

***Interpersonal Relationships and Health:
Social and Clinical
Psychological Mechanisms***

3rd Purdue Symposium on Psychological Sciences

Sponsored by the

Department of Psychological Sciences

at

PURDUE

U N I V E R S I T Y

West Lafayette, Indiana, USA

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Monday May 7 & Tuesday May 8, 2012

Interpersonal Relationships and Health: Social and Clinical Psychological Mechanisms

***Organized by
Christopher R. Agnew and Susan C. South
Department of Psychological Sciences
Purdue University***

The Department of Psychological Sciences at Purdue University is pleased to host the third installment in its symposium series. This biennial event showcases current and emerging topics within the psychological sciences that form the basis for an edited volume following each symposium.

The ***3rd Purdue Symposium on Psychological Sciences*** gathers leading thinkers in social and clinical psychology, medicine, and sociology to consider theoretical and empirical issues relevant to understanding the mechanisms linking close relationship processes with mental/physical health. Each contributor highlights theoretical and/or empirical findings.

This symposium arises out of a recent explosion of interest, across multiple academic and research fields, in the ways that interpersonal relationships affect health and well-being. The goal for this gathering is to pull together a range of scholars focusing on different aspects of the topic, in order to encourage collaboration and cross-disciplinary initiatives. The resulting work (to be published by Oxford University Press) will be the first edited volume to pull together so many experts across the diverse fields represented whose research in the realm of relationships and health include such topics as child adjustment, mental illness, sexual health, and intervention efforts.

For our symposium, we have divided coverage into four sections spread over our two-day symposium: (1) Interpersonal Relationships and Health: Social and Clinical Overviews, (2) Marital and Family Relationships, Health and Well-Being, (3) Biology of Interpersonal Relationships, and (4) Interpersonal Relationships and Sexual Health. Despite the imposed sections, we hope and expect there to be significant overlap in issues examined across sections. We are indebted to our “symposiasts” for their valuable time and input and look forward to a fruitful gathering.

***Interpersonal Relationships and Health:
Social and Clinical Psychological Mechanisms***

Program

3rd Purdue Symposium on Psychological Sciences – May 7-8, 2012

Stewart Center, 3rd floor

Monday May 7, 2012

- 7:30 – 8:30 am: Continental Breakfast (*for all registrants*), Stewart 306
8:30 – 8:45: Welcome and Logistics, Stewart 302
Christopher R. Agnew, Professor and Head of Psychological Sciences
Christine M. Ladisch, Inaugural Dean, College of Health & Human Sciences

Interpersonal Relationships and Health: Social and Clinical Overviews

- 8:45 – 9:15: Relationships, Health, and Social Psychology:
The Power of Simple Theory
Christopher R. Agnew, Purdue University
- 9:15 – 9:45: The Interplay between Intimate Relationship Functioning and Mental Health
Susan C. South, Purdue University
- 9:45 – 10:00: Questions / Comments / Discussion
- 10:00 – 10:30: Coffee Break, Stewart 306

Marital and Family Relationships, Health and Well-Being

- 10:30 – 11:15: Family Experiences and Depression:
Guidelines and Targets of Intervention
Steven Beach, University of Georgia
- 11:15 – 12:00: Interparental Conflict and Children's Mental Health:
Emerging Directions in Emotional Security Theory
E. Mark Cummings, Notre Dame University
- 12:00 – 12:30: Questions / Comments / Discussion
- 12:30 – 2:00: Lunch (*for all registrants; in Stewart Center, Room 306*)
- 2:00 – 2:45: Intimate Partner Violence:
A Biopsychosocial Perspective on Etiology and Treatment
Chris Murphy, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
- 2:45 – 3:30: It Sometimes Takes Two:
Marriage as a Mechanism for Managing Chronic Illness
Mary Ann Parris Stephens, Kent State University
- 3:30 – 4:00: Questions / Comments / Discussion

3rd Purdue Symposium on Psychological Sciences – May 7-8, 2012

Stewart Center, 3rd floor

Tuesday May 8, 2012

- 7:30 – 8:30 am: Continental Breakfast (*for all registrants*), Stewart 306
8:30 – 8:45: Welcome Back and Logistics
Susan C. South, Purdue University, Stewart 302

Biology of Interpersonal Relationships

- 8:45 – 9:30: Relationship Researchers:
Putting the Psycho in Psychoneuroimmunology for Over 30 Years
Timothy Loving, University of Texas at Austin
- 9:30 – 10:15: Relationship Disruptions and Health:
From Social Epidemiology to Social Psychophysiology
David Sbarra, University of Arizona
- 10:15 – 10:30: Questions / Comments / Discussion
- 10:30 – 10:45: Coffee Break
- 10:45 – 11:30: On Marriage and the Heart:
Models, Methods, and Mechanisms
Timothy Smith, University of Utah
- 11:30 – 12:15: Family Relationships and Health in Everyday Life
Richard Slatcher, Wayne State University
- 12:15 – 12:45: Questions / Comments / Discussion
- 12:45 – 1:45: Lunch (*for all registrants; in Stewart Center, Room 306*)

Interpersonal Relationships and Sexual Health

- 1:45 – 2:30: What Makes Sex Safe and Satisfying?
Understanding the Interplay of Individual, Dyadic, and Contextual Factors
M. Lynne Cooper, University of Missouri, Columbia
- 2:30 – 3:15: Trajectories of Within-Relationship Relationship Quality, Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction among Young African-American Women
Dennis Fortenberry, Indiana University School of Medicine
- 3:15 – 3:30: Questions / Comments / Discussion
- 3:30 – 4:15: Positive Personality and Sexual Well-being in Long-term Relationships:
Results from the National Social Life Health and Aging Project
Linda Waite, University of Chicago
- 4:15 – 5:00: Overarching Comments / Discussion / Wrap-Up

Abstracts

(in alphabetical order by speaker)

3rd Purdue Symposium on Psychological Sciences – May 7-8, 2012

Relationships, Health, and Social Psychology: The Power of Simple Theory

Christopher R. Agnew
Purdue University

Although there is solid evidence demonstrating the benefits of interpersonal relationships to both mental and physical health, much work is descriptive rather than theory-derived. Social psychology is rich with theories, both simple and complex, emphasizing the critical role of the situation in understanding human behavior. I will review two simple yet powerful theoretical models and their recent application to understanding how relational dynamics influence condom use intentions and behavior in young adults at elevated risk for HIV acquisition: The Investment Model of Commitment Processes and the Principle of Least Interest. Using data from the Project on Partner Dynamics, the Investment Model provides a framework for understanding how commitment to a relational partner becomes associated with a reduction in perceived vulnerability to harm from the partner and a consequent reduction in motivation to enact protective behavior. The Principle of Least Interest provides the bases on which to understand whose behavioral intentions, within a dyad, will ultimately guide whether a couple will use a condom or not. Together, these theories show the power of simple theory in furthering our understanding of mechanisms underlying health behaviors.

Family Experiences and Depression: Guidelines and Targets of Intervention

Steven Beach
University of Georgia

Several lines of research converge to suggest that family experiences may influence mental health outcomes. I will review evidence linking early experiences to later family outcomes and depression, and evidence that early adversity influences epigenetic change, potentially setting the stage for broader impacts on later health and mental health. It currently seems that some individuals are at greater risk for adverse effects than are others and this risk may be captured by variation in genotype. Accordingly, I will briefly review the evidence for differential response to preventive intervention due to genotype. In adulthood we have less evidence about genetic and epigenetic impacts on response to intervention, but there is substantial evidence that marital interventions have a substantial impact on depression, and that we can find non-arbitrary ways to identify those in need of intervention. Accordingly, I will review the literature on marital therapy for depression and evidence for identification of marital discord, noting the need for research in key areas. Conclusions: strengthening and supporting families should help in the prevention of depression and other mental and physical health problems - and marital intervention in adulthood is an important aspect of intervention with depression.

*What Makes Sex Safe and Satisfying?
Understanding the Interplay of Individual, Dyadic, and Contextual Factors*

M. Lynne Cooper and Ruixue Zhaoyang
University of Missouri, Columbia

Historically efforts to understand sexual behavior, especially risky sexual behavior, have focused on stable characteristics of the person in isolation from characteristics of the partner and the context in which sexual experience takes place. In this talk, we will argue that although the beliefs, attitudes, values, needs and personal preferences of the individual play an important role in shaping one's sexual experience, these contributions cannot be understood in the abstract. An adequate understanding of sexual behavior requires that we consider the complex interplay among the person, his or her partner, and the larger context. Data from a large community sample of adolescents followed over 15 years, a sub-study of these individuals interviewed with their romantic partner, and two dyadic diary studies of young adults will be used to illustrate the limitations of a strictly individual-level perspective and to point the way toward a more comprehensive and promising model of sexual behavior that embraces both its dynamic and complex nature.

*Interparental Conflict and Children's Mental Health:
Emerging Directions in Emotional Security Theory*

E. Mark Cummings, Kalsea Koss, and Rebecca Cheung
University of Notre Dame

Relations between interparental conflict and children's adjustment problems are well established. Research in recent years has focused on understanding the psychological and physiological mechanisms accounting for these relations. Specifically, this talk will focus on the rapidly growing study of emotional security theory as an explanatory model (Cummings & Davies, 2010). The theoretical model will be described, including empirical findings supporting emotional security as a mediating process for relations between interparental conflict and children's short- and long-term adjustment. Additional new directions will also be discussed, including (a) advances in the conceptualization of emotional security processes, for example, the study of relations between physiological and psychological indicators of emotional security, and (b) the application of emotional security theory to the study of how multiple family processes affect child adjustment, for example, findings of recent studies on the role of emotional security in relations between parental depression and child adjustment.

Trajectories of Within-Relationship Relationship Quality, Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction among Young African-American Women

J. Dennis Fortenberry and Devon J. Hensel
Indiana University School of Medicine

African-American adolescents are typically well represented in studies focused on sexual behavior as a risk factor for social and public health problems such as early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. However, African-American adolescents are much less visible in research addressing sexuality and sexual health in the context of romantic relationships. This paper examines trajectories of relationship quality, relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction within romantic/sexual relationships, using data from a longitudinal study of 340 African-American adolescent women (ages 14-17 years at study enrollment). Triple latent growth curve models were used to model developmental change within relationships. In general, within-relationship quality and satisfaction were initially high but declined over time. Higher levels of sexual satisfaction were associated with generally slower rates of decline in relationship quality and satisfaction. These findings are discussed within the context of an experiential learning model for development of close relationships during middle and late adolescence.

Relationship Researchers:
Putting the Psycho in Psychoneuroimmunology for Over 30 Years

Timothy J. Loving and Elizabeth Keneski
The University of Texas at Austin

Dating back to House, Landis, and Umberson's (1988) seminal paper on the link between social ties and mortality, researchers have called for a greater understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the link between personal relationships and physical health outcomes. At the same time, mainstream psychoneuroimmunologists have pushed for more refined models that account for the incredible complexity that characterizes the relationship between the *neuroendocrine* and *immune* systems and how modulation of these systems affects objective health indicators. In this talk I will argue that a more holistic understanding of psychoneuroimmunological processes and how they relate to physical health can be achieved by paying similar attention to what constitutes the "psycho" in *psychoneuroimmunology*, and that relationship researchers are ideally suited to provide such attention. Specifically, psychoneuroimmunologists commonly equate "psycho" to "stress", but the application of close relationship theories, methods, and statistical tools highlights the multiple avenues through which such stress derives, ultimately providing a more nuanced picture of exactly how close relationships undermine or promote health. As a case in point, I will draw on the burgeoning adult attachment and health literature, noting the significant advances that have been made over the past twenty years. At the same time, however, I hope to highlight how these advances are limited in their ability to contribute to the larger psychoneuroimmunology literature, but this need not be the case. I will close with some humble suggestions about how close relationship researchers can play a more central role in the field of psychoneuroimmunology as a whole.

Intimate Partner Violence: A Biopsychosocial Perspective on Etiology and Treatment

Christopher M. Murphy
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a major public health and social problem. Victims and child witnesses experience a wide array of negative effects on physical and mental health. Extensive social costs include policing, prosecution, incarceration, and legal monitoring for IPV perpetrators, as well as family dislocation and lost productivity. Popular conceptual models promote narrow, often one-dimensional views of the causes and treatment of IPV. A broader, biopsychosocial systems approach is needed to integrate key empirical findings across multiple levels of analysis. A comprehensive understanding of IPV must account for individual, dyadic, and socio-cultural influences, encompassing a broad array of coercive relationship behaviors across a continuum of severity. Social information processing provides a core foundation for integrating research findings on contributing factors, including neuro-cognitive dysfunction, emotion dysregulation, traumatic stress exposure, psychoactive substance abuse, dyadic conflict escalation, and socio-cultural values. After explicating this broad conceptual analysis of IPV, it will be used to examine the limited efficacy of existing interventions and the need for translational research and innovative treatment development.

*Relationship Disruptions and Health:
From Social Epidemiology to Social Psychophysiology*

David A. Sbarra, Sita Nojopranoto, and Karen Hasselmo
University of Arizona

Using social neuroscience as a framework for integrating multiple levels of analysis, this talk reviews our research on the association between relationship transitions and health outcomes. The first section of the talk documents the effects of interest by describing a recent meta-analysis that quantifies the prospective association between divorce and risk for early death. We describe a series of epidemiological studies that qualify this effect, including research showing that the effect size between divorce and death varies as a function of how one's so-called "marital biography" is defined. In the second part of this talk, we review our laboratory studies that shed light on the potential mechanisms of action and moderators of health-relevant biological responding. Specifically, this section of the talk focuses on how adults create (or fail to create) meaning in the wake of their separation, as well as potential gender differences that may drive the observed associations between marital dissolution and health. The talk concludes with a discussion of future directions for this line of research.

Family Relationships and Health in Everyday Life

Richard B. Slatcher, Erin T. Tobin, and Daniel J. Saleh
Wayne State University

For over a decade, researchers have incorporated cortisol sampling into investigations of everyday stress in families. However, little is known about how specific ongoing stressors (e.g., work stress) are related to daily fluctuations in cortisol. Further, virtually all studies of everyday stress in families have overlooked child health, focusing exclusively on parents. Our research takes into account the whole family system. In this talk, I present work examining daily stress and cortisol in families and describe current research that uses an innovative technology to assess daily stressors at home. In Study 1, married couples provided saliva samples and indicated their worries about work while at home. Wives' cortisol was associated positively with their own work worries and with their husbands' work worries, whereas Husbands' cortisol was associated positively only with their own work worries. Wives low in self-disclosure showed a stronger association between work worries and cortisol. In Study 2, the preschool-aged children of the couples from Study 1 provided saliva samples at home and wore a device called the Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR), a digital voice recorder that participants wear while going about their daily lives. EAR-assessed child conflict at home was associated with children having less "healthy" diurnal cortisol rhythms. I then describe our ongoing EAR research investigating the links between everyday family behaviors, asthma morbidity and biological mediators (including diurnal cortisol, gene expression, and epigenetic markers) in adolescents in Detroit, MI. Discussion focuses on the use of emerging technologies and biomarkers in social and clinical health research.

On Marriage and the Heart: Models, Methods, and Mechanisms

Timothy W. Smith, Carolynne E. Baron, and Catherine Caska
University of Utah

The quality of marriage and similar close relationships predicts the development and course of coronary heart disease (CHD). Although being in such relationships is associated with reduced cardiovascular risk, marital strain and disruption are associated with increased risk for the initial development of CHD and for poor medical outcomes among CHD patients. These associations illustrate the importance of close relationships in health, but also suggest the potential health benefits of relationship interventions. Three issues are central in the further evolution of this literature, in order for it to guide the development and implementation of risk reducing interventions. First, future research on marriage and CHD should utilize current multi-dimensional and structural conceptual models of marital adjustment, as opposed to older, single dimension models. Second, research to date has relied almost exclusively on self-reported marital quality, but other methods (e.g., behavioral assessment) may provide greater utility in predicting cardiovascular outcomes. Finally, the set of potential mechanisms linking marital quality to the development and course of CHD should be expanded to include a broader range of biobehavioral processes. We illustrate each of these issues with recent research, and discuss implications for intervention.

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The Interplay between Intimate Relationship Functioning and Mental Health

Susan C. South
Purdue University

Most people will enter into a long-term romantic relationship, including a marital relationship, at some point in their lives. These intimate relationships are an important source of both support and strain in a person's everyday life. The mental and physical health of both individuals in the relationship can be affected by, and in turn negatively affect, relationship functioning. In the current talk, I review findings from the areas of intimate relationship functioning and mental health and well-being, with an eye toward understanding how relationships can function as a pathogenic context for mental illness. At this point, research has documented the significant associations between poor relationship quality and most major forms of psychopathology. These effects are found both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, with evidence for bi-directional interplay between relationship functioning and mental health. What is needed going forward is a focus on understanding the mechanisms that can account for these relationships. Behavior genetic methods offer one potentially intriguing way of examining the mechanisms of interplay between relationship processes and individual outcomes, and I review recent findings from my lab using these methods. In the future, more research is needed that can combine individual difference variables, couple-level interaction variables, and longitudinal methods to understand the interplay over time.

It Sometimes Takes Two: Marriage as a Mechanism for Managing Chronic Illness

Mary Ann Parris Stephens
Kent State University

Many chronic conditions of later life (e.g., diabetes, heart disease) can be managed effectively through lifestyle behaviors such as diet and exercise, but older adults experiencing these conditions frequently find it challenging to make and maintain lifestyle modifications. Among married couples, it is common for spouses to try to assist their ill partners (patients) with making recommended changes in lifestyle behaviors. This presentation aims to illuminate the many ways in which spouses of chronically ill patients attempt to influence their partners' adherence to prescribed health behavior, as well as the effects of these efforts on changes in patients' health behaviors and health status. To set the stage, chronic illness is conceptualized as a family problem (more specifically, a dyadic problem) rather than solely a problem of the individual with the disease diagnosis. The presentation highlights the theoretical and empirical literature bearing on direct and indirect social mechanisms by which marriage confers its health benefits. It draws heavily on the programmatic research that my colleagues and I have conducted on spouses' attempts to support and control the dietary behavior of their partners with type 2 diabetes.

*Positive Personality and Sexual Well-being in Long-term Relationships:
Results from the National Social Life Health and Aging Project*

Linda Waite
University of Chicago

In this paper, we examine the relationship between personality and sexuality in 953 married and cohabiting couples from a nationally-representative survey of older adults. Using items from the MIDI personality battery, we fit a structural equation model which extracts respondents' general propensity to identify with all socially-desirable trait adjectives, in addition to the five dimensions of personality (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism). We label the new dimension 'Positivity,' and examine its relationship to the quality of couples' sexual lives in the context of bivariate probit and bivariate ordinal probit models. We find that Positivity is associated with heightened arousal during sex, and also greater physical satisfaction in their relationship, but only in women. Furthermore, women with more highly open, conscientious and extraverted male partners also reported greater sexual arousal; men whose female partners exhibited these traits did not report increased arousal. We close with implications for understanding gendered roles in sexual relationships through the lens of personality research.

Symposiants

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