CDFS 633
Adult Development and Social Relationships
Spring 2011
Wednesday 1:30 to 4:30
Fowler House 123

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Description
This course will examine reciprocal influences between adults’ relationships, individual development, and health. We will consider how relationships with friends, families, and the broader social network contribute to the course of development throughout adulthood. We will critically review research that focuses on how close and distal social partners affect physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being throughout adulthood. The effects of changes in social relationships on well-being also will be discussed.

Course objectives
In the introductory weeks, students will gain an overview of the spectrum of relationships that comprise the social world of adulthood. We will consider contextual influences on development. The course considers relationship processes on health. Researchers have suggested that physical decline may be a preprogrammed aspect of aging. At the same time, compelling evidence shows that the associations between relationship qualities and mortality are as strong as the associations between smoking and mortality. We will consider how and why relationships may affect physical declines or recovery into old age. We also consider areas of potential stability or growth in late life, including cognitive changes, personality, and emotional well-being. We will look at relationships as contexts for positive growth and/or stability in these areas. Recent theory suggests that biological processes affecting the oldest old adults may differ from processes affecting middle-aged and young old adults. The course concludes by examining the oldest old adults (over age 85) and widowhood at the end of life.

Readings are specified for each week. Due to copyright law, I am not able to provide copies of articles. Students should be able to access readings via Purdue’s electronic publications. If not, please contact Laura VanderDrift laura@psych.purdue.edu

Grades are based on the following criteria:
  Weekly Writing and Class Participation: 90
  Class Summary: 10
  Relationship Paper: 75
  Relationship Presentation: 25
  Final Examination: 50
  TOTAL: 250
Weekly Writing Assignments and Class Participation

Each week, students will write a 1 page essay (double-spaced) based on at least 3 readings from that week. The essay should refer to specific readings. It should be well-organized with clear paragraphs and grammar. We will exchange essays in class to begin discussion. Be prepared for other students to read your essay and to write comments pertaining to your essays.

There are 11 required writing assignments but only 9 are necessary for the grade. We will drop the lowest or missed assignments due to illness. All assignments are due in class; no electronic submissions will be accepted.

Class Summary

Each student will write a one page summary of the key points from the prior week’s discussion (single-spaced is okay). They will present this summary during the first 10 to 15 minutes of the next class. To prepare to lead the discussion, students should send the professor the review by Monday at 5:00 pm.

Course Paper & Presentation

Paper: Students will write a literature review pertaining to social development in adulthood that is 7 to 10 pages in length (double-spaced; one side of paper) and that includes at least 10 empirical studies. The paper will focus on some aspect of a specific type of relationship (e.g., romantic ties, siblings, parents and children, friendship).

The paper includes 5 required assignments:
1. A few sentences identifying the topic and a reference list (Jan 26)
2. One page critiques of 10 journal articles and outline (Feb 16)
3. Rough draft provided to partner (Mar 6)
4. A one page typed critique of your partner’s rough draft (Mar 23)
5. Final draft of paper (along with rough draft and partner comments; Mar 30)

Presentation: Students will prepare a brief Power Point presentation for the class regarding this relationship. Students who address the same relationship will work in groups to plan their presentation on the topic. The presentation should be broader in scope than the paper (so additional reading may be required). It should be cohesive and well-organized as a whole— not simply a repetition of the paper.

Final Examination

We will have a take home examination at the end of the semester. The grade for the examination will include 3 aspects:
1. Submission of potential questions for the examination
2. Completion of a 8 to 10 page essay examination addressing 2 questions
3. Participation in class discussion of the examination.

The written examination will receive the greatest weight in grading, but the other two parts will also be considered. The final class discussion will include a discussion of the questions students wrote and a justification for those questions, regardless of whether or not the questions were used in the actual examination.
Learning Objectives

- Ability to critique empirical studies of relationships and outcomes across adulthood (Weekly writing assignments)
- Acquiring theoretical overview of how and why relationships may influence different outcomes in adulthood (Weekly writing assignments, final examination)
- Achieve in-depth understanding of a specific topic pertaining to relationships and adult development (Course paper)
- Communication skills in critiquing a colleague’s ideas (Exchange of discussion papers at the start of class, written critique of partner’s paper)
- Develop spoken skills and presentation of material pertaining to relationships and adult development (Class participation, class leadership, presentation, and final examination discussion)
- Acquire teaching skills in graduate instruction (Class leadership, presentation)
- Integrative understanding of key issues pertaining to social relationships and adult development (final examination)
Below are suggested topics and writing assignments for each week of the course. Actual assignments may vary based on students’ interested. Assignments will be announced in class.

**Jan 12: Introduction to Adults’ Relationships**

*Note: Cohen provides an overview of several key themes in this course. Please read prior to the first day of class.*

**Jan 19: Theories of Adults’ Relationships**


**Optional:**


**Writing assignment 1:** These readings introduce several theories or models for studying adults’ relationships. Identify two key research questions in the study of adults’ relationship that these theories might answer. Explain which theories or models are best suited to address each question and why.
Jan 26: Relationships & Health


Optional:


**Writing assignment 2:** Drawing on this week’s readings, critique the evidence that good relationships contribute to good health across adulthood.
Feb 2: Social Support


Uchino, B. (2004). The meaning and measurement of social support. In Social support and physical health (pp. 9-32). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (Please email laura@psych.purdue.edu for reading)


Optional:


Writing assignment 3: The readings describe several distinct types of support. Develop an organizational framework for different types of support and describe the criteria you believe are most useful for understanding different aspects of support. Your essay might include a chart or figure if that is useful.
Feb 9: Social Network Diversity and Functions of Different Types of Relationships


Writing assignment 4: Based on the readings for this week and for prior weeks, to what extent do different types of relationships serve distinct functions? Which functions? Why?

Feb 16: Social Contagion and Homophily


Writing assignment 5: Christakis and Fowler have received considerable media coverage for their discoveries regarding the spread of behaviors and mood through the social network. Compare and contrast these findings with the homophily perspective. Under what conditions can each perspective account for similarities among social network members?
Feb 23 Relationships and Cognitive Outcomes


**Objective:** This class will focus on understanding when and how “social engagement” may contribute to maintenance of cognitive skills in adulthood. Cognitive declines are evident in adulthood in the areas of working memory and reaction times. Stine-Morrow suggests that social contexts are important to understanding maintenance of cognitive performance into late life. Several epidemiological studies (Bassuk, Fratiglioni, Seeman) suggest that individuals who are more socially embedded are less likely to suffer cognitive declines such as dementia in old age. Berg et al examined cognitive processes as they occur in real life, using daily problems and collaboration among couples.

**Writing assignment 6:** Evaluate the evidence for social relationship influences on cognitive declines or maintenance. To what extent do social ties influence cognitive changes and how?
Mar 2: Negative Relationships


Optional:


Objective: Many of the readings have articulated benefits of relationships for physical well-being. But relationships are not consistently a source of support; some relationships evoke disappointment and stress. This unit considers relationships as a source of distress. Rook’s paper is a “classic”—she pointed out the deleterious effects of problematic relationships. Holt-Lunstad distinguishes between relationships that are primarily positive, primarily negative or ambivalent (e.g., mixed with positive and negative sentiments). They consider microlevel processes such as the effects of ambivalent ties on individual physiological responses. We will address social structures that shape the nature of problematic relationships (e.g., work settings, gender) in the paper by Wager.

Writing assignment 7: Write your own question and then write an essay that answers that question. Be sure to draw on at least 3 readings in your question and response.
**Mar 9: Rejection and Loneliness**


Williams, K. D. (2011). The pain of exclusion. *Scientific American Mind*, pp. 30-37. (Please email laura@psych.purdue.edu for reading)

Optional


*Note: Start with Williams’ *Scientific American Mind* piece. It is very enjoyable and will set up the other readings on rejection.

**Writing assignment 8:** Social rejection, ostracism, and loneliness may be distinct constructs. Compare and contrast similarities and differences in these experiences and how they may lead to deleterious outcomes.

**Mar 16: SPRING BREAK**

**Mar 23: Groups work on projects**

**Mar 30: Project presentations**
Apr 6: Relationship Coping with Health Problems


Optional:


Writing assignment 9: Describe the ways in which relationships function to restore health when individuals encounter chronic and acute diseases. What are the limitations social partners face when one of them has a chronic illness?
Apr 13: Caregiving


Optional:


Writing assignment 10: The readings present positive and negative aspects of caregiving in late life. Identify those aspects that are likely to be most rewarding in this situation and those aspects that are most likely to be detrimental to each party’s well-being.
Apr 20: Grief


Optional:


Writing assignment 11: Consider the role of relationships in coping with grief. How do prior and current relationship qualities contribute to how widows cope with grief?

Apr 27: No class to prepare for final exam discussion

Finals Week: We will meet for a two hour discussion of the final exam