

*Are you having relationships with people from all over the world?...*  
*Do you provide regular updates on your love life through Facebook and twitter?...*  
*Are you constantly bombarded with information on how relationships should work?...*

**November 5 – 7, 2009.** Researchers from all over the world will meet at the Lawrence campus to answer just some of these questions. They will present research on sexuality, love, friendship, parenting, and other relationship topics. The Close Relationships Interest Group at KU has invited psychologists, communication specialists, anthropologists, sociologists, biologists, and others to be a part of the bi-annual mini-conference of the International Association for Relationship Research (IARR) at the University of Kansas (KU).

*Here are some examples what researchers will present at this sensational conference:*

**Your parent or your spouse? Which relationship is the site of "true love"?**  
**Dr. Phia Salter and Dr. Glenn Adams**

Although discussions in Western literature and media often portray true love as romantic connection between sexual partners, one might also argue that a "truer" form of love characterizes the parent-child relationship. Drs. Phia Salter and Glenn Adams find that views of what constitutes true love are not randomly distributed, but vary systematically as a function of sociocultural forces. This presentation finds that different ideas about true love are associated with different forms of Christianity in West African settings.

**The way you take care of your ill partner depends on what you got from your parents years ago...**  
**Dr. Gery Karantzas and colleagues**

This study finds a link between people's relationship style and the way they cope with their partner's cancer, Alzheimer, etc. These Australian scholars have discovered that when you are secure about your relationships, you can improve the ability to cope, which in turn increases the psychological well-being of both partners, even when one's partner is severely ill. Being insecure, on the other hand, leads people to focus on themselves rather than their partner and makes them less likely to cope with their partner's illness. This, in turn, can result with worse health outcomes for both partners.

**Are you hot or not? The consequences matter more in urban than rural settings.**  
**Drs. Stephanie Anderson, Glenn Adams and Victoria Plaut**

Research has found that attractive people have better outcomes--not only more successful relationships, but also better jobs and happier lives-- than unattractive people. However, this new study shows that the effects of attractiveness on outcomes may be true in only urban settings, where the relationship market provides greater opportunity for relationship choice and greater influence of the preferences (e.g., for physical attractiveness) upon which choice is based.

In contrast, relationships in rural settings provide less room for personal choice, and therefore people are less dependent on attractiveness. The researchers argue that people in urban settings must cultivate a higher degree of attractiveness to secure the benefits of relationships, but people in rural settings are somewhat free from reliance on attractiveness.

**Killing me softly... Can we help people break-up more kindly?**  
**Dr. Tara Collins and Omri Gillath**

One of the most difficult times to show compassion and kindness is when terminating a relationship. Dr. Tara Collins and Dr. Omri Gillath now find a significant link between feeling secure and the use of compassionate breakup strategies. People who feel secure about themselves and their relationships were found to use more compassionate break-up strategies. Insecure people use more uncompassionate strategies. Despite these links, when insecure people were asked to focus on positive relationship-related memories, which lead them to feel more secure, they were less likely to use these uncompassionate strategies.

### **Not gonna write you a love song, but I'll analyze it for you...**

Everyone appreciates love songs, but did you know that love songs are actually useful for us? According to Melanie Canterbury and Omri Gillath from the University of Kansas, love songs can help us deal with our frustrations within close relationships, and lead potential mates know our preferred type of relationship. In their study, the researchers examined participants' favorite love songs and their thoughts and feelings regarding these songs. Love songs were found to help people maintain their relationship by validating people's experiences and emotions (this is not just me it happens to everyone). Songs were also found helpful in communicating peoples' relationship preferences. For example, people that tend to prefer short-term sexual relationships to long-term romantic ones reported preferring songs that had a sexual promiscuous theme to them. Further work from these researchers examines ways to use these qualities of love songs to enhance people's well-being and relationship skills and satisfaction.

### **What can a monkey named Titi and a little field mouse teach us about love?**

According to Karen Bales, a researcher from the University of California, Davis, the answer is: a lot. Our knowledge of the neurobiology of social bonding has made great strides in the last few decades, with most research focusing on two hormones, oxytocin and vasopressin. However, the neurobiological basis of bonding between parents and children has been studied very differently than bonding between adults, and the focus has been almost exclusively on mothers. Monogamous animals, such as the prairie vole or the titi monkey, allow us to study the neurobiology of parenting from the perspectives of mother, father, and child. Bales will discuss the basic findings from prairie vole research, how early experience can affect parenting and its underlying neurobiology later in life, and whether or not findings from rodents are holding up well in primate models.

### **Women talk about the "C-word" and are better off for it!**

"Cancer" is probably the most dreaded word that can ever cross our doctor's lips. But over two million women in the United States survive today after being diagnosed with breast cancer. Research shows that cancer survivors benefit greatly from the social and emotional support that they receive from others. One great source of this support is participation in a breast cancer support group. While many of these groups exist, little is known about why some are more functional for their members than others. Adrienne Kunkel, from the University of Kansas, and her colleagues identify Bosom Buddies as a hugely successful breast cancer support group and examine what exactly its members do and say for one another. Among several surprising findings is that there is not as much emotion expressed, as popular conceptions of support groups would lead us to believe. Instead, group members share their experiences as inexact guides for others' reactions and behaviors.

### **The mourning after...why not love me BEYOND "till death do us part"?**

Everyone eventually loses someone they love and is thrust into the world of bereavement, grief, and mourning. Until just a decade or so ago, Western culture was subjected to understandings of grief that promoted progress toward "closure," "moving on," and "letting go" of loved ones who are deceased. A newer paradigm of grief theory recognizes the value and health of instead continuing bonds and revising relationships with the departed. Researcher Michael Dennis of Emporia State University joins with Robert Neimeyer of the University of Memphis, a central figure in this new wave of grief theory, to review how we can maintain the most long-distance relationships ever – between the living and the dead! Eulogies, poetry about death, and both fiction and non-fiction writing about grief are examined to see whether popular culture is keeping up with recent ideas about mourning.