomes in rural Appalachian youth. Rebecca is also involved in a research study examining the effectiveness of an integrative healthcare program for cancer patients in improving quality of life and reducing emotional distress. Finally, Kristi Gordon is part of a large community based program to provide empirically supported relationship education via church volunteers throughout Knoxville. This project just completed a pilot program in which 5 churches participated, and 5 more were trained and will begin data collection in January 2017. Thirty-two more churches are on a waitlist to participate.

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**Steffany J. Fredman, Ph.D.**

Couple and Family Adaptation to Stress (CFAS) Lab  
Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies  
The Pennsylvania State University

The Penn State CFAS Lab has been working on a number of basic and treatment outcome studies focused on improving the health and well-being of couples and families under stress. We've recently completed our first cohort of couples for our grant funded by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs through the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (CAP) to test an accelerated, multi-couple weekend version of CBCT for PTSD (Monson & Fredman, 2012) for Service Members and Veterans with PTSD (PI: Fredman). Co-Investigators include Galena Rhoades, Alex Macdonald, and Candice Monson. Other lab projects are focused on the associations among PTSD symptoms, interpersonal adjustment, and academic functioning among partnered student Service Members and Veterans and the associations among PTSD symptoms, couple functioning, and parenting stress among first-time parents during the transition to parenthood.

Yunying (Annie) Le defended her Master's thesis on the mediating role of parenting stress in the association between neuroticism and harsh parenting in first-time parents during the transition from late toddlerhood to the early preschool years and has passed her candidacy exam. August Jenkins, who graduated from Michigan State, recently joined our lab as a first-year Ph.D. student in HDFS this fall and is applying for a Ford Foundation fellowship to study the intersection between PTSD symptoms and relationship adjustment in African-American couples. Aubrey Rafinsky is our newest undergraduate research assistant and is working on her thesis related to academic adjustment in student veterans.

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**Keith Renshaw, Ph.D.**

Anxiety, Stress, & Relationships Lab  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
George Mason University

The Anxiety, Stress, and Relationships Lab is continuing to run a number of studies, stress, trauma, and couples. Jennifer DiMauro just completed data collection for her dissertation project on relationship processes in sexual assault survivors as compared to combat veterans. After a year-long battle with bureaucracy, Sarah Carter finally got IRB approval to collect daily data from 50 active duty soldiers at high risk for suicide and their partners! Lauren Paige recently completed her study of cognitive interventions after distressing films, and we are preparing to use the distressing film paradigm in future studies of couples responding to stress. Our newest lab members, Annie Ledoux and Sarah Thomas, as well as two of our amazing post-baccalaureate RAs (Christopher Summers and Jenny Stewart) are all presenting posters at the upcoming ABCT conference. Finally, we are also preparing to begin coding of videotaped discussions of 60 community couples in a microanalytic study of couples' processes.

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**Rebecca Cobb, Ph.D.**

SFU Close Relationships Lab  
Assistant Clinical Professor  
Seattle University

This past year, the Close Relationships Lab participated in a multi-site (16 labs in 5 countries) Registered Replication project to replicate an experiment by Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, and Hannon (2002). In the

original study, participants who received a high commitment manipulation were more willing to forgive a hypothetical relationship transgression than participants who received no such prime. The manipulation check failed in all participating labs and thus we failed to replicate the original results. Read the replication report here: <http://pps.sagepub.com/content/11/5/750.abstract>

Dr. Jennifer Trew, a post-doc in the Close Relationships Lab, has wrapped up data collection on her longitudinal study on attraction and the formation of romantic relationships (in a speed dating paradigm) funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

We have begun a new daily diary study of how married couples manage hurt feelings from day to day, and how sexual communication and sexual problems relate to daily fluctuations in sexual satisfaction and mood. This study is funded by a Vice President's Research Grant and a Psychology Department Research Grant.

For her undergraduate honours thesis, Brittany Lasanen has spearheaded a longitudinal study examining how couples navigate long distance relationships. She is interested in how self-expansion and attachment security play a role in buffering relationship decline during this challenging and stressful experience.

In June, lab members Marissa Bowsfield, Jennifer Pink, and Jennifer Trew presented a symposium at the Canadian Psychological Association's convention in Victoria, British Columbia, entitled "Individual and Relational Predictors of Intimate Partners' Sexual Satisfaction." Some teaser findings from our one-year study on sexuality in relationships: constructive verbal communication about sexual issues mediates links between attachment security and both spouses' sexual satisfaction; non-verbal sexual communication during sexual activity fosters sexual satisfaction, but verbal communication during sex does not; sexual anxiety mediates links between negative body image and sexual satisfaction.

The graduate students and Dr. Cobb also went on their annual writing retreat to beautiful Thetis Island, British Columbia! Despite what you might think from our photo, work was accomplished! (From left to right: Jennifer Pink, Jessica Ferreira, Roanne Millman, Jill Logan, and Marissa Bowsfield. Rebecca Cobb is the big head in front).



**Richard Mattson, Ph.D.**

Center for Transdisciplinary Research on Intimate Research  
Associated Professor of psychology  
Binghamton University

Our lab is continuing to analyze data on the Individual and Marital Well Being Study, where we have just received analysis of the DNA samples. Some graduate students in the lab are working on individual grant and fellowship proposals such as the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program.

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**Sarah Whitton, Ph.D.**

The Today's Couples and Families Research Program  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
University of Cincinnati

We are excited to report on both new and ongoing projects happening in our lab!

This summer, we launched a NICHD-funded 5-year longitudinal study of female-born sexual minority adolescents and young adults. FAB400, as we call it, is being conducted in collaboration with the Northwestern Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing. Though largely focused on the youth's romantic relationships and factors that differentiate healthy from unhealthy or violent relationships, the study will also examine other factors that may contribute to the health disparities faced by LGBT women.

This fall, in collaboration with the Talbert House Fatherhood Project, we just launched a small RCT of enhanced coparenting services to be delivered as part of a fatherhood program for low-income, non-residential fathers. This project is funded by the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network

We also continue to collect data for our 2-year study (funded by the American Heart Association), which is assessing the efficacy of a newly developed, couple-based smoking cessation program (PACT). PACT integrates relationship education strategies to improve couple support-related skills into standard CBT smoking cessation treatment. It is still too early to evaluate program effects, but most couples report enjoying it and many smokers have successfully quit!

Finally, graduate student Neslihan James-Kangal continues to run focus groups for her qualitative project exploring how young adults manage conflict (or don't) in their uncommitted or ambiguous romantic and sexual relationships.

We also have two new wonderful lab members: Lisa Godfrey started this fall as a student in our doctoral program, and Christina Dyar joined us as a postdoctoral fellow on the FAB400 project.

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## *HOT off the Press*

### In Press and Recently Published Literature

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- Hawrilenko, M., Gray, T. D., & Córdova, J. V. (2016). The heart of change: Acceptance and intimacy mediate treatment response in a brief couples intervention. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*(1), 93-103. doi:10.1037/fam0000160
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# Couples Research & Therapy NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Summer 2016

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## Letter from the Editors

We are pleased to present the Summer 2016 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG newsletter full of exciting updates and information and are delighted to share a shortened version of the recently published article, “*A randomized controlled trial of the web-based OurRelationship program: Effects on relationship and individual functioning*” by Doss et al. (pg. 5). Additionally, University of Miami undergraduate student, Natalie Laboy has provided a review of the book *The Thinking Girl's Guide to the Right Guy: How Knowing Yourself Can Help You Navigate Dating, Hookups, and Love*, written by Davila & Lashman. (pg. 8). We are also pleased to feature the 2015 Student SIG poster winners on pg. 13 so that everyone can have the opportunity to hear about their work.

We received many lab updates and kudos from fellow couples SIG labs. As this is our first time filling the role of co-editors, it was wonderful to learn about the fantastic work going on in your labs, and we look forward to sharing your accomplishments with the SIG!

We would also like to thank Cherelle Carrington, Aleja Parsons, and Kim Pentel for lending their expertise as co-editors and introducing us to our new roles. Thank you for your guidance! We look forward to sharing SIG news in coming issues, and hope that you all enjoy the rest of your summers!

**Kate Nowlan, Yunying (Annie) Le, and Sarah Bannon**

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## Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Katie Baucom & Brian Baucom  
*University of Utah*

Hi everyone! Hope you are enjoying summer. Thanks to those of you who made it to our packed 2015 SIG meeting in Chicago – we're considering standing room only in NYC. We kicked off the meeting by congratulating the recipient (Dev Crasta, University of Rochester) and runner up (Roanne Millman, Simon Fraser University) of the Robert L. Weiss Student Poster Award. Big thanks to the award committee: Patti Fritz (chair), Becky Cobb, and Galena Rhoades. We held elections for student co-presidents (Kayle Knopp & Dev Crasta), newsletter editors (Sarah Bannon, Kate Nowlan, Annie Le), and media coordinators (Marissa Bowsfield, Katie Lenger). As you have seen from their listserve and backchannel emails, as well as their updates in this newsletter issue, they dove into their respective positions with enthusiasm – we are lucky to have them!

We discussed several potential SIG changes that members unanimously supported. First, we will be moving to online elections for the SIG leadership positions. Nominations and voting will occur prior to the conference – stay tuned for announcements about that over the listserve! Second, as we typically have far more submissions for the SIG expo than spots, we will be incorporating additional criteria starting this year. The goal is to continue to showcase high-quality research while increasing the likelihood of acceptance for those who might not otherwise have a chance to present. Thus, starting this year the call for abstracts will include a request for information on professional stage, other presentations that have been accepted at the general convention, and ABCT presentations over the past several years. Big thanks to the SIG expo abstract review committee that will help institute these changes: Michelle Loenard, Steffany Fredman, Justin Lavner, and Jenny Langhinrichsen-Rohling!

As a reminder, Katie Lenger sent out a survey for you to complete regarding the 2016 pre-conference event (please complete it if you haven't yet: [https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_06CjagIEAb8sZKt](https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_06CjagIEAb8sZKt)). We'll keep you posted on plans for that.

We also want to introduce you to a new SIG member: Jackson Monroe Baucom was born on December 23, 2015. You may see him at the convention in New York. We don't know if he's going to be a couples researcher or a professional foot eater when he grows up but we can't wait to find out!



## Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Dev Crasta<sup>1</sup> & Kayla Knopp<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Rochester; <sup>2</sup> University of Denver

Hello from your new Student Co-Presidents! We want to thank the previous co-presidents Shelby Scott and Christina Balderrama-Durbin for their fantastic work. We are excited to work with you over the next two years and look forward to seeing everyone in New York City. We have a few important announcements to share with everyone:

### Student Symposium:

- We are pleased to announce the acceptance of the student symposium “State of the art of Couples Interventions: New Treatment Outcomes”! The papers in this symposium present fresh outcome data on evidence-based couple interventions, examining their efficacy when disseminated across a variety of contexts and populations.
- Thanks to the presenters, Kathryn Nowlan (University of Miami), McKenzie Roddy (University of Miami), Tara Fairbanks (Fuller Theological Seminary), and Hannah Williamson (University of California, Los Angeles), (and colleagues) and their contributions to this line-up of papers! We are also thrilled to have Galena Rhoades (University of Denver) serving as the discussant!
- Time and location to follow in the Fall 2016 Newsletter. We encourage everyone to come out!

### Plans for October:

- **SIG Cocktail Party:** We are beginning to scout locations for this year’s SIG Cocktail Party. We’re hoping to find a location close to the conference hotel that is conducive to an evening of fun and fellowship.
- If you have any suggestions for locations in New York (midtown), please do pass them along!
- More details to follow in the Fall 2016 Newsletter.

### Students Applying for Graduate School or Internship:

- NOTE: For student SIG members applying to graduate programs and predoctoral internships this coming application cycle (2015-2016), be on the lookout for updates to the couple-focused graduate programs and internships resource list on the SIG website (<http://www.abetcouples.org/training.html>). We will be soliciting SIG members for updates to these lists and posting the updated versions in the near future.

Please contact us at any time with comments, questions, or suggestions.

Sincerely,

Dev ([dev.crasta@rochester.edu](mailto:dev.crasta@rochester.edu)) and Kayla ([kayla.knopp@du.edu](mailto:kayla.knopp@du.edu))

### SPECIAL SIG ANNOUNCEMENT:

Please consider submitting an abstract for consideration for the SIG Exposition & Cocktail Party that will be held on Friday, 10/28/16 6:30-8:30 pm. This is a great opportunity for SIG members to present work that may not have been completed in time for the general conference abstract submission deadline. By Friday 8/12 at 5 pm EST please complete the following

survey: [https://csbsutah.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_cvYXw0nlg3SNLGI](https://csbsutah.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cvYXw0nlg3SNLGI) and send Katie Baucom your abstract ([katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu](mailto:katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu)) For blind review, please do \*not\* include author or affiliation information on your abstract, only title and a max of 250 words of text. Both steps must be completed for your abstract to be considered. Please contact Katie with any questions about submissions!

## ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update

Dear SIG Members,

I hope that all of you are doing well and looking forward to an exciting summer! Here is an update of our membership status and dues.

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 217 (83 professional, 134 students). Since our last count, a few former members have been cleared out, and we have had 12 new members join (10 of whom were students). Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members!

The balance at the last update was \$1290. Since that time, we have paid out a total of \$1228 (\$300 poster awards, \$300 speaker honorarium, \$143 projection screen, \$250 party balance, \$25 baggage reimbursement for screen, \$205 website fees, and \$5 bank fees) and brought in a total of \$1250 (\$680 at conference, remainder online/by mail), leaving us with a current balance of \$1312.

At our upcoming conference, we can likely expect to pay out \$300 for poster awards, \$300 for the preconference event, and some amount for party support funds, but details have not yet been confirmed. Thank you for your continued support!

As always, we will collect 2016 dues at the SIG business meeting during the ABCT conference which will be in New York this year! If you are not attending the conference or would like to pre-pay your 2016 dues, please pay electronically via PayPal (go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and send money to [cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com](mailto:cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com)) or by mailing a check to the address below. If you pay by paypal, it is important to designate the payment as a "send to friends and family" to avoid processing fees.

Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students and retired members.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership. Many thanks for your support of the SIG!

Best,  
CJ

Send checks to:  
CJ Fleming, PhD  
111 Rosaline Ln  
Durham, NC 27713

## Media Coordinators Update

Marissa Bowsfield, Katie Lenger

Hi Everyone,

If you ever have any information you would like to share with fellow SIG members via the listserv or website (e.g. job postings, study recruitment, or anything you believe will be of interest), please don't hesitate to email us, Marissa Bowsfield ([mlb9@sfu.ca](mailto:mlb9@sfu.ca)) or Katie Lenger ([klenger@vols.utk.edu](mailto:klenger@vols.utk.edu)) – we will be happy to disseminate that information to the SIG. Furthermore, please be in touch if ever your contact information needs updating on the website or listserv.

Thanks so much everyone and we look forward to seeing you in New York in the coming months!  
Marissa and Katie

## A Randomized Controlled Trial of the Web-Based OurRelationship Program: Effects on Relationship and Individual Functioning

Brian D. Doss, Larisa N. Cicilia, Emily J.  
Georgia, McKenzie K. Roddy, and Kathryn  
M. Nowlan  
*University of Miami*

Lisa A. Benson  
*Harbor-UCLA Medical Center*

Andrew Christensen  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

### Full article citation and for full list of references:

Doss, B. D., Cicila, L. N., Georgia, E. J., Roddy, M. K., Nowlan, K. M., Benson, L. A., Christensen, A. (2016). A randomized controlled trial of the web-based OurRelationship program: Effects on relationship and individual functioning. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 84*, 285-296.

Almost half of first marriages in the United States ultimately end in divorce (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012) and approximately one third of married individuals are relationally distressed at any given time (Whisman, Beach, & Snyder, 2008). Moreover, relationship distress and divorce are strongly linked to mental and physical health problems in partners (Whisman, 2007) and their children (O’Leary & Vidair, 2005). Numerous interventions in the form of relationship education and couple therapy have been developed to help prevent relationship distress altogether or reduce relationship distress after it has developed. Although relationship education programs significantly improve relationship satisfaction at post-intervention and follow-up (Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008), the effects are relatively small (Cohen’s  $d = 0.31-0.36$ ), and programs tend to be underutilized by couples at high-risk for developing later distress (e.g., cohabiting couples, lower religiosity, African American couples; Doss et al., 2009; Halford, O’Donnell, Lizzio & Wilson, 2006). Similarly, while couple therapy is efficacious in randomized trials (Cohen’s  $d = 0.56-0.82$ ; Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012), only 19% of current dyads have sought couple therapy to improve their relationship and only 37% of divorced couples attended couple therapy prior to separation (Johnson et al., 2002). These numbers likely reflect barriers common to both couple interventions and individual mental health services such as financial burden, perceived stigma, and logistical concerns such as childcare, regular transportation to appointments, and difficulty in scheduling (Hoge et al., 2004).

To increase reach of couple interventions, flexible and/or brief interventions that are able to reach more couples and circumvent obstacles to seeking treatment are needed to improve relationship functioning on a widespread level. One way to increase reach is to offer low cost, brief services that are attractive to a larger percentage of couples, such as blended programs over the computer/internet. As the internet is widely used nationally, this delivery option has the potential to reach high-risk couples including low-income, African American, and Hispanic couples who often do not seek or have access to in person interventions. Unfortunately, no web-based program for distressed couples has been tested, raising the question of whether couples’ more severe problems can be productively handled online.

Thus, this study endeavors to examine the reach and efficacy of a web-based secondary intervention aimed at ameliorating relationship distress. Specifically, our first aim was to determine



the characteristics of couples who seek out a web-based secondary intervention for relationships. We expected that the program would reach a relationally distressed and demographically representative sample of the population. The second aim was to assess the efficacy of the intervention on relationship functioning; we hypothesized that the program would create significant, medium-sized improvements in relationship functioning outcomes. Finally, we explored whether the program significantly impacted individual functioning. We expected that, for individuals who began the program with significant individual difficulties, the intervention would lead to small- to medium-sized gains in these outcomes.

### Method

A total of 300 heterosexual couples (600 individuals) participated in the present study. The majority were married (80%), White, non-Hispanic (67.2%), in their mid-30's ( $M = 36.11$ ;  $SD = 9.58$ ), and reported their highest level of education as high school or less (30.5%), some college or technical training (21.3%), or a bachelor's or graduate degree (47.7%). The majority of the sample was employed part time (14.0%) or full time (61.5%). Couples reported a median annual household income of \$70,500 ( $M = \$97,738$ ; range \$0 – \$1,400,000). Twenty-eight percent of couples reported an annual household income below 200% of the poverty threshold. Most couples had children (73%), and 85.6% reported initial relationship satisfaction scores in the distressed range ( $<13.5$ ; Funk & Rogge, 2007). Participants learned about the site from online search engines (57%), social media, word of mouth, and paid advertisements (43%). Eligible couples completed an online baseline assessment and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: waitlist control condition ( $n=151$ ) and web-based intervention condition ( $n=149$ ). Both groups completed assessments of global relationship satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007); positive and negative relationship quality (Fincham, & Rogge, 2010); relationship confidence (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009); mental health (Cole, Rabin, Smith, & Kaufman, 2004; Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Löwe, 2006); perceived health and quality of life (The WHOQOL Group, 1998); and work functioning approximately 4 and 8 weeks after the initial assessment. Additionally, intervention couples completed brief assessments approximately 2, 5, and 7 weeks following the initial assessment. Couples randomized to the waitlist control group were provided the option to complete a brief version of the intervention following the waiting period. All procedures were approved by the University of Miami institutional review board.

Individuals in the web-based intervention condition were given access to the OurRelationship (OR) program, which was developed to serve as an online tool to help couples solve a specific relationship problem they selected. The program was based on IBCT (Christensen et al., 2010); accordingly, its key components were the promotion of emotional acceptance and resulting behavior change. In the program, couples completed online activities and had four 15-min calls with project staff. The program consisted of three sections: Observe, Understand, and Respond. In each section, each partner worked separately as they generated material for a joint conversation that took place at the end of each section. The first section, "Observe," provided individuals feedback on the current state of their relationship and helped them identify one or two relationship problems on which to focus during the program. The "Understand" section led individuals through steps to achieve a more accurate understanding of the problem, including how differences between partners, hidden emotions, external stressors, and patterns of communication might affect the core problem(s). In the "Respond" phase, which included information about acceptance, self-change, communication tips, and suggestions tailored to their presenting problem, partners developed a plan for ameliorating the problem. The program concluded by providing tailored feedback to the couple showing their improvement since beginning the program and offering suggestions for next steps (e.g., referrals).

### Results

Of the 151 couples randomly assigned to complete the intervention, 129 couples (86%) completed the entire program. Analyses of relationship outcomes were conducted within the Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) program (Version 7.01; Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, & du Toit, 2011) using three-level models for couple data to assess change over time (see Atkins,



2005). Results revealed that the intervention created significant, medium-sized improvements in relationship satisfaction (Cohen's  $d = 0.69$ ). Examinations of clinically significant change in relationship satisfaction revealed that 32% of participants were recovered by the end of the intervention, 25% were improved, 36% experienced no change, and 7% deteriorated. The intervention also significantly improved relationship confidence, with an effect size approaching a medium effect ( $d = 0.47$ ). Likely due to a lower reliability, the majority of participants showed no clinically significant improvement in relationship confidence (64%) while others reported that they were recovered (31%) or deteriorated (5%). As hypothesized, the intervention was more successful in reducing negative relationship quality ( $d = 0.57$ ) than increasing positive relationship quality ( $d = 0.15$ ). This difference was reflected in calculations of clinically significant change: 24.3% of participants were classified as recovered and 16.9% were classified as improved in negative relationship quality while only 12.3% were classified as recovered and 5.3% classified as improved in positive relationship quality. Notably, only 6.0% showed significant deterioration in negative relationship quality but 23.2% evidenced deterioration in positive relationship quality. The effects of the program on relationship satisfaction, relationship confidence, and positive relationship quality did not significantly differ by gender. However, there was a significant time-by-gender-by-condition interaction for negative relationship quality ( $b = 0.223, p = .043$ ), indicating that women in the intervention condition reported approximately 1.5 times larger reductions in negative relationship quality than did men in the intervention condition.

Individual outcomes were only assessed before and following the intervention; therefore, analyses of residualized change were conducted in HLM in a two-level model (individuals nested within couples). Compared to those in the waitlist control group, individuals in the intervention condition experienced significantly greater reductions in depressive ( $d = 0.50$ ) and anxiety symptoms ( $d = 0.21$ ). Additionally, individuals in the intervention condition experienced significantly greater improvements in work functioning ( $d = 0.19$ ), quality of life ( $d = 0.18$ ), and perceived health ( $d = 0.23$ ). Additionally, as hypothesized, the effect of the intervention on individual functioning was significantly greater for individuals who began the program reporting problems in those areas: depressive ( $d = 0.71$ ) and anxious symptoms ( $d = 0.94$ ), work functioning ( $d = 0.57$ ), and quality of life ( $d = 0.44$ ).

### Discussion

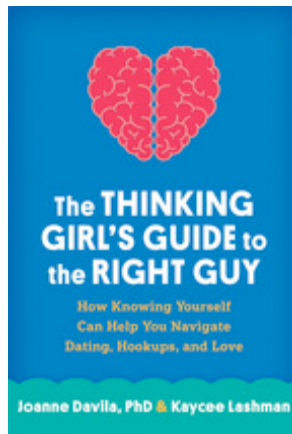
The goal of the OR program was to reach couples “underserved” by existing couple interventions and to effectively intervene by increasing relationship and individual functioning. Fortunately, results suggest that the program was able to meet these goals. In addition to significantly improving various relationship and individual functioning domains, the program was successful in overcoming some financial and logistic barriers common for lower-income households (e.g., work schedule conflicts and childcare difficulties). However, there were two remaining barriers to reaching underserved couples which should be noted. First, ethnic/racial minority couples were more likely to be excluded from the present study— often because they reported intimate partner violence resulting in injury of fear. Second, it is likely that many lower-income couples did not have the opportunity to participate because they did not have access to a home computer with broadband Internet access. Therefore, future programs should be designed so that they can be completed on a smartphone in order to improve access. In terms of efficacy, benchmarking analyses (e.g., Minami, Serlin, Wampold, Kircher, & Brown, 2008) indicated that the program is more effective in increasing relationship satisfaction than existing primary and secondary interventions, but less effective than high-quality couple therapy. Notably, however, the OR program included substantially less staff contact with couples than these interventions, increasing cost effectiveness and potential for dissemination. Future research should determine whether effects are maintained over follow-up and whether they will generalize to other domains (e.g., coparenting quality, child functioning). It will also be important to explore both the expansion of web-based interventions for distressed relationships and moderators of intervention effects— especially factors related to the increased reach of the OR program.

# The Thinking Girl's Guide to the Right Guy

## How Knowing Yourself Can Help You Navigate Dating, Hookups, and Love

By: Joanne Davila, Ph.D.  
and Kaycee Lashman

Book Review by:  
Natalie Laboy, University  
of Miami



Pages: 322  
ISBN: 9781462516957  
List Price: \$ 14.95  
Publication Date: 2015

It is no question that navigating through the dating scene is tough. With countless decisions to make such as whether one should settle down and get married or move in with a partner and remain unmarried, it can be difficult to know what choices to make in a relationship. Furthermore, many individuals find themselves making decisions in their relationships based on what their partner wants. Recognizing that many women are unhappy with failed relationships and feeling powerless in relationships, Dr. Joanne Davila and Kaycee Lashman wrote *The Thinking Girl's Guide to the Right Guy* to empower women to shift their focus from how to be what a partner wants to focusing on whether a romantic partner wants what they have to offer. With the use of evidence-based questionnaires, this book serves as a guide to help women gain the skills necessary to understand their needs and assess whether a partner can meet those needs. Research-based strategies also help women learn techniques to resolve conflict in relationships and decide whether a relationship is healthy and worth pursuing.

The book is divided in six parts. Part I is an introduction. Chapter one highlights the three key skills for a healthy relationship approach: insight, mutuality, and emotion regulation. This chapter also introduces the dating stories of seven young women who use the skills taught in the book to develop personal power; a quality which is effective for making informed decisions. Chapter two presents three conditions that must be in place for a healthy relationship: “I know and I like myself”, “I know and I like him”, and, “He knows and likes me”. When women think consciously about the kind of relationship they want and if they are ready for it, they can avoid feeling pressured to meet certain expectations in relationships from family, friends, media, and society more broadly. The book helps women focus instead on their own needs in a relationship and how they prefer to get them met.

Part II takes a deeper look into these three conditions. Chapter three is entitled “I know and I like myself.” The focus of this chapter is identifying needs, respecting them, and actively seeking out relationships and opportunities in which those needs to be met. The authors highlight how this kind of autonomy allows an individual to choose a relationship with someone who wants what she has to offer. The chapter provides questionnaires to challenge readers to understand their traits, goals, fears, desires, and how they affect behavior. Chapter four is titled “I know and I like him.” When an individual is confident with the choice of a partner, she is more likely to note the partner’s needs, goals, and fears. Readers are encouraged to take note of a partner’s behaviors and how these are influenced by his traits, goals, fears, desires and interests in life. The authors note that when an individual knows she is attuned to her partner’s feelings and values, she can better assess if the partner is doing the same in return. This can help an individual determine if the partner is meeting her needs and if the relationship is built on mutual concern and respect. Chapter five is entitled “He knows and likes me.” The chapter focuses on the last key, which indicates whether a guy likes an individual for all she has to offer and expresses that through his words and actions. This chapter challenges readers to question whether a partner truly

knows them and is interested in the different aspects of their characters, emotions, and life interests. The authors report that when individuals feel respected, cared for, and accepted for who they are, they can better shift attention from trying to be the perfect partner to assessing whether the partner is the kind of partner they want.

In Part III, “Resolving Relationship Conflict”, Chapter six suggests that when relationship distress is prevalent, it is time to assess which partner’s needs are not being met because it is likely that the two partners have conflicting needs. The authors explain step by step how the skills of insight, mutuality, and emotion regulation can help each partner identify and resolve issues effectively.

In Part IV, “Assess whether you are in a healthy relationship,” Chapter seven emphasizes the importance of sitting down with a partner to define expectations, preferences, and limits within the relationship. Chapter seven highlights that although all relationships are different, at some point both partners need to define the relationship to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Chapter eight distinguishes the several signs that could determine whether a relationship is healthy or unhealthy. For example, when safety and trust are compromised for lies, betrayal, and hurt, it is time to reconsider the relationship. The authors note that if the betrayal and hurt is extreme and dangerous, the only option should be to leave.

Part V is entitled “Make Stay-Or-Go Decisions.” Chapter nine recommends that readers maintain a healthy balance of an emotional and logical mind before they make a decision about their relationship. This balance results in the development of the emotion regulation skill, which essentially helps the reader assess whether the context of the relationship aligns with their needs.

Part VI, “Dealing with Feelings of Lovesickness” teaches healthy coping skills. The authors provide insight into healthy alternatives to common problematic reactions. With the use of insight and emotion regulation skills, for example, women can cope with their past relationship in a way that helps them be better prepared for their future. Chapter eleven shows how the I/ME skill has helped one of the characters introduced earlier in the book understand her needs and how it has helped her have a healthy relationship.

Overall, the book was an enjoyable read. It is a good resource for individuals looking to better understand their needs in a relationship and determine if a relationship is meeting those needs. The research studies and statistics mentioned throughout the book add validity to the context. While the references are often brief, the authors provide links for readers to read more about the research.

In summary, this book intends to empower woman by teaching them the skills to know how to have a healthy relationship. A take home message is that if individuals focus on getting to know themselves better, they can better determine if a relationship is meeting their needs instead of feeling pressured to be someone they believe their partner wants. By practicing the skills provided in the text, individuals gain the personal power that allows them to make more conscious decisions and seek out partners who meet their needs.

## **About the Authors:**

**Joanne Davila, PhD**, is a Professor of Psychology at Stony Brook University, a clinical psychologist in private practice, and an internationally known expert on young women’s romantic relationships. She lives in Stony Brook, New York, with her partner.

**Kaycee Lashman** is an organizational change specialist who focuses on relationship dynamics with companies. Married with two children, she lives in Vancouver, Canada.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Steffany J. Fredman's Couples and Families Adaptation to Stress (CFAS) Lab

☺ **Yunying (Annie) Le** received a competitive travel award to present her first-authored poster on the mediating role of conflict over in-laws in the association between gender-role consensus and relationship distress in Taiwanese couples at the 2016 International Association for Relationship Research Conference in Toronto, Ontario, Canada

## Dr. Joanne Davila's Relationship Development Center

☺ **Joanne Davila** gave a TEDx talk on healthy relationship skills:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh5VhaicC6g>

☺ **Joanne's** book also came out: "*The Thinking Girl's Guide to the Right Guy: How Knowing Yourself Can Help You Navigate Dating, Hookups, and Love.*". NY: Guilford Press.

<http://www.guilford.com/books/The-Thinking-Girls-Guide-to-the-Right-Guy/Davila-Lashman/9781462516957>

☺ **Vickie Bhatia** will graduate in August and has accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at the Charleston VA

☺ **Jess Latack** matched to her first choice internship – Weill Cornell Medical Center in NYC

☺ Former lab member **Rachel Hershenberg** accepted a position as an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Psychiatry at Emory University

☺ Former lab member **Lisa Starr** was named an APS Rising Star

## Dr. Christopher I. Eckhardt's Purdue Institute for Relationship Research

☺ We are excited to announce two recent births in our lab! **Claire Autumn**, daughter of our graduate student **Joel Sprunger**, was born in January and **Evelynn Norah**, daughter of our recent graduate **Erica Birkley**, was born in February. **Raven Johnson**, our Lead Research Coordinator for the NIAAA project, got married in May. A warm congratulations to all!

## Drs. Brian and Katie Baucom's CLOSE lab

☺ **Alex Crenshaw** and **Jasara Hogan** for defending their Masters Theses this past semester.

☺ **Brian, Paula Williams**, and **Panos Georgiou** (at USC) for receiving an NIA-funded Stress Measurement Network pilot grant to fund a pilot study of how sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system activation are encoded in the vocalizations of young, middle, and older adults.

## Dr. James Córdoba's The Marriage Checkup Project

☺ **Dr. James Córdoba** released his Children's Book, *The Story of Mu*, currently available from Wisdom Publications.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Rebecca Cobb's Close Relationships Lab at SFU

- ☉ PhD candidate, **Roanne Millman**, has accepted a residency position with the Calgary Clinical Psychology Residency program.
- ☉ PhD candidate, **Jill Logan**, has accepted a residency position at St. John's Eastern Health.
- ☉ **Dr. Jennifer Trew** has started a new position as a clinical psychologist at the North Shore Stress and Anxiety Clinic.
- ☉ **Jessica Ferreira** received a Graduate Scholarship from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.
- ☉ **Jennifer Pink** received the Student Award for best poster presentation at the 2015 Canadian Sex Research Forum.

## Dr. Kristina Coop Gordon's Gordon Couples Research Lab

- ☉ **Jessica Hughes** successfully defended her dissertation and will begin her predoctoral internship at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC in Philadelphia, PA this summer.
- ☉ **Kristi Gordon** is completing her term as Past President of the Society for Couple and Family Psychology (APA Division 43).

## Dr. Scott R. Braithwaite's Relationship Health Lab

- ☉ **Dr. Braithwaite** just received word that he got tenure!
- ☉ Fifth year graduate student **Kersti Spjut** will be starting her internship at Brigham Young University's Counseling and Psychological Services in August.
- ☉ Undergraduate student **Gabe Hatch** received a college level Experiential Learning Grant to fund his ongoing project concerning the development of a technology based marriage enhancement intervention.

## Dr. Brian Doss' Couple Research Lab at University of Miami

- ☉ **Emily Georgia** received the Virginia A. Roswell ABCT Student Dissertation Award for her dissertation exploring the effectiveness of OurRelationship.com for underserved couples. She will be starting a predoctoral internship at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center.
- ☉ **Kate Nowlan** defended her master's thesis in May 2016, which examined the efficacy of a fully web-based relationship intervention offered to individuals to improve relationship and individual functioning.
- ☉ **McKenzie Roddy** defended her master's thesis in October 2015, which examined the necessity of including coach or paraprofessional contact during a brief, online intervention for relationship distress.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

## Drs. Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades's Center for Marital and Family Studies

☺ **Dr. Ben Loew** has graduated with his PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Denver! He is almost finished with his internship at the San Diego VA and has accepted a position at the Columbus, Ohio VA.

☺ **Shelby Scott** is almost finished with her internship and has accepted a position as a Women's Mental Health Psychologist and LGBT Care Coordinator at the Denver VA.

☺ **Aleja Parsons** received honorable mention from the Ford Foundation for her dissertation on experiences of racialization among African-American couples.

Kayla Knopp is currently collecting data for her dissertation project, which is focused on the define-the-relationship talk among adolescents.

☺ **Lane Ritchie** is preparing to propose her dissertation, which examines how couples both explicitly and automatically regulate their engagement with romantic alternatives.

## Dr. Donald Baucom's UNC Couples Lab

☺ **Jenn Belus**, a 4<sup>th</sup> year in Dr. Don Baucom's lab at UNC, successfully proposed her dissertation this spring, examining HIV prevention efforts for South African couples. She also received two fellowships from UNC: the Summer Research Fellowship through the Graduate School and the Earl and Barbara Baughman Dissertation Research Award, through the Department of Psychology, allowing her to travel to South Africa this summer to gather her dissertation data.

☺ **Kimberly Pentel** successfully defended her master's thesis this spring examining the impact of patient and partner insight into anorexia nervosa on treatment outcome.

This spring, Matt Cohen, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year in Dr. Don Baucom's lab at UNC, received a university-wide teaching award called the Student Undergraduate Teaching and Staff Award.

☺ **Danielle Weber** will be joining our lab as a new graduate student in the fall, coming from American University. We are very excited to have her join the lab!

☺ **Dr. Melanie Fischer** will be joining our lab September 1 as a Postdoctoral Fellow where she will further develop her research on couples, psychopathology, and emotional processing.

☺ **Dr. Baucom** received an Outstanding Mentor Award from the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

## Dr. Sarah Whitton's The Today's Couples and Families Research Program

☺ **Neslihan James-Kangal**, M.A., received a \$3000 University of Cincinnati University Research Council Graduate Student Research Fellowship to support her project, "Exploring Conflict in Emerging Adults' Romantic and Sexual Relationships"

☺ **Eliza Weitbrecht**, M.A., will be completing her internship at the Orlando VA starting this summer.

☺ **Amanda Kuryluk**, M.S. and her husband Wes welcomed their second baby girl, Ella, to the family this March.



## **2015 Student SIG Poster Winners Spotlight**

### **Winner: Dev Crasta University of Rochester**



**Title:** Towards a theory-based, empirically supported measure of couple functioning: The utility of measuring Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR).

**Authors (Mike Maniaci wasn't listed in the ABCT poster, but will likely be on the final manuscript due to his growing contributions to Study 1):**

Dev Crasta, M.A., University of Rochester

Michael R. Maniaci, Ph.D., Florida Atlantic University

Ronald D. Rogge, Ph.D., University of Rochester

**Summary:**

Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR; Reis & Shaver, 1988)—an individual's belief that a relationship partner will attend to and support one's core concerns—has gained currency in social psychology for its ability to integrate different closeness theories. However, its use to clinical researchers is limited as without standardized measurement.

Thus, we set out to build a measure by presenting candidate items and boundary measures to 2212 respondents (Study 1). EFA indicated pre-existing scales fell into a bidimensional structure (Responsiveness and Insensitivity). We then used IRT analyses to construct the Perceived Responsiveness-Insensitivity questionnaire (PRI) from the best 8-items for each dimension.

As the PRI represents a broad evaluation, we then examined the transactional links between the subscales of the PRI, global evaluations, and behaviors in a sample of 376 participants assessed biweekly over 8 weeks (Study 2). SEM cross-lagged analyses found PRI dimensions showed more week-to-week sensitivity to fluctuations in emotional support and conflict than satisfaction.

To explore the added value of this sensitivity to treatment research, we included PRI items as potential outcome measures in a pilot effectiveness study of 87 participants enrolled in a self-guided, movie-based discussion intervention (Study 3). Mixed ANOVA analyses showed that effect sizes for treatment adherence were larger for PRI subscales than satisfaction.

Thus, we present the PRI as a theoretically cohesive and empirically validated tool to tap into this rich construct. Its sensitivity to recent changes in relationship dynamics as well as treatment effects makes it ideal for intervention research and may also increase its utility for clinicians tracking session-to-session improvement.

**Contact Statement:**

Please contact lead author Dev Crasta ([dev.crasta@rochester.edu](mailto:dev.crasta@rochester.edu)) should you have any further questions, if you would like to see the poster, or if you would like to see the talk Dev presented which has since explored the possible use of the PRI in mechanism research.



## **2015 Student SIG Poster Winners Spotlight**

### **Runner-up: Roanne D. Millman Simon Fraser University**



**Title:** To Talk or Not To Talk? The Role of Communication During Sexual Activity

**Authors:**

Roanne D. Millman, Jennifer C. Pink, & Rebecca J. Cobb  
Simon Fraser University

**Summary:**

How openly and constructively couples share their sexual desires, needs, and preferences is important for sexual satisfaction and functioning, and relationship satisfaction more generally (e.g., MacNeil & Byers, 2005). However, research has almost exclusively focused on sexual communication outside of sexual encounters, which ignores the potential importance of verbal and nonverbal behaviour during sexual activity.

The aim of this study was to investigate how individuals' verbal and nonverbal communication during sexual activity predicted their own and partner's sexual and relationship satisfaction, in 127 heterosexual couples. Hypotheses were tested with path analysis using an actor-partner interdependence framework and the model provided a good fit to the data. Individuals' perceptions of partner's nonverbal communication predicted their own and partner's sexual satisfaction. However, mixed findings for verbal communication emerged. Women's perceptions of partner's verbal communication were positively associated with their own sexual and relationship satisfaction, but men's perceptions of partners' verbal communication were negatively associated with women's relationship satisfaction and not associated with their own sexual or relationship satisfaction. Further, results of  $\chi^2$  difference tests indicated verbal and nonverbal communication differentially contribute to relationship and sexual satisfaction.

Generally, nonverbal communication seems to play a larger role in sexual satisfaction than verbal communication, during sexual activity. Results suggest that women perceive men's verbal communication during sex as positive, whereas they see their own verbal communication during sexual activity in a less positive light. These results suggest that clinicians should be wary of encouraging clients to engage in verbal communication during sexual encounters (as is often done in later stages of sensate focus). Instead, identifying deficits in and improving nonverbal communication may be a more fruitful avenue to improving sexual and relationship quality.

**Contact Statement:**

Please contact lead author Roanne Millman ([rmillman@sfu.ca](mailto:rmillman@sfu.ca)) with any questions about the project or if you would like to see the figure of the path analysis model.

## Lab Updates

Please take some time to read about what all of the wonderful  
Couples Labs are up to.

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start thinking  
about your updates for the Fall 2016 Newsletter.  
We'd love to hear from you!

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### **Brian Baucom, Ph.D., and Katie Baucom, Ph.D.**

Couples Laboratory for Observational StudiEs (CLOSE)  
Department of Psychology  
University of Utah

Our major current focus is our on-going study of cognitive and behavioral markers of risk for suicide in National Guard Soldiers and their romantic partners. We are a little over the halfway mark of our first year of this study and are in full bore recruitment mode. We are delighted that the study is giving us the opportunity to grow our lab team this upcoming year as we welcome Drs. Feea Leifker, Alexis May, and Jason Chen as postdoctoral fellows. In addition to working on this study, Drs. Leifker, May, and Chen will also work with Drs. Craig Bryan and Jonathan Butner at the U of U to receive additional training and gain experience in a broader range of military mental health issues and advanced quantitative methods.

We are also very excited to welcome two new graduate students to our lab this upcoming year. Nick Perry, an advanced graduate student at the U of U, is joining us to conduct his dissertation, and Colin Adamo, a rising first year student, is joining us after several years of post-baccalaureate work in the public policy sector. We are very excited about these additions to our CLOSE lab team and look forward to introducing them to our SIG family at future conventions.

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### **Casey Taft, Ph.D.**

Principal Investigator  
National Center for PTSD

Dr. Taft recently completed a one-year roll-out of the *Strength at Home* (SAH) program for preventing intimate partner violence across 11 sites within the U.S Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), funded by the Blue Shield of California Foundation. Additionally, Dr. Taft was awarded funding from the Bob Woodruff Foundation to continue this roll-out to 4 more VA's over the next year. An RCT to test the effectiveness of the *Strength at Home Couples* program for military couples on a military installation is currently in process, funded by the Department of Defense. Dr. Taft collaborated with Dr. Emily Rothman on several grant submission to NIH and the VA to implement Strength at Home in civilian populations. His research was recently featured in NPR, "*After Combat Stress, Violence Can Show Up At Home*"

Alex Macdonald, Ph.D., a former post-doc is now an Assistant Professor at the Citadel in NC, and Suzannah Creech, Ph.D, a former post-doc, is now a Clinical Research Psychologist at the VHA VISN 17 Center of Excellence for Research on Returning War Veterans in Waco, TX.

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**Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.**

Director: Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory Assistant Professor of Psychology  
Binghamton University – SUNY

From its humble beginnings this past fall, the CAST lab has been steadily growing – initiating exciting projects and attracting bright new members! The research is focused on understanding and promoting couple resilience following acute stress and trauma. Our current studies aim to examine risk and protective factors related to adverse reactions to acute stress and trauma both in clinical and community populations.

We are thrilled to welcome two incoming doctoral-students this Fall 2016: Seigie Butler and Alex Wang! These gifted students are delightful additions to the CAST lab and to the Binghamton University Clinical Science program.

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**Christopher I. Eckhardt, Ph.D.**

Professor and Director of Clinical Training Purdue Institute for Relationship Research  
Department of Psychological Sciences  
Purdue University

Our lab, in collaboration with Dominic Parrott at Georgia State University, has been busy collecting data for the second part of a large project funded by NIAAA. We are investigating the cognitive and affective mechanisms underlying alcohol-facilitated intimate partner aggression and will be presenting preliminary data at the Research Society for Alcoholism conference in New Orleans in June and the International Society for Research on Aggression World Meeting in Sydney this July. Joel Sprunger, one of our current doctoral candidates, is collecting data for his exciting new NIAAA-funded NRSA pre-doctoral fellowship project examining the efficacy of a brief intervention for alcohol-facilitated intimate partner aggression. We are excited to welcome a new graduate student, Molly Maloney (B.A., Union College, 2015, where she was valedictorian), into our lab in August. We are also pleased to have several new undergraduate research assistants: Lexi Fetters, Catherine Galley, Nick Mundell, and Taylor Prebel. Of course, we are pleased to announce our continued benefit from the lab leadership of Darby Dyar and Sarah Zoubaâ. While we are sad to see Darby move on to a paid research assistant position in the Mitchell lab at the Oregon Health and Science University, we are excited to see her next steps toward graduate school.

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**Donald Baucom, Ph.D.**

Richard Lee Simpson Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
Director: UNC Couples Lab  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Our lab is continuing to collaborate with the National Health Service in England to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner is depressed. This is part of England's nationwide IAPT program to provide empirically supported interventions to the public. In addition to providing clinical services, these efforts will result in a large scale effectiveness treatment study of couple-based treatment for depression in routine outpatient clinics around the country. Dr. Baucom and Dr. Melanie Fischer lead the US component of this effort. We also have established a network of some of our former lab members and UNC graduates in which we provide ongoing supervision to about 80 therapists in England through video conferencing, a unique and gratifying challenge.

We currently have two projects underway as part of our lab's broader effort, in collaboration with Dr. Cindy Bulik and the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders, to develop psychological interventions for

couples around eating disorders. First, our randomized clinical trial of our couple-based treatment for anorexia nervosa (Uniting Couples in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa - UCAN) is in its fourth year of treatment. In addition, we have just completed a pilot study called UNITE (UNiting couples In the Treatment of Eating disorders) which focuses on working with couples in which one partner has binge eating disorder.

Our lab has continued our collaboration with Dr. Kevin Guskiewicz at the UNC Department of Exercise and Sport Science to pilot test a couple-based treatment which we have developed for couples where one member is a former NFL player with depression.

Our lab is collaborating with Dr. Jon Abramowitz's lab at UNC to develop and evaluate a couple-based treatment for body dysmorphic disorder under the leadership of Dr. Melanie Fischer and Lillian Reuman. Treatment development is completed and recruitment for our pilot study will begin this summer.

Our lab is collaborating with Dr. Sean Drummond in Australia and Dr. Melissa Jenkins, a former UNC doctoral student, on a randomized controlled trial to treat insomnia with a couple-based intervention, expanding our couples and psychopathology work to a new disorder.

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**Doug Snyder, Ph.D.**

Director: Texas A&M Couple Research Lab  
Professor of Psychology  
Texas A&M University

Doug Snyder, Kimberley Stanton, and Laura Osborne are pursuing a new initiative examining the impact of deployment on individual and family functioning in women veterans, as well as the impact of PTSD and marital conflict on children's health, in collaboration with Suzannah Creech at the Waco, TX VA.

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**Howard Markman, Ph.D., Scott Stanley, Ph.D., and Galena Rhoades, Ph.D.**

Center for Marital and Family Studies  
University of Denver

Faculty and graduate students in the Center for Marital and Family Studies work to marry the basic science of relationships with the development of effective interventions for couples.

Galena has recently received grant funding for several projects to evaluate the effectiveness of relationship education interventions. She is the Principal Investigator on a study testing whether the Within My Reach relationship education program can help at-risk pregnant women have better personal relationships, lower stress, improved wellbeing, and healthier pregnancies. She is partnering with Denver Health Medical Center to provide these services to pregnant women across Denver, using an RCT design to test the effectiveness of Within My Reach as part of a national evaluation funded by the Administration for Children and Families. Scott and Galena are Co-Investigators on two large-scale projects designed to evaluate programs for low income couples and fathers in Oklahoma and Dr. Stanley continues to write his internationally recognized blog, Sliding vs. Deciding. Howard has been working with the government of Singapore to disseminate PREP (the Prevention and Relationship Education Program) to all couples getting married in Singapore.

Our research team also continues to study relationship processes and intervention effects using existing data sets from several long-term, large-scale longitudinal research projects. These projects include the Relationship Development Study, the Family Stability Project / Family Interaction Study, and the Army Marriage Project. We have also collected genetic data in two of these projects to examine GxE interactions.

We are excited to welcome Maggie O'Reilly Treter as the newest graduate student in our lab! She completed a B.A. in psychology at the University of Michigan and is currently working as a research assistant at Brown Alpert Medical School.

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**James V. Córdova, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology  
Director: The Marriage Checkup Project  
Department of Psychology  
Clark University

Dr. Cordova and his lab are working on several exciting Marriage Checkup projects. In collaboration with Lt. Colonel Jeffrey Cigrang (Ret.), currently at Wright State University, we recently received funding from the Department of Defense to complete a Randomized Control Trial of the Marriage Checkup for military couples in primary care settings at four different Air Force bases. We are also in the thick of submitting for publication the results of our randomized control trial with Tea Trillingsgaard and Hanne Norr Fentz adapting the Marriage Checkup for use in Danish private practice settings. In addition, we are working with Kristi Coop Gordon on a manuscript describing the results of our collaboration to take the MC into the homes of under-served couples. Finally, we are currently beta testing our website for use by individuals, couples, and therapists, to make the Marriage Checkup more widely accessible.

Julia Sollenberger is completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the Kennedy Krieger Institute at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Ellen Darling is engaged in her dissertation research, a pilot study of a brief couples-based preventative intervention for perinatal depression and anxiety co-located in obstetric clinics. She is completing her internship at Suffolk University Counseling Center. Tatiana Gray completing her dissertation investigating the therapeutic mechanisms of change at the heart of the Marriage Checkup and will be starting her internship at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial VAMC in Bedford, MA in September. Matt Havril is continuing his clinical practicum training in the family therapy program at the Seattle VA. He is working on his dissertation proposal and is planning to apply for internship in the fall. Liz Ollen is finalizing her dissertation proposal, which is a qualitative study exploring help seeking for intimate partner violence in the context of same-sex relationships for sexual minority women and hopes to begin data collection over the summer. She will be wrapping up her externship working with inpatient adolescents at the UMASS Adolescent Continuing Care Units and will be applying for internship in the fall.

Emily Maher is continuing work on her Master's thesis project examining effects of contemplative practice on relationship quality. She will be starting her practicum at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in June. Justin Laplante will be defending his dissertation proposal on the influences of meditation on couple relationships. He is also working on a study investigating the role of empathy and communication on couples who meditate together, and teaching a course on Interpersonal Relationships. Taylor Dovala is preparing to collect data for her research project that applies positive psychology concepts to the context of intimate relationships. Finally, we are looking forward to welcoming Nick Canby to our lab family in the fall!



From the left: James Cordova, Tatiana Gray, Justin Laplante, Emily Maher, Taylor Dovala

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**Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology

Director: Marriage and Family Resiliency Lab

University of South Alabama

On January 14 & 15, 2016, our lab was treated to 2 days of training by Olga E. Hervis, MSW, LCSW, Executive Director of the Family Therapy Training Institute of Miami. Our focus was on learning her Structural Systems Rating Scales (SSRS) in order to code three interaction tasks that were completed in our lab by families who had experienced a natural disaster. Stay tuned!

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**Joanne Davila, Ph.D.**

Professor and Director of Clinical Training

Department of Psychology

Stony Brook University

The Relationship Development Center continues its work on adolescent and adult romantic relationships and well-being. We continue to be involved in a number of projects and collaborations, including: (1) ongoing data collection on romantic competence among emerging adults, (2) the development and evaluation of a relationship education program for college students, (3) the study of LGB individuals' relationship experiences and (4) examining associations among mental health, relationship and sexual behavior, and their neural correlates.

Our new PhD students, Jiaqi Zhou and Lauren Mize, have nearly completed their first year in the program, and our advanced graduate students, Vickie Bhatia and Jess Latack, have both successfully defended their dissertations!

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**Kristina Coop Gordon, PhD**

Director: Gordon Couples Research Lab

Professor of Psychology

University of Tennessee – Knoxville

The Gordon lab is busy with multiple projects including analyzing data from Relationship Rx, a large collaborative project with James Cordova's lab to implement the Marriage Checkup in community based integrative health-care facilities in Tennessee and with a low-income population. In addition, we have several ongoing projects utilizing data from Un Tiempo para Las Parejas - a collaborative project with the Duke University Medical Center that implemented a couples-based smoking intervention program for Latino families.

We are also analyzing data from the Mindfulness and Relationship Health Study – a small-scale longitudinal study that examines relationship changes in couples undergoing a mindfulness-skills training course at the University of Tennessee. Relatedly, one of our graduate students is currently initiating a longitudinal study of the relationships among mindfulness, sexual health, and relationship health in young adult dating couples.

In addition, one of our graduate students is currently analyzing data to examine emerging adults' motivations for breaking up with a romantic partner and participating in infidelity and how these romantic experiences are related to developmental tasks. She is also piloting a randomized controlled trial at Cornerstone of Recovery, an inpatient residential treatment center for chemical dependence, on the efficacy of group therapy for romantic partners of patients who struggle with the process of forgiveness. Kristi Gordon is

returning refreshed and full of new ideas from last semester's sabbatical and ready to hit the ground running and to welcome new student, Katie Lenger, who is coming to us from Cameron Gordon's lab.

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**Matthew D. Johnson, Ph.D.**

Director: The Marriage and Family Studies Lab  
Professor of Department of Psychology  
Binghamton University

Hayley Fivecoat is wrapping up her internship at the Syracuse VA this summer and then heading to a post-doc position at the Philadelphia VA to work with Steven L. Sayers, Ph.D.

Matt Johnson is currently on leave as the APA Executive Branch Science Fellow. He is working at the U.S. Department of Justice on issues related to violence against women. He will return to be chair of his department on September 1, 2016. He recently published a book, [\*Great Myths of Intimate Relationships: Dating, Sex, and Marriage\*](#) (ISBN: 978-1-118-52128-1, 264 pages, Wiley-Blackwell).

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**Rebecca Cobb, Ph.D.**

Director: SFU Close Relationships Lab  
Associate Professor in Department of Psychology  
Simon Fraser University

We have officially wrapped up data collection on our one-year longitudinal study of communication and sexuality in cohabiting couples, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and are now analyzing the data. We've also completed data collection on an experimental, multi-site replication study on forgiveness. Stay tuned for results!

Dr. Jennifer Trew, a post-doc in the Close Relationships Lab, spearheaded a longitudinal study on attraction and the formation of romantic relationships using speed dating, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

We are poised to begin data collection on a daily diary study on forgiveness in couples, which is funded by a Vice President Research Grant.

Jessica Ferreira will be joining the lab and the Clinical Psychology MA program this fall.

Finally, Dr. Cobb and her graduate students are looking forward to their annual summer writing retreat on beautiful Thetis Island, British Columbia!

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**Brian Doss, Ph.D.**

Couple Research Lab  
Department of Psychology  
University of Miami

We recently started recruitment for our 5-year "Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education" grant from the Administration for Children and Families in which we will offer relationship interventions to lower-income couples. This project will test the efficacy of the OurRelationship.com program compared to that of the PREP online (formally called ePREP) in a sample of 2,500 low-income couples nationwide. Dr. Galena Rhoades will



be collaborating with us as our external evaluator. After months of preparation, we are excited to get started! We are also thrilled to welcome Karen Rothman as the newest graduate student in our lab!

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**Richard Mattson, Ph.D.**

Director: Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
Binghamton University

Data collection for the Individual and Marital Well-Being Study has just concluded. We are now beginning to clean and analyze this data. Allison McKinnon has accepted an offer to join the lab as a graduate student and will be beginning in the Fall. Our new undergraduate research assistants include Bijan Kashani, Callie Patsellis, Christopher McKiever, Deanna Keenan, Emily Rooney, Lauren Levi, Maggie Parker, Mary Grega, Nilda Rivera, and Samantha Cermak.

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**Ronald D. Rogge, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Psychology  
Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology  
University of Rochester

The Rogge lab ([www.couples-research.com](http://www.couples-research.com)) is excited to be welcoming Jennifer Daks as an incoming graduate student in the fall. We are currently conducting a small-scale RCT of the Promoting Awareness, Improving Relationships (PAIR) program (based on the Relational Awareness program of Rogge et al., 2013) using funding secured by Dev Crasta. We have also taken the basic approach of the PAIR program to develop a co-parenting intervention: the Reflecting to Enrich Family Life & Enhance Coparental Teamwork (REFLECT) program. We have tested REFLECT in a small pilot RCT of 36 families and demonstrate significant pre-post gains compared to a waitlist control. We are planning on submitting an R01 to NICHD to conduct a large-scale RCT of REFLECT, collecting both parent-report and family interaction data.

We are excited to have a couple new measurement papers coming out. In Shaw and Rogge (2016), we use a large item pool in a massive sample to develop a psychometrically optimized measure of sexual quality. In Rolffs, Rogge, & Wilson (in press), we examine a massive item pool across three large scale studies to develop a 12-dimensional scale that assesses the individual dimensions of psychological flexibility and inflexibility proposed by the Hexaflex model (a central model informing the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy approach).

We are also excited to have a paper coming out in JFP examining how toddler's sleep problems can affect family functioning (including marital functioning) and vice versa through a series of cross-lagged models in a multi-wave longitudinal study of 249 families.

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**Sarah Whitton, Ph.D.**

Director: The Today's Couples and Families Research Program  
University of Cincinnati

This year, we completed observational coding of couple communication data from a randomized waitlist control trial of our relationship education program for female same-sex couples (funded by the Lesbian Health Fund). The data show significant program effects on couple communication, as well as relationship satisfaction and confidence. We hope to publish these findings soon!

We also launched a 2-year study funded by the American Heart Association, which is assessing the efficacy of a newly developed, couple-based smoking cessation program that integrates relationship education strategies to improve couple support-related skills into standard CBT smoking cessation treatment.

We are pleased to be welcoming Lisa Godfrey to our lab as an incoming graduate student this fall!

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**Scott R. Braithwaite, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship Health Lab

Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology

Brigham Young University

We have multiple student led projects in the works, including a sleep/relationship intervention for postpartum parents, a measurement project on how to best operationalize “cheating” (especially in relationships other than marriage), and an investigation into how the method of communication (text, snapchat, etc.) influences the course of dating relationships.

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**Steffany J. Fredman, Ph.D.**

Director: Couples and Families Adaptation to Stress (CFAS) Lab

Assistant Professor

Human Development and Family Studies

Pennsylvania State University

The Penn State Couples and Families Adaptation to Stress (CFAS) Lab has been working on a number of basic and treatment outcome studies focused on improving the health and well-being of couples and families under stress. We're very excited to begin a grant jointly funded by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs through the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (CAP) to develop and test an accelerated, multi-couple weekend version of CBCT for PTSD (Monson & Fredman, 2012) for recently deployed Service Members with PTSD (PI: Fredman) in collaboration with Co-Is Candice Monson, Alexandra Macdonald, Galena Rhoades, Alan Peterson, and Terry Keane. Steffany has also received funding from the Penn State College of Health and Human Development Fran and Holly Soistman Faculty Endowment to examine the associations among PTSD symptoms, couple functioning, and parenting stress among first-time parents during the transition to parenthood in collaboration with Penn State colleagues Mark Feinberg and Amy Marshall. In partnership with Penn State colleagues Amy Marshall, Danny Perkins, and Keith Aronson, we are also examining the associations among PTSD symptoms, interpersonal adjustment, and academic functioning among partnered student Service Members and Veterans with the intention of adapting CBCT for PTSD for this population.

Yunying (Annie) Le is making great progress finishing up her master's thesis on the mediating role of parenting stress in the association between neuroticism and overreactive parenting in first-time parents during the transition from late toddlerhood to the early preschool years and looks forward to presenting this work at ABCT in November. Jenny Antle recently defended her honors thesis on predictors of expressed emotion in relatives of patients with bipolar disorder and presented this work at the University of Virginia's L. Starling Reid Undergraduate Psychology Conference in Charlottesville, VA.

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## *HOT off the Press*

### In Press and Recently Published Literature

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Braithwaite, S.R., Doxey, R.\*\* Keddington, K.\*\*, & Fincham, F.D. (In Press) The Unique Influences of Parental Divorce and Parental Conflict on Emerging Adults. *Journal of Adult Development*.

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# Couples Research & Therapy *NEWSLETTER*

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Fall 2017

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## Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to share the Fall 2017 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG Newsletter with you. Thank you for sending in your lab updates. We were thrilled to hear from so many of you. Everyone is doing great work and we're happy to share your accomplishments with the SIG!

Along with updates, we are pleased to share a shortened version of the recently published article "Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Romantic Relationship Distress Among Caucasian and Mexican American Newlyweds" by Hammett and colleagues. (pg. 5). Additionally, Yvette Karvay from Stony Brook University provided a comprehensive review of the book *Great Myths of Intimate Relationships: Dating, Sex, and Marriage* written by Dr. Matthew Johnson (pg. 8). The newsletter is also full of information about this year's ABCT convention (and reflections on last year's conference)! **For more SIG specific information for this year's conference in San Diego, please read the letters from your SIG Co-Presidents, Drs. CJ Fleming and Julianne Flanagan (pg. 2), and your Student Co-Presidents, Kayla Knopp and Dev Crasta (pg. 3).** We hope everyone has an enjoyable and productive conference in beautiful San Diego!

As Sarah, Annie, and I pass the torch to the incoming editors, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the honor of serving in this role. It has been a pleasure to bring you the highlights of the Couples SIG over the last couple years. Thank you for this amazing opportunity! We wish each and every one of you continued health and happiness, and success in all your endeavors!

**Thank you for making the Couples SIG Newsletter possible! See you soon!**

*Sarah Bannon, Annie Le, and Kate Nowlan*  
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# Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Julianne Flanagan and CJ Fleming

Hello Couples SIG Members! We are looking forward to seeing everyone in beautiful San Diego! As always, we anticipate an action-packed conference filled with your exciting new work and our awesome couples community. We'd like to first reflect on last year's conference and then provide you with details about San Diego SIG events.

## Reflections on ABCT 2016:

We are pleased to reflect on a great year with ABCT in New York City. Last year's preconference event led by Keith Renshaw focused on bridging basic science with couples interventions, and featured thoughtful discussion from Don Baucom, Sarah Campbell, and Melanie Fischer. Our business meeting was well-attended and saw the election of Treasurer Melanie Fischer, and our Cocktail party was a blast at the Reunion Bar. We awarded the first place Bob Weiss graduate student poster award to Kayla Knopp and second place to Melanie Fischer. The undergraduate award went to Jennifer Stewart. (Thanks to Patti Fritz and team for judging, and thanks to Michelle Leonard, Scott Braithwaite, and Ron Rogge for agreeing to take over this year).

## Outgoing Officers and Election:

We would like to sincerely thank our outgoing officers for all their hard work. The SIG has been running smoothly thanks to their many efforts. Thank you to Kayla Knopp and Dev Crasta for serving as student Co-Presidents and organizing the ABCT cocktail parties and student symposium submissions. Thank you also to Sarah Bannon, Kate Nowlan, and Annie Le, our newsletter Co-Editors, for organizing the newsletter and keeping us all informed. Finally, thank you to Katie Lenger and Marissa Bowsfield, our Media Coordinators, for managing our site and communications.

With last year's changes in place, we were excited to hold our recent election. Thank you to everyone who voted! We look forward to announcing our new student Co-Presidents, newsletter Co-Editors, and Media Coordinators at our SIG Business Meeting!

## ABCT 2017 SIG Events:

Our **annual business meeting** will take place **Friday November 16 at 9:15am in Sapphire 411**. We will finalize our elections, present the Robert L. Weiss Student Research Awards, collect dues and update our membership lists/info.

We also have two items that we'd like to bring to the group. First, we'd like to discuss the possible institution of an early career award within the SIG. Our student awards are very meaningful and rewarding, so why stop there? Second, several members have expressed concern about this year's rating criteria regarding presenter seniority and we would like to have a larger group discussion of this issue. If you have other ideas/concerns, please let us know.

In addition to our scheduled SIG events, we had a banner year for SIG cocktail hour submissions. Please attend the Friday evening poster/cocktail hour to see 12 exciting posters from our couples' colleagues! Many thanks to Drs. Steffany Fredman, Jenny Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Justin Lavner for their work reviewing and rating abstracts.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Best,  
Julianne Flanagan (hellmuth@muscd.edu)  
CJ Fleming (cfleming6@elon.edu)

## Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Dev Crasta<sup>1</sup> & Kayla Knopp<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Rochester; <sup>2</sup>University of Denver

Greetings from your outgoing Student Co-Presidents! It has been our honor to serve in this role. We are looking forward to the ABCT conference in beautiful San Diego and hope to see you all there for the following events.

### **SIG Cocktail Party**

This year's annual Couples SIG Cocktail Party will take place at Half Door Brewing Co. Half Door has a great location in downtown San Diego and some delicious house-brewed craft beers. As usual, the SIG will provide some light appetizers. Come enjoy great company and refreshments at a lovely local establishment.

**When:** Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup> from 6:30-8:30pm

**Where:** Half Door Brewing Co., 903 Island Ave. San Diego, CA 92101. <http://www.halfdoorbrewing.com/>

**Transportation:** The restaurant is about a 15-minute walk from the conference Hilton, one block north of Petco Park (directions [here](#)). If you prefer to drive, there is limited street parking. Lyft is also widely available in San Diego.

In accordance with tradition, the **Student Cocktail Party** will immediately follow the main event. All undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students are welcome to stay longer and have a chance to get to know each other better.

### **Contribute to the Clinical Round Table**

Make sure to wake up bright and early on Sunday, November 19<sup>th</sup> at 8:30am for a clinical round-table featuring some of our senior SIG members, *Couple Therapy and Research, Plus or Minus Forty: A Brief Look Back, A Major Look Forward*. As part of the symposium's "major look forward," we would like to relay questions and thoughts from SIG students – *so send us your questions!* Email Kayla and Dev with the subject line: "Round Table Questions".

### **Get Involved!**

We would particularly like to encourage students to join the SIG and **SIG listserv** (couples-sig@sfu.ca) – this is a great professional organization, so get involved! For those of you who have already been with the SIG, this year we are also holding elections for student positions, including Student Co-Presidents! We strongly encourage any interested students to self-nominate for these two positions. If you have any questions about what this role entails, please feel free to contact Dev or Kayla.

As always, please contact us at any time with comments, questions, or suggestions. We look forward to seeing you all soon!

Sincerely,

Kayla (kayla.knopp@du.edu) and Dev (dev.crasta@rochester.edu)

## ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update

*Melanie Fischer*

Hello SIG Members! I hope that all of you are doing well and looking forward to an exciting conference! Here is an update of our membership status and dues:

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 216 (78 professionals, 138 students). This includes 4 new members (1 professional, 3 students) since our last count in June. Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members, particularly during our upcoming conference!

The balance at the last update in June was \$1707. Since then, we have taken in \$45 in dues, leaving us with a balance of \$1752. We anticipate paying out \$300 for poster awards, \$620 for the party at the upcoming conference (including \$120 that were not spent last year out of the \$500 budget to help with steep San Diego prices!), and a \$300 honorarium for the preconference speakers. As always, we anticipate collecting most of our dues during and around the conference. We will collect 2017 dues at the SIG business meeting during the upcoming conference. If you are not attending the conference or would like to pay your dues electronically, please go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and send money to [msfi@email.unc.edu](mailto:msfi@email.unc.edu). If you use paypal, it is important to designate the payment as a "send to friends and family" to avoid processing fees. You can also mail a check to the address below. Thank you for your continued support!

Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students and retired members. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at the conference!

Best,  
Melanie

Send checks for membership dues to:  
Melanie Fischer  
Department of Psychology and Neuroscience  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
CB #3270, Davie Hall  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3270

## Media Coordinators Update

*Marissa Bowsfield and Katie Lenger*

If you ever have any information you would like to share with fellow SIG members via the listserv or website (e.g. job postings, study recruitment, or anything you believe will be of interest), please don't hesitate to email the new Media Coordinators who we are sure will be happy to disseminate that information to the SIG. Furthermore, please be in touch if ever your contact information needs updating on the website or listserv.

Thanks so much everyone and we look forward to seeing you in San Diego soon! It has been wonderful to serve in this role and we wish the incoming Media Coordinators all the best!

Marissa and Katie

## **Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Romantic Relationship Distress Among Caucasian and Mexican American Newlyweds**

Julia F. Hammett<sup>a</sup>, Emilio C. Ulloa<sup>b</sup>, Donna M. Castañeda<sup>b</sup>, and Audrey Hokoda<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of California Los Angeles

<sup>b</sup>San Diego State University

### **Full article citation and for full list of references:**

Hammett, J. F., Ulloa, E. C., Castañeda, D. M., & Hokoda, A. (2017). Intimate partner violence victimization and romantic relationship distress among White and Mexican newlyweds. *Violence and Victims*, 32, 326-341.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a prevalent concern for couples in the United States (O'Leary et al., 1989) and numerous negative consequences associated with IPV have been identified (e.g., Breiding et al., 2015). One of the strongest negative correlates of IPV perpetration and victimization is relationship distress. Previous research shows that higher levels of all types of IPV (physical, psychological, and sexual aggression) are associated with higher relationship distress (Panuzio & DiLillo, 2010) and that IPV may help discriminate between separated or divorced couples and those who remain married (Rogge & Bradbury, 1999).

However, findings are inconsistent with regard to the role that gender may play in this association, with some studies showing that the association between IPV perpetration and relationship distress is stronger for men whereas the association between IPV victimization and distress is stronger for women (e.g., Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008), and other studies showing that IPV may be more harmful to the quality of women's romantic relationships, regardless of whether the male or the female partner is the perpetrator of IPV (e.g., Ackerman & Field, 2011). This inconclusiveness might in part be due to the fact that most previous studies tend to look at gender as a moderator of the IPV-relationship distress association, which prevents researchers from teasing apart the influences that husbands' and wives' behaviors might have on themselves from the influences that their behaviors might have on their partners. In addition, research exploring patterns of IPV and relationship distress across different cultural groups is sparse. Among Latinas/os, for example, gender is an important predictor of IPV, with women reporting greater risk for victimization than men and men reporting greater risk for perpetration (see Cummings, Gonzalez-Guarda, & Sandoval 2013 for a review), but previous studies have not yet investigated how gender may influence the IPV-distress association within this group.

To overcome limitations of previous research, the present study aimed to assess actor and partner effects of IPV victimization and romantic relationship distress among 100 heterosexual newlywed Caucasian and Mexican American couples who provided data during both the first and third year of marriage. We chose a dyadic data analysis approach using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy,

& Cook, 2006), which allows the investigation of issues of mutual influence on an outcome variable. It was hypothesized that for both husbands and wives, higher levels of IPV victimization at the first year of marriage would predict higher levels in their own relationship distress (actor effects) and their partner's relationship distress (partner effects) at the third year of marriage.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Husbands and wives were recruited from the community through flyers and in-person solicitation and were interviewed during their first ( $N = 139$  couples) and third year of marriage ( $N = 101$  couples). The final sample for analysis included 100 heterosexual couples (35% Caucasian American, 65% Mexican American), who provided data at both time points. At Year 1, husbands ranged in age from 19 to 58 years ( $M = 28.92$ ,  $SD = 7.97$ ) and wives ranged in age from 19 to 57 years ( $M = 27.56$ ,  $SD = 8.08$ ).

### Materials

Intimate partner violence victimization (IPVV) at Year 1 was assessed using the 10-item Aggression (AGG) subscale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R; Snyder, 1997). Relationship distress at Year 3 was assessed using the 22-item Global Distress (GDS) subscale of the MSI-R. Husbands' and wives' relationship distress scores at Year 1 as well as age, cohabitation status before marriage, education, income, and presence of children were included as covariates in all analyses. Acculturation, assessed with the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARMSA-II; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995), was included as an additional covariate in the analyses examining Mexican American couples.

### Analytical Approach

A path-analytic approach was used to assess the APIM (Kenny et al., 2006). Two models were analyzed, one for Caucasian Americans and one for Mexican Americans. In both models, husbands and wives' IPVV at Year 1 were added as antecedents and husbands and wives' relationship distress at Year 3 were added as outcome variables. In addition, all covariates were entered into the models. To test whether actor and partner effects were significantly different for husbands and wives, we generated nested models by constraining paths to be equal and compared the constrained models with the baseline (unconstrained) models.

## Results

### Caucasian American Couples

Contrary to predictions, greater wife IPVV at Year 1 was associated with *lower* husband relationship distress at Year 3 ( $\beta = -.486$ ,  $p = .008$ ). All other actor and partner effects were non-significant. Comparing the constrained model with the baseline model revealed that the actor effects of IPVV and relationship satisfaction were not significantly different for husbands and wives ( $\Delta\chi^2(12) = 19.50$ ,  $p = .08$ ). However, the partner effects of IPVV and relationship distress were significantly different for husbands and wives ( $\Delta\chi^2(12) = 24.78$ ,  $p = .02$ ).

### Mexican American Couples

In line with predictions, greater wife IPVV at Year 1 was associated with greater husband relationship distress at Year 3 ( $\beta = .219$ ,  $p = .041$ ). All other actor and partner effects were non-significant. Comparing



the constrained model with the baseline model revealed that both actor effects and partner effects of IPV and relationship distress were significantly different for husbands and wives ( $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 31.27, p < .01$  and  $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 24.51, p = .04$ , respectively).

### Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the association between newlyweds' IPV victimization and their romantic relationship distress and how this association might differ by gender and ethnic/cultural group. Among Caucasian American couples, wives' greater IPV victimization was associated with *lower* relationship distress among husbands. Among Mexican Americans, the finding was opposite — Here, wives' greater IPV victimization was associated with husbands' greater distress. It is possible that the counter-intuitive, negative associations between higher victimization and lower distress among Caucasian Americans could be accounted for by perpetrators' increased perceptions of power (see Bentley, Galliher, & Ferguson, 2007). However, future research is warranted to examine this mechanism and to clearly test the direction of the association between perceptions of power and IPV perpetration. Although male power and control are certainly also a component of Mexican American heterosexual relationships, their cultural collectivist and familistic orientations, highlighting the importance of *personalismo* (a warm and personal way of relating to others), *simpatico* (emphasis on harmonious social relationships), and *respeto* (dignity and respect towards others; Flores et al., 2004), may help explain why parallel negative associations did not emerge in the Mexican American sample (e.g., Bermudez & Stinson, 2012). Again, future research should test these possible cultural mechanisms.

Some factors may limit interpretation of the current findings. First, the sample size of the current study was relatively small, which might increase the risk for Type II errors, particularly with regards to those findings that did not support the hypotheses. Second, the loss of subjects from Year 1 to Year 3 may bias the current findings. Third, the current study relied solely on self-report measures and assessed only IPV victimization but not IPV perpetration.

The present findings support gender differences in the association between IPV and relationship distress, which may be related to men's and women's differential perceptions and interpretations of IPV. When treating violent partners, clinicians should address mediating factors of the IPV-distress association that may differ by gender, such as women's fear resulting from the experience of IPV and men's potential desire to exert control over their partner as well as their feelings of shame and guilt (Caldwell et al., 2012). Furthermore, different patterns of associations emerged when looking at Caucasian versus Mexican American couples. As outlined in the DSM-5 section on Cultural Formulation (APA, 2013), understanding the cultural context an individual is in is essential for effective clinical work. Thus, practitioners in the field of marriage and family therapy should consider adapting interventions based on couples' specific cultural group.

## Great Myths of Intimate Relationships: Dating, Sex, and Marriage

*By: Matthew Johnson, Ph.D.*  
*Pages: 264*  
*ISBN: 978-1-118-52128-1*  
*Publication Date: 2016*



*Book Review by:*  
*Yvette Karvay*  
*Stony Brook University*

Using an innovative and accessible framework, *Great Myths of Intimate Relationships: Dating, Sex, and Marriage* by Dr. Matthew Johnson, breaks down commonly held beliefs pertaining to intimate relationships. With this compelling approach, Johnson makes relationship science accessible and relatable for the everyday consumer, while simultaneously debunking myths such as “opposites attract,” “premarital cohabiting leads to a better marriage,” and “men have higher libido than women.” The book begins by emphasizing that intimate relationships are significant in our everyday lives, particularly for individual satisfaction. The author argues that the influence of intimate relationships necessitates a critical examination of these commonly held beliefs.

The book is broken down into chapters which address broader topics within relationships (e.g., sex, attraction and courtship, online dating, same-sex relationships, predicting success and failure in relationships, etc.). Specific myths regarding each topic area are addressed. For example, regarding sex, four myths are examined: (1) Men have stronger libido than women, (2) Hooking up in college is bad for women, (3) All marriages have been consummated, and (4) All marriages are sexually active. These myths are debunked with support from empirical data from relationship psychologists, which is supplemented by the author’s thoughts on what he learned as a professor. In terms of “debunking” the myth that “men have stronger libidos than women”, the author integrates historical perspectives to provide insight into the basis for the myth. Specifically, he discusses how women have historically faced oppression related to their sexuality. Johnson provides several examples, including Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and Greek mythology. Johnson then refutes the myth with evidence from a study on the discrepancies between the associations between self-reported arousal and physical arousal to sexual stimuli. He notes the key finding that women tend to self-report less arousal than they actually experience. Following this chapter, each of the remaining topic areas is addressed in a similar manner.

Overall, this book was a very interesting and informational read. Johnson discusses data in an engaging way, leaving behind the jargon that often turns individuals away from scientific work. Thus, this book is appropriate for anyone wanting to learn more about their own romantic relationship. Researchers with interest in studying relationship dynamics and clinicians who see couples would likely also find benefit.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

Dr. Douglas K. Snyder's Texas A&M Couple Research Lab

☺ **Kimberley Stanton** has begun her predoctoral internship at the Charleston Consortium. She defended her dissertation in June, which examined female Veterans' mental health following combat exposure.

Dr. Richard Mattson's Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships

☺ **Tarah Midy** has recently matched at the Syracuse Veterans Affairs for internship.  
☺ **Samantha Wagner** received honorable mention for the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and recently defended her Master's Thesis.  
☺ Undergraduate **Emma Ryan** recently received the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence and the President's Award for Undergraduate Student Excellence. She will be attending Duke Medical School in the Fall.

Dr. Brian Doss's Couples Lab at the University of Miami

☺ **McKenzie Roddy** was awarded the Family Strengthening Scholars grant – a two-year dissertation grant funded by ACF – to assess mental and physical health outcomes for low-income couples participating in the OurRelationship and ePREP programs.  
☺ We are thrilled to announce that, **Emily Georgia-Salivar**, received her Ph.D and welcomed her first child, Etta Jean, this summer. She started her post-doctoral internship at the Miami VA this fall.  
☺ **Kate Nowlan** proposed her Dissertation this fall and **Karen Rothman** proposed her Master's Thesis.  
☺ Last year we were excited to welcome **Samantha Joseph** as our new participant coordinator.

Dr. Rebecca Cobb's Close Relationships Lab at SFU

☺ PhD candidate, **Jennifer Pink**, has accepted a residency position with the Calgary Clinical Psychology Residency starting in the fall.  
☺ **Roanne Millman** has accepted a post-doctoral position in the Department of Oncology at the University of Calgary, specializing in sexual health.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

Dr. Norm Epstein's Lab at University of Maryland College Park

☺ **Jenni Young** has continued her fellowship at the National Cancer Institute and recently defended her dissertation proposal, for mixed methods research on ways that patients with Li Fraumeni Syndrome (heritable cancer) and their partners cope with the diagnosis both short-term and long-term, including risk management decisions family planning, etc. Jenni also was selected for the Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award by the University of Maryland Graduate School.

Dr. Joanne Davila's Relationship Development Center

☺ **Jess Latack** will graduate in August and has accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at the Weill Cornell Cognitive Therapy Clinic in New York City.

☺ Former lab member **Kate Stroud** received tenure at Williams College.

☺ Former lab member **Brian Feinstein** received an F32 from NIDA to study partner- and relationship-level influences on HIV risk behavior and substance use among young same-sex male couples.

☺ Former lab member **Rachel Hershenberg** was awarded the Alies Muskin Career Development Leadership Award in Clinical Research from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

Dr. Molly Gasbarrini's Diverse Couples Lab

☺ **Dr. Gasbarrini** is celebrating a promotion to Associate Professor and will be assuming the role of Director of the Clinical PhD Program at CSPP-Los Angeles in the fall.

☺ First year students **Aly Ceja** and **Tara Schlüssel** have been accepted to present posters at the Crossroads Couple and Family conference in Chicago in June. We look forward to seeing you there!

Dr. Steffany J. Fredman's Penn State Couple and Family Adaptation to Stress Lab

☺ **Dr. Fredman** has been awarded the Karl R. Fink and Diane Wendle Fink Early Career Professorship through Penn State's College of Health and Human Development.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

Dr. James Córdova's The Marriage Checkup Project

- ☉ **Liz Ollen** and **Matt Hawrilenko** matched for internship at the UCLA Medical School/Semel Institute and the Seattle VA, respectively.
- ☉ **Liz Ollen** received the 2017 Michael Sullivan Diversity Grant
- ☉ **Tatiana Gray** accepted a postdoctoral position at Clark University.

Drs. Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades's Center for Marital and Family Studies

- ☉ **Aleja** matched at the Washington DC VA Medical Center and was given honorable mention for the Ford Foundation Dissertation Grant – she will be defending her Dissertation in June! Congrats Aleja!!

Dr. Donald Baucom's UNC Couples Lab

- ☉ **Jenn Belus**, a 5<sup>th</sup> year in Dr. Don Baucom's lab at UNC, successfully defended her dissertation this spring, examining HIV prevention efforts for South African couples. Jenn also matched with University of Washington in Seattle for pre-doctoral internship for 2017-2018. Congrats, Jenn!
- ☉ **Matt Cohen**, a 4<sup>th</sup> year in Dr. Don Baucom's lab at UNC, successfully proposed his dissertation, which is an intervention designed to help male partners gain skills for supporting female partners who are hospitalized during the perinatal period due to mood, anxiety, or psychotic symptoms.

Dr. Christina Balderrama-Durbin's CAST Lab

- ☉ She said yes! **Seigie Butler** got engaged this past March!
- ☉ **Christina Balderrama-Durbin** and her husband welcomed a healthy, happy baby girl, Elisia Marie, this past November (6 lbs 14oz, 19.5 inches)! Their hearts and their hands are full with two strong young ladies!

## **Lab Updates**

Please take some time to read about what all the wonderful  
Couples Labs are up to.

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start  
thinking about your updates for the Spring 2018 Newsletter.

Looking forward to hear from you!

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### **Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.**

Director: Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory  
Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology  
Binghamton University – SUNY

The CAST lab enjoyed a productive spring for a number of exciting studies! Enrollment is well underway for our multidimensional study examining acute stress reactivity and recovery in community couples. This study is aimed at understanding and promoting couple resilience following acute stress and trauma. First year graduate students, Seigie Butler and Alex Wang are completing data collection for their theses. Seigie has designed a study examining sexual risk-taking behavior in those with and without a history of trauma. Alex is investigating the impact of a brief relationship enhancement intervention, whereby partnered participants elaborated on a positive relationship memory. Finally, we are in the process of submitting an intervention grant targeting comorbid alcohol misuse and PTSD.

Our productivity was only made possible by a wonderful and energetic team of bright undergraduate research assistants (many of which are in the photo).

We are welcoming two doctoral-students this Fall 2017: Eileen Bardon and Dana Ergas! We are thrilled to have them join the CAST lab and the Binghamton University Clinical Science program.



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**Donald Baucom, Ph.D.**

Richard Lee Simpson Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
Director: UNC Couples Lab  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Dr. Baucom is continuing his collaboration with the National Health Service to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner is depressed. This is part of England's nationwide IAPT program to provide empirically supported interventions to the public. In addition to providing clinical services, these efforts will result in a large scale effectiveness treatment study of couple-based treatment for depression in routine outpatient clinics around the country. At this point, approximately 200 therapists have been trained in Great Britain to offer these services, and several former lab members have served as clinical supervisors for this international effort.

In addition, our lab is partnering with Dr. Mitch Prinstein to examine interpersonal emotion regulation and long term outcomes in adolescent girls with depression and/or anxiety and their best friends; Dr. Melanie Fischer (postdoc) and Danielle Weber (graduate student) are leading this effort in our lab.

Our lab has continued to explore interpersonal emotion regulation by examining couple conversations using dynamic systems modeling and other intensive time series methods. We have been interested in vocal features of emotional arousal within multiple populations of couples where one member has significant psychopathology. We are currently working on multiple projects at various stages.

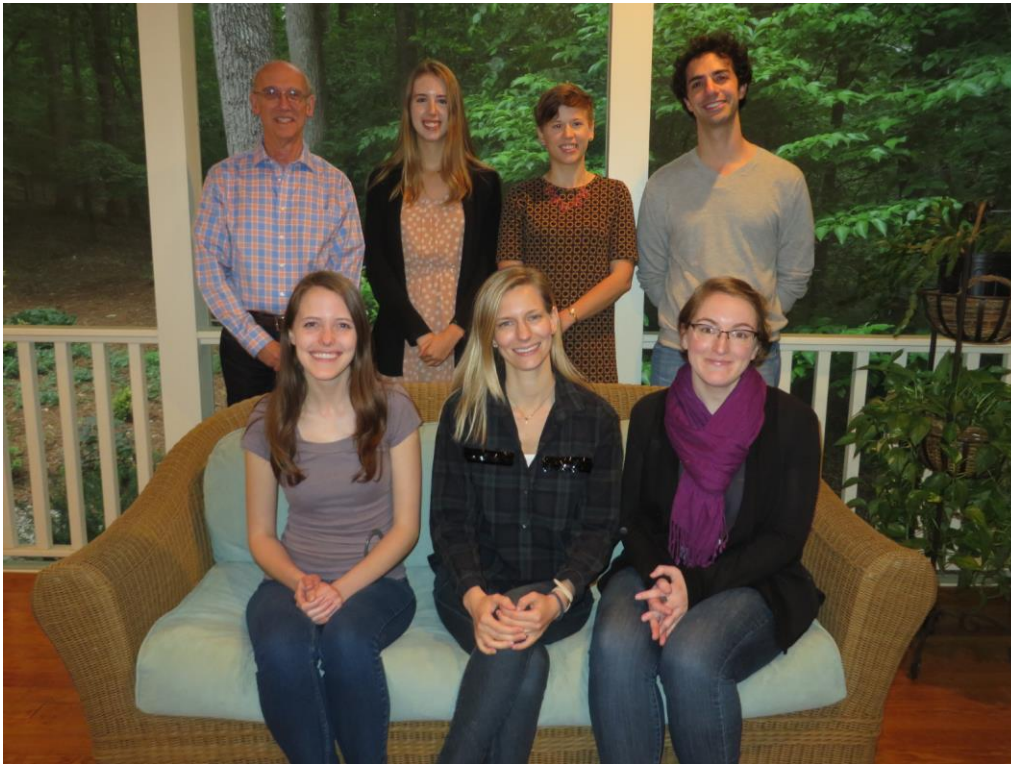
Also, our lab has continued our collaboration with Dr. Kevin Guskiewicz at the UNC Department of Exercise and Sport Science to pilot test a couple-based treatment which we have developed for couples where one member is a former NFL player with depression. We are currently in the active treatment phase, and are recruiting couples for this pilot treatment study.

In another effort, our lab is collaborating with Dr. Jon Abramowitz's lab at UNC to develop and evaluate a couple-based treatment for body dysmorphic disorder under the leadership of Lillian Reuman and Dr. Melanie Fischer. Treatment development is completed and we are currently recruiting for this pilot study.

We currently have two projects underway as part of our lab's broader effort, in collaboration with the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders, to develop psychological interventions for couples around eating disorders. First, our randomized clinical trial of our couple-based treatment for anorexia nervosa (Uniting Couples in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa - UCAN) is actively recruiting. In addition, we have finished recruitment for a pilot study called UNITE (UNiting couples In the Treatment of Eating disorders) which focuses on working with couples in which one partner has binge eating disorder. We are currently examining the data on 11 pilot couples who completed the UNITE study.

Alexandra Wojda will be joining our lab as a 1st year doctoral student in the fall, joining us from New York. Welcome, Alexandra!





*Top row L to R: Don Baucom, Emily Carrino, Melanie Fischer, Matt Cohen  
Bottom row L to R: Danielle Weber, Jenn Belus, Kim Pentel*

### **Rebecca Cobb, Ph.D.**

Director: SFU Close Relationships Lab  
Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology  
Simon Fraser University

We are nearing the end of data collection on our daily diary study of how married couples manage hurt feelings from day to day, and how sexual communication and sexual problems relate to daily fluctuations in sexual satisfaction and mood. This study is funded by a Vice President's Research Grant and a Psychology Department Research Grant.

We have received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) institutional grant for a longitudinal study on long-distance relationships spearheaded by honours student Brittany Lasanen. She is the role of self-expansion and attachment security in relationship satisfaction for couples experiencing a temporary geographical separation.

Brittany also just successfully defended her honours thesis, a cross-sectional study on relationships at a distance. You can read more about this project in a recent news story here:

<http://www.burnabynow.com/community/sfu-student-looking-for-couples-in-long-distance-relationships-1.11691460>

Lauren McRae also successfully defended her honours thesis on how discussions of relationship boundaries and spouses' perceived acceptability of extra-dyadic involvements were related to relationship satisfaction. She will be presenting her work at CPA in June.

We are also excited to welcome a new graduate student this Fall! Richard Rigby completed in his BA at the University of British Columbia, and will be joining the lab and the Clinical Psychology program to continue his research on sexuality and attachment security in close relationships.

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**Joanne Davila, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship Development Center  
Stony Brook University

The Relationship Development Center continues its work on adolescent and adult romantic relationships and well-being. We continue to be involved in a number of projects and collaborations, including: (1) ongoing data collection on romantic competence among emerging adults, (2) the development and evaluation of a relationship education program for college students, (3) the study of LGB individuals' relationship experiences and (4) examining associations among mental health, relationship and sexual behavior, and their neural correlates. We also have a number of new collaborations including research on romantic relationships among individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, as well as the psychophysiology of romantic rejection sensitivity and romantic acceptance.

Our PhD students, Jiaqi Zhou and Lauren Mize, have nearly completed their second year in the program, and our advanced graduate student, Jess Latack, is completing her clinical internship.

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**James V. Córdova, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology  
Director: Center for Couples and Families at Clark University  
Department of Psychology  
Clark University

James Cordova is working on disseminating and implementing the Marriage Checkup for a wide range of couples. We are collaborating with Dr. Cigrang and his Air Force team on an RCT adapting the Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. Dr. Cordova is also in the process of testing an online platform for the Checkup, allowing couples in any geographical region easy access to a well-trained Marriage Checkup clinician.

Tatiana Gray is completing her internship at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial VA in Bedford, MA, where she has started to integrate yoga as a mental health intervention in both inpatient and outpatient settings. After internship she will be moving into a Post Doctoral position at Clark University focused on the dissemination and implementation of the Relationship Checkup nation wide. Matt Hawrilenko is putting the final nail in the coffin of his dissertation, exploring heterogeneity in mechanisms and outcomes of couples preventive interventions. He's also getting ready to start internship at the Seattle VA this summer. With assistance from the 2017 Michael Sullivan Diversity Grant, Liz Ollen is finishing her dissertation on help seeking behaviors among sexual minority women for relationship abuse. This July, Liz will begin her pre-doctoral internship at the UCLA Medical School/Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior in the Stress, Trauma, and Resilience track where she will work with children, adolescents, and families. Justin Laplante is working on his dissertation investigating the intersection between mindfulness practices and romantic relationships from a developmental perspective. He is also teaching Psychology of Mindfulness, and advising two independent research projects. Emily Maher is continuing work on her Master's thesis project examining the link between meditation practice and relationship health. She is assisting Dr. Cordova as Research Assistant for the Air Force RCT. Emily is

also working at UMass Medical School on a treatment study of Alcohol Behavioral Couples Therapy, and will begin her externship at Rhode Island Hospital later this summer. Taylor Dovala is continuing to collect data on her Master's thesis project analyzing the connection between the implicit theories couples hold about relationships and the interaction patterns they use, in efforts to better understand the factors that lead couples to respond to conflict in the way they do. She will begin her practicum placement at UMASS Medical School in the fall. Nick Canby is currently collecting data for a project that experimentally tests the effects of mindfulness training on empathy and listening skills in a dyadic context. He is finishing up his first year assessment training and is excited to begin his psychotherapy practicum next year.

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**Brian Doss, Ph.D.**

Director: Doss Couple Lab  
Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology  
University of Miami

We have been continuing to work on our ACF-funded grant, delivering OurRelationship.com and ePREP to low-income and highly distressed couples. We are also preparing to work on two adaptations of OurRelationship.com—one for same-sex couples, and one translated into Spanish.

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**Norman B. Epstein, Ph.D.**

Professor, Family Science  
Director of the Couple and Family Therapy Program  
University of Maryland College Park

We continue to work on our component of the large 4-year grant from the Henry Jackson Foundation, regarding a clinical trial of an intervention to treat Service Members with PTSD through their involvement in training service dogs for placement with physically disabled Service Members. The project involves collaboration with the Uniformed Services University, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and the National Intrepid Center of Excellence in Bethesda. Doctoral students Jenni Young and Haedong Kim continue as RAs for the project, in which we conduct couple and family assessments at five time points during Service Members' participation.

In collaboration with former Department of Family Science Ph.D. graduate Laura Evans, we have a research team conducting a series of studies on common factors influencing process and outcomes of couple therapy, within our Center for Healthy Families clinic. This Spring semester Couple and Family Therapy grad students Magdalena Straub and Taylor Baker completed theses examining links between therapist in-session behaviors and client outcomes. Ph.D. student Shyniece Porter is helping coordinate training of a team of undergraduates for further coding of therapist behaviors across sessions.

Dr. Patricia Barros-Gomes joined our Department of Family Science and our CFT program faculty this past Fall as our new clinic director. She earned her Ph.D. from Kansas State University and conducts research on intimate partner violence, military families, and cultural factors in couple and family relationships. She is now collaborating with our group on studies within the Center for Healthy Families.

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**Steffany J. Fredman, Ph.D.**

Director: Penn State Couple and Family Adaptation to Stress Lab  
Human Development and Family Studies  
Pennsylvania State University

We're delighted to report that five cohorts of couples have now completed treatment through our DoD- and VA-funded study to test an accelerated, multi-couple weekend version of cognitive-behavioral conjoint therapy for PTSD (CBCT for PTSD) for Service Members and Veterans with PTSD and their romantic partners. This study is being conducted under the auspices of the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD and in collaboration with co-investigators Alex Macdonald, Galena Rhoades, and Candice Monson. Other lab projects include an examination of the associations among PTSD symptoms, interpersonal adjustment, and academic functioning among partnered student Service Members and Veterans and an investigation of the intersection between PTSD symptoms, couple functioning, and parenting during the transition to parenthood.

Yunying (Annie) Le is busily writing her comprehensive exams and preparing manuscripts on couples' adaptation during the transition to parenthood. August Jenkins is hard at work on her masters thesis focused on the associations among depressive symptoms, marital satisfaction, and racial identity in African-American couples. Jeremy Hicks, LICSW, from the Altoona VA has recently joined the lab as a research assistant and is working on the student veteran project. Welcome, Jeremy!

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**Molly Gasbarrini, Ph.D.**

Director: Diverse Couples Lab  
Associate Professor  
Alliant International University

2016-2017 was an active year in Los Angeles for the members of the Diverse Couples Lab at the California School of Professional Psychology. We celebrated the successful proposal of three student dissertations! Third year student Harpreet Malla, M.A. will conduct an exploration of marital satisfaction in Indian-American women in free-choice and arranged marriages. Ashley Cherrington, M.A. will be studying the role of social support in partners' decisions to stay together or separate after the disclosure or discovery of an affair. And Alexis Hershfield, M.A. will bring technology to our lab's growing list of interests with her study on uncoupling in the social media era.

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**Cameron Gordon, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology  
Director: UNCW Marital Studies Lab  
University of North Carolina Wilmington

Our lab is currently celebrating the conclusion of 10 wonderful years at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington (UNCW)! As our recent graduates continue to submit manuscripts on their projects examining relationship well-being, we look forward to launching a new chapter in the life of the lab at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU)! Cameron Gordon and his wife just had a beautiful baby girl in January and we are delighted for the opportunity to move our "lab family" closer to our biological family!



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**Howard Markman, Ph.D., Scott Stanley, Ph.D., and Galena Rhoades, Ph.D.**

Center for Marital and Family Studies  
University of Denver

Lots has been happening in the CMFS lab! Lane and Kayla are currently collecting data for a project looking at commitment in bisexually-identified individuals. Maggie is working on her Master's Thesis examining the impact of having a child on married and unmarried romantic relationships. Galena's MotherWise Project in partnership with Denver Health is in full swing! Howard is in the process of evaluating a premarital counseling program based in Qatar. Scott is up to the usual: Thinking, writing, talking, and living out his motto, "so much data, so little time." Finally, Charlie Huntington, B.A. will be joining our lab as he begins DU's Clinical Child Psychology PhD program in the fall.

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**Richard E. Mattson, Ph.D.**

Director: Center for Transdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
Binghamton University

Our lab is continuing to analyze data on the Individual and Marital Well Being Study, where we have received analysis of the DNA samples. Some lab members are working in collaboration with the nursing school on a study of predictors of rape victim blame and reporting. Maggie Parker will be joining the lab as a new graduate student.

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**Doug Snyder, Ph.D.**

Professor of Psychology  
Department of Psychology  
Texas A&M University

Doug Snyder, Kimberley Stanton, and Laura Osborne are continuing efforts examining the impact of deployment on individual and family functioning in women veterans in collaboration with Suzannah Creech at the Waco, TX VA.

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**Sarah Whitton, Ph.D.**

Director: The Today's Couples and Families Research Program  
Associate Professor  
University of Cincinnati

FAB400, our NICHD-funded 5-year longitudinal study of female-born sexual minority youth, has had an amazing year! We have recruited an ethnically and economically diverse sample of 400 participants (age 16-20) in just one year- twice as fast as expected! This speaks to the strong interest of female sexual minorities to be seen and heard by the scientific community. Conducted in collaboration with the Northwestern Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing (ISGMH), FAB400 will be largely focused on the youth's romantic relationships, but will also examine other factors that may contribute to the health disparities faced by LGBT women.

In collaboration with Sherry Rostosky of the University of Kentucky, we have also begun adapting the Strengthening Same Sex Relationships Program, Female version (SSSR-F) into an online format. In the coming year we will pilot the online program with 40 rural Appalachian female same-sex couples, to assess feasibility, acceptability, and efficacy in improving relationship quality and dyadic coping with minority stress.

Eliza Weitbrecht completed her dissertation, "Short-term Effects of "Hooking Up" on the Well-being of Emerging Adult College Students" and graduated in August, 2017. She is now a postdoctoral fellow in Couple & Family Systems at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

Graduate student Neslihan James-Kangal completed a qualitative study exploring how young adults manage conflict in their uncommitted romantic and sexual relationships. Highlights of findings include that most young adults do not feel comfortable raising concerns or addressing issues due to the lack of stated commitment and relationship "rules." Consequently, most young adults report self-silencing, indirect communication, or ending the relationship rather than addressing their concerns.

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## *HOT off the Press*

### In Press and Recently Published Literature

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# Couples Research & Therapy: *DIVERSITY NEWSLETTER*

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Special Edition, 2018

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“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation.”

- Mahatma Gandhi



## Letter from the Editors

Eileen Barden<sup>1</sup> & Alexandra Wojda<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SUNY Binghamton; <sup>2</sup>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

We are happy to present a special edition of the Couples SIG newsletter focusing on the theme of diversity in academia, research, and clinical work. This newsletter was inspired by the members of the Couples SIG, their passion to better understand the experiences of couples from different backgrounds, and their drive to increase the inclusion of diverse voices in the field. To capture their varied perspectives, the contents of this newsletter are split into three sections. In “Diversity in the Field,” SIG co-presidents, Drs. Flanagan and Fleming, reflect on the importance of recognizing diversity within our current political climate. In “Taking a Look Back,” former student co-presidents, Kayla Knopp and Dev Crasta, provide an overview of the Clinical Round Table-turned townhall meeting at the 2017 ABCT conference. Additionally, in “The Road Ahead,” current student co-presidents, Judith Biesen and Alex Wang, consider the future of diversity and inclusion in the couple field. Interviews with several members of the SIG and other professionals whose work focuses on underrepresented populations are also presented. Lastly, we are excited to feature the op-ed “The Credibility Gap in Academe” by Annmarie Cano – a piece that focuses on the challenges of women and other marginalized individuals in academic environments. This is followed by an interview with Dr. Cano on her sources of inspiration for writing the article. We appreciate Dr. Cano’s willingness to share her article with all of us, and thank her for participating in the interview.

Many thanks to Sarah Bannon, Annie Le, and Kate Nowlan for their guidance into our new role and sharing their expertise. Thank you to the Couples SIG presidents and student co-presidents for their contributions to this issue. A special thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in our interviews; your feedback is valuable and very much appreciated. A final thanks to all the members of the Couples SIG—we appreciate you taking the time to read this and leading the effort to change the way of the field.

We are enthusiastic for this great opportunity to be your newsletter editors and look forward to presenting future newsletters sharing the accomplishments of everyone in this wonderful Couples SIG!

# DIVERSITY IN THE FIELD

## **Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents**

Julianne Flanagan<sup>1</sup> & C.J. Fleming<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Medical University of South Carolina*; <sup>2</sup>*Elon University*

Dear Couples SIG members,

The struggle is *real*, isn't it? We are living and working in a time filled tension and divisiveness to our country. It has been challenging to stay informed and employ our emotion regulation skills while maintaining professional productivity and overall well-being. And if we as experts in managing relationships and emotions are struggling with this, who isn't?! Fortunately, our expertise also helps us remember that positive change and solidarity often arise out of times of challenge, chaos, and uncertainty. This is where we believe we have room to capitalize on our unique and valuable strengths – on our important work and on the value of awareness, togetherness, and inclusion. We believe that our collective value as a SIG is to provide a safe space to grow and learn both personally and professionally. We seek to honor the founders of our field and of this group, and to celebrate *all* of the voices that have contributed to building and sustaining the field of couples' research and treatment. At the same time, we seek to identify and amplify the voices of the present and future generations of researchers, clinicians, and educators whose voices have yet to be heard. Our group is among the largest and most active in the ABCT community, and we hope to lead the effort on recognizing and championing diversity.

We applaud this group for cultivating a space where sometimes-uncomfortable conversations are safe, and action to promote diversity is prioritized. We are grateful to the many members who have offered suggestions about how to increase awareness and diversity by ensuring support to every member of the SIG, and to those who demonstrate commitment to this effort in their actions every day. We would also like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation for the members of the SIG newsletter team who have taken the very important initiative to organize this effort. We hope that this newsletter will facilitate more dialogue and action in our group by increasing the amount and visibility of critical research on marginalized groups, efforts to promote gender equity and the advancement of students and faculty from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and to model and engage our trainees in behaviors to increase awareness and inclusion. Let's be the change we wish to see in the world.

Best,

Julianne Flanagan (hellmuth@musc.edu)

CJ Fleming (cfleming6@elon.edu)

# TAKING A LOOK BACK

## Letter from the Former Student Co-Presidents

Dev Crasta<sup>1</sup> & Kayla Knopp<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Rochester*; <sup>2</sup> *University of Denver*

Dear Couples SIG,

It is with great admiration for the members of our wonderful professional community that we reflect on the town hall event that arose during this past year's ABCT conference.

The event was originally proposed as a Clinical Round Table where several senior researchers in the field would be able to look back at where the couples research and therapy field has come over the past few decades and to look forward to where we aspire to go in the future. A key piece of looking forward for our field is the professional development of students; thus, as the Student Co-Presidents of the Couples SIG at the time, we were invited to elicit questions from students to pass on to the panel during the CRT. When members of the Couples SIG voiced concerns about the representation of diverse voices at this CRT, especially those of women, the organizers of the CRT shifted its format to a town hall meeting during which all SIG members could contribute to this important discussion. We stayed on to moderate the town hall discussion in order to ensure that student voices and concerns were emphasized, including relaying some of the questions we had received from students.

The town hall discussion addressed many key topics in couple therapy and research that both highlighted past scientific contributions and charted a path for our evolution as a field. Several experienced researchers shared perspectives on the effectiveness of couple therapy, including a discussion about common factors versus the unique effects of different couple therapy modalities and their implications for research and practice. Attendees discussed several important ways of looking forward as a field, including better serving underserved groups and obtaining funding for our research. The important role of students in the field was highlighted, both in terms of the ways that students drive the field forward – especially in domains of diversity and inclusiveness – and on best practices for faculty mentorship to create opportunities for students to become successful young professionals. We were encouraged to hear discussion about ways to combat some of the structural challenges for students entering the field, particularly for women and people of color.

This town hall event seemed to be a valuable opportunity for the SIG to come together and share thoughts about the issues that matter to us as a field and a community. We further feel that the event was enriched by the collective wisdom of the SIG's diverse voices. We feel privileged to have been involved, and we are grateful to everyone who attended. We look forward to bringing the wisdom shared at this event with us as we take our own next steps toward becoming part of the new generation of young professionals and continuing the important work of carrying our field forward.

Sincerely,  
Kayla Knopp and Dev Crasta  
Former Couples SIG Student Co-Presidents (2015-2017)

**SIG Feedback on the 2017 ABCT Townhall:** In January 2018, a brief survey was emailed to the Couples SIG to gather feedback on the townhall meeting. Respondents were asked to (1) rate their level of satisfaction on the breadth and depth of the townhall, (2) indicate whether the meeting adequately addressed the topic of diversity and inclusion, and (3) report other areas that should have been addressed during the meeting. Of the total number of participants (N=12), the majority (75%) were at least somewhat satisfied with the depth and breadth of the discussion among SIG members, and with the way in which the topic of diversity was addressed. Approximately 17% of respondents were somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with the way in which the meeting content was handled. Other topics respondents wanted to discuss included the experiences of other marginalized groups (e.g., people of color, individuals of the LGBTQ+ community). In sum, despite the small sample size, results of this survey indicate that SIG members would like to maintain an open dialogue on the ways in which the couple field can actively change its approach toward inclusivity across multiple levels (professional, academic, and clinical).

# THE ROAD AHEAD

## **Letter from the Student Co-Presidents**

Judith Biesen<sup>1</sup> & Alex Wang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Notre Dame*; <sup>2</sup> *Binghamton University*

As your new student co-presidents, we're excited to be part of a group that is so invested in the betterment of couples' lives through research and development of evidence-based treatments, and is committed to fostering an environment where different backgrounds, beliefs, and approaches are not only accepted, but valued and desired.

When we talk about diversity in the world of academia, the focus of the conversation is often on increasing diversity by attracting and recruiting diverse graduate students or faculty members. Proclaiming our desire for greater inclusion and acceptance of individuals who bring different perspectives to the table is admirable and demonstrates the commitment of our field to diversity. Nevertheless, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that we first need to build an inclusive environment that enables and empowers diverse members to make meaningful contributions. Otherwise, we run the risk of sending a message that diversity is only a priority when it does not require significant effort or changes. A true commitment to diversity and inclusion means educating others by creating compassion for diverse persons and their unique backgrounds and experiences. This can be especially challenging in clinical or pedagogical settings. In these roles, we are not supposed to impose our personal views on our clients or students. We are expected to focus on our clients' emotional needs, and we are expected to teach our students facts and skills. Yet, by not challenging people's views and bringing to their attention the experiences of minority populations, we are maintaining the status quo, thus creating anything but an inclusive environment.

Moving forward, we first must identify and consult with individuals from diverse backgrounds and ask them what they need – after all, they are the experts. In a teaching/educational context, this may happen by asking directly about their lived realities and struggles. Other times, there may be the need for a more delicate approach, especially if minority persons are concerned about repercussions of voicing their concerns. Feedback could be solicited anonymously (e.g., through online surveys distributed to students or employees), or through the appointment of a trusted representative that keeps identifying information confidential.

Second, we need to identify the ways in which current rules and attitudes interfere with the implementation of procedures that would better serve the needs of certain populations. For instance, although as couples researchers and clinicians we value and promote commitment to our partners and families, our workplace culture might encourage women to return to work as quickly as possible after giving birth, or might frown upon the non-birth parent taking family leave, even if it is part of their official policy. This could even be more challenging for same-sex parents. Third, and most importantly, we need to take steps to address these issues by lobbying for and implementing changes. This can take many forms. Within a university setting, it may mean identifying faculty or staff with relevant expertise who are willing to take on a leadership role in the ongoing efforts to promote diversity. It could also mean developing and establishing appropriate training opportunities for staff, students, and faculty to raise awareness of issues related to diversity. Furthermore, it could involve developing and offering community outreach programs to educate the general population, decrease bias, and foster compassion for the experience of diverse persons.

*Continued on next page*



In terms of better serving diverse couples and families, our field has made great strides in this direction, and many members of our SIG have successfully developed and implemented protocols for minority/underserved couples and families. However, it is important that our efforts don't end here. What good is the most efficacious intervention if only a few hundred people in the world know it exists? Researchers sometimes fall a bit short in their efforts to educate those outside of academia about interventions that would be extremely valuable for many people. Although dissemination has been a recurring topic, it often doesn't translate into anything concrete, first because it takes considerable effort, but also because outside of our field there appears to be a genuine lack of understanding of the importance of relationships for psychological and physical well-being. This highlights the need to leave our academic bubble and put forth more effort to educate people (e.g., lawmakers, insurance agencies) not only about the importance of relationships, but also that we already have some of the answers. For example, when policy makers make mental health related decisions at the local, state, federal, or company level, they usually seek out input from a few "experts". One way of stepping out of our academic bubble might be to either influence or become these experts, so that our evidence-based knowledge can inform policy and improve the well-being of exponentially more people than we have been able to reach thus far.

The field of psychology is at an exciting crossroads. We have an opportunity to influence the direction of our field towards ever more emphasis on work that is beneficial for people of myriad backgrounds. We live in an interconnected world, and to achieve our goals we will need to communicate, work collaboratively, and ensure that no group is left behind. We are proud to be part of a diverse organization that is at the forefront of this movement. We look forward to working with this group of wonderful researchers to continue fostering a culture of diversity and acceptance as we strive to make a positive impact in the world.

Best,  
Judith Biesen & Alex Wang  
Current Student Co-Presidents

## **Interviews on Future Directions in Couple Research**

Members of the Couples SIG whose research or positions have a strong focus on diversity were invited to participate in a brief interview. Questions focused on the present state of couples research in terms of diversity and future directions to facilitate the inclusion and representation of diversity.

Thank you to those who gave their time and responses: Drs. Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Anthony Chambers, Kristi Coop Gordon, Joanne Davila, Kim Halford, Barbara McCrady, Aimee McRae-Clark, Uzma Rehman, Shelby Scott, and Sarah Whitton. Their responses are summarized below.

## Common Themes of the Interviews

### **1. In your opinion, to what degree does current couples research reflect the experiences of minority populations? (“Experiences” are defined broadly as couples’ struggles with individual, relationship, and environmental stressors; resiliency; and other factors that have an impact on relationship functioning.)**

The majority of interviewees agreed that concerted efforts to increase our understanding of the relationship experiences of individuals from minority and under-represented populations have increased within the past decade. In particular, a number of investigators have completed basic research on relationship outcomes in African American, Latino, and LGB couples. While this progress is encouraging, interviewees claimed the field still has a long way to go. Primarily, very little has been done in terms of conducting *couples therapy* research with minority populations. Once we have a better grasp of the unique circumstances, stressors, and strengths that shape the relationships of diverse couples, the field will be better equipped to address the multifaceted needs of said couples via relationship education programs or clinical trials.

The way in which this research is conducted is equally important. Some interviewees suggested that we must do better in our research efforts – “ranging from recruitment to measurement to the implementation of our scientific methods” – to adequately and sensitively capture the experiences of minority couples. Currently, dozens of studies have limited their data collection to non-minority couples (i.e., White, middle-class, heterosexual) for practical or statistical reasons; using a culturally-informed theory-driven approach might be one way to change this. Furthermore, conducting well-designed qualitative research might provide valuable insight into ethnic/cultural differences among diverse couples. As one interviewee eloquently stated, “[Doing such studies] with members of various cultures will help us to better understand the nuances [of their relationships] and to allow important themes that we are not *a priori* aware of to emerge organically.” This work can then be used to inform larger-scale quantitative investigations.

### **2. How do you address diversity within your lab, research, clinic, and day to day work?**

In terms of research, most interviewees noted their work focuses on sexual minority and economically disadvantaged samples. Within this domain, specific interests range broadly from recruiting international couples to working with interracial couples and individuals in arranged marriages. Many noted that their ability to pursue empirical work within these populations is a function of their access to resources: Whereas some investigators have graduate students and staff members who are committed to, and knowledgeable about, conducting research with diverse populations, others claimed that such work depends on the community within which their research institution is located. When the communities one recruits from are inherently diverse, study samples are more likely to be representative of a multitude of cultures and ethnicities. This cannot be said of communities that are more homogenous in nature.

Within the realm of clinical work and academia, nearly all interviewees spoke of their attempts to maintain cultural humility. Many respondents discussed the importance of rejecting a “one size fits all” approach and underscored the clinical utility of administering individually-tailored treatment. By acknowledging a couple’s intersecting identities, clinicians are better equipped to sensitively address the complexities of individual, dyadic, and systemic influences within a couple’s life. Similar perspectives were shared with regard to graduate instruction and the maintenance of research lab environments. Several of our respondents openly discussed continuing education – that is, “continually educating ourselves about how to be more inclusive in our work” and recognizing that we all have blindspots where “we need to grow and improve.” Most importantly, some claimed that when these blind spots are pointed out, it is vital to respond with openness and a willingness “to look inward and change.” These practices will not only improve the quality of our research; they will also enable us to consider, explore, and discuss diversity and cultural considerations more profoundly.

### **3. What are some factors you consider in the recruitment of faculty and/or graduate students?**

Many respondents echoed one another's comments on important factors that influence the recruitment of graduate students and new faculty. The most common responses included: (a) looking for students who are diverse in terms of their ethnic/cultural background and their experiences prior to attending the program; (b) considering the potential adversity and lack of opportunity afforded to the prospective student/professor related to their identity and/or cultural background; (c) ensuring that students/faculty themselves are accepting of, and value, diversity; (d) attending to the unique background, qualities, and perspectives that candidates "bring to the table"; and (e) having search committees who are diverse with respect to gender, ethnicity, experience, student representation, and discipline.

Although programs often strive for representation of diverse students and faculty, many claimed their departments are partially successful in meeting this goal. While reasons for this outcome were not consistently provided across respondents, it is clear that a gap exists between the *ideal* recruitment method and the *reality* of the recruitment process.

### **4. What are the biggest barriers that negatively impact diversity in couples research as well as the recruitment or mentoring of underrepresented minority investigators/clinicians?**

Interviewees agreed there are unique barriers and considerations when working with diverse populations in couples research. Of the many factors identified, participants' knowledge about research was listed as a primary concern. There may be a lack of knowledge about this process that creates a barrier in reaching certain populations. Couples from oppressed and disadvantaged backgrounds may not engage in our research with the same level of trust, comfort, and knowledge about the research process creating a notable barrier in reaching more diverse populations. Respondents highlighted it would be helpful to create partnerships with trusted organizations in diverse communities and work to understand the specific barriers the community members may face. It is important to put our efforts towards decreasing these barriers instead of relying on undergraduate populations for convenience. Location was also brought up as a factor as a possible barrier. Depending on where you are conducting your research, you may not have access to certain populations of interest or them to you. Restricting our research to the laboratory can deepen potential barriers and divides.

When samples of participants are indeed diverse, interviewees stated that, there is a need to ensure we are providing culturally sensitive materials – that is, having culturally appropriate questionnaires (e.g., translation) and interpretation of results. A recommendation of having cultural informants was given to enhance sensitivity to cultural practices, beliefs, and customs. Additionally, to aid in our cultural competence, incorporating knowledge of research outside of the U.S. as well as other fields, such as behavioral health and sociology, would enrich our understanding of diversity considerations. Finally, responses reflected that there is a need for an increase in resources and funding in the area of diversity research. Moreover, there is need to incorporate specific training on how to competently study important aspects of different diverse populations.

As for mentoring minority individuals (e.g., investigators, clinicians or graduate students), it was acknowledged that those from diverse backgrounds tend to experience increased barriers, biases, and less resources available to them. Interviewees proposed considering diversity in the recruitment process, especially in leadership roles, to mitigate these barriers diverse populations face. There is a need to have more diverse representation of role models for mentoring, such as PIs, faculty members and supervisors. These individuals provide unique perspectives into research and mentorship approach informed by their own experiences of adversity and diverse knowledge.

**5. What are some factors that currently facilitate diversity within couples research as well as the recruitment or mentoring of underrepresented minority investigators/clinicians?**

Many of those who responded were encouraged by the growing awareness of the importance of diversity. There are actively growing areas of research examining diverse populations right now! In particular, research on LGBT relationships is gaining more attention. Additionally, the requirement of training in diversity and multicultural competence for accreditation has been a step in the right direction. This is promising in helping current and future members in the field become more competent in working with diverse populations and shows diversity is becoming more of a priority.

Collaboration was a common theme in many responses regarding research, mentoring, and teaching. To increase collaboration, it was suggested that we should be more proactive in seeking out underrepresented members to become involved, and create more opportunities for people from marginalized backgrounds. There are some programs available in the mentoring of diverse undergraduate students, especially those interested in research (e.g., McNair Scholars program). These types of avenues are useful opportunities that can aid in the inclusion of more diverse students. All acknowledged that the inclusion of diverse voices is advantageous and helps to bring in different perspectives and experiences.

**6. What are some things that can be done (by students, faculty, and other academicians) to increase and maintain inclusion of diverse voices in research and clinical work in the long-term?**

There were great suggestions provided from the interviewees for increasing diversity. The most common were: (a) continue raising awareness on the importance of diversity. We need to keep including diverse members into our teams (e.g., students, faculty, clinicians) and keep researching diverse populations; (b) actively educate ourselves on issues of diversity. We should not depend or solely rely on the effort of those from diverse populations to educate us. It is our responsibility to reach out and gain the knowledge we seek; (c) understanding how diversity impacts multiple domains. There are many different levels such as the individual themselves, couple or familial, systemic, and/or institutional; (d) expanding our understanding through multiple sources. There are many other fields that may be more advanced in their study of diversity. Creating collaborations from other disciplines or fields may lessen this gap and increase our knowledge collectively; and (e) leading by example. This can be done by all: students, faculty, clinicians, researchers, everyone. A concrete example for faculty would be taking the time to speak about diversity and inclusion in your labs. It is important to set the standards in our everyday practice, whether it be in research, practice, mentoring or teaching. Let's keep diversity a priority!

## The Credibility Gap in Academe

Annmarie Cano, 2017

*\*Article can be found on: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Credibility-Gap-in-Academe/241980/#.WigcYfJPplg.facebook>*

The Harvey Weinstein scandal has led to renewed awareness about sexual misconduct in every sector, including a string of recent allegations in academe. In the past, claims by women — especially those in subordinate or less senior roles — were not always considered credible. That appears to be changing this time. Women are being believed, and predators are losing their jobs. Yet a recent incident showed me how much women's credibility remains under siege, in subtle ways, even when dealing with faculty peers.

In an academic environment where credentials are everything, women's credentials may still mean little.

Just a few days ago, a female professor and colleague emailed several of us to offer a handout with tips on how to write unbiased letters of recommendation for students pursuing graduate studies. Research has shown that one of the many reasons women lag behind men in academic environments is the fact that, compared with recommendation letters for men, the ones for women candidates often contain less powerful and more negative descriptions.

In essence, recommendation letters written on behalf of women are not as impressive as the ones written for men. Some might argue that women are simply less qualified but other studies have shown that women are evaluated as less competent than men even when both have the very same qualifications.

A male colleague who also received the handout then messaged all of us on the email chain to say the handout was a good resource, and that he would forward it to other professors and to graduate students. Then he added: "perhaps more effective coming from a man than a woman."

I was dumbfounded. Then the irony of his statement sunk in. Here was a man stating that he would be a more credible source about how to prevent gender bias against women.

I emailed him privately to explain that — while I knew he was trying to be helpful — he was simply maintaining beliefs that the handout was trying to dispel. I was hoping for a response like, "You know what? You have a point there. Next time I'll ask her to send it to the other faculty directly."

That's not the response I received. Instead, he replied: "Yes, I'd like to see that as well. But the question I raise is, 'Is a message advocating for women more effective coming from a woman, or from a man, at least at this point in our history/culture?'" He went on to suggest that if we were advocating for a men's issue, my voice as a woman would be more effective than his.

Granted, studies have shown that when people express a view consistent with their own self- or group-interest, their messages tend to be dismissed, scrutinized, or ignored. But does that mean we can never let women talk about their experiences, out of fear that men will dismiss the information or not pay attention in the first place?

What struck me about my male colleague's response, however, was that he was sharing the handout with a largely female audience. These professors and graduate students were already on board with the need to reduce gender bias. Equally troubling: I later learned that when he shared the handout with graduate students, he did not credit its female author.

Let's unpack his response because it sends messages that well-intentioned people may want to avoid if they are genuinely interested in being an ally to women.

Message 1: The status quo is reality and that's just the way it is.

My colleague acknowledged the problem of gender bias, which is good. However, his response and his solution sustained the problem. His response suggests that nothing can really be done. He might as well have said, "My thoughts and prayers are with you."

Message 2: I know more about your personal experience than you do.

By asking me to take his perspective, typically a good idea, he was also sending the message that I was not being objective. Perhaps I was too sensitive (as a woman). In fact, my personal experience of his initial message was not acknowledged or validated. And therefore, my personal experience as a woman is not important.

Message 3: We're all equals (but I'm a more qualified equal).

In his attempt to educate me about persuasion, he did not acknowledge the existence of gendered power differences in academe. The example he used assumes equality where there is none, and his choice not to credit the female author of the handout is problematic.

How can we confront the credibility gap?

A first step is for men to say they hear or believe "the women," as Sen. Mitch McConnell recently said about Roy Moore's accusers. Likewise, in the situation I describe here, men could acknowledge the experience of their female colleagues. They can invite women to participate as credible sources of valuable knowledge. All the attention this year to "manels" (all-male conference panels) also shows that men can refuse to participate in systems that perpetuate the idea that only half of the scholarly population has credible knowledge and skills.

Women and men need to work together to change attitudes about credibility in academe. Last month, for example, at the annual meeting of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, an all-male panel of scholars was slated to discuss the current state of the field. After a female professor of color voiced her concerns online and other women supported her, organizers decided to convert the panel into an open forum that included discussion on diversity and inclusion in the profession.

We all have to be willing to risk speaking up when we see bias, to listen when it's been brought to our attention, and to engage in open dialogue. Those steps are key in moving toward equity and inclusion. Of course speaking up is not without risk. Thinking about my colleague, who couldn't acknowledge the unintended impact of his words, I also wonder about the impact of these situations on my peers and me when we raise our concerns and they are dismissed. What about for colleagues who are untenured or otherwise more vulnerable?

Why is it that we "get to" spend so much time thinking about things like this? I doubt my male colleague has given it a second thought. He has moved on to create more knowledge to enhance his credibility. In the meantime, I am expending additional effort thinking about this incident rather than writing that next scholarly publication. No wonder my credibility is at stake.

## Interview with the Author: Dr. Annmarie Cano

### What inspired you to write the op-ed, “The Credibility Gap in Academe”?

The making of this article stemmed from many, many interactions with lots of different people – interactions I participated in, along with ones I heard about – that underscored how the accomplishments of women and people of color continue to be discredited. The particular interaction described in the article [between Cano and a male colleague] happened a few days before Dr. Uzma Rehman emailed the SIG to voice her opinion about the Clinical Round Table at ABCT; both things occurred within the span of one week. At that point, I felt something needed to be said – indeed, many of us could be saying things, and are not. All too often, when individuals of a vulnerable group speak up about being treated a particular way, we may agree about the injustice but we remain silent, even when the injustice affects us in our marginalized identities. But with the MeToo movement in the national conversation, we see a shift in the dialectic from simple acknowledgement of the treatment of marginalized groups to folks saying that something needs to be *done* about it. In academia especially, the responses of individuals like Drs. Rehman and Snyder on the SIG listserv – that is what you want to see. I was particularly encouraged by that. You want to see someone who is bold enough to speak out when they see something that’s not quite right; you then want others to listen and say, “Yes, we hear you – let’s *do* something about this.” So, if anything, my goal with this article was to harness my privilege as a full professor/administrator and create a platform to motivate women and others to speak up.

### What reactions have you gotten from others since writing the piece? Were these reactions what you hoped to hear from your readers?

All of the direct reactions were positive. Honestly, I didn’t think too much about what would happen after the article was published – I just knew that its ideas were incredibly timely and needed to be said. I didn’t know how people would react; I wasn’t looking for a positive reaction.

That said, I soon learned that the article was shared and re-shared and re-shared! People who I didn’t even know were reaching out and telling me how inspiring it was. Two words that continued to come up were “powerful and brave”; however, I didn’t necessarily feel powerful and brave for writing the article. I suppose it was considered powerful because it included a description of a real experience, as well as real thoughts and reactions, all of which felt authentic to the readers. On the other hand, perhaps it was brave to speak out about my observations. Most responses have been from women, some of whom have shared with me their own experiences in academia. Some senior women even mentioned that they have renewed hope for change – change that will affect even more egregious types of behavior than that described in the article. Ultimately, to hear that I affected people and inspired them has been really empowering for me.

Of course, when writing a piece like this, you run the risk of having people lash out; fortunately, that has not been my experience. I haven’t yet heard direct negative feedback from anyone. However, there have been some responses that weren’t completely positive. Some people wanted to identify the male colleague I referenced in the article. Others thought I misinterpreted the email exchange that in large part inspired the article; this is why I included its language verbatim. I understand the cognitive dissonance driving this assumption; it’s often hard to see our colleagues – who are kind, nice people – say things that are prejudiced in one way or another. Ultimately, you can still be a nice person and make mistakes. We all – every single one of us – have made judgments without thinking. With that in mind, we need to think more about the ways in which our biases are translated to behaviors that might offend/oppress people or affect their work. This is especially true for psychologists. We should be more self-aware so that everyone with whom we interact has an equal shot. Sometimes, it’s a struggle to reconcile the differences between being a good person and allowing our own biases to affect our behavior.



## **What are some things that can be done (by students, faculty, and other academicians) to increase and maintain inclusion of diverse voices in research and clinical work in the long-term?**

I would say that something I am guilty of in my own research is neglecting to look at the gendered and racialized ways in which couples' interactions affect relationship quality and health. I think this stems from the fact that recruitment is \*so\* hard to begin with; oftentimes, researchers are just happy to have a sample with an N large enough to run analyses. Nevertheless, we can learn more about ways to critically examine differences among racial and ethnic groups in sensitive and culturally competent ways. Too often, researchers just lump everyone together in their analyses and, in the limitations section of their manuscript, state "we don't have enough power to understand how these results apply to various racial/ethnic groups." In this day and age, we could be doing more. We could learn a lot from the work of sociologists, anthropologists, and social workers, and collaborate with researchers who have expertise in theoretical, conceptual, and large-scale analyses of majority and minority groups to better understand how the social structures of inequality, power, and stratification interact with, and affect, relationship outcomes. Therefore, it is important to diversify the professoriate – not just to diversify the individuals one works with, but also to obtain a diversity of *ideas*. The more psychology departments can hire faculty with new and innovative ideas, with creative and interesting ways of studying different relationship phenomena, the more we can start to fill the gaps currently in our knowledge base. To see more of that would be wonderful.

Additionally, I have a lot to say about how graduate recruitment is practiced. Typically, the process of graduate admissions is built around finding students who could potentially become "mini-me"s of the professors with whom they apply to work. This is not always a bad thing – however, it is important to think about the way this impacts the diversity of the student body *and* the potential diversity of the research pursued between the student and their advisor. For this reason, when recruiting students, we need to ask ourselves: what are important qualities that I want in my student beyond their standardized test scores? Am I looking for people who are really good team-players? To what degree are my applicants good at handling failure? So much of academia involves being OK when your research does not go as planned, picking up the pieces, and moving on. Certain indices, like test scores, do not capture one's ability to handle that. There is quite a bit of research showing that if programs are using GRE cut scores, they are automatically eliminating people, like women and individuals of color, who might have those vital qualities – that grit – that you are looking for. What's more, test scores are not correlated with graduate school outcomes beyond first-year GPA. This finding should not be ignored. That said, if a program is okay with that, sure, make that decision and use test scores as a way of guiding the admissions process. But if this is something a program does \*not\* choose to do, they need to address the broader question of which qualities and experiences truly make an applicant qualified for graduate work in their program. Two articles that do a really great job of touching on these issues include Posselt (2014; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/676910>) and Miller and Stassun (2014; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nj7504-303a>).

Fortunately, there are a number of networks and initiatives that are bringing diverse scholars together and providing them with a platform to have their voices heard. One that immediately comes to mind is the "Op-Ed Project" (<https://www.theopedproject.org>). It was founded by a journalist who sought to increase the range of voices we see on various social platforms and encourage under-represented professionals, like women, to take thought leadership positions via op-eds and other pieces of writing. They run a number of different workshops at universities and other organizations that train folks to harness their voice in writing and provide attendees with a number of resources to help publish their work. Another example is University of Michigan's Diversity Scholars Network (<https://lsa.umich.edu/ncid/engagement-opportunities/diversity-scholars-network.html>). Started in 2008, it fosters an interdisciplinary community of scholars who care about issues of diversity and inclusion. I just joined a little while ago; membership is by application once per year. I'm so glad I made

that decision – I instantly connected with people who are concerned with the under-representation of marginalized groups in scholarship. I look forward to continue participating in their events. Additionally, there are many offices for diversity and inclusion across campuses; these are great resources for linking people together, people who are invested in the same goals. Finally, there are other informal networks, like the Couples SIG Women’s Happy Hour at ABCT spearheaded by Dr. Kristi Gordon, that provide young scholars with the opportunity to meet others who care about equity, access, and inclusion in academia. Taken together, these entities provide both local and professional communities with resources to enact social change.

As a whole, I am so heartened and hopeful by what started within the SIG during ABCT and hope that those conversations continue – when creating panels for symposia, when deciding who are the reviewers for posters, etc. It is a process, and I am so glad to see that we are taking a step in the right direction. I wouldn’t have expected anything less from our SIG!

*Annmarie Cano is a professor of psychology and associate dean of the graduate school at Wayne State University, in Detroit. Her research focuses on couples coping with chronic illness and issues relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.*

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## **Call for Lab Updates!**

The next issue of the Couples SIG newsletter will be released *Summer 2018*. In preparation for this issue, we’d like to encourage all labs to keep their eye out for an email from Alexandra and Eileen requesting lab updates as well as “hot off the press” articles. Requests will be sent shortly in May.

We look forward to hearing from you!

# Couples Research & Therapy *NEWSLETTER*

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Summer 2018

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## Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to share with you the Summer 2018 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG Newsletter. We were thrilled to receive many updates from a variety of labs; thank you for your contributions! We are happy to share your accomplishments with the SIG!

In addition to lab updates, kudos, and “hot off the press” publications, we are pleased to share with you the featured article, “Trauma Exposure and Aggression Toward Partners and Children: Contextual Influences of Fear and Anger” (pg. 5) by Amy Marshall and her team. This recently published piece is just a sample of the great work that members of the SIG continue to do. Additionally, the newsletter includes reflections on this past year’s ABCT convention as well as anticipatory announcements for this year’s conference in Washington, D.C. **For more information, please read the letters from your SIG Co-Presidents, Drs. CJ Fleming and Julianne Flanagan (pg. 2), and your Student Co-Presidents, Judith Biesen and Alex Wang (pg. 3).**

Finally, there is still time to submit abstracts for the SIG Exposition & Cocktail Party to be held at the conference! If you would like to present a poster, please see the **Special SIG Announcement** on page 3 for details on how to submit your work. The deadline for submissions is August 13<sup>th</sup> at 5:00pm.

We hope everyone has a productive and enjoyable end to their summers. We look forward to providing you with another round of updates prior to the conference in November. Until then, **thank you for making the Couples SIG Newsletter possible!**

*Eileen Barden and Alexandra Wojda*

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## Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Julianne Flanagan<sup>1</sup> & CJ Fleming<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Medical University of South Carolina*; <sup>2</sup>*Elon University*

Hello colleagues!

We hope everyone is having a wonderful summer full of rest and relaxation, and time well spent with family and friends. As always, we are grateful for your membership and have enjoyed serving the SIG.

Last year's conference in San Diego began with a preconference event focused on intimate partner violence, and featured thoughtful presentations from Amy Marshall, Rick Heyman, and Dan O'Leary. Our business meeting was well attended. We welcomed our new Student Co-Presidents (Judith Biesen and Alex Wang), Newsletter Co-Editors (Eileen Barden and Alexandra Wojda) and Media Coordinators (Anna Gilmour and Jessica Ferreira). We awarded the first place Bob Weiss graduate student poster award to Katie Lenger and second place to Joel Sprunger. Thanks to Drs. Justin Lavner, Jenny Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Steffany Fredman for their helpful reviews. The cocktail hour was well attended. Many also attended the cocktail party, and we all enjoyed catching up with one another. We hope to see even more people this year! Some important content around diversity and inclusion were brought to the forefront, and we also joined together to advocate for the critical role our student and trainee members play in our SIG and ABCT overall.

This year, we will be ending our service as Co-Presidents and we would like to sincerely thank Dr. Melanie Fischer for her hard work as Treasurer during the past two years. We will continue holding elections prior to the conference, and we will open nominations for a new Treasurer and President(s) soon. We hope that you will consider nominating (or self-nominating!) a stellar colleague to fill one of these positions. Please keep an eye out for an email from us requesting nominations.

Thinking ahead to the 2018 conference in Washington, D.C., the call for cocktail hour posters was recently distributed, and plans for the preconference event are in the works. We aim to be responsive to last year's request to highlight our student members' research, incorporate mentoring opportunities, and focus on diversity in education, clinical practice, and research. We will keep you posted as the details are finalized.

Best wishes,

CJ and Julianne

## Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Judith Biesen<sup>1</sup> & Alex Wang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Notre Dame; <sup>2</sup> Binghamton University

Greetings from your new Student Co-Presidents! We are very excited to serve this great organization!

### Couples SIG Cocktail Party!

We are currently working on organizing the Couples SIG Cocktail Party. More information will be forthcoming as we finalize the venue. So please keep your eyes peeled for details in the fall newsletter as well as a listserv RSVP email.

In line with past Cocktail Parties, faculty presence is very welcomed at this event. We know that many students relish the opportunity to mingle and get to know the amazing researchers at the forefront of their field!

### Get Involved!

Since we are both new to the student leadership role of this professional organization, we are very interested to hear your suggestions for how we can make it better and more useful to you! Please contact us with your comments, questions and suggestions! And don't forget to join the SIG and the SIG listserv ([couples-sig@sfu.ca](mailto:couples-sig@sfu.ca)) if you haven't already!

We are looking forward to seeing you in DC in a few months! Stay in touch!

Judith ([jbiesen@nd.edu](mailto:jbiesen@nd.edu)) and Alex ([bwang@binghamton.edu](mailto:bwang@binghamton.edu))

## SPECIAL SIG ANNOUNCEMENT:

It's time to submit abstracts for consideration for the SIG Exposition & Cocktail Party that will be *held on Friday, November 16, 2018 from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.* This is a great opportunity for SIG members to present late-breaking work or poster abstracts that may not have been accepted at this year's full conference.

**Submissions are due August 13 by 5 PM.**

If you plan to submit an abstract, please follow the steps below:

1. Complete the following survey, which includes your abstract title and list of authors and affiliations. It asks for the first author's status (undergrad, etc) - not to worry! This is not about seniority, but about making sure at least one spot is saved for an undergrad poster. Submission can be made here:

[http://elon.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cOc4j4dlhk9GTT7](http://elon.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cOc4j4dlhk9GTT7)

2. Send your abstract to [cjebanksfleming@gmail.com](mailto:cjebanksfleming@gmail.com)

**IMPORTANT:** For blind review please **DO NOT** include author or affiliation information on your abstract.

Please include only the title and a max of 250 words of text. Both steps must be completed for your abstract to be considered.

Please be in touch if you have any questions. We look forward to your submissions!

### **ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update**

*Melanie Fischer*

Hello SIG Members!

I hope that all of you are doing well and are enjoying the summer! Here is an update of our membership status and dues:

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 213 (82 professionals, 131 students). This includes 12 new members (2 professional, 10 students) since our last count in October. Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members, particularly during our upcoming conference!

The balance at the last update in October was \$1752. Since then, we have taken in \$1260 in dues. We have paid out \$300 for poster awards, \$620.87 for the party at the 2017 conference, \$167.85 in gift cards as a thank you for our preconference speakers, \$107 for a new projector screen for the SIG and \$25 bag fee to transport it to the conference. This leaves us with a current balance of \$1791. Thank you for your continued support!

We will collect 2018-19 dues at the SIG business meeting during the upcoming conference. If you are not attending the conference or would like to pay your dues electronically, please go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and send money to [msfi@email.unc.edu](mailto:msfi@email.unc.edu). If you use paypal, it is important to designate the payment as a "send to friends and family" to avoid processing fees. You can also mail a check to the address below.

Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students and retired members. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at the conference!

Best,  
Melanie

Send checks for membership dues to:  
Melanie Fischer  
Department of Psychology and Neuroscience  
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Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3270

### **Media Coordinators Update**

*Jessica Ferreira and Anna Gilmour*

If you ever have any information you would like to share with fellow SIG members via the listserv or website (e.g. job postings, study recruitment, or anything you believe will be of interest), please don't hesitate to email us. We will be happy to disseminate that information to the SIG. Furthermore, please be in touch if your contact information ever needs updating on the website or listserv. Thanks so much everyone and we look forward to seeing you in Washington D.C. this year!

- Jessica and Anna

## FEATURED ARTICLE

### Trauma Exposure and Aggression Toward Partners and Children: Contextual Influences of Fear and Anger

Amy D. Marshall  
The Pennsylvania State University

Michael E. Roettger  
The Australian National University

Alexandra C. Mattern, Mark E. Feinberg, and Damon E. Jones  
The Pennsylvania State University

#### Full article citation:

Marshall, A. D., Roettger, M. E., Mattern, A. C., Feinberg, M. E., & Jones, D. E. (2018). Trauma exposure and aggression toward partners and children: Contextual influences of fear and anger. *Journal of Family Psychology*, doi: 10.1037/fam0000405

Aggression within families is a common phenomenon, particularly among parents of young children. In a community sample of 453 families with children ages 3–7 years, 49% of parents engaged in physical intimate partner aggression (IPA) and 87% engaged in physical parent-to-child aggression (PCA; Slep & O’Leary, 2005). Rates of psychological IPA and PCA are even higher, with rates of psychological IPA estimated at 97% of parents (O’Leary, Smith Slep, & O’Leary, 2007) and psychological PCA estimated at 90%–98% of parents (Straus & Field, 2003). Similar rates of IPA and PCA have been observed across community samples of young families (Kim, Lee, Taylor, & Guterman, 2014; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012). Moreover, IPA and PCA frequently co-occur within families, such that nearly 95% of parents who engage in IPA also engage in PCA (Slep & O’Leary, 2005).

A breadth of physical and mental health consequences of experiencing IPA exist, and often occur following exposure to psychological IPA, even in the absence of physical IPA (Lawrence, Orengo-Aguayo, Langer, & Brock, 2012). Men’s IPA is particularly concerning as it is most strongly associated with women’s development of mental health problems and physical injury (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). At the same time, children’s exposure to IPA is a risk factor for poor emotional, behavioral, social, and cognitive functioning (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003). Although these outcomes are more prevalent and serious with exposure to physical IPA (Kitzmann et al., 2003), exposure to psychological IPA also predicts children’s adverse outcomes above and beyond the effect of physical IPA (Jouriles, Norwood, McDonald, Vincent, & Mahoney, 1996). Similarly, the negative consequences of PCA for children are substantial and occur even with relatively commonplace acts such as spanking (Gershoff, 2002). In fact, exposure to psychological PCA predicts adverse outcomes independent of physical PCA (Miller-Perrin, Perrin, & Kocur, 2009). Importantly, children exposed to IPA and PCA exhibit more severe negative outcomes than children exposed to only one form of family aggression (McDonald, Jouriles, Tart, & Minze, 2009).

In response to frequent calls for contextual conceptualizations of family aggression and to facilitate causal inference, we asked men and women to report on their emotional experiences immediately preceding their initiation of IPA and PCA. Given the pervasiveness of trauma exposure in the United States (i.e., approximately 83% of individuals have been exposed to an average of six types of trauma; Liu et al., 2017), we examined our questions among a sample unselected for trauma exposure, thus increasing generalizability of study findings. This sample includes men and women whose first-born child was roughly age 2.5 to 4 years during the measurement period as this is a time of increased family stress (Belsky et al., 1991) when rates of IPA remain high (Fritz & O’Leary, 2004) and rates of PCA begin to peak (Straus & Stewart, 1999). We used an interview to assess incidents of psychological and physical IPA and PCA, including antecedents of discrete incidents of aggression and the specific aggressive behaviors that occurred during each aggressive incident. This approach is distinct from existing work in which the total number of aggressive behaviors perpetrated over the course of a specified time frame (e.g., past year) are measured, thus conflating aggression frequency (i.e., number of incidents of aggression) with aggression persistence (i.e., number of aggressive acts used within discrete aggressive incidents). Because

predictors of aggression initiation and within incident aggression persistence may differ, we focus on the latter to best reflect disinhibited behavior that has the greatest potential for harm.

### Method

Participants include 203 parents (109 women, 94 men) from 111 heterosexual couples whose first-born child was approximately 32 months old at the beginning of the study (in 19 families only one parent participated). Most participants were married (87% of women, 84% of men) and identified as non-Hispanic, White (90.8% of women, 92.6% of men). On average, women were 31.02 years of age ( $SD = 3.81$ , range = 23–45), with 15.78 years of education ( $SD = 1.38$ , range = 12–17), an annual family income of \$85,500 ( $SD = \$34,429$ , range = \$7,500 – \$162,500), and worked 28.07 hr per week ( $SD = 19.17$ , range = 0–80). On average, men were 32.56 years of age ( $SD = 5.12$ , range = 25–50), with 15.43 years of education ( $SD = 1.75$ , range = 11–17), an annual family income of \$85,698 ( $SD = \$34,564$ , range = \$22,500 – \$162,500), and worked 43.44 hr per week ( $SD = 14.17$ , range = 0–80).

All procedures were approved by the Pennsylvania State University institutional review board (Study 36870, “Within-Incident Spillover of Family Aggression”). Participants were originally recruited to take part in a randomized controlled trial of Family Foundations (Feinberg et al., 2016), a psychosocial program for first-time expectant parents designed to enhance coparental and parent–child relationships, parental mental health, and infant self regulation (Feinberg & Kan, 2008). Couples had to be expecting a first child and cohabiting or married, with each parent at least 18 years of age. Couples were primarily recruited from childbirth education programs and obstetric/gynecologic clinics in three mid-Atlantic states and one Southern state. After completion of the Family Foundations 24-month follow-up assessment, participants were recruited into the current study if they were in a cohabiting intimate relationship. Because recruitment overlapped with completion of the Family Foundations study, only participants who completed the 24-month follow-up assessment were recruited into the current study. With the exception of one participant who did not complete the first interview until his child was 47 months of age, the average child age at Wave 1 was 31.86 months ( $SD = 2.70$ , range = 25–38).

Participants who completed at least one interview ( $n = 203$ ) did not differ from those who declined to participate ( $n = 113$ ; 49 women and 64 men from 66 couples) in terms of intervention group status, age, race, education, hours worked per week, or social desirability. Based on data from the 24-month assessment, participants who accepted versus declined participation also did not differ in terms of IPA perpetration. Men who accepted versus declined participation did not differ in terms of PCA perpetration, but women who participated in the study reported somewhat more PCA perpetration than those who declined participation,  $t(137) = -1.68$ ,  $p = .094$ ,  $d = .29$ . Full results are available upon request.

Participants were asked to complete four telephone interviews during which the Children, Intimate Relationships, and Conflictual Life Events (CIRCLE) interview (see below) was administered. Because each interview assessed aggression during the prior 13 weeks, interviews could not be scheduled less than 91 days apart. The median time between interviews ranged from 112 to 115 days. Participants were paid \$40 per interview, plus a \$40 bonus for completing all four interviews.

### Results

Men’s degree of incident-level fear interacted with their breadth of exposure to potentially traumatic events (hereinafter, simply “trauma exposure”) to significantly predict their number of within-incident IPA behaviors; however, the nature of the interaction was not as hypothesized. As displayed in Figure 1A, and as expected, IPA behavior counts remained relatively constant across levels of trauma exposure under conditions of relatively low fear. In contrast, under conditions of relatively high fear, trauma exposure was negatively associated with men’s IPA behavior count. Compared to men with the most trauma exposure, those with no trauma exposure used approximately 4.5 times more IPA behaviors under conditions of high fear. Additionally, under conditions of high fear compared to low fear, men with no trauma exposure used twice as many IPA behaviors, whereas men with the most trauma exposure used roughly half the number of IPA behaviors. Men’s incident-level anger did not significantly moderate the effect of men’s trauma exposure on their use of within-incident IPA behaviors.

Women’s incident-level fear interacted with their trauma exposure to significantly predict their within-incident IPA behavior count, with the nature of the effect being similar to that found among men. As displayed in Figure 1B, IPA behavior counts remained relatively constant across levels of trauma exposure under conditions of relatively low fear. In contrast, under conditions of relatively high fear, women’s trauma exposure was more strongly negatively associated with their IPA behavior count. Compared to women with the greatest trauma exposure, those



with no trauma exposure engaged in approximately five times more IPA behaviors under conditions of high fear. Additionally, under conditions of high fear compared to low fear, women with no history of trauma exposure engaged in nearly twice as many IPA behaviors whereas women with the most trauma exposure engaged in approximately half the number of IPA behaviors.

Women's incident-level anger also interacted with their trauma exposure to significantly predict their within-incident IPA behavior count. As displayed in Figure 1C, IPA behavior counts remained relatively constant across levels of trauma exposure under conditions of relatively low anger. In contrast, under conditions of relatively high anger, women's trauma exposure was negatively associated with their IPA behavior count. Compared to women with the most trauma exposure, those with no trauma exposure engaged in approximately six times more IPA behaviors under conditions of high anger. Also, under conditions of high anger compared to low anger, women with no trauma exposure engaged in approximately three times more IPA behaviors whereas women with the most trauma exposure engaged in little IPA regardless of the degree of anger experienced.

In contrast to results for men's and women's IPA, as displayed in Figure 2A, PCA behavior counts remained relatively constant across levels of trauma exposure under conditions of relatively low fear. In contrast, under conditions of relatively high fear, men's trauma exposure was positively associated with their PCA behavior count. Compared to men with no trauma exposure, those with the most trauma exposure engaged in nearly five times more PCA behaviors under conditions of high fear. Additionally, under conditions of high fear compared to low fear, men with the most trauma exposure engaged in approximately three times more PCA behaviors, whereas men with low levels of trauma exposure engaged in little PCA regardless of the degree of fear experienced.

Similarly, as displayed in Figure 2B, men's PCA behavior counts remained relatively constant across levels of trauma exposure under conditions of relatively low anger. In contrast, under conditions of relatively high anger, men's trauma exposure was more strongly positively associated with their PCA behavior count. This effect was driven by men exposed to relatively low and moderate levels of trauma as men exposed to the most trauma did not report experiencing high levels of anger immediately prior to their use of PCA. Compared to men with no trauma exposure, those with a moderate degree of trauma exposure engaged in approximately 4.5 times more PCA behaviors under conditions of high anger. Additionally, men with moderate levels of trauma exposure engaged in approximately four times more PCA under conditions of high anger compared to low anger. Neither the experience of incident-level fear nor anger significantly interacted with women's trauma exposure to predict their PCA behavior counts.

### **Discussion**

The current study is the first to simultaneously examine trauma exposure, anger, and fear as contributors to men's and women's IPA and PCA perpetration, with a focus on their persistence of aggression within incidents. To date, the reliance on global measures of anger and fear to predict IPA and PCA perpetration renders the immediate, within-incident functional influence of these emotions ambiguous (Norlander & Eckhardt, 2005). We tested this notion by examining the context and sequence of behaviors within aggressive incidents, including the emotions that immediately preceded initiation of IPA and PCA.

A substantial literature documents greater individual-level proneness to anger, angry cognitions, anger expression, and frustration intolerance among individuals who perpetrate IPA or PCA (e.g., Norlander & Eckhardt, 2005; Stith et al., 2009). Results of this study support this literature using a methodology that provides a unique and essential form of data. That is, the experience of more anger immediately prior to men's and women's initiation of IPA, as well as men's initiation of PCA, was followed by their use of more acts of aggression. A direct effect of anger on women's PCA was not observed, despite women's reports of high levels of anger immediately prior to their initiation of PCA. This result indicates that more negative emotion does not always lead to more aggressive behaviors. It may be that anger facilitated women's initiation of PCA, but not the persistence (i.e., use of more than one act) of PCA. Alternatively, this finding may be unique to the current sample as women's PCA often appeared to be used as a form of well-intentioned, but harsh, discipline; thus, replication with a more severely aggressive sample is necessary.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Christina Balderrama-Durbin's Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Lab

☺ Congratulations **Dana Ergas** on her receipt of the 2017-18 Mamie Phipps Clark Diversity Research Grant! This grant will assist her in investigating correlates of stress-related growth in the context of chronic minority stress for LGBTQ+ individuals.

☺ **Seigie Kennedy** and **Alex Wang** successfully defended their theses! Congratulations on a job well done!

## Dr. Don Baucom's UNC Couples Lab

☺ **Dr. Melanie Fischer** has completed her postdoctoral fellowship at UNC and will begin her new research position at the Institute for Medical Psychology (Heidelberg University, Germany).

☺ **Jenn Belus** has received a post-doctoral fellowship from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to support her project titled, "Couple-based intervention for HIV treatment and prevention in South Africa." Jenn will be completing this project—and her post-doc—at the University of Maryland, College Park.

☺ **Matt Cohen** successfully defended his dissertation this spring and matched with Duke University Hospital for his pre-doctoral internship for 2018-2019.

☺ **Kim Pentel** received the 2018 Roy Scrivner Memorial Research Grant from the American Psychological Foundation, granted to a promising young investigator conducting dissertation research on LGBT family psychology and therapy. She also received the 2018 Outstanding Student Clinician Award from the Society for a Science of Clinical psychology, a 2018 LGBTQ Advocacy Award from the UNC LGBTQ Center, and a 2018 Earl and Barbara Baughman Dissertation Research Award from the UNC Department of Psychology and Neuroscience.

## Dr. Bradbury's UCLA Marriage Lab

☺ **Teresa Nguyen** has recently matched at the NorCal VA for her pre-doctoral internship! Teresa also recently received the Teaching Practicum Program Fellow and Collegium of University Teaching Fellows awards.

☺ Recent lab graduate **Dr. Hannah Williamson** just finished her first year as an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

☺ Former graduate student **Dr. Justin Lavner**, now an assistant professor at the University of Georgia, was awarded one of the 2017 Rising Stars Awards by the Association for Psychological Science (APS).

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members.  
Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Rebecca Brock's Family Development Lab

- ☺ **Molly Franz**, doctoral student, successfully defended her dissertation, titled "PTSD and dysfunctional parenting: Emotional and biological mechanisms" and will be starting an internship at the VA Boston Healthcare System in the fall.
- ☺ **Erin Ramsdell**, doctoral student, received her master's degree this spring and the prestigious faculty commendation for excellent performance from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln clinical training program.

## Dr. Annmarie Cano's Relationships and Health Lab

- ☺ Congrats to **Angelia Corley** as she begins a postdoctoral fellowship at the Phoenix VA.
- ☺ Congrats to **Gavin Sanders**, a first-year student, who presented his work on doctoral dissertation writing challenges among underrepresented scholars at the National AGEP Conference in Berkeley, CA and won a NAGAP Research Grant in March 2018.
- ☺ **Dr. Cano** completed the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Summer Leadership Institute at Bryn Mawr College in July 2018.

## Dr. Rebecca Cobb's SFU Close Relationships Lab

- ☺ Recent PhD graduate, **Jill Logan**, has begun her private practice in Vancouver – congratulations and well wishes to Dr. Logan!
- ☺ Congratulations to **Lauren McRae**, our incoming Master's student and former honours student, who won the Dean's Convocation Medal and is the convocation speaker for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences ceremony in June 2018!
- ☺ Congratulations to PhD student, **Marissa Bowsfield**, who successfully defended her MA thesis last fall; also, congratulations on being awarded a Joseph-Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for her PhD research.

## Dr. James Cordova's Center for Couples and Families at Clark University

- ☺ The lab would like to congratulate **Liz Ollen** on finishing her clinical internship and graduating this May! She will begin her post-doc at the UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, where she will be helping to launch EMPWR – UCLA's first clinic for LGBTQ youth who have experienced trauma and chronic stress.

# **KUDOS!!!**

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members.  
Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Brian Doss's Couples Lab at the University of Miami

- ☉ We are thrilled to announce that Ph.D. candidate, **Kathryn Nowlan**, matched at her top choice and will be starting her clinical internship with the Atlanta VA in Georgia this summer.
- ☉ Our 2nd year graduate student, **Karen Rothman**, received her M.S. after successfully defending her thesis, "Completion of a stand-alone versus coach-supported trial of a web-based program for distressed relationships."
- ☉ **McKenzie Roddy** was awarded summer funding from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Miami for her project "Long-term Effects of OurRelationship and ePREP on Individual Mental and Physical Health" and was this year's recipient of the Kirk R. Danhour Award for academic, research, clinical, and leadership excellence for the Adult Clinical Psychology Program.
- ☉ This summer we are excited to welcome **Stephen (Gabe) Hatch** as our new graduate student.
- ☉ Congratulations to **Emily Georgia-Salivar** on passing the EPPP!

## Dr. CJ Fleming's Lab at Elon University

- ☉ **CJ Fleming** and her sophomore research assistant, **Jordan DeVries**, were awarded Elon's Lumen Prize, a \$20,000 award to fund excellence in undergraduate research.

## Dr. Steffany Fredman's Penn State Couple and Family Adaptation to Stress Lab

- ☉ **Steffany Fredman** was awarded an NIH-funded KL2 grant through the Penn State Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute to learn new methods for studying emotion regulation and co-regulation in couples with posttraumatic stress disorder on short time scales.
- ☉ **Yunying (Annie) Le** successfully defended her comprehensive exams.
- ☉ **August Jenkins** successfully defended her master's thesis on the longitudinal associations between depressive symptoms and couple functioning in African-American couples.

## Dr. Jean-Philippe Laurenceau's Lab of Interpersonal Functioning and Experiences (LIFE)

- ☉ **Amy Otto** is finishing her internship at the University of Florida Health Science Center in Gainesville, FL this summer, then will be moving on to a postdoc at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute in Tampa, FL

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members.  
Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Justin Lavner's Lab at the University of Georgia

☺ The two graduate students in the lab both hit big milestones this year: **Lauren VanderBroek Stice** defended her dissertation on the broader autism phenotype and mental health among emerging adults and matched for her clinical internship at The Medical College of Georgia/Charlie Norwood Veteran Affairs Medical Center, and **Tony Petruzzella** defended his Master's thesis on community connectedness and mental health among gay men. **Dr. Lavner** was named a Rising Star by the Association for Psychological Science (APS) and was funded as co-PI on a four-year grant from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK).

## Dr. Amy Marshall's Relationships and Stress Research Lab

☺ Lab alumna, **Lauren Sippel**, is now serving as Associate Director for Research for the National Center for PTSD, Executive Division and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. Lauren received a 2018 Alies Muskin Career Development Leadership Program award from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America

☺ Lab alumna, **Kelly Parker-Guilbert**, renewed her contract as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology at Bowdoin College.

☺ Lab alumna, **Feea Leifker**, is now the Director of Clinical Services for the National Center for Veterans Studies and a postdoctoral research fellow with Brian Baucom at The University of Utah.

☺ **Kelly Daly** made a person! Welcome to the world (and lab!), Lucy!

☺ Former McNair Scholar, **Jenelle Richards**, will begin graduate school in the fall at Columbia University.

☺ Former undergraduate research assistant, **TJ Sullivan**, will begin graduate school in the fall at SUNY Stony Brook to work with Joanne Davila and Dan O'Leary.

## Dr. Richard Mattson's Center for Transdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships

☺ **Tarah Midy** is finishing her internship at the Syracuse Veterans Affairs and successfully defend her dissertation. She obtained a post-doc position at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, working as the Family and Couples Counseling Services resident beginning in the Fall.

☺ Graduate Student **Allison McKinnon** successfully defended her Master's thesis.

☺ Undergrad **Margarita Ashkinazi** obtained a \$3,000 grant from the Summer Scholars and Artists Program through Binghamton University.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

## Dr. Krista Ranby's Healthy Couples Lab

- ☺ **Jennalee Wooldridge** graduated in May and will start her postdoctoral position at UCSD/San Diego VA in the fall!
- ☺ **Sydneyjane Varner** was married in May!
- ☺ **Gillian Lloyd** was engaged in May!

## Dr. Keith Renshaw's Anxiety, Stress, and Relationships Lab at George Mason University

- ☺ **Sarah Bricker-Carter** accepted a Research & Development research fellowship at the Puget Sound VA – Seattle Division to begin this summer. She will focus on how interpersonal factors relate to suicidality and mental health in high-risk and vulnerable populations.
- ☺ **Jennifer DiMauro** accepted a postdoctoral fellowship in trauma psychology at the Washington D.C. Veterans Affairs Medical Center to begin this summer. She will focus on treating veterans with histories of trauma using a variety of evidence-based practices, and engage in program evaluation and development research.

## Dr. Gregory Stuart's Relationship Aggression & Addictive Disorders (RAAD) Lab

- ☺ **Caitlin Wolford-Clevenger** recently matched to the UAB-BVAMC Consortium Internship Training Program in Birmingham, AL. She also defended her dissertation, funded by the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NIAAA F31) on the proximal relation between alcohol use and suicidal ideation and behaviors among college students.
- ☺ **Meagan Brem** received a Visionary Grant from the American Psychological Foundation to support her dissertation entitled "Extending a Conceptual Model of Alcohol-Related Violence to Cyber Dating Violence using a Daily Diary Design with College Students." It seems likely that she will also receive funding from NIAAA (a Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award F31 grant) for this work.
- ☺ **Autumn Rae Florimbio** received a Thomas Fellowship (\$10,000) from the University of Tennessee to support her research project entitled "Longitudinal Association between Implicit and Explicit Attitudes, Laboratory Aggression, and Dating Violence in Couples."
- ☺ As an incoming graduate student, **Alisa Garner** received the Tennessee Fellowship for Graduate Excellence from the University of Tennessee.



## Lab Updates

Please take some time to read about what all of the wonderful  
Couples Labs are up to.

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start thinking about your  
updates for the Fall 2018 Newsletter.

We'd love to hear from you!

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### **Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.**

Director: Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory  
Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology  
Binghamton University – SUNY

Another incredible academic year is in the books! The CAST lab has completed recruitment for their community study aimed at understanding and promoting couple resilience following acute stress and trauma. Graduate students, Eileen Barden and Dana Ergas, successfully completed their first year and are well underway in implementing their own studies! Eileen aims to elucidate dyadic coping strategies and psychophysiological co-regulation in underserved couples struggling with PTSD and substance use. Dana's research aims to examine mechanisms of stress-related growth in sexual minority populations. Second year graduate student, Seigie Kennedy continues to collect data for her longitudinal study examining sexual risk-taking behavior in those with and without a history of trauma. Alex Wang, also recently completed his second year, is designing and testing a brief web-based relationship enhancement intervention – a follow-on from his previous work on relationship savoring.

The CAST lab is excited to kick-off a large collaborative project investigating the unique challenges and strengths of lesbian, gay, and bisexual military couples this coming fall. Thank you to our wonderful 2017-2018 CAST lab team! (Many of who are in the photo below). We will also be welcoming a large team of bright undergraduate research assistants into the lab in the fall!



**Donald Baucom, Ph.D.**

Director: UNC Couples Lab

Richard Lee Simpson Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

It has been a very busy and productive year at the Couples Lab at UNC-Chapel Hill!

Drs. Baucom and Fischer are continuing their collaboration with the National Health Service in England to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions when one partner is depressed. This is part of England's nationwide IAPT program to provide empirically supported interventions to the public. In addition to providing clinical services, these efforts will result in a large scale effectiveness treatment study of couple-based treatment for depression in routine outpatient clinics around the country. The first publication demonstrating the effectiveness of the intervention recently appeared in *Family Process*. At this point, approximately 200 therapists have been trained in Great Britain to offer these services, and several former lab members have served as clinical supervisors for this international effort.

Dr. Baucom and Dr. Melanie Fischer, along with Drs. Sarah Corrie, Michael T. Worrell, and Sara Boeding are continuing to draft their latest book on Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT). This book focuses on how to assist couples in which one or both partners experience psychopathology, along with recent developments in treatment relationship distress. The new text is scheduled to be released in 2019.

In addition, our lab has continued to explore interpersonal emotion regulation by examining couple conversations using dynamic systems modeling and other intensive time series methods. We have been interested in vocal features of emotional arousal within multiple populations of couples. We are currently working on multiple projects at various stages. These include the following:

- Using data from our UNITE project (a pilot study investigating a novel couple-based intervention for binge-eating disorder [BED]), Danielle Weber (3<sup>rd</sup> year) conducted a secondary data analysis to examine how partner accommodation relates to specific patterns of emotion co-regulation between patients with BED and their partners. The manuscript summarizing her findings is currently in press in *Family Process*.
- Danielle Weber is currently leading an investigation on the processes through which individuals in long-distance relationships become emotionally "in sync" after periods of separation.
- Drs. Fischer and Baucom (co-PIs) received a NIMH R03 grant titled "Social processes in RDoC: Function and dysfunction of interpersonal emotion regulation in depression and anxiety," which will be the largest study of vocally encoded emotional arousal in couples to date, with a sample of approximately 400 couples and a focus on interpersonal emotion regulation. This investigation will bring together several existing datasets to explore how expressed emotional arousal (as measured by vocal indicators of emotion) is related to marital discord and symptoms of psychopathology (i.e., anxiety and depression).
- Using data from a 25-year-long longitudinal study, the lab has partnered with Dr. Kurt Hahlweg of Technische Universität Braunschweig to explore how dynamics of emotional arousal predict long-term relationship quality in a sample of German couples.
- Alexandra Wojda (2<sup>nd</sup> year) is conducting a secondary data analysis to examine trajectories of vocally-encoded emotional arousal during interactions of couples with and without relationship distress and experiences of male-to-female intimate partner violence.

Additionally, for her dissertation, Kim Pentel (6<sup>th</sup> year) is overseeing the development and pilot study of a cognitive-behavioral couple therapy to treat relationship distress, specifically tailored for same-sex female couples. This past academic year, the ACCESS Program (Affirming Couples Counseling to Engage Same-Sex partners) treatment manual was written, a team of doctoral student therapists were trained to administer the therapy, and recruitment and treatment



began (study website: <http://accessprogram.web.unc.edu/>). Moreover, Kim will be helping co-facilitate the UNC cognitive behavioral couple therapy practicum with Don Baucom in the 2018-2019 academic year.

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**Tom Bradbury, Ph.D. & Ben Karney, Ph.D.**

Directors: UCLA Marriage Lab  
Professors in Department of Psychology  
UCLA

We are nearing the end of our NICHD-funded data collection of newlywed couples living in low-income communities in Houston, Texas. In this study, we are focusing specifically on how couples' social networks influence individual and relationship wellbeing. In addition, we are about to begin a continuation study of our 2009-13 data collection of couples in Los Angeles County. Tom and Ben are finishing the 3rd edition of their *Intimate Relationships* textbook.



**Rebecca Brock, Ph.D.**

Director: Family Development Lab  
Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology  
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

The current focus of the lab is a large-scale longitudinal study of families navigating the transition into parenthood. The primary aim of *The Family Development Project* is to understand the role of family processes in both adult and child psychopathology. In particular, we are investigating how functioning in the interparental (couple) relationship during pregnancy “sets the stage” for functioning in the family after childbirth, ultimately impacting the health and well-being of each family member. 159 families are completing assessments at pregnancy, 1 month postpartum, 6 months postpartum and when the infant turns ages 1 and 2. We have presented preliminary results from this project at several national conferences (ABCT, IARR, APA) and have several publications under review or in preparation from the first two waves of data collection. For more information, check out the study website: <https://familydevelopmentlab.wixsite.com/familyproject>



Most of our 2017-2018 team. To learn more about the team, visit: <https://psychology.unl.edu/family-development-lab/meet-team>

We said goodbye to our lab manager, Kailee Groshans, who has worked in the Family Lab since 2015. She will be starting UNL's school psychology doctoral training program in the fall.

We are welcoming two new graduate students to the lab in the fall, Frances (Frannie) Calkins and Lauren Laifer.

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### **Anmarie Cano, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationships and Health Lab  
Professor in Department of Psychology  
Wayne State University

We continue to examine emotion regulation in couples facing chronic health conditions with an emphasis on emotional disclosure of health distress and partner responsiveness and empathic responses. We are preparing a manuscript on the feasibility and acceptability of our novel couple-based mindfulness and acceptance intervention for chronic pain. We are also continuing investigations into the role of implicit and in-group faculty bias in doctoral admissions.

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### **Rebecca Cobb, Ph.D.**

Director: SFU Close Relationships Lab  
Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology  
Simon Fraser University

We have been studying how couples communicate about sexual issues, and how this predicts changes in sexual and relationship satisfaction. We recently completed microanalytic coding of couple's sexual discussions and we will be presenting this research at the conference of the Canadian Sex Research Forum in the Fall. Our next step is coding emotion in the discussions using the Noldus FaceReader, a facial expression recognition software, which was funded by a Psychology Department Research Tools grant awarded to Dr. Cobb and Dr. Yuthika Girme.

A group of dedicated research assistants recently presented a qualitative analysis of themes in couples' sexual discussions (e.g., negotiation of sexual scripts) at Connecting Minds, an undergraduate conference. Their poster won second place for the Best poster – congratulations to Julia Hindy, Edna Ng, Karina Thiessen, and Shaira Thobani!

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In collaboration with Dr. Joanne Davila of Stony Brook University, NY, we are conducting a randomized controlled trial examining the effects of a relationship education workshop on individual and relational outcomes. This work is funded by an SFU Department Research Grant.

One of our undergraduate students, Brittany Lasanen, is examining how self-expansion and attachment security predict changes in relationship satisfaction over six months in long-distance relationships. This study is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) institutional grant.

We are excited to welcome a new graduate student this coming Fall! Lauren McRae graduated this month with her B.A. (Hons.) from SFU. She conducted her honours research on relationship boundary discussions last year, and was the winner of the Dean's Convocation Silver Medal and the convocation speaker. Lauren will be entering the Clinical Psychology program at SFU to continue her research on sexuality and close relationships.

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**James V. Cordova, Ph.D.**

Director: Center for Couples and Families  
Professor and Chair in Department of Psychology  
Clark University

James Cordova is working on disseminating and implementing the Marriage Checkup for a wide range of couples across varied treatment settings. He is collaborating with Dr. Cigrang and his Air Force team on an RCT adapting the Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. Dr. Cordova is also in the process of testing an online platform for the Checkup, allowing couples in any geographical region easy access to a well-trained Marriage Checkup clinician.

Tatiana Gray is completing her post-doc at Clark, turning the Relationship Checkup into a start-up company in order to provide brief, effective relationship healthcare to even more couples. Matt Hawrilenko is finishing up his clinical internship at the Seattle VA and will be starting a research postdoc at the Seattle VA in the fall. Justin Laplante is finishing his dissertation on the developmental trajectory of mindfulness in romantic relationships. He is supervising two undergraduate independent research projects and teaching undergraduate research methods and statistics courses. Emily Maher is finishing her clinical externship at Rhode Island Hospital. She is beginning work on her dissertation, examining the roles of experiential avoidance and acceptance in explaining treatment gains at an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-based partial hospitalization program. She will be applying for internship in the fall. Taylor Dovala has concluded her thesis research and is beginning work on her dissertation. She is also finishing her clinical placement at UMass Memorial and preparing to begin a new placement at Rhode Island Hospital. Nick Canby finished and presented his second year project, entitled "The role of mindfulness in interpersonal perceptions of empathy and comfort with vulnerability," and will spend the summer preparing it for publication. He is looking forward to starting his practicum site in the Fall at UMASS counseling center. Setareh O'Brien is preparing to collect data for a qualitative study of marriage and spirituality among religiously unaffiliated adults. She is looking forward to starting her psychotherapy practicum in the fall.

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**Brian Doss, Ph.D.**

Director: Doss Couples Lab  
Associate Professor in Department of Psychology  
University of Miami

After enrolling over 700 couples during our first phase of data collection for our ACF-funded grant delivering the OurRelationship and ePREP programs to low-income couples, we have begun our second phase of data collection testing the role of coach contact. We are also continuing to work on two adaptations of the OurRelationship program—one for same-sex couples and one translated into Spanish.

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**Steffany J. Fredman, Ph.D.**

Director: Couples and Families Adaptation to Stress (CFAS) Lab  
Assistant Professor in Human Development and Family Studies  
Penn State

Our lab has been busy working on a variety of translational and basic research pertaining to couples and stress. We've happily completed data collection for our DoD- and VA-funded pilot study to test an intensive, multi-couple weekend version of cognitive-behavioral conjoint therapy for PTSD (CBCT for PTSD) for service members and veterans with PTSD and their romantic partners conducted through the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD. We're also very excited to be collaborating with colleagues at Penn State, UNC-Chapel Hill, and NYU on studies investigating how couples co-regulate emotion in real time. Other lab projects include the daily experiences of couples during the transition to parenthood, the intersection of couple functioning and mental health in racial minorities, and the interpersonal relationships of student veterans with PTSD.

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**Wyndol Furman, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship Center  
Professor in Department of Psychology  
University of Denver

For the last 18 years, we have studying the romantic relationships of a cohort of 200 participants who were recruited when they were in the 10th grade (15 years old). The majority are currently married or cohabiting. We have collected 11 waves of data, including interview, observational, diary, and multi-reporter survey data. We are currently collecting a 12th wave of survey data. In another project we gathered six months of monthly data from high risk couples to identify predictors of dating violence.

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**Jean-Philippe Laurenceau, Ph.D.**

Director: Laboratory of Interpersonal Functioning and Experiences (LIFE)  
Professor and Chair in Department of Psychology  
University of Delaware

Our current major project is an intensive longitudinal investigation of stress, relationship functioning, health behaviors, and glycemic control in patients with type 2 diabetes and their spouses/partners. We are currently collecting follow-up data for this year-long study. One of our doctoral students, Emily Soriano, recently applied for an F31 predoctoral fellowship to examine the effects of spouse involvement in diabetes management on continuously measured glucose for her dissertation using these data.

We are in the midst of analyzing data and writing up findings from our recently completed longitudinal study on fear of cancer recurrence in breast cancer patients and their spouses/partners. Looking ahead, we are planning our next grant submission to continue our work in this area.

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**Justin Lavner, Ph.D.**

Director: Couples Lab  
Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology  
University of Georgia

Our lab started data collection for our new NIDDK-funded project testing the effectiveness of a responsive parenting intervention for first-time African American mothers and their infants. The project is co-directed by Dr. Leann Birch from the Department of Foods and Nutrition at UGA in collaboration with the Center for Family Research at UGA and Augusta University. We have also been continuing our research examining predictors of marital functioning and how marital dynamics change over time.

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**Annette Mahoney, Ph.D.**

Director: Relational Spirituality and Psychology Research Team – R-SPiRiT  
Professor in Department of Psychology  
Bowling Green State University

R-SPiRiT is an ecumenical research team dedicated to using psychological methods to examine ways religion/spirituality may impact interpersonal relationships (e.g., dating, sexuality, parenting, coupling and uncoupling), for better or worse, and also thereby affect individual adjustment. See website for more information.

<https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/psychology/graduate-program/clinical/the-psychology-of-spirituality-and-family/about.html>

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**Amy D. Marshall, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationships and Stress Research Lab  
Associate Professor in Department of Psychology  
Pennsylvania State University

Members of the Relationships and Stress Research Lab are busy disseminating findings from the Children, Intimate Relationships, and Conflictual Life Events (CIRCLE) study regarding the context and precipitants of incidents of family violence and aggression. We recently submitted a NIH/NICHHD proposal to continue this work with a greater focus on the role of trauma and threat in promoting or inhibiting violence among high risk families. Additionally, with funding from the Penn State Justice Center for Research, we are starting new data collection with families of children enrolled in Head Start. This work focuses on understanding mechanisms of firearm-related family violence, including the nature and impact of the presence of firearms on the within-incident occurrence, persistence, severity trajectory, and cross-dyad spillover of violence.

We are fortunate to continue working collaboratively across Penn State labs to answer questions about couples' transition to parenthood (with Mark Feinberg) and the impact of PTSD on couple relationships (with Steffany Fredman). Kelly Daly is working on her dissertation regarding the developmental timing of trauma exposure on late adolescents' social competence and aggressive behavior. Alex Mattern completed her master's thesis on how observed threats of rejection and dominance are differentially associated with husbands' observed aggression based on their histories of trauma exposure. Jen Wong completed her master's thesis on gender differences in how dissatisfaction with couples' division of labor and childcare impacts the severity of aggression used during conflicts about division of labor/childcare versus other topics. Emily Taverna joined the lab this year and has hit the ground running to understand differences between parents and non-parents in how IPV perpetration leads to guilt as well as how examination of vocally encoded emotion can inform the validity of interviews used to assess intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization.

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**Richard E. Mattson, Ph.D.**

Director: Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships  
Associate Professor in Department of Psychology  
Binghamton University

Our lab continues to analyze data from the Individual and Well Being Study utilizing both the biological measures obtained and other subjective measures, and will be presenting initial findings at the International Association for Relationship Research conference later this summer. The graduate students in the lab have made significant progress in their individual projects focusing broadly on sexual assault, including the following projects: Longitudinal Perceptions of Consent, Sexual Assault in the Media, Determinants of Underreporting in the Sexual Victimization and Abuse of Elder Adults. Our team of nearly 25 undergraduate research assistants have been irreplaceable assets as usual. Two of them, Margarita Ashkinazi and Emily Bibby, are working on research projects through the summer with a focus on how body image affects marital and sexual satisfaction and how power differentials influence misinterpretations of women's friendliness as flirting, respectively. We, in collaboration with members from the Sex Lab at Binghamton University, submitted a grant proposal focusing on perceptions of consent in college populations. Additionally, graduate student



Samantha Wagner submitted a proposal to the National Institute of Justice's Graduate Research Fellowship in Social and Behavioral Sciences to support her dissertation work assessing underreporting of sexual abuse in the elderly.




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### **Krista Ranby, Ph.D.**

Director: Healthy Couples Lab  
 Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology  
 University of Colorado Denver

Our lab has four current projects, all examining health behavior engagement within an interpersonal context, specifically romantic partners. PhD students working with Dr. Ranby include Jennalee Wooldridge, Sydneyjane Varner, Gillian Lloyd, and joining in fall 2018, Stephanie Callan. We are working to publish findings in our engaged/newlywed couples study. We have recently published work on a collaborative planning intervention for physical activity within couples experiencing type 2 diabetes. We are in the early stages of recruitment for couples within a cancer survivorship population for an online study of interest in dyadic support for physical activity. We are also enrolling couples for a longitudinal study of physical activity and relationship factors throughout the transition to parenthood. You can keep up to date on lab activities by checking our website: <https://clas.ucdenver.edu/healthy-couples-lab/> or liking our Facebook page: UCDHealthyCouplesLab.

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### **Keith Renshaw, Ph.D.**

Director: Anxiety, Stress, and Relationships Lab  
 Associate Professor and Chair in Department of Psychology  
 George Mason University

This spring, we completed data collection on a cross-cultural study comparing mental health and family factors among Pakistani and American college students. This project was a result of our collaboration with Dr. Sadia Saleem, from the University of Management and Technology in Lahore, Pakistan, who received a Fulbright Scholarship to work in our lab for the past year. We will be sad to see her go this summer, but we look forward to continuing to collaborate from afar!

Other updates include that Sarah Bricker-Carter and Jennifer DiMauro are completing their internships at the Seattle VA and Baltimore VA, respectively. Both have completed their dissertations and will graduate as of August! Also, Sarah Giff recently re-submitted a NIH NRSA (F31) application to investigate military couples' parenting practices. Finally, we are excited to welcome Sissi Palma Ribeiro to our lab this coming Fall!




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### **Gregory Stuart, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship Aggression & Addictive Disorders (RAAD) Lab  
 Professor in Department of Psychology  
 University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Our research generally focuses on intimate partner violence, substance misuse, family dysfunction, impulsivity, and the overlap of these constructs. Lab members are free to pursue other topics of interest as well. When possible, our research has used longitudinal and/or experimental approaches, including some randomized controlled trials.

Caitlin Wolford-Clevenger is a rising 6th year graduate student whose research examines risk and protective factors for suicide and other harmful behaviors (e.g., interpersonal violence, substance abuse), particularly among vulnerable populations (e.g., LGBT people).

Meagan Brem is a rising 5th year graduate student whose research examines risk and protective factors for face-to-face and cyber intimate partner violence perpetration. She has a secondary line of research investigating compulsive sexual behavior among adults with substance use disorders.

Autumn Rae Florimbio is a rising 4th year graduate student whose research examines cognitive (e.g., attitudes accepting of violence) and behavioral (e.g., alcohol and substance use) factors that increase the risk for intimate partner violence and sexual aggression.

Hannah Grigorian is a rising 3rd year graduate student whose research examines factors that increase the risk for intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization such as sleep quality, emotion dysregulation, and substance use.

Alisa Garner is an upcoming 2nd year graduate student whose research focuses on risk factors for sexual risk-taking and the perpetration of sexual aggression and coercion.

Gloria Romero is a 1st year doctoral student who is interested in studying the intergenerational transmission of interpersonal trauma. Specifically, Gloria hopes to identify risk and protective factors for intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration by examining the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and adult IPV perpetration and victimization.

# HOT off the Press

## In Press and Recently Published Literature

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- Balderrama-Durbin, C., Vogt, D., Erbes, C., & Polusny, M. (2018). Psychometric evaluation of a measure of intimate partner communication during deployment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *32*, 31-41.
- Baucom, D. H., Fischer, M. S., Worrell, M., Corrie, S., Belus, J. M., Molyva, E., & Boeding, S. E. (2018). Couple-based intervention for depression: An effectiveness study in the National Health Service in England. *Family Process*, *57* (2), 275-292. doi: 10.1111/famp.12332
- Belus, J. M., Kline, T., Carney, T., Myers, B., & Wechsberg, W. M. (2018). Measuring relationship functioning in South African couples: A strategy for improving HIV prevention efforts. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*. doi: [10.1080/14681994.2017.1419559](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2017.1419559)
- Belus, J. M., Pentel, K. Z., Cohen, M. J., Fischer, M., & Baucom, D. H. (2018). Staying connected: An examination of relationship maintenance behaviors in long-distance relationships. *Marriage and Family Review*. doi: [10.1080/01494929.2018.1458004](https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2018.1458004)
- Benson, L., & Nguyen, T. P. (in press). Integrative behavioral couple therapy. In Lebow, J., Chambers, A., Breunlin, D. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of couple and family therapy*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Bowsfield, M. L., & Samra, J. (2018). Closing the access to care gap: How Internet delivered CBT can improve the health of Canadians. *Journal of the BC Psychological Association*, *7*, 8-10.
- Brem, M. J., Shorey, R. C., Rothman, E., Temple, J. R., & Stuart, G. L. (in press). Trait jealousy moderates the relationship between alcohol problems and intimate partner violence among men in batterer intervention programs. *Violence Against Women*.
- Brem, M. J., Shorey, R. C., Anderson, S., & Stuart, G. L. (in press). Does experiential avoidance explain the relationships between shame, PTSD symptoms, and compulsive sexual behavior among women in substance use treatment? *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*.
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# Couples Research & Therapy *NEWSLETTER*

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Spring 2019

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## Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to share with you the Spring 2019 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG Newsletter. We would like to thank all of the labs who submitted updates, and are happy to share your achievements with the SIG!

In addition to lab updates, kudos, and “hot off the press” publications, we are pleased to share with you the featured article, “**Effects of Romantic Involvement on Substance Use Among Young Sexual and Gender Minorities**” (pg. 5) by **Dr. Sarah Whitton** and her team. This piece is a sample of the great work that members of the SIG continue to do, and underscores the SIG’s dedication to exploring relationship factors within diverse populations. Additionally, the newsletter features comments from newly-appointed faculty co-leaders, **Drs. Christina Balderrama-Durbin and Mikhila Wildey (pg. 2)**; we are thrilled to have their leadership in the SIG and have included their reflections on this past year’s ABCT convention in Washington, DC. Also included are updates from the SIG student co-leaders, **Judith Biesen and Alex Wang (pg.3)**, who provide further information on the upcoming SIG Cocktail event at this year’s convention in Atlanta.

We hope everyone has had a productive academic year thus far! We look forward to providing you with another round of updates prior to the conference in November. Until then. . .

**Thank you for making the Couples SIG Newsletter possible!**

*Eileen Barden and Alexandra Wojda*

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## Letter from the SIG Co-Leaders

Christina Balderrama-Durbin<sup>1</sup> & Mikhila Wildey<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Binghamton University (SUNY);* <sup>2</sup>*Grand Valley State University*

Hello colleagues!

As your new Co-Leaders, we are looking forward to working with you over the next two years. Thank you for your continued membership, and a special thank you to both CJ Fleming and Julianne Flanagan for all of their hard work as past Co-Leaders of the SIG!

Mikhila Wildey is an Assistant Professor at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI, and Christina Balderrama-Durbin is an Assistant Professor at Binghamton University in Binghamton, NY. Please feel free to contact us at [wildeymi@gvsu.edu](mailto:wildeymi@gvsu.edu) or [cbalderr@binghamton.edu](mailto:cbalderr@binghamton.edu).

For those who attended ABCT this past fall in Washington DC, we had an exciting meeting with lots of great discussion for how to shape our future SIG events. Our preconference event included an informative panel presentation by Drs. Anthony Chambers, Vickie Bhatia, and Galena Rhoades featuring the topics of Diversity in Education, Treatment, and Research in the Couples Field. Additionally, we enjoyed our first ever student research lightning symposium and speed mentoring events - they were a hit! Our business meeting was well-attended and we elected a new Treasurer, Jamie Winters. We awarded the first place Bob Weiss graduate student poster award to Alexandra Wojda and second place to McKenzie Roddy. The undergraduate poster award went to Shayla Weiser. Thanks to Julianne Flanagan, CJ Fleming, Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Justin Lavner for judging. Also, thank you to all of you who volunteered to be on the program committee for next fall's conference. Your work is important as we strive to be well represented in the context of the broader conference.

We also had a fantastic discussion surrounding how to improve inclusivity within our SIG. On that note, we thank Brian Baucom for taking the lead and starting the Underrepresented Scholars Fund. Anyone is welcome to donate to this fund, and we will be using these funds to support underrepresented minority students to attend the ABCT conference. To donate to the fund, you can Paypal or Venmo (bbaucom@gmail.com) to Brian directly.

As we think ahead to our 2019 conference in Atlanta, we are working on making a final plan for our preconference event guided by interests expressed at the business meeting. We will keep you posted as we finalize the agenda. Also, keep an eye out for calls for cocktail hour posters and additional conference activities.

We hope you all have a wonderful summer!

Christina & Mikhila

## **Letter from the Student Co-Presidents**

Judith Biesen<sup>1</sup>&Alex Wang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Notre Dame*; <sup>2</sup> *Binghamton University*

Greetings from your returning Student Leaders!

We are very excited to continue our service to this amazing organization!

### **Couples SIG Cocktail Party!**

We are currently working on organizing the Couples SIG Cocktail Party. More information will be forthcoming as we finalize the venue. So please keep your eyes peeled for details in the fall newsletter as well as a listserv RSVP email.

We want to thank all the faculty members who made time for this fun event last year! We have received a lot of positive feedback about the opportunity to mingle with so many faculty and professional members! And we are looking forward to your presence this year as well!

### **Get Involved!**

We are continuing our journey of optimizing our role as student leaders in this professional organization. We would love feedback from you about how we can best serve you and improve your experience in this organization! Please contact us with your comments, questions and suggestions! And don't forget to join the SIG and the SIG listserv ([couples-sig@sfu.ca](mailto:couples-sig@sfu.ca)) if you haven't already!

We are looking forward to seeing you in Atlanta!

Judith Biesen  
([judithbiesen@gmail.com](mailto:judithbiesen@gmail.com))

Alex Wang  
([bwang@binghamton.edu](mailto:bwang@binghamton.edu))



## ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update

Jamie Winters

VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System

Hello SIG Members!

I hope that all of you are doing well. Here is an update of our membership status and dues:

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 206 (84 professionals, 122 students). This includes 15 new members (4 professional, 11 students) paying dues so far this year. Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members, particularly during our upcoming conference!

The balance last reported in June was \$1791.66. Since then, we have taken in \$1500 in dues. We have paid out \$300 for poster awards, \$492.97 for the party at the 2018 conference, and 99.90 for webpage fees. This leaves us with a current balance of \$2398.79. Thanks to all who have paid their dues!

Remember it is not too late to pay this year's dues. If you use paypal, it is important to designate the payment as a "send to friends and family" to avoid processing fees. You can also mail a check to the address below. Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students and retired members.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership.

Jamie

Send checks for membership dues to:

Jamie Winters, PhD

VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System 116A

Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105

or

Paypal: [Jamiewin@umich.edu](mailto:Jamiewin@umich.edu)

## Media Coordinators Update

Jessica Ferreira<sup>1</sup> and Anna Gilmour<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Simon Fraser University; <sup>2</sup>University of Colorado Boulder

If you ever have any information you would like to share with fellow SIG members via the listserv or website (e.g. job postings, study recruitment, or anything you believe will be of interest), please don't hesitate to email us. We will be happy to disseminate that information to the SIG. Furthermore, please be in touch if your contact information ever needs updating on the website or listserv. Thanks so much everyone and we look forward to seeing you in Atlanta, GA this year!

- Jessica and Anna

## FEATURED ARTICLE

### Effects of romantic involvement on substance use among young sexual and gender minorities

Sarah W. Whitton<sup>a</sup>, Christina Dyar<sup>a</sup>, Michael E. Newcomb<sup>b</sup>, Brian Mustanski<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Cincinnati

<sup>b</sup> Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing, Northwestern University

Full article citation: Whitton, S. W., Dyar, C., Newcomb, M. E., & Mustanski, B. (2018). Effects of romantic involvement on substance use among young sexual and gender minorities. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, *191*, 215–222.

#### Introduction

Substance use and heavy drinking represent a significant public health problem, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood (Bachman et al., 2002; Johnston, 2010). Among young people, sexual and gender minorities (SGM) are at 2–3 times higher risk for cigarette, alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine use than heterosexuals (Marshal et al., 2008). It is therefore important to identify factors that may protect young SGM from substance use. One well-established protective factor against problematic substance use among heterosexual adults is marriage. Longitudinal studies consistently show that entry into marriage is followed by reduced binge drinking and drug use (Duncan et al., 2006; Fleming et al., 2010; Staff et al., 2010). According to social control theories, spouses monitor one another, discouraging risky behaviors such as heavy drinking, smoking, and drug use (Lewis and Butterfield, 2007). The internalization of behavioral norms for the social role of a spouse may also reduce substance use, which is often viewed as more appropriate for single individuals (Umberson, 1987). Further, marriage is associated with tangible legal and financial benefits (Waite and Gallagher, 2000) and fulfills individuals' needs for social connection, emotional support, and intimacy (House et al., 1988). Therefore, it may also reduce substance use by decreasing financial stress, loneliness, and isolation, which many individuals cope with through substance use.

#### *1.1. Relationship involvement and substance use among adolescents and young adults*

It remains unclear whether the “marriage benefit” to substance use generalizes to the dating relationships of young people. Young romantic partners may not exert social control over each other or monitor their romantic partner's behavior, and the social pressure to refrain from risky behaviors when married is not typically present in young dating relationships. In fact, involvement in dating during adolescence has been linked with increases in other high-risk behaviors, including delinquency (Cui et al., 2012; Joyner and Udry, 2000) and externalizing behaviors (Furman and Collibee, 2014; van Dulmen et al., 2008). Further, the non-marital romantic relationships of youth generally do not provide legal or financial benefits that might alleviate stressors associated with substance use. To the contrary, among adolescents, romantic involvement has been associated with depression (Davila et al., 2004), possibly due to the stresses of dating that teens lack the emotional resources to handle (Davila, 2008). Alternatively, being in an intimate relationship may discourage substance use among young people, partly by limiting engagement in the single “hook-up” culture, where heavy drinking and drug use is common (e.g., Owen et al., 2010). Romantic involvement may also provide youth with a sense of accomplishment and social identity (Montgomery, 2005), along with emotional intimacy not offered by other social partners. Both factors may reduce youth's use of substances to cope with loneliness or negative affect. Research examining the association between dating relationships and substance use among young people is fairly limited and inconsistent. Cross-sectional studies of young adults have found that, compared to those who are single, those in committed relationships report less alcohol consumption (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Whitton et al., 2013) but do not differ in use of tobacco or illicit drugs (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Simon and Barrett, 2010). Some longitudinal research on young adults has indicated that substance use declines when individuals enter dating (Furman and Collibee, 2014) and nonmarital cohabiting relationships

(Duncan et al., 2006; Staff et al., 2010), though effects are not as consistent or strong as for marriage. However, another study found that entry into a relationship between ages 18 and 20 was not associated with reduced heavy drinking or marijuana use and was associated with increases in smoking (Fleming et al., 2010). Further, romantic involvement has been associated with greater alcohol (Davies and Windle, 2000; Miller et al., 2009) and substance use (Furman and Collibee, 2014) in adolescents (< 18 years).

### *1.2. Relationship involvement and substance use among sexual and gender minorities*

It also is unclear whether romantic involvement has effects on substance use among SGM, particularly youth. Among adults, same-sex romantic relationships are exceedingly similar to different-sex relationships in relationship quality (e.g., Kurdek, 2005) and associations between relationship functioning and partners' mental health (Whitton and Kuryluk, 2014). Sexual minority and heterosexual adults report similar efforts to promote healthy behaviors in their romantic partners, including discouraging heavy substance use (Reczek and Umberson, 2012), suggesting the "marriage benefit" observed in heterosexual adults is likely to generalize to SGM adults. It is also possible that the increased risk of substance use associated with heterosexual romantic involvement during adolescence will generalize to SGM. In fact, this effect might be more pronounced among SGM youth, because dating may increase stress by activating any internal conflicts about sexuality and may raise risk for discrimination and family rejection by revealing their same-sex attractions. Further, involvement with a same-sex partner may promote engagement in SGM communities, which often have tolerant social norms regarding substance use (Cochran et al., 2012; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008). Alternately, SGM youth may benefit more psychologically than heterosexual youth do from having a romantic partner, who may provide social support lacking from their parents and schoolmates (Katz-Wise and Hyde, 2012; Ryan et al., 2009). Similarly, increased affiliation with the LGBT community may buffer the effects of minority stress (Johns et al., 2013), thereby reducing substance use as a coping method. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate any studies investigating associations between relationship involvement and substance use in SGM.

### *1.3. Potential moderators of relationship involvement effects on substance use*

Although often treated as a homogenous group, SGM young people are diverse in age, gender, and sexual identity (i.e., self-identified sexual orientation). As we seek to understand how relationship involvement may affect substance use among young SGM, we must explore potential differences between demographic groups. First, the effects of dating on substance use among SGM youth may show developmental differences across adolescence and young adulthood. The normative trajectory model theorizes that romantic involvement undermines social-emotional health during adolescence when it is nonnormative, but promotes wellbeing beginning in young adulthood when it is normative (Connolly et al., 2013) and represents a salient developmental task (Furman and Collibee, 2014). Consistent with this theory, romantic involvement was associated with more substance use in middle adolescence but less substance use in young adulthood in a predominantly heterosexual sample (Furman and Collibee, 2014). Effects of romantic involvement on young SGM substance use may also vary by gender. Findings from heterosexual samples are highly inconsistent: Among young adults, some studies have found no gender differences in the beneficial effects of romantic involvement on substance use (Fleming et al., 2010; Whitton et al., 2013) whereas others found stronger effects for women than men on binge drinking (Duncan et al., 2006) and substance use problems (Simon and Barrett, 2010). Among heterosexual adolescents, some have speculated that dating may promote substance use more in female than male adolescents because all youth are more likely to be introduced to substance use by a male (Miller et al., 2009). However, most studies find no gender differences in effects of romantic involvement on adolescent substance use (Beckmeyer, 2015; Furman and Collibee, 2014; Joyner and Udry, 2000). Further, this theory assumes adolescents date someone of a different gender, often not the case for SGM youth. Specific sexual identities may also influence how romantic involvement affects substance use. Although dating is associated with better psychological health among gay and lesbian individuals, among bisexuals it is associated with greater risk for anxiety disorders (Feinstein et al., 2016) and more psychological distress (Whitton et al., 2018). These differences may be attributable to unique stressors bisexuals face when involved in romantic relationships, including invalidation of their bisexual identity by others who assume they are lesbian/gay or heterosexual based on their current partner's gender (Dyar et al., 2014) and pressure from non-bisexual partners

to change their sexual identity (Bostwick and Hequembourg, 2014). The psychological distress resulting from such experiences might raise risk for substance use among bisexuals who enter romantic relationships. Exploring this possibility is important, as bisexual youth use cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs at markedly higher rates than heterosexual, gay, and lesbian youth (Marshall et al., 2008).

#### *1.4. The current study*

In the current study, we aimed to examine how relationship involvement influences substance use among SGM youth. Using multiwave longitudinal data from a large and diverse sample, we assessed whether, within-persons, relationship involvement is associated with the use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit drugs. That is, do SGM youth tend to use these substances less (or more) often at times when they are in a relationship versus when they are single? Further, we examined whether these effects differ by age, gender, and sexual identity.

### **Material and methods**

#### *2.1. Sample and procedure*

Participants were 248 sexual and gender minority youth from Chicago who participated in Project Q2, an IRB-approved longitudinal study of LGBT youth. Project Q2 employed an accelerated longitudinal design in which participants who varied in age at baseline (from 16 to 20 years; collected from 2007 to 2009) provided eight waves of data over 5 years (baseline and 6-, 12-, 18-, 24-, 42-, 48-, and 60-month follow-up). Retention at each wave ranged from 80 to 90%. See Mustanski et al. (2010, 2016) for details about Project Q2. These analyses used data from all waves except 18-month follow-up when relationship involvement was not assessed. Verifications during followups revealed that 13 participants misreported their age at baseline; data these participants provided when outside the study age range were removed (22 time-points). Participants were paid \$25-\$50 per wave. See Table 1 for sample demographics at baseline.

### **Measures**

#### *2.2.1. Demographics*

At baseline, participant age, gender, sexual identity, and race/ethnicity were assessed. Age at each wave was calculated using the birth date and assessment date. The following measures were collected at each wave:

#### *2.2.2. Current relationship involvement*

Participants were asked about their current and recent relationships. Those who reported a current romantic relationship at a given wave were coded 1, others as 0.

#### *2.2.3. Cigarette use*

Participants were asked, "Do you currently smoke cigarettes?" Those who said yes were asked, "How many cigarettes a day do you smoke?" (open-ended). This variable represents the current number of cigarettes smoked per day (non-smokers coded as 0).

#### *2.2.4. Alcohol use*

Participants were asked about frequency of alcohol use: "In the last 6 months, how many days did you drink alcohol?" and quantity "Think of all the times you have had a drink during the last 6 months. How many drinks did you usually have each time?" Quantity and frequency were multiplied to create an index of alcohol use (Bartholow and Heinz, 2006; Greenfield, 2000), or the number of alcoholic drinks consumed over the past 6 months.

#### *2.2.5. Marijuana use*

Participants' open-ended responses to the question, "In the last 6 months, how many times did you use marijuana?" were used as an index of marijuana use. This variable represents a number of times the participant used marijuana in the past 6 months.

### 2.2.6. Other illicit drug use

Participants were asked, “In the last 6 months, did you use [illicit drug]?” Illicit drugs included cocaine, methamphetamines, and club drugs (e.g., ecstasy, ketamine, GHB). Because endorsement was low across waves (0.0%–2.0% methamphetamines, 3.8–10.0% cocaine, and 5.8–10.8% club drugs), we created a dichotomous variable indicating any use of illicit drugs other than marijuana in the past 6 months (9.5–15.6% of participants per wave).

## 2.3. Analyses

Mplus Version 7 with robust maximum likelihood estimation was used to conduct analyses (Muthén and Muthén, 2012). 10.7% of data were missing and were handled using full information maximum likelihood (FIML), which was appropriate given preliminary analyses indicating data were missing at random (i.e., missingness was not predicted by available variables). To test hypotheses, we used multilevel modeling: Repeated measures (Level 1) were nested within individuals (Level 2). To assess within-person associations between relationship involvement and each substance use outcome (i.e., cigarette, alcohol, marijuana, other illicit drug use), the given substance use variable at each time point was predicted by relationship involvement at that time point. This Level 1 association was modeled as random (i.e., free to differ between participants) to allow for tests of moderation by demographic characteristics. Age (grand mean centered) at each time point was included at Level 1, and age, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity were included as controls at Level 2. We used negative binomial distributions to model cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use because these variables were over-dispersed (standard deviation > mean; see Table 2); though we also considered a zero-inflated model of cigarette use, Akaike and Bayesian Information Criterion (AIC and BIC) values were lower for the negative binomial model ( $\Delta AIC = -28.84$ ;  $\Delta BIC = -97.80$ ), suggesting it was more parsimonious and had a better fit to the data than a zero-inflated model (Raftery, 1995). A Bernoulli distribution was used to model other illicit drug use (a dichotomous variable). Next, for each substance use variable, we ran three additional models to test for moderation of the within-person association between romantic involvement and substance use by: (1) age, (2) sexual identity, and (3) gender. In the age moderated models, a latent variable interaction was added at Level 1 to model the interaction between age and relationship involvement in predicting substance use at each wave (Preacher et al., 2016). In the sexual identity moderated models, sexual identity (lesbian/gay [coded 0]; bisexual [coded 1]) was added to Level 2 as a predictor of the Level 1 association between relationship status and substance use (i.e., cross-level interaction; Aguinis et al., 2013); the 24 participants who identified as unsure or questioning were excluded from these models due to their small number (but included in all other models). In the gender moderated models, gender (cisgender men [coded 0]; cisgender women [coded 1]) was added as a Level 2 predictor of the Level 1 association between relationship involvement and substance use; the 20 transgender participants were excluded from these models (but included in all others).

## Results

Table 2 includes intra-class correlations (ICCs) for binary and continuous variables and means, standard deviations, and medians for all variables. To reduce the impact of extreme outliers in alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use, these variables were Winsorized (Yang et al., 2011): cigarette use at 3 standard deviations above the mean (17.27) and alcohol and marijuana use at the 95th percentile (190 for marijuana; 90 for alcohol) because outliers remained when using 3 standard deviations above the mean.

### 3.1. Cigarette use

In the unmoderated model for cigarette use (Table 3), there was a significant average within-person effect of relationship involvement on cigarette use. Participants smoked 1.26 times more cigarettes per day at waves when they were currently in a relationship than at waves when they were single. Despite the significant variance in this within-person association across participants, it was not moderated by age, gender, or sexual identity.

### 3.2. Alcohol use

There was a significant average within-person effect of relationship involvement on alcohol use (see unmoderated model, Table 4). At waves when they were romantically involved, youth reported consuming 36% fewer alcoholic drinks in the past 6 months than at waves when they were single. Age and sexual identity did not moderate this association, but gender did (see Fig. 1). Simple rate ratios indicated romantic involvement was associated with less alcohol use for both groups, but this effect was stronger for cisgender men ( $b = -.65$ ,  $SE=.01$ ,  $z = -66.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $RR = .52$ ) than cisgender women ( $b = -.32$ ,  $SE=.01$ ,  $z = -35.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $RR = .73$ ).

### 3.3. Marijuana use

In the unmoderated model (Table 5), the average within-person effect of relationship involvement on marijuana use was not significant. Gender and sexual identity moderated this effect, but not age (see Fig. 1). Simple rate ratios indicated that, within-individuals, relationship involvement was not associated with marijuana use for lesbian/gay individuals ( $b=.08$ ,  $SE=.06$ ,  $z=1.27$ ,  $p= .20$ ;  $RR = 1.08$ ) or cisgender women ( $b = -.09$ ,  $SE=.14$ ,  $z = -.66$ ,  $p= .51$ ;  $RR = .91$ ). However, at waves when bisexual individuals ( $b=.84$ ,  $SE=.05$ ,  $z=18.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $RR = 2.31$ ) and cisgender men ( $b=.29$ ,  $SE=.15$ ,  $z=1.95$ ,  $p= .05$ ;  $RR = 1.34$ ) reported current relationship involvement, they reported more frequent past 6-month marijuana use than at waves when they were single.

### 3.4. Other illicit drug use

There was a significant negative within-person effect of relationship involvement on the use of illicit drugs other than marijuana (see unmoderated model, Table 6). At waves when participants reported relationship involvement, they were 27% less likely to have used other illicit drugs in the preceding 6 months than at waves when they were single ( $OR=.73$ ). This within-person association was not moderated by age or gender but was moderated by sexual identity. Simple odds ratios indicated that current relationship involvement was associated with lower likelihood of recent illicit drug use for lesbian/gay individuals ( $b = -.58$ ,  $SE=.09$ ,  $z = -6.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $OR = .56$ ) but with a higher likelihood of recent illicit drug use for bisexuals ( $b=.87$ ,  $SE=.13$ ,  $z=6.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $OR = 2.39$ ). Lesbian/gay individuals were 44% less likely to have recently used other illicit drugs during waves when they were in relationships than when they were single, whereas bisexual individuals were 2.39 times more likely to have used these drugs during waves when they were in relationships than when they were single (Fig. 1).

## Discussion

In the first study to explore how romantic relationship involvement influences the substance use of young SGM, we used multiwave longitudinal data to assess whether young SGM used less (or more) alcohol, cigarettes, and other illicit drugs when romantically partnered than when single. In contrast to the normative trajectory model, which suggests that romantic involvement may promote risky behavior in adolescence but inhibit it in young adulthood (Connolly et al., 2013), we found no evidence of developmental differences in the withinperson association between romantic involvement and SGM substance use across the ages of 16 to 26 years. Rather, findings suggested that the effects of romantic involvement among SGM youth differ across substances and demographic subgroups. Relationship involvement demonstrated the most consistent positive effects on alcohol use, with participants reporting 36% less recent alcohol use when in a relationship than when single. Though this effect was stronger for men than women, it was present across gender, age and sexual identity. Echoing evidence that entering a relationship reduces drinking among heterosexual young adults (Duncan et al., 2006; Furman and Collibee, 2014; Staff et al., 2010), this finding suggests that romantic involvement may represent a broad protective factor against alcohol use among SGM youth. Similarly, romantic involvement had a protective effect against the use of illicit drugs other than marijuana for participants who identified as gay/lesbian (but not bisexual), reducing their chances of having recently used by 78%. Perhaps by finding a partner, young SGM escape norms of heavy drinking and drug use in the bar/party scene, a common forum for meeting potential romantic or sexual partners (Claxton et al., 2015; Owen et al., 2010). In contrast to its positive effects on alcohol and other illicit drug use, dating does not appear to protect SGM against marijuana use. In

fact, romantic involvement was not associated with marijuana use for gay/lesbian youth or cisgender women and was associated with increased recent use among cisgender men and bisexuals. These findings are consistent with a growing literature suggesting that the marriage benefit to marijuana use does not extend to non-marital different-sex relationships of young adults (Duncan et al., 2006; Fleming et al., 2010). Further, they suggest dating may be a risk factor for marijuana use among young SGM men. This was surprising because, in past research, there have generally been no gender differences (Fleming et al., 2010; Staff et al., 2010), and any evidence of romantic involvement increasing marijuana use has been limited to early and middle adolescence (Beckmeyer, 2015; Furman and Collibee, 2014). The positive association between romantic involvement and marijuana use may persist into young adulthood among male SGM partly because substance use declines less with age among SGMs than in heterosexuals (Green and Feinstein, 2012). Romantic involvement may also affect marijuana use differently for young male SGM than for their heterosexual counterparts due to differences in partner gender (male partners may smoke more marijuana than heterosexual female partners) or because it increases exposure to SGM communities accepting of marijuana use (Cochran et al., 2012). Romantic involvement was associated with increased drug use for bisexuals. Bisexuals reported 1.34 times more recent marijuana use and were 2.39 times more likely to have recently used other illicit drugs at waves when romantically partnered than when single. These findings add to mounting evidence that the experiences of bisexuals differ markedly from those of other SGM. In addition to being at higher risk for mental health issues (Ross et al., 2017) and substance use (Marshall et al., 2008), bisexuals may not benefit from romantic relationships in the ways that gay, lesbian, and heterosexual young adults do. Together with other findings from this sample indicating that bisexuals report greater psychological distress when romantically involved than when single (Whitton et al., 2018), the current findings suggest that any benefits of dating may be outweighed by the anti-bisexual stigma bisexuals can face from straight and lesbian or gay partners (Bostwick and Hequembourg, 2014; Dyar et al., 2014). Romantic involvement also increased tobacco use across all demographic groups. On average, SGM youth smoked 26% more daily cigarettes when in a relationship than when single. Although this finding contradicts some earlier evidence that cohabitation, engagement, and marriage all reduce cigarette use among young adults (Staff et al., 2010), it is consistent with other studies documenting increased smoking in young adults who enter a romantic relationship (Fleming et al., 2010) or first marriage (women only; Duncan et al., 2006). It is possible these effects are driven by youth entering relationships with partners who smoke; same- and different-sex partners can promote unhealthy habits in each other (Reczek and Umberson, 2012) and teens who date a smoker are more likely to start smoking (Kennedy et al., 2011). Such socialization effects may be particularly present in LGBT communities, where smoking is more common and often perceived as a way to form connections with other SGM youth (National LGBTQ Young Adult Tobacco Project, 2010). Because we did not assess partner tobacco use, future research is needed to explore this possibility. Conclusions should be drawn keeping study limitations in mind. First, because we did not have information on the length of participants' current relationships, it is possible that some of the alcohol, marijuana, and other drug use reported occurred prior to the relationship. Second, there were too few transgender individuals to explore potential differences from cisgender individuals, and we did not capture non-binary gender identities. Future research should explore how relationship involvement is associated with substance use across multiple genders and sexual identities, particularly considering the increasing number of LGBT people who identify as non-binary or transgender (Richards et al., 2016) and with sexual identities other than gay/lesbian and bisexual (e.g., pansexual, queer, asexual). Due to small numbers of participants with some racial/ethnic identities (e.g., White  $n=35$ ; Latino  $n=30$ ), we were unable to test for racial differences in associations; this is an important area for future study. Because we did not collect detailed data on partners or relationships, we could not assess whether findings were influenced by partner gender, gender composition of the relationship (same- vs. different-sex), partner's substance use, or characteristics of the relationship (e.g., commitment, quality). Future research should also account for relationship commitment, given evidence that serious relationships, but not casual or group dating, increase adolescent substance use (Beckmeyer, 2015).

## Conclusions

This study provides novel evidence to support some protective effects of relationship involvement against substance use among young SGM. Being in a romantic relationship appears to reduce drinking among all SGM



youth, and reduce the use of drugs other than marijuana among those who identify as gay or lesbian. Together with evidence that romantic involvement has psychological benefits in this population, reducing the distress associated with victimization they experience related to their minority sexual identity (Whitton et al., 2018), these results support initiatives to promote healthy relationships among SGM youth. Efforts to encourage dating among SGM (e.g., through planned LGBT-focused social events), and to teach healthy relationship skills (Mustanski et al., 2015), may ultimately help reduce the mental health and substance use disparities they face. Such efforts must, however, keep in mind that romantic involvement may raise risk for smoking among all young SGM, as well as for drug use among bisexuals and marijuana use among SGM men. These findings speak to the potential value of anti-tobacco campaigns targeting smoking in LGBT communities and of initiatives to reduce the stigmatization of bisexuality.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members.  
Congratulations to you!**

Dr. Christina Balderrama-Durbin's Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Lab

☺ **Christina Balderrama-Durbin** has received funding from NIAAA as a Co-I to develop and test a brief intervention for Veterans with co-morbid PTSD and heavy alcohol use in primary care. This is a collaborative project across three VA sites in upstate New York. She has also been granted the SUNY Presidential Diversity Research Award to support her research examining couple-level minority stress and barriers to couple therapy help-seeking for couples who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

☺ Congratulations to **Seigie Kennedy** and **Alex Wang** who passed their comprehensive exams with flying colors!

Dr. Donald Baucom's UNC Couples Lab

☺ **Dr. Donald Baucom** has received the 2019 University of North Carolina Distinguished Alumn Award for his decades-long commitment to conducting research on intimate relationships at UNC.

☺ **Matt Cohen, MA**, who is currently on internship at Duke University Hospital, has received a post-doctoral fellowship from the UNC's Center for Women's Mood Disorders.

☺ **Kim Pentel, MA** will be moving to Seattle, Washington for her pre-doctoral internship year at the Seattle VA starting this summer.

☺ **Danielle Weber, MA** received a Departmental Undergraduate Teaching Commendation for Fall 2018 in recognition of exceptional course ratings. Additionally, Danielle has recently passed her comps, qualifying her as a doctoral candidate.

☺ **Alexandra Wojda** received the Robert L. Weiss Graduate Student Poster Award from ABCT's Couples Special Interest Group for her poster, *Patterns of Emotional Arousal in Couples With and Without Histories of Intimate Partner Violence*, at ABCT's 2018 convention.

☺ We welcome Emily Carrino, who will be joining us as a first-year doctoral student in the fall. Welcome, Emily!

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!**

Drs. Steven Beach & Justin Lavner's UGA Couple and Family Lifespan Health Lab

☺ **Lauren VanderBroek Stice** will be beginning her postdoc at the Emory School of Medicine/Grady Hospital.

☺ **Victoria King** will be beginning her post-doc at UGA this year.

☺ **Dr. Beach** received the President's Award of Distinction for Team Science.

☺ **Dr. Lavner** received tenure and was awarded the Charles B. Knapp Early Career Award.

Dr. Rebecca Brock's Family Development Lab

☺ **Molly Franz** was awarded the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Presidential Graduate Fellowship and will be starting a T32 post-doctoral position at the National Center for PTSD at the VA Boston Healthcare System.

☺ **Beth Alexander** received the 2019 Donald D. Jensen Award for the best undergraduate research project conducted by a psychology major. Beth's thesis was titled "The Relationship Between Maternal PTSD and Child Internalizing Behaviors: The Influence of Parenting Stress and Social Support."

☺ **Jaime Stephenson** successfully defended her senior thesis titled "Interparental Control During Pregnancy Predicts Parental Control Directed Toward Infants."

☺ We had two undergraduate research assistants receive funding this year to support research. **Sage Volk** is currently completing a project entitled "The Role of Partner Support in the Link Between Insecure Attachment and Maternal and Paternal Depression During Pregnancy." **Olivia Maras** received funding for Summer 2019 for her project entitled "Role of Parental Eating Pathology on Child Outcomes and Parenting Practices."

Dr. Joanne Davila's Relationship Development Center

☺ Former lab member **Vickie Bhatia** took a position at the Edward Hines Jr. VA in Chicago, her hometown!

☺ Former lab members **Brian Feinstein**, **Rachel Hershenberg**, and **Lisa Starr** have been named as Rising Stars by APS!

# KUDOS!!!

We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members.  
Congratulations to you!

Dr. Brian Doss's Couples Lab at the University of Miami

☺ We are thrilled to announce that **McKenzie Roddy** will be starting her clinical internship with Baylor College of Medicine in Texas this summer.

Dr. Jean-Philippe Laurenceau's Laboratory of Interpersonal Functioning and Experiences (LIFE)

☺ **Christine Perndorfer** (third year doctoral student) matched at the Philadelphia VA Sleep Center and Behavioral Health Lab—her first choice—for clinical externship next year!

☺ **Emily Soriano** (fifth year doctoral student) was recently awarded an F31 predoctoral fellowship from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) to fund her dissertation research and training over the next two years. The title of her project is "Spouse Involvement in Everyday Type 2 Diabetes Care: Effects of Social Control on Continuously Measured Glucose."

Dr. Richard Mattson's Center for Transdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships (CTRoIR)

☺ **Maggie Parker** successfully defended her Master's Thesis and submitted a proposal for the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship.

☺ **Samantha Wagner** was awarded national recognition for her teaching through the Society for a Science of Clinical Psychology (SSCP).

☺ Our sibling lab, Dr. Matthew Johnson's Marriage and Family Lab welcomes new graduate student **Erin Alexander**, who, in her first year, has submitted a National Institute of Justice Dissertation Fellowship Grant.

☺ Our undergraduates have shone bright again with **Emily Bibby** receiving the Chancellor's Award of Student Excellence, and was offered a post-bac lab manager position at UNC Chapel Hill.

☺ Both **Sarah Kneebis** and **Ifeoluwa** were accepted to competitive Master's programs at Binghamton University.

☺ **Dr. Richard Mattson** was featured in *The Conversation* discussing how our genes may influence quality of marriage.

# KUDOS!!!

**We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members.  
Congratulations to you!**

Dr. Keith Renshaw's Anxiety, Stress, and Relationships Lab at George Mason University

☺ **Lauren Paige** matched with the VA West Los Angeles Medical Center for her 2019-2020 pre-doctoral internship. We'll miss her but are excited for her next step!

☺ **Sarah Giff** received an F31 award from NICHD to support her dissertation work on parenting in relation to PTSD!

Dr. Sarah Whitton's Today's Couples and Families Research Program

☺ **Lisa Godfrey**, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year graduate student, received a scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to support her doctoral training and research investigating the effects of varying sexual agreements on the quality and stability of male same-sex relationships.

☺ **Neslihan James-Kangal** matched for internship at the Southwest Consortium/New Mexico VA Healthcare System (NMVAHCS).

☺ **Amanda Kuryluk** successfully defended her dissertation and graduated with her Ph.D. in December, 2018.

## Lab Updates

Please take some time to read about what all of the wonderful  
Couples Labs are up to.

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start thinking  
about your updates for the Fall 2019 Newsletter.

We'd love to hear from you!

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### **Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.**

Director: Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory

Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology

Binghamton University – SUNY

It has been a busy and productive year in the CAST Lab! We have cleaned and prepared all the self-report, psychophysiological, and salivary data from our community study aimed at understanding and promoting couple resilience following acute stress and trauma.

CAST Lab second-year graduate students, Eileen Barden and Dana Ergas, are in the midst of completing their master's theses. Eileen is investigating physiological couple coregulation (via respiratory sinus arrhythmia) in the context of PTSD and Dana is examining stress-related growth in a community sample of sexually marginalized individuals. Third-year graduate student, Seigie Kennedy, is set to propose her dissertation this spring, she aims to explicate the impact of sexual assault on emotional and physical intimacy using an innovative multimethod approach. Alex Wang, also a third-year student, is working toward submitting his NRSA and is currently examining the moderating effects of attachment on couple coregulation following acute stress induction.

The CAST Lab is engaged in several federally funded research endeavors with military service members and Veterans including a large collaborative project investigating the unique challenges and strengths of lesbian, gay, and bisexual military couples, another longitudinal study following military couples through their first several years after joining the Air Force as well as a treatment development study designed to target comorbid PTSD and heavy drinking for Veterans in primary care. Finally, this fall we plan to launch a pilot project examining couple-level minority stress and barriers to couple therapy help-seeking for community couples who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. A big thank you to our extraordinary 2018-2019 CAST lab team! We look forward to publishing our findings and welcoming another large team of bright undergraduate research assistants into the lab in the fall!



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**Donald Baucom, Ph.D.**

Director: UNC Couples Lab

Richard Lee Simpson Distinguished Professor of Psychology  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Dr. Baucom is continuing his collaboration with the National Health Service to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner is depressed. This is part of England's nationwide IAPT program to provide empirically-supported interventions to the public. In addition to providing clinical services, these efforts will result in a large scale effectiveness treatment study of couple-based treatment for depression in routine outpatient clinics around the country.

Dr. Baucom and lab alumna Dr. Melanie Fischer, along with Drs. Sarah Corrie and Michael T. Worrell, have completed their latest book on Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT). Covering the basic empirical and conceptual aspects of the model, along with descriptions of how CBCT can be used in the treatment of psychopathology and long-term health conditions, this volume will be the most comprehensive to date on CBCT. In fact, it is set to replace the principle textbook on CBCT originally published by Epstein and Baucom in 2002. The new text is scheduled to be released later this year.

Our lab continues to explore interpersonal emotion regulation by examining couple conversations using dynamic systems modeling and other intensive time series methods. We have been interested in vocal features of emotional arousal within multiple populations of couples, including couples where one member has significant psychopathology, couples with histories of intimate partner violence, and couples in a longitudinal study of relationship functioning. We are currently working on multiple projects at various stages.

We currently have a new project examining long-distance relationships. We are actively recruiting community couples in long-distance relationships as well as couples who live in the same geographic location. We are interested in exploring times of transitions within these couples; that is, when partners transition from functioning individually versus times when the couple is together

The entire lab is assisting in efforts supporting Kim Pentel's dissertation project titled ACCESS (Affirming Couples Counseling to Engage Same-Sex Partners). ACCESS is a cognitive-behavioral couple therapy tailored specifically for same-sex female couples. The 10-session ACCESS treatment manual has been developed, a team of doctoral-student therapists trained, and an open trial pilot study is currently underway.

We are working in collaboration with the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders to conduct an effectiveness study comparing individual- and couple-based treatments for binge eating disorder. Recruitment is underway.

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**Rebecca Brock, Ph.D.**

Director: Family Development Lab

Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology  
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

We are continuing our large-scale longitudinal study of families navigating the transition into parenthood and early childhood. The primary aim of *The Family Development Project* is to understand the role of family processes in both adult and child psychopathology. In particular, we are investigating how functioning in the interparental (couple) relationship during pregnancy sets the stage for functioning in the family after childbirth, ultimately impacting the health and well-being of each family member. Families (N=159) completed



assessments during pregnancy, at 1 month postpartum, at 6 months postpartum, and when the infant turned 1 year of age. We are currently completing a toddler-age assessment. We recently received funding for a preschool-age visit to investigate the role of family relationships in the early development of executive functioning. For more information, check out the study website:

<https://familydevelopmentlab.wixsite.com/familyproject>.



Here we are at our fall 2018 lab party. We are welcoming a new graduate student, Eric Phillips, to the lab this upcoming fall! To learn more about the team, visit: <https://psychology.unl.edu/family-development-lab/meet-team>.

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### **James V. Cordova, Ph.D.**

Director: Center for Couples and Families  
Professor and Chair in Department of Psychology  
Clark University

James Cordova is working on disseminating and implementing the Relationship Checkup for a wider range of couples. In collaboration with Dr. Cigrang and his Air Force team, we are wrapping up an RCT adapting the Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. Dr. Cordova is also in the process of testing an online platform for the Checkup, allowing couples in any geographical region easy access to a well-trained Checkup clinician.

Justin Laplante is finishing his dissertation on the influences of meditation on romantic relationship, and teaching a global project-based applied learning course. He is also collaborating on a paper investigating the impact of meditation on social interactions. Emily Maher continues to work on the lab's current grant, disseminating the Checkup among US Airmen and their partners. She is working on her dissertation, which will examine the utility of a brief mindfulness intervention among postpartum women. She will apply to internship in the fall. Taylor Dovala is finishing up work at her clinical externship at Rhode Island Hospital. She is continuing to work on her dissertation, evaluating an LGB-affirmative adaptation of The Relationship Checkup. She will be applying for internship in the fall. Nick Canby is currently doing his practicum at UMASS medical school counseling center and couple therapy at Clark. He is writing up his Master's research on mindfulness, perceptions of empathy, and comfort with vulnerability. He is also currently finishing papers on the influence of social factors in mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT),

predictors of home meditation practice minutes in MBCT, and the role of the teacher in mindfulness-based interventions. Setareh Rossman is currently collecting data for a qualitative research study examining relational spirituality among nonreligious married adults. She is looking forward to starting her couples therapy practicum this fall. David Yoo is the newest member of the lab! Before coming to Clark, he worked as a pediatric hospice chaplain and a trauma/psychiatric chaplain. David's research interests revolve around authentic communications between emerging adults and their parents.

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**Joanne Davila, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship Development Center  
Professor in Department of Psychology  
Stony Brook University

The Relationship Development Center continues its work on romantic relationships and well-being. We continue to be involved in a number of projects and collaborations, including: (1) ongoing data collection on romantic competence among emerging adults, (2) the development and evaluation of a relationship education program for college students, and its adaptation to different populations using a variety of formats, (3) the study of LGBTQ individuals' identity, health, and relationship experiences and (4) the study of diverse relationship types. We also have ongoing collaborations including research on romantic relationships among individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, as well as associations between romantic functioning and mental health.

We now have four PhD students: Jiaqi Zhou (currently in her 4th year), Ellora Vilkin, Howard Huang, and T.J. Sullivan (co-advised by Dan O'Leary), all finishing up their first year. They are all actively working on lab projects, as well as developing their own lines of research.

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**Brian Doss, Ph.D.**

Director: Couples Lab  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
University of Miami

We have successfully translated the OurRelationship program to Spanish and are now actively enrolling and treating Spanish-speaking low-income couples.

We presented our Phase 1 analyses for our ACF-funded grant delivering the OurRelationship and ePREP programs to 742 low-income couples at this year's ABCT. Results show that both interventions showed significant, medium-sized improvement relative to WL control in all four relationship outcome domains (satisfaction, conflict, communication skills, and relationship knowledge), with few significant differences between intervention groups. Additionally, the programs created significant, small-sized effects on individual functioning (psychological distress, perceived stress, anger, perceived health, and insomnia). Intervention effects on both relationship and individual functioning were generally maintained over 6-month follow up.

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**Jean-Philippe Laurenceau, Ph.D.**

Director: Laboratory of Interpersonal Functioning and Experiences (LIFE)  
Professor and Chair in Department of Psychology  
University of Delaware

Our current major project is an intensive longitudinal investigation of stress, relationship functioning, health behaviors, and glycemic control in patients with type 2 diabetes and their spouses/partners. We recently completed data collection for this year-long study and are currently analyzing the data and writing up initial findings.

In addition, we are in the midst of analyzing data and writing up findings from our recently completed longitudinal study on fear of cancer recurrence in breast cancer patients and their spouses/partners. Looking ahead, we are planning our next grant submission to continue our work in this area.

We are excited to welcome a new doctoral student, Ovsanna Balian, from CSUN, to the LIFE lab this fall!

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### **Steven Beach, Ph.D. & Justin Lavner, Ph.D.**

Directors: UGA Couple and Family Lifespan Health Lab  
Professors in Department of Psychology  
University of Georgia

The lab has been working on several projects aimed at understanding and promoting health among rural African American families. This includes a new follow-up of middle-aged couples who participated in the ProSAAF intervention to examine longer-term impact on relationship functioning and health (PI: Beach; R01AG059260-06) and an ongoing RCT examining a responsive parenting intervention for first-time mothers and their infants (PIs: Lavner and Birch; R01DK112874). In addition, Dr. Beach is continuing to examine biomarkers and health among African Americans (R01CA220254 and R01HD080749) and Dr. Lavner has been continuing to pursue his interests in how and why relationship dynamics change over time and in LGB family functioning.

New graduate students are Ariel Hart (first year) and Tosin Adesogan (incoming), who join Tony Petruzzella (fourth year) and Lauren VanderBroek Stice (6th year on internship). Also working with the lab is an interdisciplinary group of researchers at UGA including Man Kit Lei (Assistant Professor of Sociology), Allen Barton (Research Scientist), Victoria King (post-doctoral), Mei Ling Ong (Statistician), as well as several regular off-campus collaborators.

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### **Erika Lawrence, Ph.D.**

Director: Translational Science at The Family Institute  
Northwestern University

The Couple and Family Development Lab headed by Dr. Erika Lawrence has been making many strides at building a robust research branch at The Family Institute at Northwestern University. Within the lab, there are three lines of research currently taking place. The first is replicating and extending an effectiveness trial of a novel violence intervention (ACTV). ACTV was adapted from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and has been shown to significantly reduce aggression and one-year recidivism rates among intimate partner violence (IPV). Due to these findings, Iowa was the first state to employ ACTV as a statewide, court-mandated, empirically supported intervention for IPV.

The second line of research is testing the effectiveness of a novel prevention program that is tailored to couples' specific needs. Five different areas of couple functioning will be assessed using the Relationship Quality Interview (RQI), which provides objective ratings based on behavioral exemplars of each domain. Couples will then attend workshops only for those domains/skills that received lower objective ratings by

interviewers. The lab is currently finalizing workshop manuals and will begin pilot testing the workshops this summer.

Lastly, the lab is exploring assumptions about how couples function in minority populations. Most of what we know about couple functioning and how best to help couples comes from research with White, non-Hispanic, heterosexual, married, middle-class couples. Our goal is to understand whether and how to adapt conceptual models and interventions for minority populations. We are in Year 3 of a 5-year study with Mexican American couples. The lab plans to extend the project with SGM and African American couples in the future.

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**Richard E. Mattson, Ph.D.**

Director: Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Intimate Relationships (CTRoIR)  
Associate Professor in Department of Psychology  
Binghamton University

Our lab continues to analyze data from the Individual and Well Being Study utilizing both the biological measures obtained and other subjective measures. These analyses have resulted in two manuscripts, one published (Mattson, Cameron, Middleton, Starr, Davila & Johnson, 2018) and one under review (Wagner, Mattson, Davila, Johnson & Cameron, under review). The graduate students in the lab have continued to make significant progress in their individual projects focused on sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and marital quality. Our undergraduate research assistants continue to be an irreplaceable asset to the team with many of them presenting thoughtful research projects at local and national conferences. Further, two of our undergraduates, Bridget Jules and Emily Ives, will be working on their own research topics supported by Binghamton University undergraduate research grants.

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**Uzma Rehman, Ph.D.**

Director: Relationship & Sexuality Research Lab  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
University of Waterloo

We are currently working on several projects that examine the intersection of relationship processes and human sexuality. In one set of studies, we are examining whether low sexual desire in women is better conceptualized a single phenomenon or whether there are distinct subtypes of low sexual desire in women. We are also investigating the attributions that partners make of sexual behaviours such a pornography use. Related to both of these projects, a focus of our research is to identify and understand the emotional barriers to sexual communication. That is, what factors present individuals from discussing their sexual preferences and negotiating a mutually pleasurable sexual repertoire.

Our research is funded by a federal grant from the Canadian government, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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**Keith Renshaw, Ph.D.**

Director: Anxiety, Stress, and Relationships Lab  
Associate Professor and Chair in Department of Psychology  
George Mason University

Our lab is growing and shrinking – Laura Martin will join us as a new doctoral student in the Fall, while Lauren Paige heads off to internship this summer (more in “Kudos” below). Lauren Paige has also begun data collection for her dissertation examining the role of PTSD knowledge as a protective factor in veteran psychosocial functioning, as well as the impact of PTSD symptom severity on daily vs. global assessment of psychosocial functioning. We have other projects that are in the formation stages. In collaboration with Sarah Bannon, a doctoral student at SUNY Stony Brook and soon-to-be-intern at MGH (congratulations!), we are working on a new data collection focused on couples relationships after a traumatic brain injury. Also, Sarah Giff is preparing for a large-scale coding effort of parenting in relation to PTSD, in collaboration with Abi Gewirtz at the University of Minnesota.

Finally, in a departure from our usual focus, Dr. Renshaw recently visited Lahore, Pakistan, where he conducted a workshop on a principle-based approach to CBT and delivered a talk on post-trauma prevention in a conference sponsored by the Institute of Clinical Psychology at the University of Management and Technology. The students and faculty at the conference were incredibly welcoming and very committed to providing quality clinical services and training. Our lab may begin a broader collaboration with that program and other programs in Pakistan, as they look to increase the reach of clinical psychology in addressing mental health issues in that country.




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### **Sarah Whitton, Ph.D.**

Director: The Today's Couples and Families Research Program  
 Associate Professor of Psychology  
 University of Cincinnati

We continue to be busy with FAB400, our NICHD-funded 5-year longitudinal study of sexual and gender minority youth assigned female at birth (SGM-AFAB), conducted in collaboration with the Northwestern Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing. We are proud to say that we have over 95% retention of our sample (N = 488) through wave 4, and wave 5 is well underway. Some accomplishments to date: we have developed and psychometrically validated three culturally sensitive measures of IPV for sexual and gender minorities. Using those measures, we have documented high rates of intimate partner violence in this population, which is predominantly bidirectional between partners, more prevalent among Black and Latinx than White participants, and associated with experienced stigma based on both race and sexual orientation identity. On a lighter note, we found evidence to debunk myths that female same-sex couples have less sex and less satisfying sex than male-female couples. Among the cisgender women in our sample, those

in same-sex relationships (with cisgender women) reported higher duration of sex, frequency of orgasm, and sexual satisfaction than those in different-sex relationships (with cisgender men). See our publications below for more details.

In collaboration with Sherry Rostosky of the University of Kentucky, we adapted the Strengthening Same Sex Relationships Program, Female version (SSSR-F) into an online program for Appalachian female same-sex couples, called Better Together. This year we are piloting it with 40 couples to assess feasibility, acceptability, and efficacy in improving relationship quality and dyadic coping with minority stress.

Graduate student Neslihan James-Kangal has launched a study exploring relational ambiguity in young adults' undefined romantic and sexual relationships, including how to best measure relational ambiguity and its associations with emotional wellbeing.

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## ***HOT off the Press***

### *In Press and Recently Published Literature*

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- Barton, A. W., Beach, S. R. H., Wells, A. C., Ingels, J. B., Corso, P. S., Sperr, M. C., Anderson, T. N., Brody, G. H. (2018). The Protecting Strong African American Families Program: A randomized controlled trial with rural African American couples. *Prevention Science*, *7*, 904–913. doi:10.1007/s11121-018-0895-4
- Beach, S. R. H., Lei, M. K., Simons, R. L., Barr, A. B., Simons, L. G., Cutrona, C. E., Philibert, R. A. (in press). Perceived relationship support moderates the association of contextual stress with inflammation among African Americans. *Journal of Family Psychology*. doi:10.1037/fam0000509
- Bergman, J., Renshaw, K.D., & Paige, L. (in press). Psychological well-being in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans: Risk and protective factors. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. doi:10.1037/tra0000416
- Bricker-Carter, S. P., Giff, S. T., Campbell, S. B., & Renshaw, K. D. (in press). Supporting a spouse with military posttraumatic stress: Daily associations with partners' affect. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. Advanced online publication. doi: 10.1002/jts.22390
- Bricker-Carter, S., Renshaw, K. D., Allen, E. S., Markman, H. J., & Stanley, S. M. (in press). Everything here is fine: Protective buffering by military spouses during a deployment. *Family Process*.
- Bricker-Carter, S., Renshaw, K. D., Allen, E. S., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (in press). Protective buffering by service members during military deployments: Associations with psychological distress and relationship functioning. *Family Process*.
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- Brock, R. L., & Kochanska, G. (in press). Anger in infancy and its implications: History of attachment in mother-child and father-child relationships as a moderator of risk. *Development and Psychopathology*. Advance Online Publication. doi: 10.1017/S0954579418000780
- Campbell, S. B., & Renshaw, K. D. (in press). Daily PTSD symptom accommodation and relationship functioning in military couples. *Family Process*.
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- Cohen, M., Pentel, K. Z., Boeding, S., Baucom, D. H. (2019). Postpartum role satisfaction in couples: Associations with individual and relationship well-being. *Journal of Family Issues*.
- Davila, J., Jabbour, J., Dyar, C., & Feinstein, B. A. (2019). Bi+ visibility: Characteristics of those who attempt to make their bisexual+ identity visible and the strategies they use. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *48*, 199-211. DOI: 10.1007/s10508-018-1284-6
- DiMauro, J., & Renshaw, K. D. (in press). Trauma-related disclosure in sexual assault survivors' intimate relationships: Associations with PTSD, shame, and partners' responses. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.
- DiMauro, J., & Renshaw, K. D. (in press). PTSD and relationship satisfaction in female survivors of sexual assault: The roles of sexuality, communication, and hostility. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, & Policy*.
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- Dyar, C., Feinstein, B. A., & Davila, J. (2019). Development and validation of a brief version of the Anti-Bisexual Experiences Scale. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *48*, 175-189. doi:10.1007/s105
- Dyar, C., Messinger, A. M., Newcomb, M. E., Byck, G. R., Dunlap, P., & Whitton, S.W. (in press). Development and initial validation of three culturally-sensitive measures of intimate partner violence for sexual and gender minority populations. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.
- Dyar, C. Newcomb, M.E., Mustanski, B., & Whitton, S.W. (in press). A structural equation model of sexual satisfaction and relationship functioning among sexual and gender minority



individuals female assigned at birth in diverse relationships. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

Feinstein, B. A., Bettin, E., Swann, G., Macapagal, K. R., Whitton, S. W., & Newcomb, M. E. (2018). The influence of internalized stigma on the efficacy of an HIV prevention and relationship education program for young male couples. *AIDS and Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-018-2093-6>

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Georgia Salivar, E., Roddy, M.K., Nowlan, K.M., & Doss, B.D. (in press) Effectiveness of OurRelationship program for underserved couples. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*.

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