

Note to Instructors: Updated Summer, 2026

Wind Goodfriend – Buena Vista University – at goodfriend@bvu.edu or (712) 749-2108

In the Spring of 2026, I redesigned my Close Relationships course. I'm happy to share any and all of my materials. We're all so busy, and I believe we should help each other whenever and however possible. I have benefited so much from generous colleagues that I am grateful for the opportunity to pay it forward.

A few notes:

- I teach at a small, private, liberal arts school and my most recent class had 25 students (so you might need to adjust accordingly).
- My course was MWF and class periods were 50 minutes long.
- I used my own textbook, co-authored by Gary Lewandowski: *Intimate Relationships* (2nd edition) published by Sage. We are proud that the book won the 2021 Most Promising New Textbook of the Year award from the Textbook and Academic Authors Association when it first came out. Still, my materials could easily be modified for other books or reading materials, and you don't have to use my book in your class for me to share my materials with you.
- My course is taught at a junior undergrad level and is cross listed as a Sociology course; I try to teach it from a multidisciplinary perspective. There were no exams or quizzes, and it is centered around critical thinking, analysis, and application of concepts.

I'm most excited to share my **Love Labs** with you! These are 14 activities (roughly one per week, or one per standard textbook chapter). Each is interactive and hopes to get students engaged, analyzing and applying course concepts with critical thinking. A few are modifications of other people's ideas already available on the IARR Teaching Resources website, but most are original to my course. The students absolutely loved these activities, and I have preliminary data showing that the activities helped them learn the material and apply it to their own lives. More about the activities will be published in a book chapter coming soon; the tentative reference is:

Goodfriend, W., & Lewandowski, G. T. (2027). Love labs: Interactive activities and application of concepts in the classroom. In J. Verette Lindenbaum & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Teaching relationship science*. Elgar.

Below, you'll see my basic syllabus (I removed my university-specific policies and links) and the fourteen Love Lab activities, as well as the accompanying assignment instructions. I am happy to provide my PowerPoint lectures if you email me. Please note that my slides do have images and links to videos for which I don't have copyright ownership – I got them from things like online searches (e.g., YouTube videos). So of course, I am sharing them with you for educational purposes. I'd love to hear from you and will be happy to share or to get advice on how to make my own materials better.



PSYC/SOCI 371: INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

CLASS SYLLABUS



INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. Wind Goodfriend

Office: SSA 204

Phone: 749-2108

Email: goodfriend@bvu.edu

Class: MWF 10:00-10:50 am in Science 126

Final exam: Tuesday, May 5th 10:15-12:15

Student Help (office) hours: Mondays/Wednesdays, after class until 1:30
(or by appointment, or whenever my office door is open)

TEXT: Goodfriend, W., & Lewandowski, G. (2027). *Close relationships* (2nd ed.). Sage.

CLASS WEBSITE: On Canvas

This site will grant you access to announcements, grades, and course documents. This is also where you will submit your papers for the course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The study of friendships, attraction, sexuality, and adult intimate relationships is covered by this course. Topics will include major theoretical approaches to studying relationships, relationships across the lifespan, communication and conflict, sexual assault and violence, and research on how to maintain a happy and health long-term commitment to a life partner. *Same as SOCI 371.*
Prerequisite: One 200 level sociology course or one 200 level psychology course, or permission from instructor.

I will be teaching this course from a perspective that is welcoming and inclusive of all genders and sexualities. You may disagree with this perspective for personal, political, and/or religious reasons and your grade will not be affected. Higher education and critical thinking require respectful dialogue from multiple perspectives. Therefore, respect for people within gender and sexual minority categories or who are from marginalized groups is expected. I (Dr. Goodfriend) identify as pansexual, part of the LGBTQ+ community.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Compare major theoretical approaches to studying close relationships (e.g., attachment, the evolutionary perspective, and interdependence).
2. Critically analyze research conclusions regarding relationship behaviors and processes, ranging from friendship, attraction, sexuality, commitment, communication, conflict, violence, and enduring satisfaction.

CLASS POINT BREAKDOWN: If the course is taken “Pass/Fail,” a grade of 60% is required to earn a “Pass.” Final letter grades will be determined by the standard scale of 93%+ = A, 90-92% = A-, 88-89% = B+, 83-87% = B, 80-82% = B-, 78-79% = C+, 73-77% = C, 70-72% = C-, 68-69% = D+, 63-67% = D, 60-62% = D-, and 0-59% = F.

ITEM	POINTS	
Attendance & Participation 1	40	
Attendance & Participation 2	40	
Love Labs (8 labs, 10 pts each)	80	(you choose 8 out of 14 options)
Presentation	40	
Movie Analysis	50	
Infographic & Analysis	50	
TOTAL	300	

Late assignments and unexcused absences from class will be penalized, unless you have communicated with me in advance (except for emergencies) and have an exception/extension. Details on all assignments are available on Canvas, but here are the basics:

Attendance & Participation: Attendance and participation are essential to keep class engaging. You can earn points each week for your contributions. Be sure to communicate with me if you need to miss class for an excused reason so I can track this on my spreadsheet.

Love Labs: For each textbook chapter, we'll spend a day in class covering the material and a day doing an exercise, activity, or application of concepts. For each Love Lab, you'll submit a written response that includes (1) brief essays responding to critical thinking prompts from the textbook and (2) a response to the lab activity or application done in class. Your understanding, analysis, and ability to apply the material will come from these papers. Details of each assignment vary, based on the activity. You will choose 8 out of 14 activities for your grade.

Presentation: You will design your own Love Lab! Create an engaging activity for the class to do regarding one of the concepts in a chapter we've covered. You will write learning objectives, design the activity and have the class actually do it. Your grade will be based on how well your activity applies or illustrates your chosen concept, how engaging it is, the quality of your materials, your presentation of the activity (e.g., eye contact, ability to answer questions), and whether your activity takes the appropriate amount of time in class.

Movie Analysis: One week of class will be devoted to watching a popular culture film in class, and you will then write a paper in which you (1) define relevant concepts from class in your own words and (2) apply them to characters or plot points from the film.

Infographic & Analysis: Your final assignment will be the creation of an infographic (a one-page visual image) synthesizing contemporary research on a topic of your choice, for an audience of your choice. You will use AI to create the initial infographic, then critically analyze how well AI did. You will then revise the infographic either on your own or again using AI and submit a paper discussing the research topic and the infographic itself. You will submit your two chosen research articles to Canvas, a summary of the articles, your infographic, and a critical analysis of how well AI did in presenting the research studies. See Canvas for details.



Love Lab 1: Famous Couples and Relationship Dynamics

This activity encourages you to apply healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics to famous couples you see in mass media, either fictional couples or celebrities. What makes people happy or unhappy? Can those relationship dynamics change over time?

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity introduces students to how individuals perceive and evaluate romantic relationships. Students draw on personal beliefs, media portrayals, and implicit assumptions to define what makes relationships healthy/positive or unhealthy/negative. The activity highlights how schemas, expectations, and subjective interpretations shape judgments about relational quality, and how perceptions may or may not reflect reality.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Define characteristics of healthy and unhealthy romantic relationships
- Analyze how personal beliefs shape relationship evaluations
- Apply Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love to relationships
- Evaluate whether patterns generalize to real relationships

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or shared writing space
- Markers or writing utensils
- Classroom arranged for pair discussion

Activity Procedure

1. Pair students with a lab partner.
2. Each pair must identify one healthy and one unhealthy famous relationship couple (it can be a celebrity couple or a fictional couple they create).
3. Have the pairs discuss reasons supporting each evaluation. They should identify two specific reasons they chose each couple (i.e., two positive things and two negative things).
4. Next, ask the lab partner pairs to consider whether the dynamics in their chosen couples changed over time, or whether they were healthy/good or unhealthy/bad from the start. What patterns can they identify? Do they think these patterns are generalizable to couples in the "real world"?
5. On the whiteboard, write "Healthy" on one half and "Unhealthy" on the other half. Then, ask one person from each lab pair to put their two couples in the appropriate columns (so, the student should be writing the names of people in both couples) as well as what they and their partner think is the best and worst aspect of this couple.

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- What patterns emerged for healthy vs unhealthy relationships?
- Did your judgments rely on observations or assumptions?
- How do media portrayals influence perceptions?
- Did groups disagree and what does that suggest?
- How do prior experiences shape judgments?
- Do these patterns apply to real relationships?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. Explain the two couples you and your lab partner chose. What are two specific things that are good/positive/healthy about the first couple, and bad/negative/unhealthy in the second couple? If you want, you can provide links to articles about the couple that are relevant, but this is not required.
2. Discuss the relationship dynamics over time in each couple. Did things change over time, or were they positive/negative from the start? What is interesting about any pattern(s) you identify? Do you think the pattern(s) in these couples are generally true for other people?
3. Now, focus on the negative/unhealthy couple. Discuss your personal opinion regarding what intervention you think might help resolve their problems. For example, would couples therapy help? Why or why not? If yes, what kind of exercises might they need in therapy? If therapy wouldn't work, what other solutions would you suggest? Is the only solution that they should break up? If so, can either or both people find happiness with someone else?
4. Finally, consider Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love. Explain which type of love you think each of your couples has (or had, if they are no longer together). If you think they changed over time, you can discuss how their relationship type changed. Be sure to use terms specifically from this theory in your answer.



Love Lab 2: Measuring Relationship Science

This activity helps you design and critically evaluate self-report measures within relationship science. You'll consider methodological strengths and weaknesses such as social desirability and reverse coding.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity is an introduction to self-report measures in social sciences. The activity's goal is to help students appreciate the complex thought required to create such measures (e.g., Likert-like response scales) and to analyze advantages and disadvantages of self-report scales (e.g., social desirability).

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Define self-report measures and their role in relationships science
- Evaluate strengths and limitations of self-report methods
- Construct a 10-item self-report measure assessing a relationship variable
- Analyze how design choices (e.g., scale range, reverse coding) affect responses
- Critically assess issues such as social desirability and measurement validity

Materials Needed

- Paper and writing utensils (including blank papers they will exchange)
- Whiteboard or shared discussion space, if desired
- Optional: Example Likert scale for reference

Activity Procedure

1. Briefly review the definition of self-report measures and compare them to other method options (e.g., archival, naturalistic observation, experiments). Ask students to identify pros and cons of self-report surveys, compared to other methods. If desired, show examples of some relationships-relevant Likert-type scales and discuss factors such as social desirability, scale ranges (e.g., 1-7 versus 1-8 versus 1-100).
2. Pair students with a lab partner.
3. Ask each pair to identify a relationship variable they would like to measure (e.g., jealousy, commitment, attraction, conflict style). They can use their textbook table of contents if they need ideas.
4. Have each pair construct a 10-item self-report scale assessing their chosen variable. Encourage them to think about how their 10 items should be similar enough to measure the same concept, but different enough to not bore participants. Make sure they decide on a response format (e.g., 1-7 Likert scale, odd vs. even number of options) and consider whether to include reverse-coded items.
5. One person from each pair should neatly write out their items and their chosen response format on a sheet of paper. Then, have pairs exchange their measure with another pair of students.

6. Give each pair a few minutes to look over and talk to each other about the scale. Are there confusing questions? Are they biased (e.g., assuming monogamy or heterosexuality)? Do you feel like you would be honest if you were asked these questions in a research study? Etc. Talk to each other about your response to the other pair's items and response format.
7. Then, allow time for pairs to revise their scale based on feedback.

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- What made some scales clearer or more effective than others? Did people find anything confusing – and how was this addressed or fixed?
- What did people decide to use for response formats? How did response scale decisions (e.g., 1–7 vs. 1–100) affect interpretation?
- Did any items seem biased or confusing? Why? How might social desirability influence responses on your measure?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of self-report measures compared to other methodologies? How could you improve the validity or reliability of your scale?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

First, provide your 10 items and response scale/format. Then, answer these questions:

1. What variable did you choose to measure? Why?
2. Explain your decisions and rationale for the following:
 - a. What is the scale (e.g., 1-7 vs. 1-100) and why did you choose that? (e.g., odd or even number of responses, total range)
 - b. How did you create the items themselves? Do you have any that need to be reverse coded (why or why not)? Did you revise any after getting feedback that they might be biased, confusing, etc.?
 - c. Do you believe “social desirability” will be a problem for your scale? If no, why not? If yes, what could researchers do to reduce dishonesty in responses?
 - d. How might you improve your scale's validity or reliability if it were used for actual research studies?



Love Lab 3: Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Closeness

In this activity, you will engage in a structured conversation designed to examine how interpersonal closeness develops between two people. It is a modified version of this now-famous “Fast Friends” research study:

Aron, A., Melinat, E., Aron, E. N., Vallone, R. D., & Bator, R. J. (1997). The experimental generation of interpersonal closeness: A procedure and some preliminary findings. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(4), 363-377.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167297234003>

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity demonstrates how increasing levels of self-disclosure can build intimacy between individuals who do not know each other well. It reflects principles of Social Penetration Theory, which suggests that relationships develop through gradual increases in depth and breadth of communication.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Understand how self-disclosure can increase interpersonal closeness
- Apply Social Penetration Theory to the activity and to your relationships outside of class
- Evaluate whether this activity is a valid replication of the original Aron et al. (1997) study (and why or why not)

Materials Needed

- Pre-test and post-test closeness surveys
- Question prompt sheets (3 sets for each lab partner pair, half from the closeness condition and half from the control condition)
- Stopwatch or timer (you can use your phone)
- Pre-created Excel sheet to compare closeness ratings in class, if desired

Activity Procedure

1. Ask students to sit next to someone in class they *do not know* or (if you are at a small college or university) someone they do not feel close to. Have them complete a 1-7 Likert scale that will become a pre-test measure of closeness, similar to this one:

Please rate your honest assessment of how *psychologically* close you feel toward your activity partner now, after completing this activity. Use this rating scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Neutral			Very close

2. Briefly explain the research procedure from the Aron et al. (1997) study. You might also assign the article as reading before class, and spend a few minutes going over it, answering any questions students have, etc. Then, explain that the activity will replicate the study's procedure

but will be modified due to several factors. You can ask the students to identify what important factors are different, but the obvious and important variables are that the time will likely be shorter in your class, the students will know which condition they are in, they know the hypothesis and results of the study, etc.

3. Pass out envelopes marked “1”, “2”, and “3” to each pair. The envelopes should have the question sets from the Aron et al. (1997) study. Half of the students should receive questions from the control group, and half should receive the “fast friends” questions. For convenience later, you might want to make half the room one condition and half the other. *Note:* You may also want to ask students who is comfortable in the “fast friends” condition, given they are more personal questions. However, if you allow people to choose their condition, this becomes another variable that might affect whether the replication is valid.
4. Depending on how much class time you have, proceed through the three sets of questions. For example, you might only have 5-8 minutes for each envelope’s set of questions. Remind students that they don’t have to get through all questions and that they can choose which questions to answer, but that both people should answer each question before they move on to the next. Alternate who gets to choose the question.
5. When you are through all three envelopes, have the students again rate their closeness to their partner on a 1-7 scale.

Post-Activity Discussion

Ideally, you can collect the closeness ratings and put them into an Excel sheet you have prepared in advance, then calculate the mean difference between the pre- and post-test ratings. This works best in a small class or if you can do it while they are discussing the questions below. You can then lead the class in an analysis comparing the change in scores from the two conditions and whether your results replicate the original study.

You can also have the students discuss:

- How did your feelings of closeness change during the activity?
- Did deeper self-disclosure increase your sense of connection (either because of your experimental condition or because you chose to discuss more personal topics)?
- Were any questions uncomfortable? Why?
- How does this activity illustrate Social Penetration Theory?
- Do you think this process could lead to meaningful relationships outside of class? Does Social Penetration Theory apply to your friendships and other relationships? How?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. First, summarize the Aron et al. (1997) “fast friends” study **in your own words**. Be sure to identify the two experimental conditions and the results by condition.
2. Next, explain our class replication and how it turned out. Be sure to discuss both your own experience (what condition were you in? Did you feel significantly closer to your partner after the lab, and does that match the prediction based on your condition?) and the class overall results (comparing the control and experimental conditions). If your own experience or the class results matched the original study, discuss the factors that mattered. If not, speculate as to why there were differences. In other words, how did our class replication differ and why would those changes matter in terms of how the results turned out?
3. Finally, apply Social Penetration Theory and reciprocal self-disclosures to your own life and friendships. Do you feel that the friendships in your life deepen when you have reciprocal self-disclosures over time? Provide examples. Are you someone who is high or low in the tendency to self-disclose in general, as a personality trait? How does this tendency affect your friendships or other intimate relationships?



Love Lab 4: Mate Value, Matching, and Maximizing

This activity allows you to engage in a “speed dating” experience in which you assess your own mate value based on how others respond to a fictional profile you wear around your neck. This is a modified version of an activity on the IARR Teaching Resources website and originally published here:

Ellis, B. J., & Kelley, H. H. (1999). The pairing game: A classroom demonstration of the matching phenomenon. *Teaching of Psychology*, 26(2), 118-121.

https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328023top2602_8

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity focuses on attraction and mate value. The core premise is that mate value is a social construction: People infer their own attractiveness based on how others respond to them verbally and nonverbally. The activity allows students to experience mate value, assortative mating, the matching hypothesis, and maximizing versus satisficing in a controlled but socially dynamic environment.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Explain how mate value is inferred through social interaction
- Identify factors that influence perceived attractiveness
- Analyze how maximizing and satisficing apply to partner selection strategies
- Apply the matching hypothesis to lived experience

Materials Needed

- Fictional dating-style profiles (one per student). Put some kind of unique identifying marker on each profile (a number, letter, etc.) for later [see student instructions below].
- Profiles should include salary, intelligence, sense of humor, kindness ratings, hobbies, descriptive adjectives, and a unique ‘note.’ These should be folded in half horizontally so that the information cannot be seen by the person wearing it but easily viewed by someone approaching them and simply folding the top half up. (For 25 pre-made profiles, email Dr. Wind Goodfriend at goodfriend@bvu.edu or you can make your own.)
- Tape or lanyards so profiles can be worn around the neck

Activity Procedure

1. Randomly assign each student a fictional profile. Students must NOT look at their own profile, but everyone else may see it. Explain that the task is to mingle and decide with whom to form a relationship based solely on profile attractiveness—not gender, sexuality, or real-life identity.
2. Ask students to consider **beforehand**:
 - Which profile factors matter most to them (e.g., salary, humor, kindness)?
 - How many profiles they want to see before deciding, whether they will be picky or flexible, and whether they will make offers or wait to receive them.

3. Begin with students spread around the room. For the first five minutes (adjust based on your class time), students may NOT make or accept offers. They may talk, joke, and interact, but may not reveal specific profile information about someone else's profile.
4. When instructed to begin the "pairing" or "offer" stage, students may start making and accepting offers. Once a student accepts an offer, both partners sit down together. Continue until all students are seated or some remain single.
5. Only after the activity ends may students look at their own profiles. Go through some examples to see who paired up with whom.

Post-Activity Discussion

Have students discuss with their chosen partner: (1) their partner selection strategy, (2) whether their profiles seem compatible, (3) how it felt to receive interest or rejection, and (4) whether the class results seem to support or challenge the matching hypothesis. After a few minutes, discuss each question as a large group. Be sure to tell them to note the unique identifying marker for their own and their chosen partner's profiles if they wish to write the lab report.

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. First, describe your 'secret' profile and the profile you paired with. To do this, report your identifying marker the marker on the profile of the person you paired with (note which was which). If you ended up single, report only your own identifying marker.
2. Analyze your experience during the activity itself. Describe how you approached the task using the guiding questions presented before the activity. Which profile factors (salary, intelligence, sense of humor, kindness, hobbies, descriptive adjectives, notes) did you think would matter most to you beforehand? Did this change once the activity began? Did you make offers or wait to receive them?
3. Analyze how others responded to your profile before you knew what it said. Based on verbal and nonverbal feedback, did you perceive your mate value to be high, medium, or low? What specific cues or behaviors influenced this perception?
4. How many profiles did you want to see before deciding on a partner? Discuss whether your approach aligns with maximizing or satisficing. Also reflect on whether you tend to be a maximizer or satisficer in your relationships outside of class.
5. Finally, analyze the activity's outcome using the matching hypothesis. Are the mate values of you and your partner similar? Why or why not? If you ended up single, analyze this outcome using the matching hypothesis, including which aspects of your profile may have been stigmatizing or unattractive and why those factors matter socially.



Love Lab 5: Evolutionary Perspectives of a First Date

This activity encourages you to apply concepts within the evolutionary perspective to a video showing two people on a real first date. Can you see how ideas from class play out between two actual people meeting for the first time? This is a modified version of an activity on the IARR Teaching Resources website called “First Date Video Analysis” originally created by Kevin McIntyre.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity introduces students to apply concepts from the evolutionary perspective (although you could use it for any theoretical perspective) as they watch a video of two people meeting for a blind date. It also helps students interpret behavior such as social cues, potentially make hypotheses, and could be a follow-up of research methods concepts such as naturalistic observation and behavioral coding.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Apply the evolutionary perspective of intimate relationships to a real-world interaction
- Evaluate how first impressions and early interactions shape relationship predictions (e.g., possible future satisfaction and commitment)

Materials Needed

- Access to video of a first-date interaction
- Paper and writing utensils
- Whiteboard or shared writing space

Activity Procedure

1. Before the video, tell students that they will be asked to do the following independently:
 - a. Form hypotheses regarding whether these two people will form a satisfying, long-term, committed relationship with each other. Why or why not? Articulate what about their initial interaction leads you to form this hypothesis.
 - b. Identify at least three *specific* concepts from the evolutionary perspective on relationships you can see playing out in this video. Examples of concepts you might encourage them to consider are:
 - Intrasexual / Intersexual competition
 - Mate preferences (e.g., wealth, physical attractiveness)
 - Attraction strategies (e.g., flirting behaviors)
 - Physically attractive features (e.g., symmetry, neoteny)
 - Promiscuity, jealousy, mate guarding, mate retention
 - Gender or sex differences
 - Children/offspring strategies
2. Have students watch a video depicting a first-date interaction. I use this one:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeSzLqqyNgs>

If that particular video doesn't work, you can use other (similar) videos on YouTube. Search for "Can 2 Strangers Fall in Love with 36 Questions?" You'll find a series of first dates based on Aron et al.'s (1997) "fast friends" procedure. It's fun to point out that they already know about these questions from earlier in class!

3. Pair students with a lab partner and have them share and discuss their ideas, to help boost their confidence about their applications.
4. Each pair should select one concept or interpretation to share with the class. Have one member from each pair write their selected idea on the board and briefly explain it to the class. (I usually ask the person who did not volunteer to write on the board to talk, so that both people participated in some way).

Post-Activity Discussion

As a large group, go through the concepts on the board and discuss concepts frequently identified. Then, ask for the class's predictions about the couple – will they form a relationship? Why or why not?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. First, explain the three evolutionary perspective concepts you saw playing out in the video. For each concept (a) define it in your own words, then (b) apply it to the people, behaviors, or scenario you saw in the video.
2. Then, analyze whether you think this couple could be happy together long term, and why. Do you think they will form a satisfied, committed relationship with each other? Provide a specific hypothesis; use relationship science to make your prediction.



Love Lab 6: Attachment Theory

In this activity, you will explore attachment styles by creating and interpreting short narratives. You will also consider whether projective tests are a good way to measure attachment style.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

Attachment theory suggests that early experiences with caregivers influence how people think, feel, and behave in relationships. This activity demonstrates how attachment styles shape how individuals interpret relationships, emotions, and interactions and helps students understand how projective tests work in psychology.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Identify key characteristics of secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant/fearful attachment styles
- Apply attachment theory to interpret behavior and emotions in a narrative
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of projective tests to measure attachment

Materials Needed

- Copy of the projective test from this study:
Klagsbrun, M., & Bowlby, J. (1976). Responses to separation from parents: A clinical test for young children. *British Journal of Projective Psychology & Personality Study*, 21, 7-27.

This test showed photographs to children and asked them to tell a story about what was happening in the picture. Interpretations of their answers measured attachment style.

- Paper/pen or electronic device for writing stories
- Timer (5 minutes)

Activity Procedure

1. Pair students with a lab partner.
2. Review the three main attachment styles originally identified by Bowlby (secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant). Have students choose one style they find interesting and write it down secretly, make sure their partner does not see what they write.
3. Choose one of the images from the Klagsbrun & Bowlby projective test. For example, you might choose “Parent goes away for the weekend.” Note that there is a “girl” version and a “boy” version, you can show each to the class and have them respond to the appropriate picture for their sex or gender. After looking at the picture, ask the students to *pretend* they are a 10-year-old child taking the test, and they need to write a two-paragraph story in response to the picture *that aligns with the attachment style they secretly wrote down in advance*. Give them 5 minutes to do this.

4. Then, have them exchange the story they generated with their lab partner. Each student should read the other person's story, then guess what attachment style they had in mind. Have the students talk with each other about (1) What their guessed attachment style is, and (2) What specific things in the story made them come to that conclusion. If the guesses are wrong, discuss what might have occurred, is it a misunderstanding of the story author? The student reading the story? Or an ambiguous cue?
5. If desired, you can do this in response to more than one image from the original study and projective test.

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you go through each attachment style and the cues that helped people correctly guess that style. Discuss any misunderstandings as well. Then, talk with the students about any possible advantages and disadvantages to projective tests used in this manner, and (if desired) compare that to other methods of measuring attachment styles or tendencies.

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. First, submit the story you wrote in response to the projective test image shown in class. Then, state which attachment style you chose to write from and what specific aspects of your story match that style.
2. Discuss how well your exchange went with your lab partner. Did they correctly guess your chosen attachment style? Did you correctly guess theirs? Provide details.
3. Finally, analyze whether you think this projective test is a good way to measure children's attachment styles. Explain your opinion, detailing specific reasons why this method is or is not valid for research purposes, therapy purposes with a counselor, etc. You might note that the class activity was different from how the test is really used (e.g., we are not children; we imagined writing from different styles). You might think projective tests are good for research but not therapy, or the other way around, or both, etc., any opinion is fine as long as you back up your answer with thoughtful arguments.



Love Lab 7: Interdependence Theory

In this activity, you will examine how you think about a close relationship using several self-report scales. You will analyze several important concepts relevant to satisfaction, commitment, and cognitive interdependence.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity focuses on interdependence theory, which examines how people incorporate others into their sense of self and how they think about commitment. It can also explore constructs related to interdependence that you want to emphasize in class, such as types of commitment, and how these concepts are measured in research.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Articulate the concepts measured in class and how self-report scales for research studies measure them [you can choose any self-report scales; examples appear below]
- Apply these concepts to your own close relationships

Materials Needed

- Paper-and-pencil surveys, PowerPoint slides with survey questions prepared in advance, or online surveys prepared for students in advance
- Ability for students to either calculate their scores or see their own results
- A partner for discussion

Activity Procedure

1. Ask each student to identify either a specific close friend or a current romantic partner to keep in mind when they respond to several self-report scales commonly used in research studies. (Allowing a close friend ensures that all students can complete the activity, even if they are not in a romantic relationship)
2. Select several self-report measures and either have the students complete them before class or during class (depending on your time needs). Your textbook might provide some; I suggest supplementing, so students have additional examples and resources. I used scales from the following studies in my class:

- Agnew, C. R., Van Lange, P. A., Rusbult, C. E., & Langston, C. A. (1998). Cognitive interdependence: Commitment and the mental representation of close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(4), 939-954. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.4.939>

[Note – You may want to modify the next one to avoid “marriage” terms/phrases]:

- Johnson, M. P., Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (1999). The tripartite nature of marital commitment: Personal, moral, and structural reasons to stay married. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 160-177. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353891>

- Sivadas, E., Bruvold, N. T., & Nelson, M. R. (2008). A reduced version of the horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism scale: A four-country assessment. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(3), 201-210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.06.016>

3. Explain the overall concepts that each scale measures first, and the possible range for each person's results. Have them guess what their score might be on each scale before they calculate or see their actual results. If you'd like and you feel they have gotten to know their lab partner (or someone else in the class) well enough by the time you do this activity, you can also have them guess each other's results (my students enjoyed this). I had my students complete a table like this:

	Possible Range	My Prediction for Myself	My Partner's Prediction for My Score	My Actual Score
Cognitive Interdependence	0-100			
Individualism vs. Collectivism	14-98			
Types of Commitment				
Personal	9-45			
Moral	9-45			
Structural	9-45			

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- Did your scores match your predictions? What about your lab partner's predictions for you? Why or why not?
- Which scale we completed today do you feel is the most interesting, valid, etc. for use in research studies? Explain why you feel that way. What do you like about each scale, and what are criticisms you have of each?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

First, provide the table we created in class with your predictions for yourself, your partner's predictions, and your actual results for each variable measured. Then, answer these questions:

1. Tell me who you had in mind when you completed the scales – a current romantic partner or a friend. You can provide some information on this person if it helps establish context (e.g., how long you've known each other, in what ways).
2. Then, analyze your own predictions, your lab partner's predictions, and your actual results for each scale. What matched and what didn't? When there were mismatches (if any), why do you think those occurred? Do the scores you got on each scale accurately reflect your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in the relationship you chose and/or your relationships in general? Discuss how you see each of the three variables we measured in this activity playing out in the important relationships in your life (or at least, in the one you focused on for the lab activity).
3. Finally, discuss which of the three scales you think is the most useful, valid, or interesting for research purposes and why. Also provide any critiques or criticisms you have of any of the scales, and explain how you might change or improve them.



Love Lab 8: Social Cognition

This activity examines how individuals explain their partner's behaviors and how those explanations reflect underlying self-serving cognitive biases in attributions. Students will explore how attributions (dispositional vs situational) shape relationship perceptions and satisfaction. This activity is inspired by:

Goodfriend, W., Agnew, C. R., & Cathey, P. L. (2017). Understanding commitment and partner-serving biases in close relationships. In J. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Foundations for couples' therapy* (pp. 51-60). Routledge.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity introduces students to dispositional (internal) versus situational (external) attributions in romantic relationships. Drawing on social cognition, students consider how they interpret their partner's behaviors and whether those interpretations reflect self-serving biases and positive illusions, which produce views more favorable than objective reality.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Define dispositional and situational attributions
- Analyze attribution patterns within their own relationship
- Evaluate the role of cognitive biases in relationship satisfaction
- Assess when biased perceptions may be adaptive or maladaptive

Materials Needed

- Worksheet with sentence stems (see below)
- Markers or writing utensils

Activity Procedure

1. Ask students to identify someone they love, such as a current romantic partner or best friend. Have them write down that person's name and complete the activity with that person in mind the entire time.
2. Provide the worksheet with incomplete sentences describing various behaviors. Explain that you want them to write complete sentences explain why their loved one might do each behavior. Emphasize that even if the behavior seems out of character, why *might* their person do this?
3. After giving them time to complete the worksheet, have each student exchange their sheet with a lab partner. They will score each other's responses. Explain the difference between dispositional (internal) and situational (external) attributions, and provide examples. Dispositional attributions should be explanations that are about the person, whereas situational attributions are more about the unique environment or circumstances. Each sentence should receive a code of 1, 2, or 3 as follows:

Coding Instructions: Exchange your responses with a partner. For each sentence, decide whether the explanation reflects:

- 1 = Dispositional (something about the person: traits, personality, intentions)
- 2 = Situational (something about the circumstances: context, luck, accident)
- 3 = Mixed/Not sure

- 4. After the partner codes the sentences, have them swap papers again.
- 5. The sentence prompts were of different types. Some were positive behaviors and were about the two people within the relationship (e.g., sentence #1). Some were about the relationship, but were negative behaviors (e.g., sentence #4). There were also sentences about the person outside of the relationship, both positive (e.g., sentence #2) and negative (e.g., sentence #3). Now, have each student look at how their responses were coded based on sentence type:

Positive, Relationship-based attributions: Sentences 1, 5, 7, and 8

Negative, Relationship-based attributions: Sentences 4, 6, 10, and 11

Positive, Non-relationship-based attributions: Sentences 2 and 12

Negative, Non-relationship-based attributions: Sentences 3 and 9

- 6. If the student showed 100% attributional bias, they would always have *dispositional* attributions for positive behaviors, but *situational* attributions for negative behaviors. If so, they would come up with “excuses” for anything bad their partner would do, to minimize the behavior. Facilitate discussion about whether their attribution patterns reflect self-serving or “partner-serving biases” (also known as positive illusions).

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- Is it possible someone’s partner really is “perfect”, so a pattern of all dispositional attributions for positive behaviors and all situational attributions for negative behaviors is objectively accurate? Or will such a pattern always reflect at least some bias?
- How does degree of bias correlate with relationship satisfaction and commitment?
- When might bias or positive illusions be beneficial to a relationship, and when might it be harmful (e.g., in situations of relationship abuse)?

Love Lab Worksheet

Instructions: Think about someone you love (a romantic partner or close friend). Complete each sentence below by explaining why the behavior might occur. Even if the event has never happened, explain why it *could* happen.

1. ... asked you how your day was because...

2. ... got a promotion at work because...

3. ... missed a payment on a bill because...

4. ... betrayed a secret of yours to a third person because...

5. ... read your favorite book because...

6. ... made fun of you in public because...

7. ... made you a surprise gift because...

8. ... treated you with respect because...

9. ... failed a difficult exam or task at work because...

10. ... never paid back money they borrowed from you because...

11. ... lied to you because...

12. ... visited a sick relative because...

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

First, provide the coding results for your 12 sentences, in a table similar to this one but with the right column filled in:

Types of Sentence	Sentence #	Codes
Relationship, Positive	1, 5, 7, 8	
Relationship, Negative	4, 6, 10, 11	
Non-relationship, Positive	2, 12	
Non-relationship, Negative	3, 9	

Then answer the following questions:

1. Tell me who you had in mind when you completed the sentences, a current romantic partner or a friend. You can provide some information on this person if it helps establish context (e.g., how long you've known each other, in what ways). You can also provide some of the sentences you wrote if it helps your analysis in the next question/answer.
2. Then, analyze your results. What do your results indicate about how you think about this person? In other words, your results will indicate a high, medium, or low level of bias, how do you feel about your level of bias? Do you agree with these results, or do you think the measure is flawed?
3. What degree or amount of cognitive bias or "positive illusion" in a friendship or romantic relationship is healthy? Explain your answer. You might discuss different contexts, or reasons why illusions are healthy or unhealthy, or different types of illusion, etc.



Love Lab 9: AI Advice in a Digital World

This activity asks you to compare relationship advice generated by your peers with advice from artificial intelligence. You will evaluate the usefulness, quality, and validity of advice from each resource.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity introduces students to the growing role of artificial intelligence in dating and relationship decision-making. Students compare peer-generated and AI-generated advice, applying relationship science concepts related to attraction, communication, and relationship maintenance. The activity highlights how people evaluate advice, perceived expertise, and ethical concerns about using AI as a substitute for human support.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Compare peer-generated and AI-generated relationship advice
- Apply relationship science concepts to critically evaluate relationship guidance
- Assess the strengths and limitations of AI in interpersonal contexts
- Analyze ethical implications of using AI for romantic decision-making

Materials Needed

- Students need access to at least one AI platform (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Copilot)
- Prepared relationship scenarios or prompts (see below for the ones I used)
- Whiteboard or shared writing space
- Paper and writing utensils

Activity Procedure

1. Introduce the idea that people increasingly use AI for help with dating and relationships. You can show examples from recent online articles if desired. Have a brief discussion about whether the students think AI is a good resource for people who have questions about how to act in dating, friendships, and other relationship situations.
2. Then, present examples of fictional scenarios (as many as you have time for, given your class period). For each, ask students to first brainstorm their own ideas about what advice they would give the person in the scenario. Write down on the whiteboard each group's best idea.
3. Next, ask individual students or pairs of students to give the same scenario to their favorite AI and consider the advice given. Then, write on the board their favorite advice.
4. Alternatively, you can go through the funniest advice, or the worst advice! And compare.

Here are the examples I used in class. Ironically (or perhaps appropriately?) you can use AI to come up with your own scenarios if you'd like different ones. I presented these 8 ideas and let the class vote on which ones they wanted to discuss.

1. How can I make my online dating profile attractive?	5. How can I get my current romantic partner to be into an “open” relationship?
2. What are creative ways I can propose to my current partner with \$20 or less?	6. How can I break up with my current partner without them being mad at me?
3. How can I find out if my current partner is cheating on me?	7. I’m in love with my partner’s personality, but I’m not physically attracted to them. What should I do?
4. My partner and I get along great, but I absolutely hate their family. What should I do?	8. I’m in love with my partner, but our sex life has become dull and routine. How can we spice it up so it’s exciting again?

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- Overall, was the AI advice better, worse, or similar to the class advice? Why?
- What patterns did you notice in AI-generated responses?
- How do people determine whether relationship advice is “good” or “bad”?
- Are there certain situations where AI advice may be more or less helpful? Are there times when AI might be more necessary or particularly helpful (e.g., someone lives in a very rural area, someone wants advice about a sensitive issue, someone is non-verbal)?
- What ethical issues arise when using AI for emotional support, relationship advice, or therapy?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. Compare the class’s advice for each of the questions or issues we covered in lab to the advice from AI for the same issues. In your opinion, was the AI advice better, worse, or about the same as what the class ideas were? In what ways? Be detailed in your analysis for each question/issue.
2. Next, come up with at least two of your own, new questions or issues related to class topics (attraction, dating, friendships, relationships, etc.). Use AI to generate an answer or advice. (Note: You can ask things that you’re just curious about – you are not restricted to things actually related to your real life). Provide the exact prompts you used for your questions/issues, then provide a summary of the AI response in your own words (don’t just copy/paste the entire response). Be sure to note which AI service you used (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot).
3. For each of your two new questions/issues, analyze the AI response or solution. Is it good advice? Realistic? Healthy? Creepy? Creative? Etc.
4. Finally, discuss the ethics of using AI in each of following contexts. Explain your opinion (provide a rationale – don’t just say “yes” or “no”):
 - a. Should people use AI to generate solutions to their relationship needs? Are there some topics or contexts where AI use is OK, but others where it is not?
 - b. Should people use AI “companions” (such as friends or even substitute romantic partners) if they feel they cannot form these relationships with other humans?
 - c. Should people use AI as a substitute for a professional, licensed counselor or therapist? What are the advantages and disadvantages?



Love Lab 10: Sexual Scripts

This activity encourages you to examine sexual scripts and how mismatches in expectations influence relationships. You will identify cultural norms, analyze case studies, and develop communication-based solutions.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity reviews sexual scripts, shared assumptions about how romantic and sexual interactions are expected occur. Media, culture, religion, family, and peers influence these scripts, which can vary across groups and over time. When partners hold different scripts, misunderstandings and conflict may arise, especially when communication is limited. This activity allows students to identify these mismatches and evaluate their impact on relationship functioning.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Define sexual scripts and identify their social and cultural influences
- Recognize variability in sexual scripts across individuals and groups
- Analyze how script mismatches affect relationship satisfaction and communication
- Develop strategies for addressing mismatches through communication and problem-solving

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or shared writing space
- Paper and writing utensils
- Prepared case studies (provided in slides or handout)

Activity Procedure

1. Begin by introducing or reviewing the concept of sexual scripts and how culture, media, religion, personal experiences, etc. influence them.
2. Ask students to brainstorm common “American” expectations for dating and sexual relationships (e.g., timing of first date, first kiss, sexual activity, and norms for acceptable behavior). One good way to do this is to have them consider how sexual scripts might be different for their generation compared to 50 years ago, for example. The discussion might highlight variation in scripts across age, culture, gender, and social groups. Question prompts I used in class to help them were:
 - What’s the expected age when people have their first kiss? First date?
 - What kinds of things happen on a first date?
 - What’s an acceptable “body count” for men? For women? Does it differ? Should it?
 - How does pornography influence people’s expectations today?
 - How often do newlyweds have sex? How often do people have sex once they’ve been married 20 years?
3. Introduce the idea of script mismatches and explain how differing expectations within a relationship can lead to conflict, especially when communication is poor.

4. Divide students into small groups (for this activity, groups of 3 students works particularly well).
5. Provide each group with one or more case studies involving couples experiencing sexual script mismatches. (The ones I used in class are provided below). For each case, ask students to identify: (1) the main script mismatch, (2) potential negative outcomes for satisfaction, commitment, or harmony between the two people, and (3) solutions or communication strategies that could improve the relationship.
6. Bring the class together and ask each group to share one key insight (problem, outcome, or solution). If you have groups of 3 students and time in class, you can have 1 person from the group report back on each part of the discussion.
7. Record responses on the board and facilitate a comparison across cases.

Here are the cases I used (which were AI-generated; or you can use your own if desired):

Case Study 1: Alex and Jordan have been dating for two years; their relationship is generally happy. Alex likes to have sex to feel emotionally connected and reassured, especially during periods of stress. Jordan, however, views sexual intimacy more as an expression of physical desire and assumes it should occur regularly, regardless of emotional context. They have not had sex for two months. Each now privately interprets the other's behavior as a sign of waning interest, or maybe even an affair with someone else.

Case Study 2: Morgan and Riley care deeply about each other and both value equality in their relationship. Morgan is a "free spirit" and often suggests they have sex in places like a public park or an elevator. Riley, however, is shy and nervous about getting caught or getting in trouble. Riley prefers "normal" sex, in a bed, but is starting to worry that Morgan will get bored with that.

Case Study 3: Taylor and Sam previously had a long-distance relationship, but Sam just moved across the country due to a new job in Taylor's city. Taylor thought they would now have more frequent, spontaneous sex. Sam, however, is often exhausted due to the stress of the job and is worried about all the adjustments of a new home and location. Both partners are disappointed in how things are going. Taylor recently suggested trying an "open" relationship, where they can have sex with other people, but they remain committed to each other romantically. Sam doesn't know whether to try it or to break up with Taylor.

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- What types of sexual scripts were most commonly identified?
- How did script mismatches affect relationship satisfaction and trust?
- What patterns emerged in how couples misinterpreted each other's behavior?
- How important was communication in resolving these mismatches?
- How do sexual scripts change across cultures, generations, or social groups?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. First, define “sexual scripts” in your own words.
2. Analyze each of the fictional case studies from class. For each, discuss (1) what the sexual script mismatch was (or were, if you identified more than one), (2) how the mismatches might lead to negative outcomes for that couple or the couple members as individuals, and (3) solutions, or what the people involved might do to improve things.
3. Choose a specific concept or research finding from your textbook that you think could provide insight into any of the three case studies we analyzed as a class. Explain your chosen concept or research finding first and provide a page number from the textbook where it is located. Then, describe how this idea applies to the characters in the case study.



Love Lab 11: Communication

In this activity, you will consider how to define communication. Then, you will do a surprise activity and see how well you communicate with your partner!

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity highlights how communication builds intimacy, how reliance on verbal communication can both help and hinder task completion, and how individual differences in communication skills relate to conflict. The activity connects explicitly to the Social Skills Deficit Hypothesis, which suggests that some relational difficulties stem from ineffective communication skills.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Articulate their own definition of effective communication
- Analyze how communication quality affects task performance and emotion
- Identify sources of conflict during collaborative tasks
- Apply models of conflict tactics to personal relationships

Materials Needed

- Blindfolds or eye coverings
- One paper bag per pair with a puzzle or construction task (e.g., blocks, tangram, Lego structure)
- Classroom space allowing pairs to sit at separate tables
- Optional small prize for motivation (e.g., candy, extra credit)

Activity Procedure

1. Pair students and ask them to discuss what makes someone a “good communicator.”
2. Each pair must decide which partner is the “better” communicator. Encourage discussion and definition-building.
3. Explain that the partner identified as the “worse” communicator will put on a blindfold and keep it on for the entire activity.
4. Before handing out the blindfolds, explain that each pair will have a small task set in front of them to complete, and that pairs will race to see who completes it the fastest for a prize. The person without a blindfold may speak but **may not touch** the materials at any time after the activity begins. Their job is to communicate how to complete the task.
5. At that point, provide the blindfold and the task inside a paper bag, so the students can’t see what it will be. After the blindfold is in place, say “go” to have them all begin.
6. Partners attempt to complete the task using verbal communication only. The first pair to finish (or the closest at time limit) may receive a small prize.

If you wish, halfway through the time (or when it seems like some groups are making good progress), you can stop all groups from working (e.g., “Hands up! Stop working.”) At that point you can allow the students one minute to remove the blindfold if they wish and debate whether to *switch* the blindfold to the other person or to keep going as they previously decided. This decision may cause further conflict if the partners don’t agree. The minute also allows everyone to see the task, although remind them that they may not touch it!

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a brief discussion focusing on frustration, miscommunication, emotional reactions, power dynamics, and whether students reassessed their beliefs about who is a “better” communicator.

For fun and if there is still time in class, you can let them complete the activity together with their lab partner if they wish. This provides closure and helps the two students bond together.

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. Explain how you and your lab partner decided which of you was the “better” communicator. What communication definition did you use? Did you agree with each other, and how did that decision make you feel?
2. Describe in detail how the activity unfolded. Discuss how your communication functioned during the task, including any conflict or frustration. What felt smooth or easy? What was challenging or irritating? How did you and your partner handle these moments emotionally? [If you allowed them to possibly switch, you can ask if they did, and whether that decision caused further conflict.]
3. There are several models of conflict tactics covered in this course. Choose the model you like most and explain it in your own words. Identify specific aspects you find useful, and apply this model to (1) how you communicated with your partner in this task and whether you had conflict, and (2) how you typically communicate with and respond to conflict in your friendships and/or romantic relationships outside of class. Be sure to use specific terms and concepts from the model you choose.



Love Lab 12: Violence Red Flags

In this activity, you will critically examine relationship violence and potential warning signs that someone might have. You will consider concepts related to perpetrators of abuse and couple dynamics. This is a modified version of an activity on the IARR Teaching Resources website called “Red Flag, Green Flag” originally created by Emma Willis-Grossman.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity introduces students to the complexity of defining and understanding relationship violence. Concepts such as normalization, romantic myths, gaslighting, self-serving biases, and cognitive dissonance shape how individuals interpret abusive situations. Students will also explore theoretical frameworks such as the cycle of violence and different types of relationship violence, as well as psychological processes involved in healing, including narrative therapy and post-traumatic growth.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Identify psychological processes that influence perceptions of abusive relationships
- Analyze patterns such as the cycle of violence and different types of relationship violence, as delineated in the Power and Control Wheel
- Evaluate pathways to healing, including post-traumatic growth

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or shared writing space
- Paper and writing utensils
- Visuals or handouts illustrating relationship violence frameworks (Power and Control Wheel)
- Red and green cards (e.g., cut from construction paper or card stock) students can hold up. If desired you can make actual little flags!

Activity Procedure

1. Begin by discussing how intimate partner violence is defined, emphasizing that this concept can be subjective and influenced by social norms. Psychological and emotional abuse are particularly hard to operationalize, and often survivors find it difficult to label what they have experienced.
2. Introduce key concepts such as normalization, gaslighting, romantic myths, the cycle of violence, self-serving biases, and cognitive dissonance, and discuss how they shape perceptions of abusive relationships. If desired, provide copies of or display the Power and Control Wheel often shared with survivors of intimate partner violence (shown below).

FIGURE 1. POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL.



Note: Reprinted from Pence and Paymar (1993).

- Next, either distribute a handout or present a list via PowerPoint of several possible traits in a potential fictional partner. The list should have a wide variety of possible traits that range from traits that are fairly clear "green flags" that someone would be a healthy, non-abusive partner (e.g., "always remembers you are allergic to peanuts") and clear "red flags" (e.g., "demands to know all your passwords"), but importantly should also have more ambiguous traits to make for an interesting discussion. For each trait, individual students should privately indicate, just to themselves, whether they think it is a "red flag" or a "green flag" that someone might become abusive, violent, and controlling in the future. This step is done to avoid later social desirability and conformity in responses.

The traits I used in class were:

- They speak four languages fluently.
- They have already been married once, for two years. That spouse died.
- Every time you meet this person for a date, you can tell they showered immediately beforehand.
- They tip exactly 10% at restaurants.
- They wait until their car is almost out of gas before filling the tank.
- They spent a year traveling around the world and camping in a tent, alone.
- They get jealous if other people show you attention when you go out together.
- They really enjoy going to parties, and they always want to go out on the weekends.
- They like to buy you clothes and give you advice on what to wear.
- They own three pit bulls.
- They have sixteen tattoos.

- They say “I’m in love with you” after going on three dates.
 - They are in the U.S. Marines as their full-time, permanent career.
 - They call their mother and speak with her on the phone every day.
 - They call their father and speak with him on the phone every day.
 - They make three times the salary you make.
 - When you see their apartment, you notice it is extremely clean.
 - Their favorite movie of all time is *Sharknado 3*.
 - They have committed two felonies.
 - They only own two pairs of shoes.
 - They get a general check-up at the doctor’s office every six months, “just in case.”
 - Has never skipped a class – not even one – “just because.”
 - When you play board games or video games together, they are very competitive.
 - They believe in “old fashioned values.”
 - They are still friends with their most recent ex-partner.
 - Says it’s a good idea for you to both have phone apps so you can see each other’s locations.
 - They remember details about what you say, even months later.
 - When offered a promotion at work, they turn it down because they say they aren’t interested in more money if it means more stress.
 - They are a vegetarian who believes crystals can heal illnesses.
4. Next, go through the same list of traits you used a second time. This time, pass out actual red-colored and green-colored cards (I created small flags by taping the cards to straws!). As you go through the list of traits, students raise the color they chose on the previous step. You can then ask individual students to explain why they chose a red or green flag. It is interesting to call on people who are in a minority opinion, to see why their perspective is different (although this is a sensitive issue, so you may want to consider having a way for students to opt out if desired).

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- What patterns emerged when perceiving the traits? Why and how might personal experiences influence our perceptions?
- How do concepts like gaslighting and romantic myths influence decision-making in relationships?
- What factors support healing and long-term recovery after relationship violence? If violence, aggression, and abuse (including psychological and emotional abuse) have become normalized for someone, how can post-traumatic growth occur?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. During the activity, how did you decide whether each trait was a red or green flag? Was it from your own experience, observation of friends' and family members' relationships, what you've seen from mass media, speculation, etc.? Provide examples of specific traits you interpreted in interesting ways and explain why you found these traits provocative, relevant to your experience, why you disagreed with your peers, etc. Also discuss how you felt or what you think it might mean when you generally agreed or disagreed with your peers on any important or interesting particular traits.
2. Discuss the Power and Control Wheel. Specifically, explain which forms of psychological or emotional abuse you believe are the most damaging, and why.
3. Finally, choose any of the key terms from your textbook's coverage of this topic [instructors can fill in the chapter number or assigned readings here]. Explain the concept you've chosen in your own words first, then analyze how that concept might affect perceptions of the red and green flags and/or wedges within the Power and Control Wheel. (For example, does cognitive dissonance affect how people see isolation or jealousy in a relationship?) You can discuss just one term or more.



Love Lab 13: Marriage and Divorce

This activity asks you to imagine marrying your lab partner and making decisions about your finances and lifestyle, plus what would happen to that marriage if it ended. This is a modified version of an activity on the IARR Teaching Resources website originally created by Pam Regan.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity introduces students to how expectations about marriage, money, and long-term commitment are shaped by social norms, personal values, and relational dynamics. Students consider how partners negotiate decisions about finances, family, and shared life goals, as well as how issues like trust, equity, and communication influence reactions to prenuptial agreements. The activity highlights how assumptions about relationships, power dynamics, and future uncertainty can influence emotional responses and decision-making.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Identify expectations and assumptions about marriage and long-term relationships
- Analyze how partners negotiate financial and lifestyle decisions
- Evaluate emotional and psychological responses to prenuptial agreements
- Apply relationship science concepts to decision-making and conflict

Materials Needed

- Paper and writing utensils, or electronic devices (tablets, computers)
- Whiteboard or shared writing space

Activity Procedure

1. Ask students to find a lab partner they feel comfortable with, knowing the activity today will ask them to imagine legally marrying each other. To help, you can encourage them to make the marriage fictional by allowing them to choose one of three scenarios for the rest of the activity: They can imagine a future marriage together based on:
(A) their actual, realistic and planned life goals, careers, and salaries;
(B) choosing one partner who will be imagined as a future high-income CEO while and the other is going to be in charge of managing the home and any potential children; or
(C) a creative fictional scenario up to them (they can imagine anything they want!).
2. Give students time to decide key aspects of their fictional future together, including what kind of wedding they want; honeymoon location; number of children; financial arrangements (e.g., shared or separate accounts, how expenses will be divided); what kind of house(s) they will have; whether they will have pets; and three physical objects they will own as a couple that they both really love. Examples are vacation souvenirs, framed pieces of art, cars, etc.
3. Introduce a role-play element. Ask the pairs to have one partner in each pair to raise their hand if they are the person who makes more money (to make sure this is explicit). If they make exactly the same amount, have them randomly choose one person to raise their hand. Then, hand out pieces of paper that are folded in half and instruct the students not to look at them.

The papers should say, “I want a pre-nup” on them. When you say “go”, have the students unfold the papers and read them out loud to their partner.

4. Next, make sure students understand what a pre-nuptial agreement is. Then, have each pair collaboratively create a prenuptial agreement that outlines how assets (favorite objects) would be divided, whether alimony or child support would be included, and how custody of children or pets would be handled. Ask students if they want to include clauses that account for factors such as length of marriage, infidelity, or other issues.
5. Bring the class together and have pairs share one key insight about decision-making, conflict, or emotional reactions that emerged during the activity.

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- How did your expectations about marriage influence your decisions? What disagreements emerged between partners, and how were they resolved? How did power and income differences affect decision-making?
- What emotions did the idea of a prenuptial agreement evoke, and why? How did your own relationship experiences, personality, attachment style, etc. affect your discussion and negotiations during the prenuptial agreement part of the activity?
- How do trust, commitment, and communication shape reactions to long-term planning in relationships? How would you feel if your partner in reality asked for a pre-nup?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. Describe the marriage you and your lab partner imagined having, including your planned marriage and honeymoon, careers and salaries, children, pets, house(s), favorite possessions, how you shared bank accounts and bills, etc.
2. Discuss how you and your partner talked about the pre-nup once it was suggested based on your “characters.” Also describe how you and your partner decided to create the terms of your pre-nup, including how you decided to divide assets, payments for alimony and child support, custody of children and pets, and whether you included any special clauses.
3. Finally, analyze how you think you would feel in “real life” if you were engaged and your future spouse suggested a pre-nup. Do your feelings and thoughts about a pre-nup have anything to do with any of the following concepts or theories? (Instructors: You can modify this list to match your class). Concepts you could discuss are:
 - Attachment theory / styles
 - Interdependence/investment model
 - Romantic myths
 - Growth vs. destiny beliefs
 - Maximizing/satisficing
 - Positive illusions / self-serving cognitive biases
 - Unrealistic beliefs
 - Terror management theory



Love Lab 14: Couples Counseling

In this activity, you will engage in structured role-playing to examine how different approaches to couples counseling shape relationships. This activity introduces applied perspectives on relationship maintenance, conflict, and therapeutic intervention.

Part I: Instructor Guide

Conceptual Framing

This activity demonstrates how different theoretical perspectives in couples counseling (psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, emotionally focused, systems, and sex therapy) shape how relationship problems are understood and addressed. Each approach emphasizes different causes of conflict, communication patterns, and pathways to change.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Compare and contrast different couples counseling approaches and how they conceptualize relationship problems
- Apply multiple therapeutic frameworks to relational scenarios
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of different therapeutic approaches to relationship dynamics

Materials Needed

- List of couples counseling approaches
- Scenario descriptions for couples
- Timer or stopwatch (a phone is fine)
- Optional: Die or random number generator (1–6) (or on an iPhone, “Hey Siri, give me a random number between 1 and 6”)

Activity Procedure

1. Ask students to form groups of three for role-playing. Explain that throughout the activity, all members of the group will have the chance to rotate through two different roles: They will either (1) be dating each other [two of the group members] or (2) be the couples therapist.
2. First, have them work in small groups to consider various forms of couples counseling. For each form of counseling, they should (1) define it in their own words, (2) consider how a therapist from that approach would talk to a couple, and (3) think about what kinds of questions or activities the counselor would suggest in a session. The forms of couples counseling I used were: Psychodynamic, Behavioral, Cognitive-behavioral, Emotionally focused, Systems therapy, and Sex therapy.
3. To ensure the role-playing uses fictional scenarios, provide three fictional options to them on worksheets or on PowerPoint slides. Each group can choose the option with which they are most comfortable. The options I used in class were:

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
You are happy and are here just to make sure you continue to love each other with as much joy for the next 50 years. You only fight occasionally and really only came to therapy today because your insurance covers a few free sessions each year.	You lowkey hate each other and are going to break up if the therapist can't "fix" you. You each think the other is a selfish idiot. Everything the other person says is annoying trash.	You love each other, but one person [you can pick] has a really annoying quality the other person can't stand [again, you can make this up]. You're hoping the therapist can figure out how to work out a way to either end the habit, make the other OK with it, or find a third solution.

4. Let students choose who will role-play as the counselor first, and then let the other two students choose their scenario option for attending fictional therapy. Remind them that you will be going through the activity two more times, letting everyone play each role. Once they chose the roles and scenario for the round, roll a die (or use a random number generator) to decide which form of couples therapy the student playing the counselor must use for that round. This ensures that the students have to feel prepared for any of the forms of therapy you have chosen to cover in class.
5. Repeat as many times as you can, given your class period's time, or until you've covered all the forms of couples counseling. Ideally, for each round students have around 5 minutes to conduct the "counseling session." Encourage the therapist to ask questions, interpret the couple's concerns, and suggest at least one intervention consistent with their assigned approach.
6. After each round, rotate roles so that each student has the opportunity to serve as the therapist. Students may choose a new scenario for each round if desired.

Post-Activity Discussion

Facilitate a group discussion in which you analyze the following questions:

- How did the therapist's assigned approach influence the types of questions asked and solutions proposed?
- Which approaches seemed most effective for each scenario, and why?
- Did some approaches feel more natural or intuitive than others?
- How might individual differences (e.g., personality, values, cultural background) influence which counseling approach is most effective?
- If you were seeking couples counseling, which approach would you prefer and why?

Part II: Student Reflection Lab Report

Suggested minimum length: 600 words

1. Briefly describe each of the forms of couples counseling we reviewed in class. You can do this in a table or through bullet points if you'd like. The point is for you to demonstrate that you understand three things about each approach: (1) its general theoretical perspective, (2) a potential benefit this approach offers that is different from the others, and (3) a potential drawback or limitation in this approach, compared to the others.
2. Based on your experience in the love lab, analyze which of the approaches you think you would probably use if you became a professional couples counselor. Why is this the approach you would likely favor? Which of the approaches would you be least likely to utilize in your counseling practice, and why?
3. Finally, if you were going to receive couples counseling for your own relationship(s), identify the approach you would be most and least likely to seek out or respond positively to in therapy, and why you believe this would be the case.