

COUPLES RESEARCH & THERAPY

A Newsletter brought to you by the ABCT Couples SIG, Spring 2020

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Letter from the Editors

During these trying times, we are delighted to share with you the Spring 2020 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! We hope that this newsletter provides some cheer and celebratory news in a time wherein many of us are struggling to find our "new normal."

In addition to lab updates, kudos, and "hot off the press" publications, we are pleased to share with you the featured article, "**Touch me just enough: The intersection of adult attachment, intimate touch, and marital satisfaction**" (pg. 3) by doctoral student **Samantha Wagner** and her team. This recently published piece is a sample of the great work members of the SIG continue to do, and highlights something that all of us are sharing right now: limited physical touch. Given the current circumstances of COVID-19, and many under shelter-in-place orders, this piece really brings us all together under a shared circumstance. We hope you enjoy this article as much as we did!

Additionally, the newsletter features comments from our faculty co-leaders, **Drs. Christina Balderrama-Durbin and Mikhila Wildey (pg. 2)** who discuss last November's conference and provide several relevant updates about the SIG. Also included are updates from newly-appointed SIG student co-leaders, **Karena Leo and Jessica Kansky (pg. 3)**, who introduce themselves, provide information on the upcoming SIG events at this year's convention in Philadelphia, and getting involved in the SIG.

As we are also new, we would like to take a moment to introduce ourselves, as the co-editors for the SIG. Colin Adamo is a fourth-year graduate student at the University of Utah working with Dr. Brian Baucom researching the use of mobile technology in couples research and interventions. Maggie Parker is a third-year graduate student at Binghamton University (SUNY) working with Dr. Richard Mattson. Her research interests include predictors of intimate partner violence, as well as better understanding factors that associate with maladaptive functioning in dyads.

We would also like to thank and express how grateful we are for the smooth transition that previous co-editors, Eileen Barden and Alexandra Wodja provided us. Your expertise is appreciated!

We hope everyone is staying healthy and well! 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!

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Letter from the SIG Co-Leaders

Christina Balderrama-Durbin & Mikhila Wildey

Greetings Couples SIG Members! When we were together this past November in Atlanta, we could not have anticipated how much our world would change a mere 5 months later. This has been such a difficult time in so many ways and we want to be there for you! Please know you can reach out to us at any time.

Last year's conference began with a pre-conference event that included an eloquent talk by Dr. Michael Newcomb, Assistant Professor at Northwestern University and a member of the Sexual and Gender Minorities SIG. His talk is entitled, "*Romantic Relationships in Young Male Couples: Understanding Relationship Functioning and Implications for Health Promotion*" highlighted his impactful intervention research capitalizing on improving couple functioning to impact health behaviors/outcomes. We also hosted a career mentorship panel with panelists representing different career trajectories including VA medical center (Dr. Steven Sayers), R1/high research productivity tenure-track (Dr. Brian Baucom), liberal arts university tenure-track (Dr. Mikhila Wildey), and private practice (Dr. Cameron Gordon – who is engaged in a part-time private practice). Additionally, we had several meaningful discussions during the business meeting that we wanted to remind/inform everyone of in this letter. Please take a moment to review the updates – we are still looking for some help on some of these items!

1. **Congratulations to our new student leaders:** We would like to sincerely thank our outgoing officers for their hard work and dedication to the SIG! The SIG has been running smoothly thanks to their many efforts. Thank you to Judith Biesen and Alex Wang for serving as student Co-Leaders, to Eileen Barden and Alexandra Wojda, our outgoing newsletter Co-Editors, and to Jessica Ferreira and Anna Gil-mour, our outgoing Media Coordinators, for your outstanding work! Congratulations to incoming student co-Leaders Jessica Kansky and Karena Leo, incoming student Co-Editors Colin Adamo and Maggie Parker, and incoming Media Coordinators Emily Carrino and Corey Pettit. We appreciate your dedication to our SIG!

2. **Congratulations to the Robert L. Weiss Student Research Award Winners:** Congratulations to the Undergraduate Student Research awardee – Briana Schubert, as well as, Graduate Student Research awardees, Erin Ramsdell (first prize) and Danielle Weber (second prize), for their exceptional poster submissions. Thank you to Drs. Scott Braithwaite, Michelle Leonard, and Ronald Rogge for their thoughtful reviews.

3. **Underrepresented Scholars Fund Winners:** This new initiative, co-chaired by Brian Baucom and Jasara Hogan, was devised last year to support and promote the scholarly activities of students from underrepresented backgrounds. Built into this fund is a mechanism for fostering mentorship opportunities within the Couples SIG as well. Two awards were granted this year at the conference to student members who come from underrepresented backgrounds. This fund is supported by you, our valuable members!

4. **Dues Increase for Professional Members:** We voted at the SIG Business meeting to raise dues for professional members by \$5, bringing the dues for this year for professional members to \$30. The additional \$5 will go to sustain the Underrepresented Scholars Fund every year. This year's funds were able to provide two students from underrepresented backgrounds with support for their professional development goals, and we hope to continue having funding for two students each year. Dues can be paid to Jamie Winters via PayPal (jamiwin@umich.edu) or via check to Jamie Winters, PhD, VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, 2215 Fuller Rd., 116A, Ann Arbor MI 48105. Student dues will stay the same at \$5, but if students would like to contribute more to support the Underrepresented Scholars Fund, they are welcome to provide additional (make a notation when you send it to Jamie).

5. **Establishment of an Early Career Award:** We voted to add an Early Career Award to our SIG, and Howard Markman and Don Baucom graciously offered to help draft the details of this award which will be circulated to the SIG later this year.

6. **Pre-Conference Feedback:** Please complete this very short survey on the pre-conference event for this past year as well as feedback/suggestions for this coming year's conference in Philadelphia. Please complete it whether you attended last year's event or not: https://gvsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1YXFM9vH8cw8LhX

Finally, we also want to take this opportunity to thank you for granting us the honor of serving as your Co-Leaders for this past year and a half. As always, we are grateful for your membership and have enjoyed serving the SIG. We will hold officer elections for the new Treasurer and Leader(s) positions this fall prior to the conference. We hope you will consider nominating yourself or a stellar colleague to fill one of these positions. Let us know if you have any questions or are interested – we will be emailing a request for nominations later this year.

Stay healthy and safe!

Kindly,

Christina & Mikhila

Letter from the SIG Student Co-Presidents

Jessica Kansky¹ & Karena Leo²
¹University of Virginia; ²University of Utah

Hello from your new Student Leaders!

We are very excited to begin our 2-year term as your student leaders. We are both thrilled to give back to the Couples SIG Organization and represent our fellow graduate students as best as possible. We hope that all of you are doing well and staying safe and healthy during this unprecedented time.

Since we are new, we thought we might tell you a little bit about ourselves:

Jess is a 6th year clinical psychology graduate student at the University of Virginia working with Joseph Allen. Her research interests include the psychosocial predictors and outcomes of healthy romantic relationships from adolescence through young adulthood, as well as the role of romantic relationships for well-being across the lifespan. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, jogging, and baking to balance it out. Next year, Jess will be completing her pre-doctoral internship at the Medical University of South Carolina and Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center.

Karena is a 5th year clinical psychology graduate student at the University of Utah working with Brian Baucom, Ph.D. She recently matched to the University of Kansas Medical Center for internship. Her research interest is primarily focused on examining communication behavior and affective expression during conflict and in couples coping with a chronic illness. Her hobbies include trail running with her chocolate lab, surfing, and traveling.

Couples SIG Cocktail Party

Due to the popularity of the Couples SIG Cocktail Party in previous years, we are currently working on organizing the cocktail party for our reunion in November in Philadelphia! We will keep everyone updated through the listserv (RSVP pending) and the fall newsletter.

Couples SIG Student Symposium

We want to thank all of the students who submitted an abstract for consideration to represent the Couples SIG at ABCT in a student-organized and led symposium. We had many fantastic submissions and it was wonderful to learn about the amazing research our peers are doing! We selected four students for the final symposium proposal that is focused on fostering intimacy and connection across diverse couples. We hope the reviewers at ABCT love the submission as much as we do.

Get Involved!

We are looking forward to working with you all as we transition into this new role as student leaders in the Couples SIG and as such, we are very open to suggestions, concerns, questions, and feedback. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time. Don't forget to join the Couples SIG and the SIG listserv (couples-sig@sfu.ca) if you haven't done so already. We are looking forward to meeting you, or seeing you again, in Philadelphia.

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FEATURED ARTICLE

Touch Me Just Enough:

The Intersection of Adult Attachment, Intimate Touch, and Marital Satisfaction

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Introduction

Intimate touch, or non-sexual tactile affection, constitutes a major aspect and foundational component of close relationships (Brennan, Wu, & Love, 1998; Montagu, 1986). Despite a long history of touch research in intimate dyads (e.g., parent-child; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970), there is a dearth of information on its impact within romantic relationships. We do know that greater engagement in intimate touch is associated with higher satisfaction in intimate relationships (Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahmann, 2003), and may serve a co-regulatory function fostering positive states in romantic partners (Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006; Sbarra & Hazan, 2008). However, not all individuals are satisfied with the touch they receive from their partner. To some extent, this could relate to variations in engagement in routine affection, or common-place behavioral expression of affections exchanged, such as kisses or cuddling at night. But, as with related areas such as sexual intimacy and social support, satisfaction with intimate touch may not solely relate to behavior frequency and, is potentially the more critical variable in determining relationship quality (Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007; McNulty, Wenner, & Fisher, 2016).

Although the determinants of touch satisfaction are currently not well understood, many argue that adult attachment theory provides a particularly useful lens to understand how touch operates in intimate dyads (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016; Ozolins & Sandberg, 2009). Attachment orientations are not only relevant to closeness and proximity, which are prerequisites for intimate touch, but also color perceptions of other relational phenomena with functional ties to touch (e.g., social support; Collins & Feeney, 2004). In theory, attachment orientations are relevant to subjective evaluations of romantic relationship behavior because they form the basis for intimacy needs and expectations, and inform the experience of proximity and closeness with others (Collins & Allard, 2001). In the present manuscript, we test whether adult attachment insecurities negatively associate with intimate touch satisfaction, as well as explore different theoretical mechanisms by which these variables might relate. We also examine whether touch satisfaction associates with marital quality, beyond engagement in affectionate behavior, and test the possibility that touch satisfaction functions as an intermediary between attachment tendencies and global evaluations of marriage.

Intimate Touch in Romantic Relationships

Research has shown that touch is particularly important to gaining and maintaining romantic relationships and, in part, is a primary nonverbal mechanism that distinguishes romantic relationships from friendships (Guerrero, 1997) and, across cultures, touch anywhere on the body is more acceptable from a romantic partner compared to any other close relationship (Suvilehto et al., 2015). While in the relationship formation stage, couples who have similar preferences with respect to touch often choose to escalate the seriousness of their relationship more quickly (Guerrero & Andersen, 1994) and, throughout romantic relationships, touch acts as a nonverbal cue that increases psychological closeness and attraction (Andersen, 1985; Mehrabian, 1969). Intimate touch behaviors, such as more kissing (Wlodarski & Dunbar, 2015) and post-sex affection (Muise, Giang, & Impett, 2014), associate with greater relationship satisfaction, and simply imagining touch from a partner can increase willingness to take on challenging situations (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016). Moreover, intimate touch is a consistent predictor of global relationship evaluations, with increases in touch relating to greater relationship satisfaction (Burke & Young, 2012; Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994) and increases in couples' positive affectivity (Debrot, Schoebi, Perrez, & Horn, 2013).

Intimate touch also serves emotional co-regulatory functions between romantic partners. For example, both giving and receiving positive touch when upset can elevate mood, irrespective of other emotion regulation strategies used (Debrot, Schoebi, Perrez, & Horn, 2014), and touching a partner improves perceived intimacy (Debrot et al., 2013) for both the toucher and recipient. Further, women who engaged in touch before a social stress task showed less stress reactivity than did women who received no support or verbal social support (Ditzen et al., 2007), suggesting that the impacts of touch go beyond merely showing support to a partner. Touch from a romantic partner also acts as a physiological regulator with direct health impacts. For example, being touched by a romantic partner leads to decelerated heart rates (Tricoli, Croy, Olausson, & Sailer, 2017) and decreased pain (Goldstein, Shamay-Tsoory, Yellinek, & Weissman-Fogel, 2016) when compared to conditions including not being touched or being touch by someone other than a romantic partner. Likewise, individuals touched by their romantic partner demonstrate increased neural activation of touch-related networks (e.g., orbital frontal, posterior cingulate, and somatosensory cortices) when compared to neuronal activity during touch from an experimenter (Kreuder et al., 2017). Women also show less activation in neural systems that respond to threat when holding their husband's hand (Coan et al., 2006). The available evidence thus supports that intimate touch plays an important role in romantic relationship functioning.

Attachment and Intimate Touch

Intimate touch is integral to attachment relationships. Attachment systems exist because they are linked to survival by facilitating physical closeness during a defenseless time (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1969), and close physical contact is a behavioral hallmark of gaining and maintaining physical proximity during infancy (i.e., clinging; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Furthermore, physical touch is inherent across a wide range of attachment-formative interactions (e.g., breastfeeding). Childhood views of caregivers form the building blocks of adult attachment (Collins & Read, 1990). There is evidence to support that adult and child attachment stem from activation of similar overlapping neurobiological systems (Carter, 1998; Fernandez-Duque, Valeggia, & Mendoza, 2003; Fisher, 1992) and may have similar evolutionary processes (Fraley, Brumbaugh, & Marks, 2005), overall implying adult and child attachment may have parallel functions. Interestingly, behaviors similar to parent-child interactions often appear in romantic relationships such as "babytalk," cuddling, and seeking closeness (Bombara & Littig, 1996; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). Though ways of obtaining contact as a child (e.g., crying) may be different in some ways from those used as an adult (e.g., having sex), physical proximity either way provides reassurance in the form of psychological and physical closeness, including emotional availability and opportunities for intimate touch.

Given that intimate touch is inherent to attachment relationships through adulthood, it stands to reason that attachment insecurities may in part explain individual differences in preferences for and proclivity towards intimate touch within romantic relationships. Individuals with avoidant attachment, for instance, are found to have less positive feelings about cuddling (Chopik et al., 2014) and report more aversions to touch, as well as a deficit of touch in their relationships (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Individuals with anxious tendencies are more likely to use touch when in need of a safe place, continually desiring more touch than they receive (Brennan et al., 1998a; cf., Ozolins & Sandberg, 2009). Altogether, these findings establish that different attachment tendencies may uniquely influence how intimate touch is exchanged and potentially experienced in adult romantic relationships.

Current Study

Evaluating touch within a romantic adult attachment framework in marriage may contribute to our understanding of why certain individuals seek more intimate touch than others and may require different levels of it in order to feel satisfied. Most studies examining adult attachment and intimate touch focus solely on behavioral engagement in routine affection (e.g. Debrot et al., 2013), such as frequency of hugging or checklists of affectionate behaviors, which provide quantitative indices of intimate touch within the relationship. While important, there is a longstanding recognition that accounts of marital behavior are not synonymous with how those behaviors are evaluated (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Indeed, subjective evaluations of behaviors often have a larger impact on overall quality of the relationship, such as with social support (Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007). Additionally, much of the existing literature on touch and attachment utilizes a college population, but data support that differences in married individuals' versus unmarried individuals' feelings about touch remain robust even after controlling for age (Hanzal, Segrin, & Dorros, 2008), suggesting that marital status, and not merely age, is an important indicator of the function of touch.

The primary aim of the current study is to understand how satisfaction with intimate touch in marriage is associated with adult attachment within an actor-partner interdependence framework (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). To date, there has been little research on the determinants of subjective appraisals of touch, let alone as a specific function of adult attachment tendencies. As such, we built our hypotheses on findings that suggest attachment orientations provide top-down cognitive filters that shape how attachment-relevant behaviors are evaluated (Collins & Allard, 2001; Dykas & Cassidy, 2011), with insecure styles associating with more negative interpretations of behavior even when controlling for its objective characteristics (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2004). Provided the general discomfort with intimacy and closeness associated with avoidant tendencies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), we predicted that individuals higher in attachment avoidance would be less satisfied with any amount of routine affection (H1a). Based on findings that anxious individuals may use intimate touch as a means of reassurance seeking that is never fully required (Brennan et al., 1998a), we hypothesized an actor effect, with greater attachment anxiety associating with less satisfaction with intimate touch, regardless of (i.e., controlling for) engagement in routine affection by the partner (H1b). We further predicted (H2) that the actor effects of attachment on touch satisfaction will be moderated by engagement in routine affection for both anxious and avoidant tendencies. We speculated that more anxious tendencies would link to more catastrophic interpretations of low levels of routine affection, which would yield an exacerbated negative association with touch satisfaction as engagement in routine affection goes down (H2a). Individuals with greater attachment avoidance tend to be more uncomfortable with and avoidant of touch (Brennan et al., 1998a; Chopik et al., 2014). Therefore, we hypothesized (H2b) that individuals with greater avoidance, thus preferring interpersonal distance, will be less and less satisfied as engagement in routine affection from the partner increases.

We also posed partner effects for both anxious and avoidant attachment tendencies on touch satisfaction (H3). It is unclear how anxious attachment tendencies will associate with partners touch satisfaction because individuals with greater attachment anxiety engage in approach-avoidance strategies, sometimes using touch as a way to obtain closeness (e.g., Dewitte, Houwer, Buysse, & Koster, 2008) and at other times withdrawing from their partner to avoid rejection (e.g., Downey & Feldman, 1996). As such, we predicted (H3a) an effect but not a direction of greater attachment anxiety on a partner's touch satisfaction. In contrast, individuals with greater levels of attachment avoidance tend to be more unilaterally uncomfortable with touch (Brennan et al., 1998a; Brennan et al., 1998b), which informed our hypothesis (H3b) that individuals with greater attachment avoidance will have partners who are less satisfied with touch.

Our secondary aim is to examine whether intimate touch satisfaction associates uniquely with global relationship functioning independent of attachment tendencies, hypothesizing (H4) that low satisfaction with intimate touch will register negatively in global evaluations of the marriage. Since intimate touch plays several critical roles within a relationship, it is possible that a relative dearth may negatively impact the individual or relationship irrespective of the individual's subjective evaluation of it. As such, we predicted (H5) that engagement in routine affection would also have a unique negative association with global evaluations of marriage.

Our final aim was to run exploratory mediation tests evaluating the possibility that (H6) intimate touch satisfaction explains the association between attachment insecurities and marital quality, at least in part. There exists research linking attachment styles to intimate touch (e.g. Brennan et al., 1998a), and greater security tends to associate with higher relationship satisfaction (e.g. Davila, Bradbury, & Fincham, 1998; for a meta-analysis, see Candel & Turlic, 2019). There is also prospective data supporting that attachment anxiety predicts lower levels of relationship satisfaction in shorter-term (1-10 years) and longer-term (more than 10 years) marriages (Feeney, 2002). If our hypothesis that intimate touch satisfaction will associate with overall marital quality receives corroboration, these findings would altogether imply a framework whereby attachment tendencies, intimate touch satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction associate mechanistically. However, there are presently no studies evaluating this possibility. Though we acknowledge *a priori that other configurations exist, we currently test a model wherein intimate touch satisfaction acts as the mediator between attachment insecurities and marital quality.*

Method

Participants

Married couples from an upstate New York community were recruited via flyers, social media, and bus advertisements for the Individuals and Marital Well-Being Study (IMWS). Inclusion criteria required couples to be cohabiting, married, and fluent in English. Men and women were required to be over the age of 18 and not on hormonal therapy, and women needed to be pre-menopausal and not pregnant or breastfeeding, as the study protocol included hormonal sampling relevant to other analyses. Couples currently in treatment for relationship problems or those in the process of separation were excluded from the study. Of the 191 couples recruited, 7 couples were excluded from the current study analyses because they were same-sex resulting in a sample of 184 different-sex couples.

Within couples, 83.2% of wives and 81.1% of husbands were Caucasian. On average, husbands were 34.05 years-old (range = 19-56, $SD = 7.23$) and wives were 32.50 years-old (range = 19-51, $SD = 6.47$). Wives reported a median of 15 years of education (range = 0-26 years) and husbands reported a median of 14 years of education (range = 0-29 years). For wives, median income was \$20,000 - \$29,999 and modal income was \$0 - \$9,999, whereas median and modal income for husbands was \$30,000 - \$39,999. All couples indicated that they were currently married with an average length of marriage of 6.46 years (range = 19 days - 24.11 years, $SD = 5.92$ years) and a median of 1 child (range = 0 - 10).

Procedure

Participants were first introduced to the study and then each asked to sign informed consent. Participants were separated and asked to complete three computer-administered surveys. Surveys included questions about demographic information, relationship information, and personality. The first two survey tasks were followed by a social support task and saliva sampling for hormonal and genetic data. Demographic information was collected at the beginning of the study, attachment measures were administered following the first social-support task, and both touch and relationship satisfaction measures were administered following the second social-support task. Finally, participants were debriefed on the experiment and given their remuneration (\$100 for the full study). Typically, the procedure lasted three hours. The university-affiliated Institutional Review Board approved this study.

Measures

Adult attachment tendencies. The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins & Read, 1990) is composed of 18 questions in which individuals rate (5-point Likert scale) how they generally feel about their relationships from "not at all characteristic" to "very characteristic." The RAAS contains two subscales that allow for the assessment of an individual's attachment. The 12-item Avoid subscale measures avoidance of intimacy. The 6-item Anxiety subscale measures the degree of worry about being rejected or unloved. Items were averaged to compute scale scores for avoidant/secure and anxious/non-anxious tendencies (anxiety dimension: Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$ for husbands, $\alpha = .86$ for wives; avoidant dimension: $\alpha = .88$ for husbands, $\alpha = .88$ for wives).

Intimate touch. The Physical Affection Scale (PAS; Dainton, 1991) is 13 item self-report measure whereon participants rate (7-point Likert-type scale) how they feel about the physical affection in their relationship from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The PAS is traditionally composed of a physical affection satisfaction scale, and a routine affection scale, which measures one's report of engagement in types of physical affection received from a partner. One question from the physical affection scale assesses sexual satisfaction (i.e., "My partner and I engage in sexual relations at the frequency I like") and was removed from that subscale. This item was used in our model as a control predictor to help distinguish non-sexual effects of intimate touch specifically, as opposed to being a proxy for sexual satisfaction. Items were averaged to compute scale scores for touch satisfaction and engagement in routine affection (touch satisfaction dimension: $\alpha = .92$ for husbands, $\alpha = .88$ for wives; routine affection dimension: $\alpha = .88$ for husbands, $\alpha = .80$ for wives).

Relationship satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The Positive and Negative Semantic Differential Scale (PN-SMD; Mattson, Rogge, Johnson, Davidson, & Fincham, 2013) is a 14-item questionnaire whereon individuals rate (8-point Likert-type scale) how well they feel certain words describe their relationship from "not at all" to "completely." The PN-SMD is composed of two separate subscales. The relationship satisfaction scale (i.e., positive semantic dimension) prompts the participant to consider only positive aspects of their relationship, while ignoring negative ones, and evaluates the relationship's positive qualities. The relationship dissatisfaction scale (i.e., negative semantic dimension) prompts the participant to consider only the negative aspects of the relationship while ignoring the positive ones, and evaluates the relationship's negative qualities. Items were averaged to compute scale scores for satisfaction and dissatisfaction (satisfaction dimension: $\alpha = .93$ for husbands, $\alpha = .92$ for wives; dissatisfaction dimension: $\alpha = .92$ for husbands, $\alpha = .92$ for wives). All items for measures can be found in supplemental material.

Planned Analysis

We utilized the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) in SPSS using syntax adapted from Kenny et al. (2006), allowing us to parse out the effects of individual attachment tendencies on their own outcomes (i.e., actor effects; H1) versus those of their spouse (i.e., partner effect; H3). The approach does not have a traditional intercept, but uses dummy-coded male and female variables, which function as the intercepts, to specify separate equations for husbands' and wives' touch satisfaction. The residual variance-covariance in the model has three components; namely, a separate error variance for husbands' and wives' outcomes and their covariance, which models nonindependence between partners and adjusts standard errors and degrees of freedom for the nesting of individuals in couples. Dummy-coded gender variables allows for the effect of each variable to be estimated separately for husbands and wives. Actor and partner effects are added in the same fashion. Although we did not specify a priori gender effects, we assessed whether different patterns of effects emerge across husbands' and wives'. This decision was based on research supporting that the impacts of touch may vary across gender (Guerrero & Anderson, 1994; Gullede et al., 2003) with perceptions of specific behaviors being gender dependent (Gullede, Stahmann, & Wilson, 2004). Further, research has shown that

wives are more impacted by marriage due, in part, to women's greater relationally interdependent self-representations and social subordination (see Wanic & Kulik, 2011 for review), which likely relates to perceptions of touch. We also ran parallel APIM models to test for statistical differences between husbands and wives.

We first ran an intercept-only baseline model to provide initial estimates of the residual outcome variances and their covariance, which allowed us to calculate Pseudo-R² values to provide a rough gauge of variance explained at each block. The first block included control variables (i.e., age, marital length, and sexual satisfaction), followed by tests of the actor and partner effects of anxious and avoidant tendencies. Relevant results are reported in the text as standardized betas, whereas unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, and 95%CI for all findings are displayed in Tables 2 and 3, and Supplemental Table 1. We then entered routine affection into the model (H3). This allowed us to assess whether associations between attachment insecurities and touch satisfaction were independent of differential engagement in routine affection. The interaction terms were added in the final model to test the hypothesized (H2) moderation effects for anxious and avoidant tendencies at levels of routine affection.

We ran two additional two-intercept models evaluating the association between touch and marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction (H4/H5). When evaluating positive evaluations of the marriage we controlled for the negative ones and vice versa, which allowed us to see if touch associated with greater relationship satisfaction versus dissatisfaction. We also included the same set of control variables and scheme for the actor and partner effects of attachment as we did with touch satisfaction analyses. We used the estimates from this model and the one evaluating the association between attachment and touch satisfaction to calculate mediation effects (H6) using the PRODCLIN method, which provides a more accurate test of mediation by accounting for the asymmetric distribution of product terms (MacKinnon, 2012), with 95% confidence bands not overlapping zero indicating a significant mediation effect. Lastly, we entered routine affection to explore its effects on relationship evaluations independent from touch satisfaction, and to see if touch satisfaction carries an independent association with marital quality over routine affection.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Data cleaning and model assumptions. Data were cleaned prior to analysis. Missing data for specific items were derived by mean imputation (Schafer & Graham, 2002) based on individuals means for each subscale. Individuals missing more than half of their data for a subscale and their partner were excluded ($n = 4$ couples) resulting in an analyzed sample of 180 different-sex couples. We reduced the raw score of any univariate outlier ($z > 3.29$) so that it maintained its position in rank but was within normal bounds. The measure of dissatisfaction for husbands and wives had several outliers emerge even after excluding the first set and demonstrated moderate skew and kurtosis. As such, we applied a square root transformation, which corrected outliers and improved normality. We screened for multivariate outliers (using mahalanobis distance) and influential cases (using Cook's d) in separate OLS regressions for husbands and wives, and ran the final models excluding these cases. We opted for reporting the results including offending cases, as excluding them did not impact the pattern of results. For the multilevel models we found no serious deviations from homoscedasticity.

Descriptive Statistics. Husbands and wives did not significantly differ on mean ratings for the majority of variables except touch satisfaction and engagement in physical affection. Compared to husbands, wives were more satisfied with touch, $t(358) = 2.05$, $p = .01$, $SE = .15$, $d = .22$, and reported that their partner engaged in more routine affection, $t(358) = .837$, $p < .001$, $SE = .12$, $d = .10$. Routine affection, touch satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction were all positively correlated, with marital dissatisfaction correlating negatively to these variables. Anxious attachment tendencies were negatively correlated with routine affection, touch satisfaction, sexual satisfaction and marital quality for both partners. Avoidant attachment was correlated with relationship satisfaction/dissatisfaction for husbands, as well as with relationship and sexual satisfaction for wives. Intercorrelations and mean ratings of each variable can be found in Table 1.

Do attachment insecurities associate with intimate touch satisfaction and does routine affection moderate this relationship?

Following the baseline analysis, we entered into the model age, marital length, and sexual satisfaction as control variables, followed by both actor and partner effects for the Anxiety and Avoidance subscales of the RAAS (see Supplemental Table 1). We predicted that anxiety and avoidance would associate with lower touch satisfaction (H1). We also predicted without direction that (1) anxiety would associate with partner touch satisfaction (H3a), and that (2) individuals higher in avoidance would have partners with less touch satisfaction (H3b). These hypotheses were partially supported. When controlling for age, marital length, and sexual satisfaction, both husbands' and wives' anxiety associated negatively with touch satisfaction, $\beta = -0.25$, $p = .005$, and $\beta = -0.24$, $p = .006$, respectively. In addition, husbands with wives higher in avoidance endorsed less touch satisfaction, $\beta = -0.18$, $p = .040$. Of the control variables, sexual satisfaction for husbands, $\beta = 1.05$, $p < .001$, and both sexual satisfaction and age for wives, $\beta = 0.79$ and 0.34 , respectively, $ps < .001$, associated positively with touch satisfaction. Length of marriage associated negatively with touch satisfaction for both husbands, $\beta = -0.27$, $p = .009$, and wives, $\beta = -0.42$, $p < .001$. Estimates for husbands and wives were not significantly different except that sexual satisfaction had a weaker effect on touch satisfaction for wives, $\beta = -0.26$, $p = .017$.

We then entered routine affection into the model (see Table 2, Block 3), which rendered the effect of wives' avoidance on husbands' touch satisfaction no longer significant, $\beta = 0.02$, $p = .783$. Routine affection accounted for the effect for wives' anxiety on her own touch satisfaction, as well as the effect of longer marriages on husband's own touch satisfaction, which were both no longer significant. By itself, greater routine affection associated with higher touch satisfaction for both husbands and wives, $\beta = 0.85$ and 0.64 , $ps < .001$, with a marginal effect suggesting that the estimate for wives was statistically smaller than for husbands, $\beta = -0.21$, $p = .050$. As hypothesized but confirmed for men only, the effect of husbands' anxious attachment remained significant when controlling for routine affection, $\beta = 0.58$, $p = .006$. We also hypothesized that routine affection would moderate the association between

avoidant and anxious tendencies on touch satisfaction (H2). Our hypotheses were partially supported (see Table 2, Block 4). We found that, for husbands, routine affection moderated the association of anxious tendencies on touch satisfaction in the expected direction, $\beta = 0.17$, $p = .013$. As shown in Figure 1, husbands reported less touch satisfaction at high levels of anxiety as they endorsed lower levels of routine affection. Additionally, wives' avoidance was moderated by routine affection, $\beta = -0.16$, $p = .046$, though not as strongly as originally hypothesized. Instead, at low levels of routine affection, wives with higher avoidant tendencies reported higher touch satisfaction than their less avoidant counterparts, though they also reported lower touch satisfaction than at high levels of routine affection (see Figure 2), as opposed to being increasingly less satisfied as the level of routine affection increased.

Does Touch Satisfaction Mediate the Association between Attachment Insecurities and Relationship Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction?

Our hypothesis that higher touch satisfaction would relate to higher satisfaction and lower dissatisfaction with the relationship (H4) was partially supported. As predicted, touch satisfaction associated positively with marital satisfaction for both husbands, $\beta = 0.38 = 0.25$, $p < .001$, and wives, $\beta = 0.23$, $p = .005$, but was not significantly related to marital dissatisfaction for husbands, $\beta = -0.02$, $p = .427$, or wives, $\beta = 0.02$, $p = .403$. We then added routine affection to the model (H5; see Table 3) and found that it uniquely associated with husbands' marital satisfaction in the expected direction, $\beta = 0.21$, $p = .022$, controlling for touch satisfaction, which remained significant, $\beta = 0.22$, $p = .046$. For wives, low routine affection associated with greater marital dissatisfaction, $\beta = -0.19$, $p = .032$, which was significantly stronger than the effect observed for men, $\beta = -0.08$, $p = .047$, and the association between touch satisfaction and marital satisfaction remained significant, $\beta = 0.22$, $p = .029$. These findings suggest that evaluations of touch have effects on marital satisfaction independent of routine affection and that routine affection carries associations with husbands' marital satisfaction and wives' marital dissatisfaction independent from touch satisfaction. Final parameter estimates for the full model can be found in Table 3.

Lastly, we conducted exploratory analyses to see if, as hypothesized, touch satisfaction is a potential pathway between attachment and relationship satisfaction/dissatisfaction (H6). Testing all viable actor mediation pathways, we found partial support for this hypothesis. Specifically, touch satisfaction was a significant statistical pathway between anxiety and marital satisfaction for both husbands, $b_{\text{a}} = -0.07$, and wives, $b_{\text{a}} = -0.04$. Notably, there were no direct effects of attachment tendencies on marital quality, meaning that the observed effects were entirely indirect. No other pathways were significant. Estimates for all pathways are displayed in Supplemental Table 2.

Discussion

Our primary aim was to evaluate potential inroads by which attachment associated with intimate touch satisfaction in married different-sex couples. Our results overall highlight that attachment was relevant to touch, which is consistent with prior research (Brennan et al., 1998a; Kuncz & Shaver, 1994; Ozolins & Sandberg, 2009), but further established that attachment insecurity may also uniquely be associated with how touch is evaluated in some cases. More specifically, our findings supported our hypotheses that greater attachment anxiety would associate with less touch satisfaction when controlling for routine affection, though this effect emerged only for husbands. This is consistent with Brennan and colleagues (1995) findings that anxiously attached individuals report wanting more touch than they receive and parallels findings that lower touch satisfaction may not be solely about the behaviors exchanged but may stem from deficits in decoding communication or negatively interpreting partner behavior (Tucker & Anders, 1998), which our data supports may be particularly salient for husbands. However, overall our findings support that reports of routine affection, or one's perception of how their partner touches them, has the greatest association with touch satisfaction above and beyond attachment insecurities.

Our moderation analysis revealed an interaction between anxious attachment and routine affection, but for husbands only. A relative dearth of touch was experienced most keenly by more anxiously attached husbands, which aligned with expectations. Notably, when routine affection was high more anxious husbands were indistinguishable in touch satisfaction from their less anxious peers. A similar phenomenon has been observed with social support (Collins & Feeney, 2004), which has ties to intimate touch (Holt-Lunstad, Birmingham, & Light, 2008). Perhaps high levels of engagement in a behavior is harder to discount or misinterpret, whereas infrequent or ambiguous reassurance are likelier to be construed as a warning sign for abandonment or rejection for those high in attachment anxiety.

We also found that more avoidant wives showed less steep negative slopes at low levels of routine affection, compared to those with less avoidant features. Individuals higher in avoidant tendencies may be less impacted by lower routine affection because they are less likely to use touch as a means of obtaining reassurance (Brennan et al., 1998a), receive less benefits from touch (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016), and need less displays of affection to define a relationship as close (e.g., using vignettes, Hudson & Fraley, 2017). They may be correspondingly less attuned to the absence of touch and may not interpret what the absence means. Our findings overall add credence to the notion that how touch is appraised may be to some extent influenced by attachment insecurity.

The hypothesized associations between attachment and partner's touch satisfaction emerged for wives with more insecure tendencies. However, this finding doesn't hold when routine affection is accounted for. This may suggest a mechanistic frame in which engagement in routine affection may influence the way that anxious attachment impacts touch satisfaction, though this is outside the bound of what is testable based on a priori hypotheses for this study. For example, though wives' anxiety associated negatively with touch satisfaction, this effect was entirely accounted for by engagement in routine affection. One interesting possibility is that higher anxiety impelled wives to use touch in controlling or manipulative ways (Feeney & Collins, 2001) or to excessively seek proximity, leading to an approach-avoidance dynamic (Dewitte, et al., 2008). Likewise, we no longer found an association between wives' avoidance and their husbands' touch satisfaction when accounting for routine affection. This may suggest that husbands of more avoidant women were dissatisfied with

touch because they were being touched infrequently, at least as compared to those with less avoidant wives. This squares with research indicating that avoidant individuals prefer greater interpersonal distance (Kaitz, Bar-Haim, Lehrer, & Grossman, 2004) and are more touch avoidant (e.g. Brennan et al., 1998b), particularly avoidant women (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). Thus, these findings highlight that attachment may associate with touch satisfaction through multiple pathways, with the exact mechanisms varying by gender and type of attachment insecurity.

Our second aim was to better understand how touch satisfaction and routine affection associated with evaluations of the marriage regardless of attachment. We found that touch satisfaction associated with marital satisfaction, but not dissatisfaction, suggesting that it was viewed as the presence of a positive rather than the absence of a negative. These findings also support that perceptions of touch, similar to other attachment-relevant behaviors (e.g., social support), have unique associations with marital quality beyond just behavioral engagement. However, greater engagement in routine affection not only explained the most variance in touch satisfaction, but also associated independently with better overall evaluations of the marriage, suggesting that – independent of how it is appraised or attachment orientation – engagement in routine affection appears to matter. Regarding marital quality, it is possible that touch positively impacts various lower-order phenomena outside of conscious awareness, such as oxytocin release (e.g., Gallace & Spence, 2010), which then link to positive marital processes (e.g., social support; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015) and quality (Gouin et al., 2010). Alternatively, less routine affection could be diagnostic of distress or somehow affiliated with marital dysfunction. In any case, it is notable that, for husbands, lower routine affection registered as an absence of something positive, whereas for wives it was tethered to the presence of marital distress and may suggest differential functions of routine affection across genders. This coincides with other research indicating that the function of different forms of intimate touch may vary considerably across gender (Guerrero & Anderson, 1994; Gullledge et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the number of significant gender differences was presently small, suggesting that processes surrounding intimate touch satisfaction may be broadly comparable across gender.

Finally, the results of our mediation analyses supported that attachment insecurity influenced marital quality because attachment anxiety negatively associated with touch satisfaction. Interpretation of these effects as causal is premature. Attachment tendencies can drift during marriage, being both a cause and consequence of distress over time (Davila, Karney, & Bradbury, 1999). Likewise, touch can promote attachment security (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016), altogether suggesting multiple plausible causal pathways by which our study variables could intersect. Likewise, the mediation effects were entirely indirect (i.e., there was no non-mediated association between anxiety and marital quality), which may reflect some form of inconsistent mediation (see MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2009). Therefore, the observed mediation effects highlight avenues by which attachment, touch satisfaction, and marital quality connect mechanistically, but should be interpreted with caution. Understanding the exact causal structure will require a longitudinal design and candidate moderators.

Methodological Considerations

Our sample of established couples had a broad range in marital length, suggesting that our findings emerged across marriages at varying stages. While attachment may have less influence later in marriage (Hollist & Miller, 2005), our data shows that, at the bi-variate level, attachment tendencies and relationship quality are still correlated, and that subjective experiences may be impacted by attachment even after years of marriage. This is important because past research on attachment and touch has focused primarily on college samples (e.g., Tucker & Anders, 1998), despite that increased stability and commitment impact attachment. Individuals who do change often become more secure once married (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Davila et al., 1999), suggesting that those in our sample who remained fixed in their insecure tendencies may be objectively different from insecurely attached individuals in mercurial college relationships. However, our sample does have limitations in generalizability. As it predominantly consisted of relatively non-distressed Caucasian individuals of low-to-middle income, our findings may not transfer to samples of more diverse couples. For instance, intimate touch may be symbolically or functionally different in distressed couples, with the impacts of touch being influenced by past traumatic experiences (e.g., sexual assault) or betrayals (e.g., infidelity).

Additionally, touch in times of stress, particularly attachment-related stressors, (e.g., approach-avoidance strategies; see Dewitte et al., 2008) is most theoretically linked to attachment; however, our findings are not elicited by attachment threat. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that proximity maintenance is solely linked to managing threats. Instead, it may be a way to proactively increase affiliative bonding or the likelihood of sex and procreation. As such, understanding the role of touch and attachment in romantic relationships without an imminent threat allows us to understand how touch associates with daily functioning, instead of just in times of crisis.

Our measures warrant further discussion. First, we utilized a measure of routine affection that encompasses a range of touch behaviors. Other studies have assessed particular behaviors (e.g., kissing; Floyd et al., 2009), but their findings may be specific to that behavior, as well as gender dependent (e.g., back rubs; Gullledge, Stahmann, & Wilson, 2004), whereas our current operation pertains to affection generally. It is important to note that the measure we used asked an individual to rate whether their partner engaged in a behavior. In light of our findings that attachment associates with perceptions, it is also possible that attachment also impacted reporting of partner behaviors and that perceptual influences skewed reports of behavioral engagement in routine affection.

We also controlled for sexual satisfaction. Attachment insecurity, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality are demonstrably intertwined (e.g., Timm & Keiley, 2011), and there is evidence to suggest that touch and sexual activity functionally and practically overlap (Van Anders, Edelstein, Wade, & Samples-Steele, 2013). Nevertheless, research on intimate touch has not controlled for sexual satisfaction (see Chopik et al., 2014), and often does not separate the unique influence of affection and sexuality (see Muise et al., 2014). Future studies should include measures of both touch and sex, as our results suggest that the association of intimate touch and sexual satisfaction with other variables may be distinct. Perhaps the emphasis of good sex on relationship quality is overstated, or simply reaching out and touching

one's partner is as important.

Finally, we measured marital quality using two dimensions. Despite evidence of their incremental validity over one-dimensional indices, two-dimensional marital quality measures are still infrequently used. However, intimate relationships comprise both positive and negative facets, and separately measuring evaluations thereof confers theoretically-relevant information. Presently, we found that husbands viewed infrequent touch as the absence of something positive about the marriage, but for wives it was perceived as a negative. This suggests that low engagement in routine affection has different implications for husbands' and wives' marital quality, and is consistent with research indicating that the impacts of intimate touch may vary across gender (e.g., Gullede et al., 2003). Exploring different intermediary processes linking routine affection to husbands' satisfaction and wives' dissatisfaction may prove to be a fruitful line of inquiry for future research.

Conclusions

Adult attachment provides a useful framework through which to understand individual differences in proximity seeking behavior, specifically intimate touch. Our results support this notion and converge on the idea that attachment tendencies can interface with intimate touch in a variety of ways that are potentially different across gender. Our results also demonstrated that both touch behaviors and perceptions of touch uniquely associated with marital quality regardless of attachment, and when controlling for sexual satisfaction, suggesting roles that are particular to non-sexual tactile affection and its appraisal. These findings emerged in a sample of established married couples while controlling for age and marital length, highlighting that attachment and touch are associated with each other and marital quality even in more stable unions. Nevertheless, as our design was cross-sectional, the way in which these associations play out at the causal level is currently unclear. As such, current claims about causal directionality should be treated as speculative. Also, we constrained our focus to routine affection, and our present findings might not generalize to other forms of or contexts for intimate touch. As such, our findings provide the scaffolding for future research, which should endeavor to map out how adult attachment, intimate touch, and marital quality relate mechanistically within a longitudinal framework, as well as extend the domain of intimate touch to encompass a wider range of situations and behaviors.

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

- ☺ **Seigie Kennedy** will be headed to the Syracuse VA for her pre-doctoral internship next year! We're going to miss her – she is going to continue to do great things!
- ☺ Congratulations to **Eileen Barden** and **Dana Ergas** on passing their comprehensive exams with flying colors!
- ☺ Congratulations, **Seigie Kennedy** on earning the Binghamton University's Graduate Student Excellence Award for her dedication to serving the Veteran community!

Drs. Brian & Katie Baucom's Couples Laboratory for Observational Studies (CLOSE)

- ☺ **Jasara Hogan, MA** accepted a National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Medical University of South Carolina. Congrats, Jasara!
- ☺ **Alex Crenshaw, MA** has accepted a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Candice Monson's IMPACT Lab at Ryerson University! Congrats, Alex!
- ☺ **Karena Leo, MA** will be starting her clinical internship with University of Kansas Medical Center this summer!

Dr. Donald Baucom's UNC Couples Lab

- ☺ **Kim Pentel, MA** accepted a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Couple and Family Health at the Seattle VA Hospital. Congrats, Kim!
- ☺ **Danielle Weber, MA** received a Departmental Undergraduate Teaching Commendation for Fall 2019 in recognition of exceptional course ratings. She has also successfully proposed her dissertation! Congrats, Danielle!
- ☺ **Alexandra Wojda** received a Departmental Undergraduate Teaching Commendation for Fall 2019 in recognition of exceptional course ratings.
- ☺ **Dr. Donald Baucom** received a University teaching award for excellence in teaching at the graduate level.

Drs. Steven Beach & Justin Lavner's UGA Couple and Family Lifespan Health Lab

- ☺ **Tony Petruzzella** matched for his clinical internship at the Bay Pines VA in Florida.

Dr. Rebecca Brock's Family Development Lab

☉ **Erin Ramsdell** (4th year graduate student) received an award for the "The Impact of the Early Family Environment on Child Behavioral Health" by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Behavioral Program of Excellence. Erin was also awarded the Robert L. Weiss Student Research Award for Outstanding Student Poster Presentation at Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies Conference (ABCT): "A healthy interparental relationship during pregnancy sets the stage for adaptive family functioning postpartum."

☉ **Frannie Calkins** (2nd year graduate student) was featured in a recent edition of HYPERLINK "<https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/study-finds-potential-dark-side-to-partner-support/>" [Nebraska Today](#)

☉ **Rebecca Brock** (Lab PI) was awarded tenure and promotion to Associate Professor (effective August, 2020) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

☉ We now have five Ph.D. students in our lab including Erin Ramsdell, Lauren Laiser, Frannie Calkins, and our newest additions, Eric Phillips and Emily Hamburger.

☉ Two of our outstanding undergraduate research assistants—**Olivia Maras** and **Sage Volk**—successfully defended their senior theses.

Dr. Annmarie Caño

☉ Dr. Caño will be moving to Washington state in July for her new position as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Gonzaga University. Congratulations!

Dr. Rebecca Cobb's Simon Fraser University Couples Lab

☉ Congratulations to PhD student, **Jessica Ferreira**, who received the Marilyn Bowman Graduate Scholarship in Psychology for her outstanding MA research!"

☉ Congratulations to MA student, **Lauren McRae** and her husband, who are expecting TWINS this coming summer!

Dr. James V. Cordova's Center for Couples and Families at Clark University

☉ **Emily** is collecting data for her dissertation, which pilots a brief, virtual mindfulness program designed for postpartum women. She will be starting internship at the Madison VA Hospital in the fall.

☉ **Taylor** is preparing to defend her dissertation exploring an LGB-affirmative adaptation of the Relationship Checkup. She is looking forward to beginning her internship at UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services this fall.

☉ **Nick Canby** is finishing his clinical externship at the Women's partial hospital program at Butler hospital and is in the process of refining his ideas about dissertation.

☉ **Setareh Rossman** continues to enjoy her clinical practica at UMass Medical School's counseling center and Clark University's couples therapy clinic. She looks forward to starting training at the Bedford VA next fall. Setareh is working on a research study examining the dyadic relations between acceptance and marital satisfaction.

☉ As a second-year clinical psychology student, **David** has started his intervention research examining whether a vulnerable conversation between emerging adults and their parents would lead to intimacy between them and emerging adults' social connectedness.

☉ **Jenna Rice** is beginning her research examining the influence of labeling relationship patterns on intimacy, acceptance, and relationship satisfaction.

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

☉ **McKenzie Roddy** has accepted a postdoctoral fellowship in the Veteran Affairs Quality Scholar's program at the Nashville VA Medical Center. The interprofessional fellowship focuses on developing leaders and researchers in quality improvement, implementation science, health services research, and outcomes research including telehealth.

☉ **Karen Rothman** successfully matched at the Philadelphia VAMC for internship and is looking forward to starting in August.

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

☉ **August Jenkins** has been awarded an F31 predoctoral fellowship through the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) to study the associations between mental health and relationship functioning in partnered African Americans under the sponsorship of Steffany Fredman and David Almeida at Penn State.

Dr. Kristina Coop Gordon's Couples Research Lab

- ☉ **Katie Lenger** matched at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University for her pre-doctoral internship training!
- ☉ **D.J. Garcia** matched and will be completing a one-year clinical internship at the University of Kansas Medical Center!
- ☉ **Matt McCall** will be joining the Gordon Lab as a first-year clinical student – welcome, Matt!
- ☉ **Zahra Amer** has begun data collection for her Master's Thesis examining first-generation South Asian immigrant's attitudes toward arranged versus love marriages.

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

- ☉ **Samantha Wagner** was accepted to an APA accredited internship program which she will begin this summer. She also successfully proposed her dissertation, expanding her work related to attachment and oxytocin.
- ☉ **Maggie Parker** was awarded the Kaschak Institute for Social Justice for Women and Girls Graduate Fellowship.

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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 2020 Newsletter. We'd love to hear from you!

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 has focused its efforts this year on collecting data from military couples and sexual minority couples to better understand their strengths and adversities in these high-risk and marginalized populations. We continue to have a large and productive team consisting of four doctoral students, Eileen Barden, Dana Ergas, Seigie Kennedy, and Binghaung (Alex) Wang, as well as 12 undergraduate and postbaccalaureate research assistants.

Eileen Barden is in her third year of the graduate program and is investigating couple functioning, including couple coregulation, in the context of PTSD. Dana Ergas, third-year graduate student, is diligently preparing her dissertation proposal. She aims to examine stress-related growth and relationship stigma in a community sample of sexually marginalized couples. Fourth-year graduate student, Alex Wang, is also preparing his dissertation proposal and aims to examine the moderating effects of attachment on couple coregulation following acute stress. Seigie Kennedy, a fourth-year graduate student, is collecting her dissertation data examining the impact of sexual assault on intimacy using eye tracking as a measure of attention bias.

A big thank you to our energetic 2019-2020 CAST lab team! We look forward to publishing our findings and welcoming Melissa Gates, University of Arizona alumni and our incoming graduate student, 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

Our lab continues both its treatment outcome research and basic research on various couple processes. We believe that both of these approaches are valuable in themselves and interact in a synergistic manner to contribute to our knowledge in the field of intimate relationship functioning.

Treatment research:

Eating disorders: Dr. Baucom and the lab continue their collaborative efforts with Dr. Bulik at UNC evaluating the effectiveness of a couple-based intervention for binge eating disorder in our community clinic. To further disseminate therapist training of our empirically-supported interventions in eating disorders, we are partnering with 3-C Family Services and the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders to take therapist training online for our couple-based treatment for anorexia nervosa (Uniting Couples in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa - UCAN) and our couple-based intervention for binge eating disorder (UNiting couples In the Treatment of Eating disorders – UNITE; an RCT comparing individual- and couple-based treatments are ongoing).

Insomnia: 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. The RCT is ongoing.

Same sex relationship distress: The entire lab has assisted in efforts supporting Kim Pentel's dissertation project which is a treatment development study. The ACCESS Program (Affirming Couples Counseling to Engage Same-Sex Partners) is a couple therapy tailored for same-sex couples, drawing upon the CBCT framework and sexual minority stress literature. The open-trial pilot study is complete and data analyses are complete. In the future, Kim hopes to work with scholars in the VA health care system to expand affirming and tailored care for underserved couples and families.

Depression: Our lab continues a long-standing collaboration with the National Health Service in England to offer training and supervision to therapists in our 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.

Basic research:

Our lab continues its broad-based exploration of 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 or a medical problem, distressed couples who engage in psychological violence, couples in a longitudinal study of relationship functioning, and long-distance couples. We are currently working on multiple projects at various stages. The manuscript based on the longitudinal study of relationship functioning, led by Danielle Weber (4th year student), was recently invited for journal resubmission. Other manuscripts on interpersonal emotion regulation in couples who engage in physical and/or psychological violence, led by Alexandra Wojda (3rd year student), are in preparation.

Dr. Baucom and Dr. Melanie Fischer are co-Principal Investigators on a funded effort to explore how symptoms of anxiety and depression relate to various interpersonal emotion dynamics in couples. This effort uses data across multiple samples of couples using integrative data analysis, in collaboration with Dr. Dan Bauer and Dr. Brian Baucom, along with several other couple researchers who have provided invaluable data sets. Data analysis is ongoing.

Our lab is collaborating with Dr. Shelby Langer and Dr. Laura Porter in a large investigation of communication among couples experiencing different forms of cancer. Dr. Baucom is involved in procedures for observational coding of couple interactions and emotional arousal. Dr. Melanie Fischer and Danielle Weber (4th year student) have provided consultation regarding procedures for processing vocal features of emotional arousal within couple interactions, and Dr. Brian Baucom is overseeing comprehensive behavioral coding efforts. Data collection is ongoing.

Led by Danielle Weber (4th year student) in collaboration with Dr. Steve Du Bois and Dr. Tamara Goldman Sher, our study of community long-distance couples in comparison to geographically-close couples is near the end of data collection. We will soon begin examining data to better understand times of transitions within these couples; that is, when partners transition from functioning individually to times when the couple is together. Emily Carrino (1st year student) is currently conducting a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) analysis to explore remote and in-person communication in these populations.

Steven R. H. Beach, Ph.D. and Justin A. Lavner, Ph.D.

Directors: UGA Couple and Family Lifespan Health Lab
 University of Georgia

The lab continues to work on several projects aimed at understanding and promoting health among rural African American families. The first round of data collection is wrapping up for a follow-up study of middle-aged couples who participated in the ProSAAF intervention to examine longer-term impact on relationship functioning and health (PI: Beach; R01AG059260-06). Data collection is entering its final year for an RCT examining a responsive parenting intervention for first-time mothers and their infants (PI: Lavner; 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. Many of our recent papers focus on understanding intervention effects and/or the effects of stigma on health and family functioning.

Current graduate students are Tosin Adesogan (first year), Ariel Hart (second year) and Tony Petruzzella (fifth year). Also working with the lab is an interdisciplinary group of researchers at UGA including Man Kit Lei (Assistant Professor of Sociology), Victoria King (post-doctoral), and Mei Ling Ong (Statistician). We also work closely with Allen Barton (former UGA Research Scientist, now Assistant Professor of HDFs at Illinois) and several other off-campus collaborators.

Rebecca Brock, Ph.D.

Director: Family Development Lab
Assistant Professor in Department of Psychology
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

We have several ongoing projects. The Family Development Project is aimed at understanding 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 parents and children. Thus far, the study is comprised of six waves of data collection spanning pregnancy to preschool age. The Healthy Couples Project is aimed at understanding respect and acceptance in intimate relationships, how couples balance autonomy needs, and partner objectification and dehumanization experiences and their consequences. The Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Couples project is aimed at examining daily experiences with discrimination and harassment of sexual and gender minority couples living in rural Nebraska, the impact of marginalization stress on individual and relational well-being, and the protective role of partner support.

Rebecca Cobb, Ph.D.

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

We are wrapping up a SFU funded randomized controlled trial in collaboration with Dr. Joanne Davila from Stony Brook University, NY that examines the effects of a relationship education workshop on individual and relational outcomes. Unfortunately, our data collection is on hold due to COVID-19, but we will resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

Our lab was recently awarded funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which we will use to jumpstart our next big project! Stay tuned for more details.

James V. Cordova, Ph.D.

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

Our lab is continuing to conduct translational and basic research on couples and stress. Following the success of our pilot study to test an abbreviated, intensive, multi-couple group version of cognitive-behavioral conjoint therapy for PTSD (AIM-CBCT for PTSD), we're currently preparing a proposal to conduct an RCT to evaluate the efficacy of AIM-CBCT for PTSD relative to the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) in military and veteran couples. This work is being conducted in collaboration with Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades, Candice Monson, and the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD. We're also excited about our collaboration with Melanie Fischer from the University of Heidelberg, Don Baucom from UNC-Chapel Hill, and Amy Marshall from Penn State to investigate how couples with PTSD regulate emotion on a moment-by-moment. Other lab projects include the daily and long-term associations between mental health and relational well-being in African Americans within a sociocultural context, which is being led by graduate student August Jenkins.

Steffany Fredman, Ph.D.

Director: Penn State Couple and Family Adaptation to Stress Lab
Karl R. Fink & Diane Wendle Fink Early Career Professor for the Study of Families
Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Studies
Penn State University

Our lab is continuing to conduct translational and basic research on couples and stress. Following the success of our pilot study to test an abbreviated, intensive, multi-couple group version of cognitive-behavioral conjoint therapy for PTSD (AIM-CBCT for PTSD), we're currently preparing a proposal to conduct an RCT to evaluate the efficacy of AIM-CBCT for PTSD relative to the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) in military and veteran couples. This work is being conducted in collaboration with Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades, Candice Monson, and the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD.

We're also excited about our collaboration with Melanie Fischer from the University of Heidelberg, Don Baucom from UNC-Chapel Hill, and Amy Marshall from Penn State to investigate how couples with PTSD regulate emotion on a moment-by-moment.

Other lab projects include the daily and long-term associations between mental health and relational well-being in African Americans within a sociocultural context, which is being led by graduate student August Jenkins.

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There are many exciting projects happening in the lab this year, including on the topics of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, consent, and intimate touch. A new project on sexual education is underway due to the awarding of the Kaschak grant. One graduate student recently proposed her dissertation, and another has plans to defend her Masters' thesis this spring. Several lab members (including undergraduates) were accepted to and have plans to attend the IARR 2020 conference in London (now rescheduled 2021) to present symposia, data blitzes, and posters.

Hot off the Press

In Press and Recently Published Literature

- Baucum, D. H., Fischer, M. S., Corrie, S., Worrell, M., & Boeding, S. E. (2020). *Treating relationship distress and psychopathology in couples: A cognitive-behavioral approach*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.
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- Brock, R.L., Franz, M.R., & Ramsdell, E.L. (2019). An integrated relational framework of depressed mood and anhedonia during pregnancy. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. doi:10.1111/jomf.12611
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- Hatch, S. G., Roddy, M. K., Doss, B. D., Rogge, R. D., Espilne, C. R., & Braithwaite, S.R. (2019). Texts 4 romantic relationships – a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 1-21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2019.1667936>
- Lavner, J. A., Stansfield, B. K., Beach, S. R. H., Brody, G. H., & Birch, L. L. (2019). Sleep SAAF: A responsive parenting intervention to prevent excessive weight gain and obesity among African American infants. *BMC Pediatrics*, 19(1), 224. doi:10.1186/s12887-019-1583-7
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