



Psychology

# Newsletter



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Welcome to the February issue!

February is a busy month for most, but even more so with the elections running, we hope everyone voted for their favourite candidates!

Love is in the air this month, with Valentine's day, or is it? Read our piece on Valentine's day and the different interpretations of love and attachment. Looking at the historical views, and relating it to research from one of our very own staff members.

In this issue we have also included a piece about Moodle, including what we like and dislike about the online resource website! From the perspective of a student and a lecturer.

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# Love and Attachment : Valentine's Day

by Veronica Savva



Every year, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, many people all over the world exchange cards, chocolates, gifts, or flowers with their special "Valentine". The day of romance, widely known as Valentine's Day, dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Has anyone ever thought about what the history of love conceals? In their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study, students taking the "Emotion" module, taught by Dr Tracy Robinson, learnt about "Love and Attachment". An emotion is considered as basic if it is universal, appears also in some higher animals, may be associated with certain facial expressions and affects the biological functions of a body. Love has been considered as a basic emotion in addition to the six basic emotions proposed by Ekman (1999) as well as embarrassment and pride.

More than 4,000 years ago, love was viewed as loyalty and friendship among the King and his followers; it was often mentioned in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as a part of Western religion, thoughts and beliefs. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the meaning and definition of love changed considerably. People who were truly in love ate and slept less, they were constantly thinking of their beloved. They could not even think of having an affair with another partner and they looked silly because of smiling without reason and being abstract very frequently. In the colonial period of America, Puritans considered passionate love as a threat to one's commitment to God. In a nutshell, love was a prerequisite of marriage; unmarried couples should not have any erotic relationships and if they slept together in bed, they should remain dressed unless they were married. Interestingly, in those eras, divorces were rare, and loyalty, deep understanding, thrift, and compromise were the main characteristics of relationships.

At some point in life, Americans' life changed significantly; there were changes in the economy, many people moved from farms to cities, women received many rights and started to become more entitled. Moreover, social relationships between males and females changed extremely, and there was a free choice in love and marriage partners. This new ideology was the initial factor that increased the emphasis on the degree of finding the "right" partner, which ultimately led to the development of what has been named "romantic love". Therefore, romance has been described as a recent invention of culture, and doubts about one's partner's love is surrounded by this subjective term as it is something that fluctuates significantly in the course of a relationship.

Generally, love makes all species feel happy. From a biological and evolutionary viewpoint, love cements bonds keeping families together which increases their chances of survival. Industriousness, motivation and empathy towards each other lead to the creation of a common future via sharing common values, emotions and desires in order to attain their goals. An interesting topic discussed in the lecture is whether adulthood is a reflection of childhood attachment.

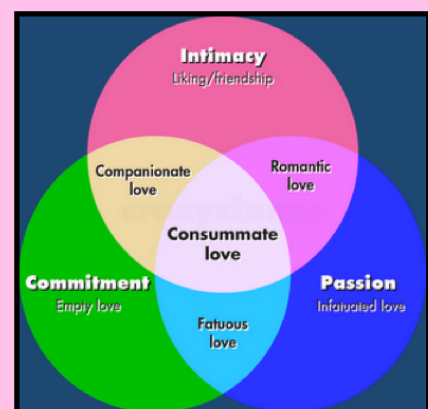
Darwin, Freud, Bowlby and many other researchers across times considered adult love to be a mirror of childhood connection. Massive data has supported the idea that attachment styles, namely secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent, are the same in both infancy and adulthood, indicating that adults' experiences of and attitudes towards love are influenced by their style of attachment developed in childhood.

As the styles of attachment have been mentioned, it might be interesting to discuss here interesting research conducted by academic staff from our department. It has been shown that the different attachment styles, increase positive human mood after interacting with an animal, whereas another attachment styles, let say fearful avoidant, increases negative moods.

Attachment to a pet is related to the relationship a child has with his/her parents based on certain feelings of security towards the parents. Dr Gerulf Rieger and his colleagues (2010) undertook interesting research based on this particular topic, and more specifically on how spouses and cats affect human moods. It has been found that cats mainly reduce the experiences of bad moods, but, interestingly, they do not increase the experiences of good moods. The reason might be the fact that cats are distracting their owners from emotional distress, just as when they are listening to music or watching TV. However, the effects of cats and activities are possibly limited compared to the ones resulting from interactions with humans. Human partners can influence both good and bad moods, albeit in different ways.

What is more, people who feel like having a small number of significant people by their side are most strongly attached to their cats, and the less social support from humans a person has, the more reciprocal behaviour there is between the human-cat pair. According to research undertaken in New York, most pet owners (84%) responded that they would hold on to their significant other if they were asked the following question: "Which would you dump if one had to go - your sweetheart or your pet?" A sizeable 14%, however, answered the opposite. When people feel distressed, when they break-up and need love, they develop a stronger bond with animals, as pets can give love easily even without reciprocity. Undoubtedly, the sharing of love with a human being is much more essential than any other, due to the ability of understanding through talking and communicating.

Last but not least, a healthy relationship, otherwise known as consummate love, is a mix between three individual love substitutions. In Sternberg's triangular theory of love (1998), the basic components of love are: intimacy (warmth, closeness, sharing), passions (sexual attraction and excitement) and commitment (intention to remain together). If you are interested in finding out how you could create the great love of your dreams, the triangular theory of love could certainly help you to understand how you could change in your attitude and behaviour towards your beloved one. In fact, it is harder to maintain love than to achieve. Nevertheless, you should not worry at all if your relationship status at the moment is single. Sometimes the "right" or "wrong" person comes to you at the wrong time. Never hurry to fall in love, and do not dream of a perfect love story taking into consideration novels and stories from different people, books, and films. Remember that love is an internal state that involves emotional upheaval, and "romance" is just an invention of the culture. What all human beings indeed need are commitment, loyalty, understanding and support from both parts.



## 60 second Interview

*Lucy Glover - Departmental Administrator*

**Favourite TV show?**

Have I Got News for You. I seek out documentaries and comedy and avoid dramas or anything too emotionally intense when I want to relax.

**If you could live anywhere in the world where would it be? And why?**

Norway in the Summer because of its awesome natural beauty and Wivenhoe in Winter: that is where my friends are.

**All time favourite book?**

I'm a bit of a fan of old classics, especially Tess of the D'Urbervilles or anything by Jane Austen for sheer satisfaction.

**If you could meet any celebrity who would it be?**

**What is your favourite type of food ?**

I have a few questions that I would like to ask Derren Brown.

Anything unhealthy, preferably involving chocolate.

**When you were growing up what did you want to become in life?**

A ballet dancer.



## Moodle: The pro's and con's

by Vivian NG



Moodle is an online resource system that enables learning for the ease of students. Moodle is straightforward, easily accessible and very active in the Department of Psychology. Many uses come out of this online resource as it gives students the opportunity to have access to information for their course. It is organised and unique to each user, having their own modules listed on their home page with resources which can be accessed in relation to these modules such as lecture slides and forums.

The online forum feature is useful in allowing students to interact and communicate about the module content. It enables students to receive more clarity on topics they may not understand fully through the support of other students and lecturers. From discussing things in the forum, students benefit from having a peer explain the content in a way fellow peers can understand. Sometimes content is not understood completely through lecturer's explanations, providing an alternative for those who are having trouble. In addition to this, students are often afraid to ask a question during a lecture which is often encouraged so that others can benefit if they have a similar query. This can be daunting in a large room full of hundreds of students, which is where Moodle is helpful in providing a substitute.

However Moodle is sometimes at risk of over use as students ask various questions that can often be found amongst other resources or repeat questions that may have previously been asked. As the system is directly linked to our individual Essex email accounts, this can often result in an excess amount of emails being sent out to students. This coincidentally

causes students to have a negative view of Moodle and may not use the forum to its full potential.

Last year, lecturers put up their PowerPoint presentations, however recently a PDF version was uploaded instead. Some students find this frustrating because they enjoy going through each slide one by one. It is easier to access and it follows what the lecturer says during their lecture or seminar. Some students may not have even noticed this slight change and may prefer this layout, as it may be easier for printing.

On the other hand Moodle allows for better home learning with individuals, in a circumstance where students were unable to attend certain lectures, the content is all still available to them. In addition to this the system can be useful during stressful revision periods as lecturers often provide revision guidelines and past exam papers for students to practise from. Having all the resources in one place can be very handy!

We also asked lecturer Dr Nicolas Geeraert about his views on Moodle and this is what he said. I was one of the first lecturers in the department to adopt Moodle for my lectures, and have been using Moodle for the past 6 years. Moodle is a great tool that can be used for many different things. Most modules use it primarily as repository for materials (i.e. module outlines, handouts, etc.). However, it can also be used for things like Q&A forums, quizzes, etc. Over the years, I have played with all of these tools and many students seem to like them. A few years ago, I did some statistical analyses on some of my modules, and it was clear that engagement on Moodle was a good predictor for exam performance on the module. Engagement on Moodle would be a good proxy for motivation in general, and so that makes sense. So in general I think online learning platforms (such as Moodle) are a great thing. However, I do believe there is no substitute for 'live teaching' in a lecture room or small group discussions. So, in that sense I see Moodle (and other online platforms such as Listen-again) as an additional tool for learning and teaching, that is these platforms are great to support learning and teaching instead of replacing it.



## Interview with Annelie

by Madiha Shabir



Dr. Annelie Harvey has been at the University of Essex for seven years studying for her undergraduate degree in Psychology, masters degree in Research Methods in Psychology, PhD, and finally she finished her journey with lecturing. Dr. Harvey has left the Psychology department to take up a new lecturing post at the Anglia Ruskin University. However, we have asked Dr. Harvey about her time and experience at the University of Essex.

### **What were the biggest differences from taking your bachelor degree, masters and then PhD?**

I think the biggest difference for me was not moving from undergraduate to postgraduate study, but beginning undergraduate study. I felt the biggest “jump” was the transition from A Level education to University. During my first year at Essex, I soon realised that a BSc required a great deal of commitment, independent learning and self-motivated organisation. Once I adapted to this style of working and learning, the transition through each year, onto my Masters and finally my PhD was a steady, yet manageable, increase. I felt with each year of training in psychology, my skill and knowledge base was expanding. This is what prepared me for the subsequent challenges of undergraduate and postgraduate study.

### **How did you feel about going from being a student at the department to lecturing? Was it difficult to adapt to a new role as a lecturer?**

In one sense it felt very strange changing roles. However, I was aware of what it was like to be a student at Essex and this helped in informing me on how to be a lecturer at Essex. I reflected back on the lectures I had attended and incorporated what I valued to be the most important elements into my lectures (e.g., clarity, examples). Because I studied at Essex for over 7 years, I was lucky enough to get to know the lecturers very well.

The support base at Essex is fantastic and for every query I had, there was more than one person who was happy to help. Although giving a lecture was a daunting thought at first, I made sure to prepare thoroughly and be confident in what I was saying. I also have had experience talking to large groups of people from attending a number of conferences during my PhD training. I found that with practice, experience, support and preparation the role felt like a very natural progression.

**What advice would you give undergraduates?**

I think the workload can get unmanageable at times without proper organisation. Although it is difficult at times, my best advice is to try and keep on top of things. Make detailed notes and do the essential reading each week. I found that doing the reading whilst the topic is still fresh and current will help to consolidate the material better. As a result, organised, detailed and relevant notes made revision much more manageable; I was reminding myself of the material rather than learning it.

**How was second year? Any good memories from second year at the university?**

Second year was very enjoyable. I loved moving off campus into a house with friends. As I was based off campus, I found myself staying on campus in between lectures and getting to know the other students on my course better. This gave me not only a great support system during my studies, but I also built up some good friendships that I still value today

**What will you miss the most about the University of Essex?**

The people. I made some great friends at Essex and the staff helped me in my career in so many ways. As I am still local, I hope that this is not “goodbye”. I plan to continue collaborating with my colleagues at Essex and keep in contact.

**When did you find out that you wanted to become a researcher?**

I enjoyed studying psychology so much that I felt a PhD was the next natural step. I originally wanted to be a teacher and I thought what better thing to teach than a subject I enjoy to students who are keen to learn? With research you are not only learning more about psychology, but also discovering and forwarding the science. The idea of adding to the literature and, one day, my findings being used in lectures was a big motivation.