

Note to Instructors: June, 2022

Eli Finkel
Northwestern University
finkel@northwestern.edu; @EliJFinkel

I overhauled my undergraduate relationships course, “Relationship Science,” in the winter of 2019, and I significantly updated again in 2021 and 2022. I wanted a course that focused on the most important findings from our discipline, but also that—in contrast to most such courses—grounded the ideas in a broader cultural and historical context. I’m making my materials publicly available in the hope that they might prove useful for other instructors.

Northwestern uses the quarter system (trimesters) rather than semesters, which means I only get nine weeks to cover the entire field. Of the eighteen 80-minute class sessions, I lose three sessions to exams, meaning that my course consists of fifteen sessions of content. If you’re on the semester system, you’ll probably experience less anguish than I did about having to cut so much important content. In the “Course Outline” document, I offer recommendations for additional content to cover beyond what I was able to fit into my nine-week course.

Below, I offer a tour of the files and folders containing my course materials. Before accessing those materials, please read this document in full so I can walk you through some of the more challenging decisions I confronted in developing the course, many of which I’ll continue to revisit in future years.

Topic Selection

The topics I cover do not represent a random selection of relationship science. I cover research that I find important and interesting, but your definitions of “important” and “interesting” will surely differ from mine in some respects—and the brevity of quarter-length classes and structure of the course mean that I’m not able to cover even some of the most important and interesting work. My topic selection was also significantly informed by the textbook I used (see below), as I try to achieve moderate content overlap between course readings and lectures. In a few cases in which an important topic received extensive discussion in the reading, I didn’t prioritize covering that topic in the lectures.

I do cover a fair bit of my own work (the work of my collaborators and myself), not only because I find some of that work interesting, but also because (1) it’s good for students to be able to connect with the research (e.g., “I emceed these speed-dating events in the Dittmar Art Gallery in Norris, just behind the Starbucks, and all the participants were, like you, Northwestern undergraduates”), and (2) it’s sometimes useful to be able to talk about the background behind the research (e.g., “My collaborators and I thought it was important to run the study in this way because prior research had shown X, but our intuition was that that was an artifact of quirky research methods”). You may want to jettison some of that content.

Textbook Selection

Most of the reading for the course comes from two books: (1) the third edition of Tom Bradbury and Ben Karney’s *Intimate Relationships* (2019) and (2) my own *The All-Or-Nothing Marriage* (2017). Bradbury and Karney’s is a textbook (and costs what textbooks cost), and my book is a trade book (and costs what a paperback costs, perhaps ~\$15). I wrote my book to develop a new theory of marriage, especially in the U.S., but also to share major findings from relationship science with the general public and to situate those findings within a broader historical and cultural context. I believe that the structure of my course integrates the readings pretty seamlessly into the lecture content. (If you think you might want to adopt a similar structure for your own course, email me; I’ll have Penguin Random House to send you a copy of *The All-Or-Nothing Marriage* for your perusal.)

I seriously considered three textbooks for this course—not only Bradbury and Karney’s, but also Rody Miller’s *Intimate Relationships* (2018)¹ and Garth Fletcher et al.’s *The Science of Intimate Relationships* (2019). All three books are excellent. I have used the Miller textbook alongside *The All-Or-Nothing Marriage* (I’m happy to offer recommendations for how other instructors might do so), and I was happy with it. The Fletcher et al. textbook is also impressive; it just dovetailed a bit less well with how I structure my course. Indeed, as you can see on the syllabus, I ended up assigning one chapter from each of those two textbooks as supplemental readings. I’m happy with how the Bradbury and Karney textbook worked in 2022, but I’ll certainly keep an eye on all three textbooks (and perhaps others) as additional editions are published and as I update my course.

Course Content

You can access the core course content through these six documents and folders, all of which are readily visible in the OneDrive folder:

1. NoteToInstructors_ReadMeFirst_2022.docx: This is the document you’re currently reading.
2. Syllabus_Psych313_Spring2022.pdf: Self-explanatory.
3. CourseOutline_RelationshipScience2022.docx: This is an outline of the course, with the major research topics organized by lecture topic. The italicized text in this outline represents video clips.
4. PowerPoints folder
 - This folder contains all of the PowerPoints, of course. Each PowerPoint file contains a number of notes to myself, including information about whether I had too much/too little content, citations or references for the studies I’m covering, information about the methods of those studies, notes for next time I teach the course, etc. (I use a PC, but I’m hopeful that it shouldn’t take too much reformatting to make the work on a Mac.)
5. Readings folder
 - This folder contains the five supplementary readings—those not contained in either of the assigned books.
6. Videos folder
 - This folder contains the video clips for each topic. The clips represent a collection I’ve been developing, culling, and editing for many years, and I’m delighted with it. That said, the video quality isn’t always excellent, especially because I created some of them by pointing my iPhone camera at my TV or my computer. Also, the collection isn’t exhaustive, and a couple of topics could use more coverage. If you have recommendations for additional videos, please do share them with me.
 - As you can see when perusing my lecture slides, I embed the video clips within the relevant PowerPoint deck, and I construct the animation sequence to optimize the student experience.
 - My naming scheme for the video clips consists of: (1) a number indicating the ordering of the clips (e.g., “03” means that this video is the third clip of the day), (2) the source (e.g., “GoodWillHunting”), and (3) the topic the clip illustrates (e.g., “AvoidantAttachment”).
 - Video clips that aren’t labeled with a number are those that I’m considering adding to the course next time around but didn’t include in 2022.

Note: I’m making this content available to instructors upon request (just email me), but it’s intended exclusively for instructors. Please don’t share these materials anybody else. If you know other instructors who would like access to this content, please have them email me.

Stay In Touch

If you end up using these materials, I’m eager to hear how the experience goes for you. If you have feedback or recommendations, I certainly welcome them (finkel@northwestern.edu).

¹ I recently discovered that a new 2022 edition of the Miller textbook has been published. I’ll be checking out it soon.