

**PSYC 644: PSYCHOLOGY OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS  
FALL 2018**

**Instructor:** Syeda Buchwach  
**Class Schedule:** MW 3:00pm-4:15pm  
**Location:** Innovation Hall 208

**Office Hours:** by appointment  
**Office:** 1004G David King Hall  
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**Final Exam (Group Project Presentation):** Monday 12/17 1:30 pm – 4:15 pm

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an advanced survey of theories and research related to intimate relationships, including romantic relations and those among family members and friends in diverse cultural and relationship contexts. **This class places an emphasis on how the social context shapes intimate relationships.** We will branch out into special topics beyond the purview of the assigned textbook. This semester we will highlight and continually revisit two constructs related to the theme of social context: **technology & gender.**

This course aims to engage you both academically and personally. We will explore what the research tells us about relationships but will also actively apply what we learn by creating opportunities to do so inside and outside of the classroom. Thus, classes will include “experiential learning” activities as well as small group discussions related to the two highlighted themes. We may also involve experiential learning through homework that involves practice within and reflections upon our own relationships.

### **CLASS ORGANIZATION**

The general time breakdown of course sessions will be as follows: **Interactive lecture:** roughly 35-40 minutes on main content; 10-15 minutes on the special topics. **Small group activities and experiential learning:** 20-25 minutes. On some days there will be less lecture and more small group interaction, and on some days there will be more lecture and less experiential learning/group interaction.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Our goal in this class is to:

- ✚ Develop an understanding of a range of topics related to the psychology of romantic relationships, family relationships, and close friendships using empirical research along with underlying theories.
- ✚ Apply some of the course content to our own lives to deepen our understanding of the material, potentially improve our own relationships, and enhance our capacity for reflective thinking.
- ✚ Acknowledge and examine diverse versions of the human experience of intimacy in terms of culture, gender, sexual orientation, and family/ relationship structure.
- ✚ Develop an understanding of how social-context level changes and cultural narratives influence our intimate relationships.
- ✚ Critique perspectives, opinions, and advice given in the popular press (i.e. self-help books, blog and news posts, tv programming), and compare them to empirical findings discussed in class.

### **REQUIRED TEXTBOOK / READINGS**

Miller, Rowland. *Intimate Relationships*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition - McGraw-Hill Education (November 16, 2017) ISBN-10: 1259870510.

*\*\*You may also purchase the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> edition of this textbook (the more recent the better), but understand that there may be some content covered in class that is not reflected in that book.\*\**

Assigned readings will include **segments of chapters from the textbook**. You will also read peer-reviewed articles; some empirical work, some literature review, and some theoretical works. In a few cases, the entire article will be assigned; however, **mostly, I will select subsections of content from the article for you to**

**read.** Reading the entire article will be optional. Excerpts will be made available on Blackboard as well as a Google Drive folder. **Please view the references list at the end of the syllabus for full citations of articles.**

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES**

**Class Participation (30 points).** Due to the nature of our course objectives, class participation is \*essential\* to get the most out of this experience and engage with course content. Each of you has a valuable contribution to add to this class, so inadequate participation does a disservice both to yourself and to your classmates and instructor. Attendance will be factored into your grade, but participation will also be gauged using worksheets for “experiential learning” activities, free-writes, and [Kahoot!](#) quizzes.

**Quizzes (48 points).** Four quizzes (12 pts each) on readings throughout the semester.

**Reflection Journals & Homework Assignments (72 points total).** Every week there will be either a reflection journal (~1 page; 7-12 pts depending on requirements) based on your response to a prompt OR an experiential homework assignment (10 pts each). There will be ten assignments and two will be dropped in calculating your final grade (one experiential assignment and one reflection journal).

**Group Project (50 points).** This project can be a PowerPoint, a video, a performance, a poster. Can be related to your term paper topic, or any other topic you select as a group. More information will be provided in class, including an assignment (not graded) in which you propose your idea for my approval. In the second half of the semester, you will be given some class time to coordinate on your projects and plan meetings, etc.

This sums to **200 points total**. I will provide **rubrics** for the group project well in advance to make sure grading standards are clear, and to help guide your process. **Extra credit opportunities** may be made available but will not apply to class participation.

Please reach out to me in advance if you are having trouble meeting the course requirements or if unforeseen circumstances arise that impact your ability to participate in class.

**Late work policy:** Classwork is due by the start of class (3 PM). Late *Reflection journals & homework assignments* will be marked down by 15% and will not be accepted after **two days**. *For all other assignments*, <24 hrs: 15% penalty; 25-36 hrs: 30% penalty, 4-7 days: 50% penalty; Over one week late: No longer accepted. These terms are negotiable only in the case of documented emergencies and with **advance notice** (i.e., I don’t want to hear about the emergency after the assignment is due).

**Cell phone and laptop policy:** Consistent with our emphasis on interpersonal relationships, an important part of this course is interactions with your classmates. As a community member and peer, you bring value to your workgroups and the classroom through your attentiveness and contributions. As such, technology use that prevents you from being fully present in class is not permitted. Cell phones, pagers, and other communicative devices are not allowed in this class, so please keep them stowed away and out of sight. Laptops or tablets (e.g., iPads) may be permitted for the purposes of (a) recording class sessions if that is helpful for you, or (b) taking notes, but you must submit a request in writing to do so. Engaging in activities unrelated to the course (e.g., gaming, email, texting) will result in a deduction from your participation grade.

**Academic integrity/Honor Code:** The Honor Code of George Mason University deals specifically with cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing. Three fundamental principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be

cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

**Accommodations:** If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance, please 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ds.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) discuss your needs with me.

**Self-Disclosures:** The course objectives aim to engage you on multiple levels, building emotional as well as intellectual intelligence. At times, this class may be made especially rewarding by sharing information from your own close relationship histories and experience through class activities, reflection journals, and some other projects. Some assignments in the course may be emotionally demanding even when they simply require introspection and no self-disclosure. This class will be most valuable if you stay within the boundaries of what feels right for you. With that in mind, know that you will not be pressured to share personal information beyond your comfort zone. When assignments allow/encourage a personal exploration, there will also be alternatives that allow the same requirements to be filled in a more academic way.

If course content or discussion brings up emotional discomfort for you, I encourage you to prioritize your self-care. If you become upset in response to assignments, discuss this with me. **Let me know if you need help.** If you need to debrief an assignment, make some adjustments in it, or would like my help in recommending resources for personal therapy or other ways of taking care of yourself, see me before or after class or make an appointment. Any information you share with me will be kept confidential with exceptions: as a mandated reporter I am legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the relevant authorities. Additionally, as a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report disclosures of ongoing, current, or recent sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per university policy 1412.

I encourage students who believe or suspect that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. [University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct](#) speaks to the specifics of Mason’s process, the resources, and the options available to students. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434), Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380), Student Health Services, or Mason’s Title IX Coordinator (703-993-8730; [cde@gmu.edu](mailto:cde@gmu.edu)). You can also let me know and we can reach out to those resources together.

## GRADING

Grades will be calculated using the points described in the course requirements section above. The total number of points you earn will be divided by 200 and converted into a percentage. They will be assigned as follows: 97-100% = A+; 93-96% = A; 90-92% = A-; 87-89% = B+; 83-86% = B; 80-82% = B-; 77-79% = C+; 73-76% = C; 70-72% = C-; 65-69% = D; below 65% = F.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

The last day to add classes is as per university guidelines for contract courses, found in the Center for Global Education Handbook. This course schedule is tentative and may change, in which case the instructor will inform students via email and lecture.

## Class Schedule

**Note:** Course Schedule is subject to over the course of the semester. Assigned readings may be changed, up to no less than two weeks in advance.

Date	Topic	Assignment/Reading(s) due for this class
1. M 8/27	Course Introduction	<b>Syllabus</b>
2. W 8/29	<u>Building Blocks</u>	Chapter 1 excerpts (“The Nature of Importance of Intimacy” (p.1-6) “The Influence of Experience” (p. 14-19) and “Chapter Summary,” (p. 39-40))
<b>M 9/3</b>	<b>LABOR DAY</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>
3. W 9/5	<u>Research Methods</u>	1. Miller, Ch. 2: <b>pp. 42-46</b> “The Short History of Relationship Science,” 2. Miller, Ch. 2: <b>pp. 53-63</b> “The Nature of Our Data,” “The Ethics of Such Endeavors,” & “Interpreting and Integrating Results” 3. <b>Excerpt</b> from Rothbaum et al. (2000) (will be posted on Trello)
4. M 9/10	<u>The Social Context of Relationships:</u> Family, Social Networks, & Cultural Narratives	<b>Reflection journal due</b> Reading to be assigned.
5. W 9/12	<u>The Self and Other:</u> Social Cognition, Identity, and Self-Disclosure	Excerpts from Miller, Ch. 4 (Check Trello)
6. M 9/17	<u>The Self, the Other/Social Context of Relationships</u> <i>Spotlight on Tech: Self-construction on Social Media</i>	Back et al. (2010) Excerpt from Strano (2008) <b>Outside-of-class Exercise due.</b>

Date	Topic	Assignment/Reading(s) due for this class
7. W 9/19	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Attraction</u></p> <p><b>Special topics:</b> Building Attraction in “the Game”</p>	Excerpts from Miller, Ch. 3 & King (2018)
8. M 9/24	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Attraction</u></p> <p><b>Special topics:</b> “Atypical” / minority groups <i>Spotlight on Tech: Online Dating Profiles</i></p>	Collier (2017) & Excerpt from Ye (2006) <b><i>Reflection journal due</i></b>
9. W 9/26	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Communication</u></p> <p><b>Special topic:</b> Consensual non-monogamy</p>	Excerpts from Miller, Ch. 5 <i>Quiz #1</i>
10. M 10/1	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Communication</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Globalization &amp; Technology</p> <p><i>Spotlight on Tech: Online dating &amp; long-distance relationships</i></p>	Excerpts: Impett et al. (2012) Winterheld et al. (2013)
11. W 10/3	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interdependency</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Relationships as Economies &amp; the Institution of Marriage</p> <p><i>Spotlight on Gender: Feminist Movement’s Impact on Marriage</i></p>	Excerpt from Miller, Ch. 6 <b><i>Outside-of-class Exercise due.</i></b>
12. <b>Tues</b> 10/9	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interdependency</u></p> <p><b>Special topic:</b> Economic Changes – Japan</p>	Excerpt from Cook (2014)
13. W 10/10	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Family</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Formative relationships and intimacy, Revisiting attachment</p>	Reading to be assigned w/ <b><i>Reflection Journal</i></b>

Date	Topic	Assignment/Reading(s) due for this class
14. M 10/15	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Love: Eros and Philos</u> (Close friendships)</p> <p><b>Special topic:</b> Cross-sex &amp; same-sex friendships in a hetero-normative culture</p>	Schoonover & McEwan (2014)
15. W 10/17	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Romantic Love</u> From Dating to Commitment; Relationship Formation</p>	Miller, Ch. 8 Fox et al. (2014)
16. M 10/22	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Romantic Love</u> Mate intimacy &amp; the role of Trauma</p>	Quiz #2
17. W 10/24	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Sexuality</u> <i>Spotlight on Gender:</i> Gender norms in the bedroom</p>	Excerpts from Miller, Ch. 9 & Sanchez et al. (2012)
18. M 10/29	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Sexuality</u> <i>Spotlight on Tech:</i> Pornography and Intimacy</p>	Muusses et al. (2015), & Ross, 2005 <b><i>Reflection journal due</i></b>
19. W 10/31	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>The Social Context of Relationships:</u> Intercultural &amp; Interracial relationships (Friendships and Marriage)</p>	Video clip <b><i>Group presentation proposal due Friday (11/2)</i></b>
20. M 11/5	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Stresses and Strains</u></p> <p><b>Special topics:</b> Changing relationships: marriage, children, and life stages. Non-heteronormative relationships</p>	Miller, Ch. 10
21. W 11/7	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Stresses and Strains</u></p> <p><b>Special topic:</b> Caregiver burden and interdependency</p>	<b><i>Reflection journal due</i></b> Reading to be assigned

Date	Topic	Assignment/Reading(s) due for this class
22. M 11/12	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Conflict</u></p> <p><b>Special topics:</b> Infidelity &amp; technology</p>	<p>Excerpts from Miller, Ch. 13 Ross, 2005 Quiz #3</p>
23. W 11/14	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Conflict</u></p> <p><b>Special topic:</b> Family estrangement and non-romantic betrayal</p>	<p>Excerpts from Carr et al. (2015) &amp; <i>Outside-of-class Exercise due</i></p>
24. M 11/19	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Power and Violence:</u></p> <p><b>Special Topics:</b> Cultural narratives around sex and gender Social power differentials</p>	<p>Miller, Ch. 12</p>
<b>W 11/21</b>	<b>THANKSGIVING RECESS</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>
25. M 11/26	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Power and Violence</u></p> <p><i>Spotlight on gender:</i> Gender differences in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) perpetration and victimization</p>	<p><i>Reflection journal due</i> Reading to be assigned</p>
26. W 11/28	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Dissolution and Loss of Relationships</u></p> <p>The trauma of loss: Break ups, separation, and divorce</p>	<p>Miller, Ch. 13 Hogerbrugge et al. (2013)</p>
27. M 12/3	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Dissolution and Loss of Relationships: Death &amp; Grief</u> <u>Maintaining and Repairing Relationships</u></p>	<p>Kelley &amp; Waldron (2005) View: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh5VhaicC6g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh5VhaicC6g</a> <i>Reflection journal due</i></p>
28. W 12/5	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Ethics in Psychology: Intimacy in Therapy &amp; Research</u></p>	<p>Excerpts from Mikulincer, et al. (2013) &amp; Huisman (2008) Quiz #4</p>
<b>M 12/17</b>	<b>FINAL PROJECTS/PRESENTATIONS</b>	

## Reading References:

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- Fox, J., Osborn, J. L., & Warber, K. M. (2014). Relational dialectics and social networking sites: The role of Facebook in romantic relationship escalation, maintenance, conflict, and dissolution. *Computers in Human Behavior, 35*, 527-534.
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- Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P., & Berant, E. (2013). An attachment perspective on therapeutic processes and outcomes. *Journal of Personality, 81*(6), 606-616.
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- Ross, M. W. (2005). Typing, Doing, and Being: Sexuality and the Internet. *Journal of Sex Research, 42*(4), 342-352.
- Sanchez, D. T., Fetterolf, J. C., & Rudman, L. A. (2012). Eroticizing inequality in the United States: The consequences and determinants of traditional gender role adherence in intimate relationships. *Journal of Sex Research, 49*(2-3), 168-183.

Schoonover, K., & McEwan, B. (2014). Are you really just friends? Predicting the audience challenge in cross-sex friendships. *Personal Relationships*, 21, 387-403.

Sprecher, S. (2011). The influence of social networks on romantic relationships: Through the lens of the social network. *Personal Relationships*, 18(4), 630-644.

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