

Couples Research & Therapy

NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Spring 2013

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

Letter from the Co-Presidents Barry & Fredman	1
Letter from the Editors Gray & Biesen	2
Treasurer Update Orengo-Aguayo	2
Media Coordinators Update Logan & Millman	2
Letter from the Student Co-Presidents Georgia & Benson	3
Featured Article <i>Psychological Victimization as a Risk Factor for the Development Course of Marriage</i> Yoon and Lawrence	4
Book Review <i>Stumbling on Happiness</i> Stanton	7
Kudos	10
Lab Updates	
Langhinrichsen-Rohling	6
Markman/Stanley/Rhoades	8
Owen	9
Allen	10
Cordova	11
Heyman & Slep	11
Whitton	12
Halford	12
Cano	12
Barry	13
Hot off the Press	14

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Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Robin Barry¹ & Steffany Fredman²

¹ *University of Maryland Baltimore County*, ² *Massachusetts General Hospital*

Greetings, all! We hope that the academic year has treated you well and that everyone is having a good summer so far.

We had great representation by SIG members at last year's ABCT Convention in National Harbor, and we would like to offer a special thanks to Dr. Deborah Capaldi for her outstanding pre-conference presentation entitled "The Development and Dynamics of Intimate Partner Violence." At the business meeting, we had the privilege of electing a new treasurer – Rosaura Orengo-Aguayo – and had a chance to thank Meghan McGinn for her dedication as treasurer for the previous two years. Many thanks to SIG poster reviewers Brian Doss, Nicole Pukay-Martin, and Steve Sayers and Weiss Award committee members Scott Braithwaite, Michelle Leonard, Laura Meis, and Ron Rogge for their efforts in support of last year's conference. We also appreciate the many SIG members who generously volunteered to serve on this year's program committee to help ensure the SIG's representation at the conference.

We're looking forward to the upcoming conference in Nashville this November. We are planning some exciting activities, including a moderated panel on applying for and securing grant funding for the preconference event and special interest breakout groups as part of the business meeting. Please send us your input regarding funding sources you would like to hear about at the preconference event and topics for breakout groups. We will soon ask you to cast your vote for the top 5 funding sources and breakout group topics! At the business meeting, we will also be holding elections for a number of offices, including student co-presidents, newsletter co-editors, and media managers. Many thanks to Lisa Benson and Emily Georgia for their work as student co-presidents; Tatiana Gray and Judith Biesen for their work as newsletter co-editors; and Jill Logan and Roanne Millman for their work as media coordinators over the past two years.

Stay tuned for emails encouraging submissions to the SIG poster exposition held at the annual Cocktail Party and submissions for the Robert L. Weiss Graduate Student Poster Awards. We look forward to your contributions!

In the meantime, we are sending our very best wishes for a relaxing and productive summer and look forward to seeing you all in Nashville!

Steffany & Robin

Letter from the Editors

Tatiana and I are pleased to bring you the Spring (or admittedly more Summer) 2013 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG newsletter. We have plenty of goodies this time around.

We are very appreciative to have an article by Jueng Eun Yoon and Erika Lawrence. They have submitted a shortened version of their recent publication on 'Psychological Victimization as a Risk Factor for the Developmental Course of Marriage'. You can find their report on page 4.

Additionally, we extend our gratitude to Kimberly Stanton for her discerning and comprehensive review of *Stumbling on Happiness* by Dan Gilbert. See page 7.

Last but not least we're pleased to report a record number of lab update submissions. It looks it's been quite a busy year so far for us SIGgers - keep up the good work!

As always, we invite our fellow Couples SIG members to submit feedback and ideas 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!

Tatiana Gray & Judith Biesen

ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer's Update

Dear SIG Members,

I hope this message finds you well! It has been a pleasure serving as your treasurer thus far and I am looking forward to seeing many of you at ABCT in the fall.

We have added 11 new members since our last update, and our dues-paying membership (members who have paid dues within the last 5 years) is currently at 172 (64 professionals and 108 students). I would like to extend a very warm welcome to our newest members and encourage all of you to spread the word to your colleagues about the Couples SIG.

At the moment, our SIG balance is \$1,170.08. Our balance at the last update was \$648.10. Since the 2012 ABCT Conference we have collected \$1,079.13 in dues and donations. This year (2013) we have spent \$27.15 on our web domain. Thank you for your continued support!

As always, we will collect dues for 2013 at our SIG business meeting during the ABCT conference. If you are not attending the conference or would like to pre-pay your 2013 dues, please pay electronically via PayPal (go to www.paypal.com and send money to rosauraorengo@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 "gift" to avoid processing fees. Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students, post-docs, 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!

Respectfully,
Rosaura

Media Coordinators Update

Jill Logan, B.A. and Roanne Millman, B.A.

In June, we will be conducting a "Spring/Summer cleaning" of the listserv and website members page. If you have not yet paid your yearly dues and would like to continue receiving SIG related emails, and have the ability to email members of listserv and be listed on the members page of the website, please send your dues to Rosaura Orengo-Aguayo as soon as possible.

If you would like to have your name removed from the listserv or the members page, or if you would like to update your contact information, please email Jill Logan (jlogana@sfu.ca) and Roanne Millman (rmillman@sfu.ca).

Roanne and Jill

Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Lisa Benson¹ & Emily Georgia²

¹ *University of California, Los Angeles,* ² *University of Miami*

We hope everyone enjoyed this past year's conference in National Harbor and are looking forward to Nashville! We have a just a few but important announcements to share with everyone:

Student Symposium:

- We are continuing the tradition of the student led symposium, and are very delighted to announce that this year's submission was accepted! This year's student symposium is titled "**Early, Preventative, and Low-Intensity Relationship Interventions.**"
- Students involved and topics covered include myself (Emily Georgia) discussing the reach of a web-based relationship intervention program, Matt Hawrilenko (Clark University) reviewing the results of the two year follow-up of the Marriage Checkup program, Hannah Williamson (UCLA) addressing predictors of success in PREP and CARE, Ellen Darling (Clark University) presenting data suggesting the usefulness of mindfulness training in improving relationship quality, and finally Kara Emery (Baylor) describing an online motivational enhancement program aiming to help couples overcome barriers to couple interventions.
- We are also lucky to have Dr. Galena Rhoades as our discussant!

Plans for November:

- **SIG Cocktail Party:** We hope to find a location close to the conference hotel, as well as one that provides us our own space, as we did last year in National Harbor. If any SIG members have suggestions for locations in Nashville, please pass them along!
- Fortunately, it looks like the SIG has funds to help out with the cocktail party, which is great! We will pass along all details for the cocktail party in the Fall 2013 Newsletter.

Finally, let us remind you of the ways that you can be involved with the SIG! In addition to our strong overall SIG listserv (couples-sig@sfu.ca), we have a Couples SIG Facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=266082574771>). We also have a student-specific facebook group, (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=82988514892>). Feel free to email us if you would like to be added or removed from this group.

Please let us know if you have other feedback for us that you think would improve the experience for SIG members. And as always, please feel free to email us with any suggestions, questions, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Emily Georgia (egeorgia@psy.miami.edu) & Lisa Benson (lbenson1@ucla.edu)

Psychological Victimization as a Risk Factor for the Development Course of Marriage: Brief Report

Jeung Yoon, Erika Lawrence, PhD

Researchers have found a negative relation between psychological aggression and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Kim, Laurent, Capaldi, & Feingold, 2008; Taft et al., 2006), and between physical aggression and relationship satisfaction (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001, 2007; O'Leary et al., 1989; Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008). A noticeable gap in this literature is the integration of research investigating the roles of psychological aggression *and* physical aggression on relationship outcomes.

Indeed, we know of only three published studies in which these types of aggression have been examined simultaneously. In the first study, Schumacher and Leonard (2005) assessed verbal aggression, physical aggression, and marital adjustment over the first two years of marriage. Husbands' and wives' verbal aggression at marriage predicted declines in their partners' marital adjustment one year later. Notably, physical aggression did not predict marital decline, in contrast with previous research findings (e.g., Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007). In the second study, Shortt, Capaldi, Kim, and Owen (2006) examined the effects of psychological and physical aggression on relationship dissolution in a sample of high risk men (men with high rates of delinquency) and their female partners. Couple levels of physical aggression – but not psychological aggression -- significantly predicted relationship dissolution. Moreover, the adverse effects of physical aggression remained even after controlling for psychological aggression. In the third study, Rogge and Bradbury (1999) found that measures of aggression predicted relationship dissolution whereas measures of negative communication predicted relationship dissatisfaction.

Based on the studies conducted to date, negative communication/verbal aggression appears to be associated with relationship dissatisfaction whereas (primarily) physical aggression is associated with relationship dissolution. However, the question of whether psychological aggression and physical aggression are differentially associated with relationship outcomes – either relationship dissatisfaction or dissolution-- remains unanswered.

Summary of Present Study

The present study aimed to examine the longitudinal associations among psychological aggression, physical aggression, marital satisfaction and dissolution in a community sample (N=102 couples) over a seven-year period. Spouses participated in six waves of data collection. The prevalence rates of psychological aggression in the present sample ranged from 72% to 98% across time, consistent with the previous literature (e.g., Capaldi & Crosby, 1997; O'Leary & Williams, 2006). On average, husbands' and wives' psychological aggression declined over time, and mean levels of psychological aggression did not differ. Hostile withdrawal was the most frequently employed type of psychological aggression. Approximately one-third of couples engaged in physical aggression, which is consistent with previous research (O'Leary et al., 1989; Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007). The most frequently employed tactics were pushing, grabbing, and throwing something at one's partner. On average, spouses' physical aggression fluctuated over time without patterns of systematic increase or decrease.

Effects on Marital Satisfaction: The main question that the present study aspired to answer was whether psychological and physical aggression differentially impacted marital satisfaction/distress and dissolution. Trajectories of psychological aggression were associated with those of marital satisfaction; however, trajectories of physical aggression were not. Consistent with Schumacher and Leonard's (2005) findings, psychological aggression was significantly more detrimental than physical aggression to marital satisfaction. Moreover, our results expand upon their findings in that we found (a) within-spouse and cross-spouse associations, (b) bidirectional associations between psychological aggression and marital satisfaction, and (c) associations over a longer time period (2 years versus 7 years; Schumacher & Leonard, 2005).

Trajectories of physical aggression were not significantly associated with trajectories of marital satisfaction. These findings are consistent with those of Schumacher and Leonard (2005), who suggested that previously reported effects of physical aggression on marital satisfaction might have been an artifact of the untested effects of psychological aggression on marital satisfaction. The detrimental effects of physical aggression in intimate relationships have been demonstrated in previous research (e.g., Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007; Shortt et al., 2006). However, those studies did not control for the effects of psychological aggression. The current findings offer a more comprehensive examination of the ways in which different types of aggression impacted the developmental course of marriage.

Although the findings of the present study demonstrate the predictive dominance of psychological aggression on marital outcomes, the presence and role of physical aggression should not be dismissed. Given that trajectories of physical aggression were associated with trajectories of psychological aggression, the presence of physical aggression might create a relationship context in which psychological aggression is more likely to occur, which then impacts marital outcomes.

Effects on Marital Dissolution: In line with prior research (e.g., Shortt et al., 2006), we expected physical aggression to adversely and uniquely affect relationship stability. However, only husbands' initial levels of *psychological* aggression predicted marital dissolution in the current study. The different findings between our study and those of Shortt et al. (2006) are a function of several differences between the two samples. First, Shortt et al.'s sample comprised married, dating and cohabiting couples. Rates of dissolution are expected to be lower in our sample of married couples relative to samples of dating or cohabiting couples. Second, rates of physical aggression have been consistently found to be higher among younger couples and among dating and cohabiting couples relative to rates among older and married couples. Thus, rates of aggression are expected to be higher in Shortt et al.'s sample relative to our sample. Third, Shortt et al. recruited boys "at risk for juvenile delinquency (p.627)" and examined their romantic relationships whereas we recruited newly married couples restricted to both partners' first marriages. In sum, there are many differences between the two samples such that the findings across the two studies cannot be directly compared.

Nonetheless, we were initially surprised that we did not find a link between physical aggression and dissolution. In addition to the sample differences between the two studies noted above, we believe that our examination of subtypes of psychological aggression is relevant. Of note, the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA; Murphy and Hoover, 1999) was used to assess (subtypes of) psychological aggression in the present study. Subtypes of psychological aggression assessed in the MMEA include Dominance/Intimidation, Restrictive Engulfment, Denigration, and Hostile Withdrawal. We found that husbands' initial levels of psychological aggression were significantly associated with dissolution. We also found that husbands' levels of Dominance/Intimidation were higher than wives' levels at Time 1. The MMEA items representing Dominance/Intimidation (e.g., "Threatened to hit you," "Drove recklessly to frighten you," "Stood or hovered over you during a conflict or disagreement") seem more likely to induce fear for one's safety in its victims, just like physically aggressive behaviors are likely to induce fear. In contrast, behaviors representing Restrictive Engulfment (e.g., "Secretly searched through your belongings"), Denigration (e.g., "Called you ugly"), or Hostile Withdrawal (e.g., "Acted cold or distant when angry") seem far less likely to induce fear for physical safety.

In sum, although these remain empirical questions, it seems likely that Dominance/Intimidation tactics represent one end of a continuum of physical aggression, and that Dominance/Intimidation tactics in a community sample function similarly to the way that physically aggressive tactics might function in a clinical sample. Thus, it is possible that husbands' Dominance/Intimidation tactics were associated with dissolution for the same reasons that other researchers have found links between physical aggression and dissolution.

Types of Psychological Victimization and Marital Distress: Although overall mean levels of psychological aggression did not differ between husbands and wives across time, husbands' mean levels of perpetration of Dominance/Intimidation at Time 1 were significantly higher than that of wives. The results may indicate the significance of a certain type -- rather than the level -- of psychological aggression on marital dissolution in a non-clinical married sample.

Additionally, notable sex differences emerged when we examined the links between subtypes of psychological aggression and marital satisfaction trajectories. Husbands' satisfaction was most strongly impacted by Restrictive Engulfment, though wives' satisfaction was not uniquely impacted by Dominance/Intimidation. More specifically, husbands' marital satisfaction declined significantly more when they were the victims of Restrictive Engulfment compared to Dominance/Intimidation, suggesting that husbands are more affected by having their social lives controlled than having their physical integrity threatened by women. In contrast, victimization by Denigration was more detrimental to wives' marital satisfaction than was Restrictive Engulfment. This finding is particularly interesting when we consider that wives' mean levels of perpetration of Denigration were higher than husbands' at Times 2 and 4. These sex differences highlight the need for researchers to move from examining levels of psychological aggression (frequencies) to investigating the true nature of psychological aggression (including the sex of the perpetrator and the type of aggression) to elucidate the impact of psychological aggression in romantic relationships.

Implications of the Present Study

The present study is one of the first to demonstrate the overwhelmingly detrimental effects of psychological aggression on marital outcomes over and above the effects of physical aggression. Additionally, multiple types of psychological aggression impacted marriages. Consequently, the effects of psychological aggression relative to physical aggression are not simply a function of the greater prevalence or frequency of psychological aggression. Rather, there is something about the nature or impact of psychological aggression itself that is destructive.

Continued on page 6

Given the impact of psychological aggression on relationship satisfaction, we recommend that researchers routinely operationalize the construct of psychological aggression in a more nuanced way than it has been in many prior studies. Specifically, we call for researchers to attend to two key aspects of the assessment of psychological aggression. First, the construct should be assessed more thoroughly than most existing measures allow in order to elucidate the nature and effects of psychological aggression in romantic relationships. For example, the CTS-2 is one of the most widely used measures of assessing diverse aggressive behaviors (psychological aggression, physical assault, and sexual coercion) in romantic relationships (Straus et al., 1996). On one hand, because the CTS-2 encompasses such a broad range of behaviors, it has exceptional utility for screening couples' levels of engagement in various forms of aggression. On the other hand, the breadth of the measure limits its ability to assess psychological aggression in depth. Specifically, compared to the MMEA, which has 28 items designed to assess psychological aggression multi-dimensionally, the CTS-2 has eight items on its *Psychological Aggression Scale*. Although each measure has its own purpose and strength, we urge researchers and clinicians to deliberately choose measures appropriate to their goals and contexts.

Second, across all published measures of psychological aggression, there is no clear distinction between the severity and frequency of psychologically aggressive behaviors. Using the MMEA or the CTS-2 as examples, if a participant endorses eight different behaviors, each of which occurred only once, his/her score would be an 8. If a participant endorses only one behavior but indicates that it occurred 10 times, his/her score would also be an 8. If one only looks at the numerical score, these two victims (or perpetrators) would be indistinguishable. Creating new measures (or new ways of scoring existing measures) would allow researchers to investigate whether the frequency, severity, and/or variability of psychologically aggressive tactics differently impact relationship outcomes or processes.

Of note, we are aware that the CTS-2 distinguishes between minor and severe psychologically aggressive behaviors (Straus et al., 1996). However, the authors made these distinctions based on whether each item predicted mild versus severe *physical* aggression. For example, an item on the *Psychological Aggression Scale* was classified as "severe" if it predicted an item on the *Physical Assault Scale* that was already classified as "severe" (Straus et al., 1996). Based on our findings that psychological and physical aggression differentially impact marital outcomes, and that different types of psychological aggression differentially impact husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction, we recommend that distinctions such as the severity of various psychologically aggressive tactics be determined based on a multi-dimensional assessment of psychological aggression in and of itself, rather than solely as they relate to physical aggression.

Finally, we recommend investigating the relationship context in which psychological aggression occurs rather than simply investigating the behaviors in isolation. Psychological aggression may have deleterious effects beyond those impacting marital distress and dissolution. For example, it may demonstrate insidious effects on dyadic processes (Sagrestano et al., 1999) and/or on spouses' physical and mental health (see Lawrence et al., 2009.)

Lab Updates:

We had a record number of lab updates for this issue of the Newsletter! 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 2013 Newsletter. We always love to hear from you!

Jenny Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology
University of South Alabama
Mobile, AL

Dr. Jenny Langhinrichsen-Rohling has been actively developing and directing a brand new Center at the University of South Alabama; this center is called the Coastal Resource and Resiliency Center and is funded through the Gulf Region Health Outreach Program. Dr. L-R has been charged with enhancing the resiliency of people residing in lower Alabama (popularly referred to as LA). To accomplish this, she and her interdisciplinary team are increasing mental and behavioral health capacity while facilitating the ability of providers to provide evidence-based health services in public schools and Federally Qualified Health Centers. As part of this work, Dr. L-R and her doctoral graduate students (Aimee Var, Adrienne McCullars, Candice Selwyn, Becky LeCroix, Noelle Newhams, and Caitlin Wolford) have begun establishing a Marital and Family Resiliency Clinic within the Clinical and Counseling Psychology Doctoral Program at USA.

Stumbling on Happiness

Stumbling on
HAPPINESS

"THINK YOU KNOW WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?
This absolutely essential book will show you more deeply, but more honestly,
about how the mind works." —STEVEN D. LEVITT, author of *PREVALENCE*



DANIEL GILBERT

Book Review by
Kimberly Stanton,
B.A.
University of
Miami

Stumbling on Happiness
By Dan Gilbert
Pages: 336
ISBN: 978-1400077427
List Price: \$16.95
Publication Date: 2007

Raising questions that afflict almost everyone, such as “What makes me happy?,” “Why am I not happier?,” or “How can I be happier?,” *Stumbling on Happiness* is intended for anyone who has ever wondered why we, as humans, are so bad at predicting our true sources of happiness. Packed with anecdotal evidence and wit, this book provides readers with a unique perspective on the essence of happiness and our own imagination often warps our perception of it.

The author, Daniel Gilbert, is a social psychologist known for his research on “affective forecasting,” or people’s ability to make predictions about how future events will impact their affect or emotional state. A Harvard College Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, Gilbert has been recognized with numerous awards for his work in teaching and research, such as the Guggenheim Fellowship and the American Psychological Association’s Distinguished Scientific Award for an Early Career Contribution to Psychology. His international bestseller, *Stumbling Happiness*, has been translated into over 25 languages and was awarded the 2007 Royal Society Prizes for Science Books.

Primarily drawing from studies in psychology and sociology, yet skillfully intertwining aspects of neuroscience, philosophy, and behavioral economics, Gilbert provides readers with a scientific explanation of how people’s imagination can often guide them in the wrong direction in their search for happiness by consistently repeating the same mistakes over and over again. In fact, according to Gilbert, neither personal nor cultural experience can compensate for these limitations in people’s imagination when predicting what makes them happy. Combining his expertise in cognitive biases in affective forecasting along with his quirky sense of humor, Gilbert is able to offer readers an easily accessible yet profound look into his take on how people’s minds often disrupt their ability to understand what happiness truly is and how to achieve it.

The book has twelve chapters which can be organized into six sections or parts, each addressing unique aspects of how and why people formulate flawed predictions about their future happiness. Part one focuses on people’s unique ability to look forward in time. Gilbert discusses two ways humans perceive the future: by making predictions about the immediate future, and by making plans for the future. He also provides two reasons why people think about the future: imagining the future is pleasant and even emotionally gratifying, and it provides people with a sense of control and ability to change what is coming.

Part two addresses the subjective nature of how happiness is defined and experienced. Gilbert argues that it is just as impossible to compare two different persons’ levels of happiness as it is to compare two kinds of happiness within the same person, the reason being that comparisons between present and past happiness are flawed due to errors in human memory. However, he suggests that happiness can be measured as long the following premises are accepted (1) measurements of happiness (although imperfect) are better than nothing, (2) real-time, present reports of happiness are the least flawed, and (3) imperfections in measurements can be detected, particularly when using large samples.

The following three sections, comprised of chapters four through nine, address the central thesis of the book by discussing three basic mistakes that people make when they try to imagine what will make them happy in their future. In part three, Gilbert suggests the first mistake is due to the process by which the human brain creates memories: store only important pieces of data and then make up for missing information by filling in the details. He argues that this same process occurs when people think ahead, resulting in erroneous expectations or predictions of what is going to happen in the future.

In part four, Gilbert explains that the second mistake in predicting future happiness occurs when people try to imagine how they would feel about a future situation based on how they would feel if it were to happen in the present. He argues that this way of thinking is

inadequate because of the great impact that present feelings have on the perception of future feelings. Drawing parallels between sensory and emotional imagination, Gilbert suggests that just as it is difficult to sense two things simultaneously, it is also difficult to feel two things simultaneously, and therefore nearly impossible to distinguish current feelings from future ones.

The third mistake that disrupts people's ability to accurately imagine future happiness, as described in part five, is the tendency to rationalize toward positive feelings, which results in biased perceptions of the future. This subconscious effort to change one's perceptions of the world in order to change one's feelings about it, referred to by Gilbert as the psychological immune system, often causes people to underestimate their future happiness or to do things that will attenuate it.

Lastly, part six focuses on how people can surpass the three basic mistakes outlined in the previous chapters in order to accurately predict future happiness. Rather than trying to imagine the future, Gilbert advises readers to base their predictions on other people's actual experiences while avoiding the assumption that their own experience will be different or unique.

In conclusion, *Stumbling on Happiness* is well-written, thought-provoking, and entertaining. Gilbert's witty sense of humor combined with his use of commonplace examples makes this book accessible and informative to the layperson. While not necessarily a self-help read, this book is a great resource for anyone seeking to learn more about overcoming basic flaws in predicting what their sources of happiness will be in the future.

Markman/Stanley/Rhoades Lab
Center for Marital and Family Studies
University of Denver

We have just begun a new study funded by NICHD to examine the impact of premarital training on children's functioning. As part of this project, we are collecting DNA samples to examine GxE interactions.

Shelby Scott, a third year in our lab recently received a grant to fund her dissertation on women in same-sex relationships from the American Psychological Foundation (the Roy Scrivner Memorial Research Grant).

We are looking forward to welcoming Lane Nisbett to our lab as a new student in the fall. Around the same time, we'll be saying sad goodbyes to Kristi Peterson, PhD, who completed a post-doc with us and is beginning a new Assistant Professor position at University of La Verne and to Laura Osborne, a post-baccalaureate research assistant, who will begin the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program with Doug Snyder at Texas A&M in the fall.

Jesse Owen, Ph.D.

Licensed Psychologist
Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology
ECPY Dept at The University of Louisville

Members of the Relationship and Psychotherapy lab are engaged in a number of empirical and psychotherapy projects.

Couple Therapy and Commitment Uncertainty Projects

We have an on-going couple therapy study examining couples' commitment uncertainty, alliance, couple coping, and therapist interventions. From this project, several multiple case studies are underway (prior the assessment of the full sample). These case studies include: (1) examining the effects of couples' commitment uncertainty on the couple dynamics in therapy, (2) therapist interventions for couples with high/low commitment uncertainty, (3) therapeutic processes associated with changes in partners' attachment styles, and (4) therapeutic processes associated with dyadic coping when one partner is depressed. These case studies are part of multi-approach to examine commitment uncertainty, and we have several other projects examining commitment uncertainty for dating couples and couples who work together.

In addition to the commitment uncertainty project, Kelley Quirk and Dr. Owen have also published an article on the effect of heightening techniques in couple therapy (check it out in *Psychotherapy*). Along with our partners in Norway, Tyler Halford and Dr. Owen recently submitted a manuscript focused on pre-therapy relationship adjustment, gender, and the alliance in couple therapy.

Relationship Education Projects

We have conducted several relationship education studies. Recently, we published a dismantling study of PREP examining the effects of a structured communication intervention (check it out in *J of Family Psych*). With our partners at SGA Youth and Family services, we continue to examine the effects of PREP with lower income African American and Hispanic couples. For example, we are currently examining whether PREP is an effective intervention for couples who are experiencing more relationship distress. With our partners in the Social Work Dept here at the University of Louisville, we have also published an article examining group processes for Within My Reach (check it out in *Family Process*). Stemming from this project, Bethany Keller examined predictors of breaking up for individuals who attended WMR. Additionally, we are working compiling PREP studies in order to tackle a meta-analysis.

Hooking Up/Friends with Benefits

We have several projects examining hooking up and friends with benefits. Two recent studies have explored the aftermath of friends with benefits in regards to the friendship or the start of romantic relationships. Similar to our past work, it appears that most of the hype regarding the destructive elements of FWB relationship in the media seems to be overplayed. While there are some folks who do not have a good experience, FWB are not nearly as negative as one would think. Meg Manthos has also submitted a manuscript that examines hooking up reactions using a latent class regression analysis. Johanna Strokoff authored a paper on diverse reactions to casual sexual experiences and is awaiting the decision of her revise/resubmit.

Individual Therapy

Our work on individual therapy has been expanding with a focus on several therapeutic processes. In brief, we are charging ahead on examining multicultural processes in therapy. For example, Dr. Owen and Dr. Drinane are collecting data regarding therapists' multicultural orientation. In the process, we have developed three new measures to explore different facets of this construct. Dr. Owen and LeKeldric Thomas co-authored an article stemming from a study exploring the role of social and self-stigma on psychotherapy processes (check it out in *The Counseling Psychologist*). This project is being extended for Keldric's dissertation. In addition, lab members are working on a book chapter, which explores the unique experience of men in psychotherapy. We also have some unique looks at the role alliance and techniques coming out soon as well.

More Good Stuff

Lab members are also excitedly beginning new projects. Darren Turner and Anna Roeder are working on a project using thin slicing of moments in couple therapy to predict outcomes. Darren, Joanna Drinane, Anna Roeder, and Kelley Quirk are also serving as raters for a study on romantic relationship danger sign recognition. Johanna is also in the beginning phases of work on a study centered on parental influence on attraction. Kelley Quirk is working on the development of a measure of romantic relationship unawareness and a study exploring the associations between commitment uncertainty and serious monitoring of partner alternatives.

Conference Presentations

Lastly, several members of the lab have been accepted to present their research at regional and national conferences. Meg Manthos will be presenting her work at the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference. Joanna Drinane recently presented her work on the content validation of the cross-cultural counseling inventory and on therapists' multicultural competence at the Kentucky Psychological Association Foundation's Spring Academic Conference and at the University of Kentucky Spring Research Conference. Tyler Halford and Dr. Sandhu recently presented work on *The Seven Stages of Spiritual Development* and spirituality in the counseling process at the Annual Kentucky Counseling Association Conference. All lab members have been accepted to present their work, via symposia and posters, at the 2013 North American Society for Psychotherapy Research Conference in Memphis, TN.

Beth Allen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Colorado Denver

Things have been busy in Beth Allen's Relationship Studies Laboratory in the Clinical Health Psychology program at the University of Colorado Denver. Student CJ Kalinka has recently matched for internship at the University of Arizona's College of Medicine, located in Tucson, AZ. Christian Somoza has completed his first year in the program and was just selected for a 2013 APA Division 19 Student Research Grant. Lisa Betthausen has finished her fourth year and was awarded the Outstanding Professional Poster Award at the 2012 Colorado Psychological Association. Jessica Henritze-Hoye will be joining our program and lab in the Fall of 2013. Beth is happy to announce that she received tenure in the summer of 2012. She also received a Department of Defense grant to study military couples (with the collaboration of Keith Renshaw, Steffany Fredman, Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades, Howard Markman, and Brett Litz) and is planning to launch recruitment in June 2013. Cathi Kern has been hired to help with the project, and Brian Hager and Danielle Glenn have been volunteering tons of hours. Questions about the project? Email Beth at Elizabeth.allen@ucdenver.edu.

Picture below (with Denver skyline in background) L to R: CJ Kalinka, Cathi Kern, Beth Allen, Brian Hager, Lisa Betthausen, Christian Somoza, Danielle Glenn

**KUDOS!!!**

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

☺ Congratulations to **Dr. Annmarie Cano**, who won the Wayne State University Graduate School's Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award this spring.

☺ **Todd Kashdan** received the American Psychological Association (APA) Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contribution to Psychology (in the area of individual differences)

☺ **Patrick Poyner-Del Vento** welcomed baby boy Nathan, successfully defended his PhD thesis, and is heading to internship at the Portland VA this Fall!

☺ **Jill Logan** received the Joseph-Armand Bombardier PhD Scholarship, successfully defended her MA thesis, and is expecting a baby girl this summer.

☺ Congratulations to **Molly Gasbarrini** a graduate student in the lab of Douglas K. Snyder, Ph.D. at Texas A&M University. She is completing her internship at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine and has successfully defended her dissertation. She has also accepted a clinical postdoctoral fellowship with a **couples emphasis** at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System/Stanford University for 2013-2014.

☺ Congratulations to **Lt. Col. Cigrang and James Cordova** for receiving a grant from the Department of Defense! The Clark team will be working with the Air Force team to implement the Marriage Checkup for military families in a primary care setting.

☺ **Jared McShall**, a graduate student of Matt Johnson at Binghamton University received a predoctoral National Research Service Award (NRSA) Fellowship from the NIH for his study titled "*Intimate Relationships Moderate the Perceived Discrimination-Health Association.*"

James V. Córdova, Ph.D.

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

Since we are finished seeing couples for the Marriage Checkup, we are currently deep in the throes of the data analysis process. We are also involved in multiple exciting collaborations. We are still working with Kristina Coop Gordon's lab to implement the Marriage Checkup (referred to in this case as a Relationship Checkup) in a community based integrative health-care facility in Tennessee. We are also working closely with Lt. Colonel Jeffrey Cigrang and his Air Force team to implement the Marriage Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting.

Amanda Harp is busy completing her postdoctoral fellowship at Harbor-UCLA. With her first child due in September, she is frantically studying for the EPPP before the sleep deprivation begins. Melinda Ippolito Morrill successfully matched for pre-doctoral internship at the UMass Memorial Hospital/Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital and will begin this Fall 2013. In the meantime, she has been working on finishing her dissertation about the role of acceptance in couples' positive parenting, and spending quality time with her almost 3-year-old daughter. CJ Fleming is excited to begin her internship at the Durham, NC VA Hospital! Ellen Darling is in the process of publishing her master's thesis on the link between mindfulness, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction, and is working on the development of a web-based platform to disseminate the Marriage Check-Up. Julia Sollenberger is working on her dissertation which examines how couples' narratives around choosing each other as mates can serve as a predictive tool in therapy. She is also collaborating with Tatiana Gray on writing a paper on how couples' strengths can be used as an assessment tool in therapy. Tatiana received a fellowship to the Family Process Institute Craft of Scholarly Writing workshop for new writers and is in the process of publishing a paper on how dating couples transition out of conflict conversations. Matt Hawrilenko is working on a project trying to understand the different types of treatment response to the Marriage Checkup through two-year follow-up. He is using growth mixture modeling to examine the impact of the intervention on unobserved subgroups, where couples are characterized by their trajectories of relationship distress over time. We are also excited to welcome Robyn Arnette to our lab family in the Fall!

**Rick Heyman Ph.D. and Amy Slep, Ph.D.**

Family Translational Research Group
 Department of Cariology and Comprehensive
 Care

The Family Translational Research Group (FTRG) – directed by Dr. Rick Heyman and Dr. Amy Slep – joined New York University in the Department of Cariology and Comprehensive Care in the summer of 2011. In addition to Drs. Heyman and Slep, FTRG comprises twelve research scientist of varying levels (doctoral through bachelor) and about 30 volunteer externs from NYU and other local schools.

The group continues to be a primarily research-funded group. They currently have prevention and mechanism funded projects, including those with a civilian population, run by Drs. Danielle Mitnick and Michael Lorber, and military projects headed by Drs. Annie Eckardt Erlanger and John Nelson. Some of the current projects include a randomized controlled trial of Couple CARE for Parents, which recently concluded its fourth phase of data collection and was discussed at the Society for Prevention Research's Annual Meeting; a clinical planning grant for an adaptation of Couple CARE for Parents to include more health-focused material; a community prevention initiative in two New York universities; several Air Force projects (e.g., developing and evaluating maltreatment training, community-based prevention, couples-based prevention); and a Department of Defense-wide project continuing our maltreatment definitions work.

During the past year, the group has had approximately 30 publications.

Five of the staff members (Drs. Heyma, Slep, Exkardt Erlanger, Mitnick, and Lorber) also have teaching responsibilities. They work with dental students on improving their interactions with patients through skills like motivational interviewing. The biggest news is that the lab is back in its home after Superstorm Sandy. The Manhattan VA, which houses FTRG, was closed for 5 months, during which FTRG was temporarily relocated, but they have returned to their space and resumed all normal activities.

If you're in NYC, come over for a visit!

Sarah Whitton, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
Psychology Department
University of Cincinnati

Here at the Today's Couples and Families research program (TCF), we have continued our work aiming to better understand modern couples and families, and to help them build and maintain strong, stable relationships. Our research with same-sex couples has been particularly active this year. We recently completed data collection for the Same-Sex Relationship Development Study, a two-wave survey study designed to gather information about how same-sex relationships develop, how gay and lesbian partners symbolize their commitment to one another, and predictors of same-sex couple outcomes. In addition, our development and evaluation of relationship education for same-sex couples continues to be active. We are wrapping up a small waitlist controlled randomized clinical trial of our program for male same-sex couples. In March, we received a grant from the Lesbian Health Fund to deliver and evaluate a parallel program for female same-sex couples; our first group will be held in July.

The graduate student members of our lab have also been quite active. Eliza Weitbrecht received a University Research Fellowship to support her Master's project, launched this May, examining the mental health implications of college "hook-ups." Amanda Kuryluk received a fellowship to the Family Process Institute Craft of Scholarly Writing workshop for new writers. David Hutsell joined the lab in Fall 2012. Two of our other research assistants, John Fleming and Emily Jeffries, have been accepted into Clinical Psychology Ph.D. programs for this coming fall.

Kim Halford, Ph.D.

University of Queensland, Australia

We have received funding from the Australian Research Council and have started a randomized controlled trial evaluating the effects of different approaches to family mediation in helping recently separated parents negotiate co-parenting arrangements. There are two studies involved the first compares mediation as usual with mediation enhanced with motivational interviewing. The second compares mediation as usual with mediation plus a co-parenting skills training program. The co-parenting skills training program is essentially couple conflict management skills and parenting skills for couples who are no longer a couple. The project is being conducted in close collaboration with Relationships Australia (Queensland), the largest provider of family mediation services in Australia.

We also are conducting a trial of Couple CARE in Uniform, an adaptation of our couple relationship education program for military couples. Like the US, Australia has had and continues to have large numbers of troops on overseas deployments, and we are seeking to support members of our military and their spouses to enrich their relationships. This work is being done in collaboration with the Gallipoli Army Base, which is a large base in Brisbane.

We are doing long term follow up of a large sample of Brisbane based Chinese couples, Western couples, and intercultural couples with one Chinese and one Western partner. We are interested in how the relationship values and modes of couple communication associated with satisfaction differ across cultures, and how intercultural couples manage the differences effectively. We hope this research will inform a culturally sensitive version of relationship education targeted on minority and intercultural couples. Later this year we will begin a replication of the current study with couples residing in Hong Kong. We are interested in how the majority culture might moderate the way intercultural couples adapt.

Anmarie Cano, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Wayne State University

We are continuing work on our NICHD-funded animal-assisted intervention for adjudicated youth and are in the process of resubmitting a proposal to NCCAM for the development of a mindfulness intervention for couples with chronic pain. Recent student accomplishments: Laura Leong is completing an internship at St. Elizabeths Hospital (D.C.) and has secured a post-doc at Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences (Canada) which will allow her to continue her forensic work closer to home. Amy Williams won the WSU Norine Johnson Clinical Psychology Award and matched to the internship in adult health psychology at Geisinger Medical Center. Dana May is working on a dissertation proposal on emotional validation and invalidation expressed between adolescents with diabetes and their parents and the newest lab member, Angelia Castorena (U. Arizona), just finished her first year and is working on couple-based mindfulness projects.

Robin Barry, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
University of Maryland Baltimore County
Psychology Department

Research in our Lab is broadly focused on understanding the reciprocal influences between couple and family relationships and personal and interpersonal well-being and distress. My team and I (currently comprised of two graduate students and 21 undergraduate research assistants) are collecting data for three studies.

UMBC Newlywed Marriage Study.

We have recently completed Time 1 of this 3-year longitudinal study. One hundred and fourteen couples came to our lab at UMBC, completed questionnaires, videotaped discussions, and structured interviews. The primary purpose of this study was to understand how avoidant and disengaged behavior during couple communication influences individual and relationship functioning both proximally and over time. The proximal influence we are examining at Time 1 is poorer memory for communication. Although I am interested in avoidant behavior, my students have distinct (albeit related) research questions. All of the students discussed will be presenting their research at ABCT in November.

Graduate student Adam Hanna is examining the links between depressive symptoms disappointment and poorer memory for communication.

Undergraduate research assistants (URA) Caitlin Rush and Megan Murduck helped to create the recall memory measure. URA Sam Kott is examining the extent to which couples and outside observers perceive couple communication behavior similarly. Sam is completing an Honors Thesis on the project and received an Undergraduate Research Award from UMBC to support the project. URA Karah Kuczarski is completing her Honors Thesis examining whether individuals with social anxiety perceive their own and their partners' communication behavior with their spouse more negatively than their partner views them. URA Kate Bensen is interested whether personality moderates the influences of attachment style in predicting spouses' safety being vulnerable with one another.

Time 2 of the Newlywed study began in October. We're inviting couples to return to the lab to complete questionnaires and two 7-minute discussions of "trust-issues" with their partners.

Graduate student Chandra Edwards is using Time 2 data to examine the extent to which couples' attachment style, level of personal mindfulness, and experience with the issue in question leads spouses to experience intimacy or distance during trust-issue discussions.

Couple Communication Study

Examines many of the same questions as Time 1 of NWS in a sample of cohabitating couples with the addition of an alternative measure of memory to provide evidence of the validity of the recall measure in T1 of the NWS.

Mood Disorders and Romantic Relationships

URA Casey Dubac spearheaded this online study that examines the extent to which specific mood disorder symptoms (e.g., anhedonia, irritability, mania) are related to specific romantic relationship functioning problems (e.g., lack of intimacy, increased argumentativeness, intimate partner violence).

Understanding Relationship Problems among Individuals with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Disengagement and Avoidance During Couple Problem Solving Interactions

I am collaborating with Drs. Chris Murphy (UMBC), Casey Taft and Robin Weatherill (Boston VA) to examine whether couples where one partner has PTSD enact increased avoidance and disengagement during their problem-solving interactions compared to couples where neither partner has PTSD. Prior research has robustly shown bidirectional influences between PTSD and romantic relationship distress. Several core symptoms of PTSD (e.g., emotional numbing, behavioral avoidance) may promote avoidance and disengagement in the context of intimate relationships, one potential pathway through which PTSD may contribute to relationship decline.

HOT off the Press

In Press and Recently Published Literature

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- Bhatia, V., Davila, J., Eubanks-Carter, C., & Burckell, L. A. (in press). Appraisals of daily romantic relationship experiences in individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder features. *Journal of Family Psychology*.
- Biesen, J. N., & Doss, B. D. (2013). Couples' Agreement on Presenting Problems Predicts Engagement and Outcomes in Problem-Focused Couple Therapy. *Journal of Family Psychology*, doi:10.1037/a0033422
- Foran, H. M., Beach, S. R. H., Slep, A. M. S., Heyman, R. E., & Wamboldt M. Z. (Eds.), *Family Problems and Family Violence: Reliable Assessment and the ICD-11* (p. 101-110). New York: Springer.
- Foran, H.M., Heyman, R. E., Slep, A.M.S & U.S. Air Force Family Advocacy Program. (in press). Emotional abuse and its unique ecological correlates among military personnel and spouses. *Psychology of Violence*.
- Hawkins, A.J., Stanley, S.M., Cowan, P. A, Fincham F. D., Beach, S. R., Cowan, C.P., Rhoades, G.K., Markman, H.J., & Daire, A. P. (2013) A More Optimistic Perspective on Government-Supported Marriage and Relationship Education Programs for Lower Income Couples, *American Psychologist*.;68(2):110-1. doi: 10.1037/a0031792.
- Heyman, R. E., Lorber, M. F., Eddy, J. M., & West, T. V. (in press). Behavioral observation and coding. In H. T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
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- Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., & Capaldi, D. (2012). Clearly we've only just begun: Developing effective prevention programs for intimate partner violence. *Prevention Science*, 13, 410-414.
- Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J. (2012). Gender and stalking: Current intersections and future directions. *Sex Roles*, 66, 418-426.
- Leonard, M.T., Issner, J.B., Cano, A., & Williams, A.M. (2013). Correlates of Spousal Empathic Accuracy for Pain-Related Thoughts and Feelings. *Clinical Journal of Pain*, 29, 324-333. doi: 10.1097/AJP.0b013e3182527bfd
- Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., McCullars, A., & Misra, T. (2012). Motivations for men and women's intimate partner violence perpetration: A comprehensive review. *Partner Abuse* 3,429-468.
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- Meuwly, N., Feinstein, B. A., Davila, J., Garcia Nuñez, D., & Bodenmann, G. (in press). Relationship quality among Swiss women in opposite-sex versus same-sex romantic relationships. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*.
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- Whitton, S. W., & Kuryluk, A. (in press). Intrapersonal moderators of the association between relationship satisfaction and depressive symptoms: Findings from emerging adults. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. doi:10.1177/0265407512467749
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Farewell from this Post

At last, we would like to thank you for all you've done to help us spread the news about the fascinating couples work being accomplished across the globe by our fellow SIGgers.

We wish you the best in all your endeavors and anticipate reading more about your research and projects in the next issues of our beloved newsletter.

Judith and I will be passing the torch to two eager new co-editors at the SIG meeting this Fall. Please let us know if you are interested in taking over this wonderful position!

Cheers,

Tatiana Gray & Judith Biesen