

The Psychology of Romantic Attraction and Compatibility

Psych 401-012 (3 units)

Instructor: Annika From

Winter 2024

Tuesdays, Thursdays 2:30-4:00 PM

3021 East Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 4-4:30, Wednesdays 4:30-5:30 in East Hall 3069 or over Zoom at <https://umich.zoom.us/j/92842382438>.

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Course Description:

Questions of romantic attraction and compatibility are all around us. You're in a coffee shop and the barista catches your eye. There's something about them that attracts you—but what? A couple that seems to have it all suddenly breaks up, while two people you never would have imagined together enjoy a happy, long-term relationship. The dynamics of romantic attraction and compatibility are complex and often confusing. But what *do* we know about what makes people drawn to potential partners and satisfied once they enter relationships?

This special-problems seminar addresses this question by covering relevant psychological research about the concepts, predictors, and consequences of initial romantic attraction, relationship initiation, and long-term compatibility. The course will be broken into four units: how we think about and study romantic relationships, initial attraction, mate selection and getting together, and experiencing (and ending) romantic relationships.

The first unit will discuss definitions of compatibility and relationship quality, historical trends in romantic relationships, and relationship beliefs and their origins. The second unit will cover predictors of initial attraction, including proximity, familiarity, similarity, reciprocity, arousal, self-disclosure, attractiveness, and mate value. The third unit will talk about initiation behaviors; mating strategies and sociosexuality; relationship preferences, potential gender differences in these preferences, and different explanations for these differences; dealbreakers; and traditional and modern (e.g., online dating matching algorithms) forms of matchmaking. The last unit will cover the role of love, how established romantic partners view and change one another, predictors and mechanisms of relationship quality and longevity, and the ways experiences of these relationships may differ for sexual minorities and individuals in consensually non-monogamous relationships.

Learning Goals:

1. Students will gain an understanding of the landscape of current psychological research on attraction and compatibility, including findings about the predictors and outcomes of romantic attraction, relationship initiation, and relationship quality and longevity, as well as the current gaps in this field.
2. Students will be able to define and apply key concepts and theories from the field of romantic relationship research relevant to initial attraction and romantic relationship compatibility.

3. Students will learn how to apply principles of scientific research to their own lives and to critically evaluate media and societal messages about romantic relationships in light of empirical findings.
4. Students will practice reading, analyzing, and critiquing scientific research, particularly noting the limits of WEIRD, White, heterosexual, and monogamous samples that are prevalent in romantic relationship psychology research.
5. Students will be exposed to different methods used to answer questions about compatibility and attraction and will practice applying these methods to their own research questions.

Course Communications:

In addition to being available over Zoom or in-person during my office hours, I will also respond to emails at annikaf@umich.edu within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. Students who cannot attend office hours or would like to meet in person can also email to schedule an alternative time to meet. It is important that students also check Canvas announcements regularly, as there may be communications and reminders through Canvas as well.

Course Materials:

Course materials include peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries; all required readings will be posted as PDFs and available on Canvas under “Readings.” Additionally, students may be asked to listen to podcasts or read online blogs throughout the course; links for these will be posted under “Readings” as well.

Course Format and Grading:

This course will meet twice a week for one and a half hour periods. Students will be expected to have read the assigned articles *before* the class period for which they are assigned, come with thoughtful questions, and be ready to discuss the articles in class. These class sections will include lectures in which new information will be introduced, reflection activities in which students will apply class concepts to their own lives and to media examples, discussion about the assigned readings, and interactive activities to reinforce course concepts.

Four main components make up students’ grade for the course: attendance and class participation (25% of the final grade), written assignments (22.5% of the final grade), exam scores (22.5% of the final grade), and a final project (30% of the final grade).

Assignment	Percent of Grade	Point Value
Attendance and class participation	25.0%	50 points
Written assignments	22.5%	45 points
Exam	22.5%	45 points
Final project	30.0%	60 points
Final project proposal	10.0%	20 points
Final project	10.0%	20 points
Final project presentation	10.0%	20 points

Attendance and Class Participation:

In-person attendance is required, and participation points will be awarded based on students attending, coming to class prepared and having read the assigned materials, and contributing to discussion section.

Each of the twenty-seven class sessions over the course will be worth 2 participation points. Students must inform the instructor of any absences ahead of time. Students will be given two free absences with no penalty to their participation grade. Participation points can be made up for additional absences if the student completes and turns in a make-up assignment within two weeks of their absence.

The make-up assignment will be one-page, single-spaced, and should include reflections and questions on the assigned readings, slides, and lecture recording (uploaded to Canvas). The make-up assignment should show that the student has thoughtfully understood the readings and course concepts covered in class and has contributed novel insights and questions about the materials. The make-up assignment is due two weeks from the missed class. Additionally, students who attend class but feel they cannot participate in class for whatever reason can also earn participation points through the make-up assignment.

Unless students have informed the instructor ahead of time and received an exemption, students arriving more than 10 minutes late will be docked a participation point.

Points Awarded	Participation Level
0	• Did not attend class or complete make-up assignment • Attended but did not participate in class activities or discussions • Engaged in disruptive, disrespectful, or off-task behaviors (such as non-class-related technology use)
1	• Attended discussion with minimal participation • Failed to read assigned materials before class • Turned in an incomplete or subpar make-up assignment • Arrived to class more than 10 minutes late
2	• Was attentive and engaged the entirety of the class, contributed in small-group and large-group discussions, and came with thoughtful questions and insights about the readings • Contacted instructor before absence and turned in a thoughtful, well-written make-up assignment within two weeks of the absence

Written Assignments:

Throughout the semester, there will be six written take-home assignments. To get full credit for the written assignment portion of the grade, students will only need to complete three of these assignments. These will be assigned approximately every other week, and they will be due every other Friday at 11:59 PM. These written assignments will ask students to apply concepts learned in class to their own lives through interactive activities and reflections. Unless otherwise specified, each written assignment should be 2-3 pages double-spaced.

Written Assignment 1: Identify a belief that you have about relationships, love, and/or compatibility. In your reflection, identify where you believe you may have developed this belief (e.g., parents, movies) and the ways this belief impacts your behaviors and relationships. Then, find at least one empirical source discussing whether there is any research supporting or denying this belief (making sure to cite this source in APA 7th edition format).

Written Assignment 2: Identify a close friend, romantic partner, or family member. Spend some time writing out a list of twenty ways you and this person are similar. Then, write a list detailing twenty ways you and this person are dissimilar. Afterwards, take time to reflect on your answers. Your reflection should cover questions such as: Which list was easier to write? What kinds of things did you write down? Did you notice any themes? How did you feel about this person after writing these lists? The two lists should be submitted along with the reflection. The reflection should be 1-2 pages double-spaced.

Written Assignment 3: See the “36 questions to fall in love” in the Canvas files section. Find someone such as a friend or partner to go through these questions with, making sure you each have time to share your answers to all the questions with each other. In your reflection, identify who you completed this activity with, which question(s) felt the most self-disclosing, whether your feelings of closeness with this person changed, and whether/how (or how not) you felt like they were responsive to your self-disclosure, as well as any other reflections on your experience completing this activity.

Written Assignment 4: For this assignment, you will need to identify a piece of media (e.g., TikTok, clip from a TV show, Buzzfeed article) that gives advice about red flag(s) or dealbreaker(s) in potential dating partners. In your reflection, name the red flag/dealbreaker identified, the reason given for avoiding this trait (if not explicitly stated, what reason do you think the creators/writers have for suggesting avoiding this trait?), and which of the six categories of dealbreakers this red flag most closely maps onto. Then, reflect on why or why not you think this is a reasonable trait to avoid in potential partners.

Written Assignment 5: For this assignment, either you will need to download a dating app (such as Tinder, Hinge, etc.) or interview someone who has a dating app profile. First, research the dating app to see if it has any algorithms in place. Second, either reflect on or ask your interviewee the following questions: (1) what makes you interested in a potential match, (2) what makes you disinterested in a potential match, and (3) do you think meeting a compatible partner is easier or more difficult through a dating app compared to in-person? Why or why not? Lastly, (4) if the app uses any algorithm (informing your interviewee of this algorithm if they were not aware), what do they think the impacts of that algorithm on their online dating experience are?

Written Assignment 6: For this assignment, you will need to interview three couples and ask them the following questions: (1) what made you initially attracted to your partner, (2) in what ways are you compatible, and (3) what do you think makes relationships work? In your reflection, describe the couples you talked to and how long each of them has been together (ideally interviewing couples with different relationship lengths, e.g., 6 months, 3 years, 20 years). Summarize their responses, noting any similar trends you saw across their answers. Then write about how their responses aligned or did not align with what you learned in this class.

Assignment	Due Date
Written Assignment 1	Friday, January 26 th at 11:59 PM
Written Assignment 2	Friday, February 9 th at 11:59 PM
Written Assignment 3	Friday, February 23 rd at 11:59 PM
Written Assignment 4	Friday, March 15 th at 11:59 PM
Written Assignment 5	Friday, March 29 th at 11:59 PM
Written Assignment 6	Friday, April 12 th at 11:59 PM

Exams:

Students will also take two exams throughout the course. The first exam will be available over Canvas from March 22nd 8:00 AM to 11:59 PM and will cover material from the first half of the class (i.e., units 1, 2, and 3). This open-book, open-note test will include 30 multiple-choice questions (each worth one points) and one essay question (worth 15 points) and will aim to assess students' understanding of concepts covered in the lecture and readings. Once students begin the exam on Canvas, they will have two hours to finish.

Students will also have the option to take a second exam, available over Canvas from April 29th 8:00 AM to 11:59 PM. This exam will only test material from the second half of the class (i.e., unit 4), and the format will be identical to the first exam. Only the highest of their two exam grades will count towards their final grade. For example, if a student scores 35 points on the first exam and 42 points on the second exam, they will receive 42 points in the exam portion of their grade. If a student is content with their grade from the first exam, they will not have to take the second exam.

Final Projects:

In addition to weekly readings and exams to test student comprehension, students will complete a final project due at the end of the semester. The goal of this assignment is for students to demonstrate an understanding of the concepts discussed in class and an ability to apply these concepts in a creative way to address their own interests and questions. This project is meant to be both enjoyable and relevant to each students' particular interests and goals. Therefore, students have flexibility deciding the format of their final project. Some final projects format ideas are:

- Record a podcast or write a blog post summarizing research findings
- Write a research grant proposal (see the National Science Foundation Graduate Student Research Fellowship application as an example format)
- Read a relationship self-help book and write a critique from a research perspective
- Design and test a communication intervention (see example [here](#))

These options are not exhaustive, and students are encouraged to think of other formatting ideas. Students can also choose a more artistic final project format (e.g., a creative writing or visual art piece) if they submit an accompanying 1-to-2-page, double-spaced explanation of how their piece incorporates concepts from the course.

Students will turn in an initial 1-to-2-page, double-spaced final project proposal detailing their final project plan. This proposal should include enough detail that it is clear the student has a thoughtful plan and demonstrates ways the student will incorporate research into the project.

The final project will be graded on how well the student addressed the instructor's comments on the proposal, incorporation of class concepts, clarity of explanations, creativity, and overall polish.

Lastly, in class on April 18th, students will also present their final projects to their classmates. Each student will be asked to give a 3–5-minute presentation describing their final project. Students will be graded on how engaging, clear, and polished their presentation is, as well as to what extent they explain the link between research concepts and their project.

Deadlines for these assignments are below.

Assignment	Due Date
Final project proposal	Friday, March 8 th at 11:59 PM
Final project	Tuesday, April 16 th at 2:30 PM
Final project presentation	Thursday, April 18 th at 2:30 PM

Final Grade Breakdown		
A+ = ≥ 194 points	B = 166-173	C- = 140-145
A = 186-194	B- = 160-165	D+ = 134-139
A- = 180-185	C+ = 154-159	D = 126-133
B+ = 174-179	C = 146-153	D- = 120-125

Classroom Guidelines:

As everyone has personal and unique experiences and thoughts about romantic relationships, the topics covered in class may feel sensitive at times. Therefore, it is paramount to maintain respect and sensitivity throughout these discussions. The class will emphasize the importance of considering alternative perspectives and making space for missing voices in our research approaches, and, likewise, these values are central to any class interactions. These discussion guidelines will be elaborated on and developed by students the first week of class as a way of generating a sense of ownership among students and tailoring guidelines to the students and class materials.

Assignment Extensions:

Two-day extensions will be granted to any student who asks *prior* to the assignment deadline. Any late assignments without an extension will earn a maximum of 50% of the total points, and no assignments will be accepted after April 26th.

Grade Appeals:

You are welcome to bring any grade appeals to my attention if you believe you have received an unfair or incorrect grade for your assignment. These grade appeals must occur within two weeks of when you received the grade. If, after I review your request, you are still unhappy with your grade, you are welcome to submit a formal grade grievance with LSA at Psych.AssociateChair.SAA@umich.edu.

Academic Integrity:

As per the [LSA community standards of academic integrity](#), using others' words or ideas without properly citing their source is considered plagiarism and will not be tolerated. Any assignments that are found to include plagiarism will be reported and will receive a 0. This includes the use of AI technologies such as Chat GPT.

Technology Policy:

Laptops and tablets are allowed for notetaking and class-related activities; however, technology use unrelated to class will result in a loss of all participation points for the day.

Special Accommodations:

I am more than happy to consider accommodations that will ensure students' wellbeing and success in the course. Please submit any VISA letters for accommodations to [Accommodate](#). If

you have not used Accommodate or do not have a VISA letter to submit but would still like to discuss potential accommodations, please feel free to reach out to me. Additionally, if you have any religious or other conflicts, please reach out to me at the beginning of the semester to discuss accommodation.

Resources:

Sweetland Writing Center: <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland>

Transfer Student Center: <https://lsa.umich.edu/transfer>

Services for Students with Disabilities: <https://ssd.umich.edu/>

English Language Institute: <https://lsa.umich.edu/eli>

Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.umich.edu/>

Full Course Schedule and Assigned Readings:

UNIT 1: HOW WE THINK ABOUT AND STUDY ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Week 1: January 11th

Introduction	No assigned readings
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Week 2: January 16th and 18th

Methods, theories, and history of romantic relationships research	Charania, M., & Ickes, W. J. (2006). Research methods for the study of personal relationships. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), <i>The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships</i> (pp. 51–71). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606632.005
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Differences across time and culture	Coontz, S. (2004). The world historical transformation of marriage. <i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i> , 66(4), 974–979. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00067.x Jordan, C. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1999). How to read a journal article in social psychology. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), <i>The self in social psychology</i> (pp. 461–469). Psychology Press.
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Week 3: January 23rd and 25th

Relationship beliefs	Franiuk, R., Cohen, D., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2002). Implicit theories of relationships: Implications for relationship satisfaction and longevity. <i>Personal Relationships</i> , 9(4), 345–367. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6811.09401
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UNIT 2: INITIAL ATTRACTION

Proximity/ Familiarity	Brannan, D. & Mohr, C. D. (2022). Love, friendship, and social support. In R. Biswas-Diener & E. Diener (Eds), <i>Noba textbook series: Psychology</i> . DEF publishers. Retrieved from http://noba.to/s54tmp7k Moreland, R. L., & Beach, S. R. (1992). Exposure effects in the classroom: The development of affinity among students. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i> , 28. 255–276. https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(92)90055-O
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Week 4: January 30th and February 1st

Similarity	Tidwell, N. D., Eastwick, P. W., & Finkel, E. J. (2013). Perceived, not actual, similarity predicts initial attraction in a live romantic context: Evidence from the speed-dating paradigm. <i>Personal Relationships</i> , 20(2), 199–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2012.01405.x
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Reciprocity and self-disclosure	Eastwick, P. W., Finkel, E. J., Mochon, D., & Ariely, D. (2007). Selective versus unselective romantic desire: Not all reciprocity is created equal. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 18(4), 317–319. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01897.x Nicholson, J. (2018, September 30). How self-disclosure creates liking. <i>Psychology Today</i>. https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-attraction-doctor/201809/how-self-disclosure-creates-liking
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Week 5: February 6th

Arousal and hormones	Dutton, D. G., & Aron, A. P. (1974). Some evidence for heightened sexual attraction under conditions of high anxiety. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 30(4), 510–517. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0037031
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No class Annika at a conference

Week 6: February 13th and 15th

Attractiveness and mate value	Eastwick, P. W., Eagly, A. H., Finkel, E. J., & Johnson, S. E. (2011). Implicit and explicit preferences for physical attractiveness in a romantic partner: A double dissociation in predictive validity. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 101(5), 993–1011. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024061
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UNIT 3: MATE SELECTION AND GETTING TOGETHER

The role of love	Hatfield, E., Bensman, L., & Rapson, R. L. (2012). A brief history of social scientists' attempts to measure passionate love. <i>Journal of Social and Personal Relationships</i>, 29(2), 143-164. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407511431055
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Week 7: February 20th and 22nd

Initiation behaviors (guest lecture from Dr. Tatum Jolink)	Jolink, T. A. & Algae, S. B. (2023). What happens in initial interactions forecasts relationship development: Showcasing the role of social behavior. <i>Social Psychological and Personality Science</i>, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506231153438
Dealbreakers	Lufkin, B. (2022, January 27). <i>Why people aren't as picky in love as they think</i>. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220124-why-people-arent-as-picky-in-love-as-they-think

Week 8: February 27th and 29th

No class Spring break

Week 9: March 5th and 7th

Preferences	Fletcher, G. J., Simpson, J. A., Thomas, G., & Giles, L. (1999). Ideals in intimate relationships. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 76(1), 72–89. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.1.72
Gender differences	Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (1999). The origins of sex differences in human behavior: Evolved dispositions versus social roles. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 54(6), 408–423. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.6.408

FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE	March 8th at 11:59 PM
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Week 10: March 12th and 14th

Mating strategies	Simpson, J. A., & Gangestad, S. W. (1992). Sociosexuality and romantic partner choice. <i>Journal of Personality</i> , 60(1), 31–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1992.tb00264.x
Online dating	Finkel, E. (2015, February 6). In Defense of Tinder. <i>New York Times</i> . https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/opinion/sunday/in-defense-of-tinder.html?searchResultPosition=7 Sharabi, L. L. (2022). Finding love on a first date: Matching algorithms in online dating. <i>Harvard Data Science Review</i> , 4(1). https://doi.org/10.1162/99608f92.1b5c3b7b

Week 11: March 19th and 21st

Review	No readings
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UNIT 4: EXPERIENCING ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Individual differences	Keller, L., & Allemand, M. (2020). Personality and divorce. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), <i>Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences</i> (pp. 3608–3613). Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_710 Li, T., & Chan, D. K. S. (2012). How anxious and avoidant attachment affect romantic relationship quality differently: A meta-analytic review. <i>European Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 42(4), 406–419. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1842
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EXAM 1	March 22nd 8:00 AM – 11:59 PM
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Week 12: March 26th and 28th

How our partners view and change us	Rusbult, C. E., Finkel, E. J., & Kumashiro, M. (2009). The Michelangelo phenomenon. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 18(6), 305–309. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01657.x
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	Campbell, L., Lackenbauer, S. D., & Muise, A. (2006). When is being known or adored by romantic partners most beneficial? Self-perceptions, relationship length, and responses to partner's verifying and enhancing appraisals. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i>, 32(10), 1283–1294. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167206290383
Sex and sexuality	Diamond, L. M., & Blair, K. L. (2018). The intimate relationships of sexual and gender minorities. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), <i>The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships</i> (pp. 199–210). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316417867.017
Week 13: April 2nd and 4th	
Consensual non-monogamy (virtual guest lecture from Dr. Amy Moors)	Moors, A. C. (2023). Five misconceptions about consensually nonmonogamous relationships. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i>, https://doi.org/10.1177/096372142311668
External influences	Karney, B. R., Bradbury, T. N., & Lavner, J. A. (2018). Supporting healthy relationships in low-income couples: Lessons learned and policy implications. <i>Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i>, 5(1), 33-39. https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732217747890
Week 14: April 9th and 11th	
Marriage	DePaulo, B. (2013, March 15). Marriage and happiness: 18 long-term studies. <i>Psychology Today</i>. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living-single/201303/marriage-and-happiness-18-long-term-studies Abreu-Afonso, J., Ramos, M. M., Queiroz-Garcia, I., & Leal, I. (2022). How couple's relationship lasts over time? A model for marital satisfaction. <i>Psychological Reports</i>, 125(3), 1601–1627. https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941211000651
Breaking up and singlehood	Eastwick, P. W., Finkel, E. J., Krishnamurti, T., & Loewenstein, G. (2008). Mispredicting distress following romantic breakup: Revealing the time course of the affective forecasting error. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i>, 44(3), 800–807. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2007.07.001

FINAL PROJECT DUE	April 16 th at 2:30 PM
Week 15: April 16th and 18th	
Relationship maintenance	Ogolsky, B. G., & Bowers, J. R. (2013). A meta-analytic review of relationship maintenance and its correlates. <i>Journal of Social and Personal Relationships</i>, 30(3), 343–367. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407512463338 Navarra R.J., Gottman J.M. (2018) Sound Relationship House in Gottman method couples therapy. In: Lebow J., Chambers A., Breunlin D. (eds) <i>Encyclopedia of couple and family therapy</i>. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15877-8_208-1
Final project presentations	No readings
Week 16: April 23rd	
Wrapping up	No readings
EXAM 2	April 29 th 8:00 AM – 11:59 PM