Meeting Time and Place
Thursday: 1:00 to 3:45
SEA 1438

Instructor:
Dr. Karen Fingerman
Office Hours: Thursday 12:30 to 1:30 and by appointment
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Course overview
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.

Course objectives
Students will gain an overview of the spectrum of relationships that comprise the social world of adulthood. The course considers relationship processes on health. We know that aging is characterized by physical decline. Yet, the social world shapes the nature of the decline. 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. Students will also understand how and why relationships grow stronger and more positive with age.

Grades are based on the following breakdown of points.

Weekly Writing and Class Participation 100
Health Assessment Presentation, Bibliography, and Paper 100
Leading Class Discussion 30
Book discussion 20
TOTAL: 250

Weekly Writing Assignments and Class participation

Each week, students should complete all the readings and come prepared for discussion. Write a 1 page essay (single spaced OK, double spaced 2 pages OK) - and yes, you can run over the page limit, but try to be concise. Your answer should be 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 at the start of class to begin discussion. Be prepared for other students to read your essay and to write comments pertaining to your essays.
There are 12 required writing assignments but only 10 are necessary for the grade. We will drop the lowest assignment or a missed assignment due to illness. PLEASE do these assignments. The point is to improve one’s writing across the semester.

The syllabus includes an essay prompt for each week that you are welcome to use. OR You are welcome to write your own essay question and response. Just be sure to refer to at least 3 readings.

Written assignments should be turned in via 2 formats—Please email your response to Dr. Fingerman by Wednesday evening at 5 pm kfingerman@austin.utexas.edu. In the subject header put “Used prompt” or “Individual Question” so she can prepare the class discussion. Also, please bring a printed copy to class.

**Health Assessments**

Research regarding social relationships and health has increasingly relied on measurement of biomarkers. Each week, a student will give a half hour presentation regarding a specific biomarker and how it is used on research on relationships. A separate handout will be provided regarding the health assessments. Each student presentation address measurement of a specific facet of physical health with regard to social relationships and/or emotional well-being in adulthood. This talk will give an overview of how other scholars have used this technique, as well as serving as a methods presentation—a “how to” of assessments.

In addition, students will prepare a write up regarding the technique and a reference list in APA format.

**NOTE** The reference list is due on Feb 1.

**Leading a Class Discussion**

Each student will lead a class discussion during one week. There are 2 parts to leading the class discussion:

1. Writing a one page summary of the key points from the prior week’s discussion
2. Leading the class in discussion of some aspect of the current week’s readings. To prepare to lead the discussion, students should send the professor two questions by Wednesday at 5:00 pm.

The goal of the discussion questions are to think about ideas not already covered in the essay prompt. Pretend that you are supposed to come up with the essay prompt- what question would you ask to cover at least 3 readings? You might try writing your essay prompt around this issue for that week.
Book Discussion

The last class will consist of a “book club” discussion. We will choose the book for May 4. Each student will write at least 2 questions that link the book to course readings. One to two paragraphs should accompany each question.

Learning Objectives and Associated Activities

- Ability to critique empirical studies of relationships and health across adulthood (Weekly writing assignments)
- Acquiring theoretical overview of how and why relationships may influence different outcomes in adulthood (Weekly writing assignments, discussion)
- Achieve in-depth understanding of a biomarker associated with social relationships and health (Literature review, paper, presentation)
- Communication skills in critiquing a colleague’s ideas (Exchange of discussion papers at the start of class, critique of partner’s paper)
- Organizing a presentation of scientific material for scholars unfamiliar with the topic area (Biomarker presentation)
- Develop spoken skills and presentation of material pertaining to relationships and adult development (Class participation, class leadership, presentation, and book discussion)
- Acquire teaching skills in graduate instruction (Class leadership, presentation)
- Integrative understanding of key issues pertaining to social relationships and adult development (Course discussions, final book discussion)
Jan 18  Introduction to Adults’ Relationships


Optional reading:

Jan 25  Theories and Models of Adult Relationships


Optional reading:

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.

**Feb 1 Relationships and Health**


Optional reading:


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

**Reference list due for biomarker presentation**
Feb 8  Social Support


Optional reading:


**Writing assignment #3**: The readings describe several distinct types of support. Develop an organizational framework for different types of support (e.g., invisible, perceived, practical) 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 15 Functions of Relationships and Network Diversity


Optional reading:


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 22 Online/Social Media and Relationships


Read pages 1 through 5 (to start of nonparametric statistics)


Optional reading:


**Writing assignment #5**: The online forum provides unique opportunities for data collection. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of using different forms of online data. OR What factors predict whether an online relationship will form and how are these relationships different from relationships involving face-to-face and phone contact?

**Mar 1 Intergenerational relationships**


**Note**: This paper does not fit the writing question below. If you prefer to generate your own question, you could find a way to include this paper.


Optional reading:


**Writing assignment #6:** Describe the antecedents and possible consequences of positive and negative feelings on parents’ well-being in adulthood OR Describe the antecedents and possible consequences of positive and negative events on parents’ well-being in adulthood.

Mar 8  Marriage, dating and sexuality


**Writing assignment #7:** The readings this week provide a wide over of romantic ties, marriage, sex and sexuality in late life. In one to two pages, provide a brief summary of the key issues regarding these topics in old age.

March 15    Spring break

Mar 22  Rejection, isolation, and loneliness


Optional reading

**Writing assignment #8:** Social isolation, 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 29 Relationships and cognitive outcomes**


**Writing assignment #9**: Evaluate the evidence that social engagement influences cognitive declines or maintenance. To what extent do social ties influence cognitive changes and how?

**Apr 5 NO CLASS** - Time to work on projects/make up for attending ambulatory assessment workshop

**Apr 12 Chronic Disease and Relationships**


**Writing assignment #10**: Describe the ways in which relationships function to ameliorate or to exacerbate symptoms and declines when individuals encounter chronic diseases.

**Apr 19 Caregiving**


Optional reading

**Writing assignment 11**: The readings present positive and negative aspects of caregiving in late life. Evaluate the quality of the evidence in different studies regarding the positive and negative effects of caregiving on the caregivers’ well-being.

**April 20 Ambulatory assessment workshop**

**Apr 26 Grief**


Optional reading

**Writing Assignment #12**: Consider the role of relationships in coping with grief. How do prior and current relationship qualities contribute to how widows cope with grief?

**May 3 Book Discussion**—Book to be chosen- like one of these:


OR


**Assignment**: Students will bring at least 2 questions to discuss at the “Book Club.” Guidelines regarding those questions will be discussed in class.