

# Enduring Love?

## Couple Relationships in the 21st Century



### Newsletter 2 - September 2012

Welcome to the second newsletter of the *Enduring Love?* research project, a study of long-term couple relationships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We hope you find this update interesting and useful. You can read much more about developments on our project website.

[www.enduringlove.co.uk](http://www.enduringlove.co.uk)

In this newsletter we've provided some details about our activities as well as information about the project team members and their responsibilities. We'd be delighted to receive any feedback or input from you, to include in future issues.

### Project update

The project team is now deeply involved in fieldwork and the online questionnaire has, so far, been completed by over 5,000 individuals. In addition our iTunes audio and video podcasts have received more than 24,000 hits, with interest particularly strong in late January when the collection ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in The Open University's download chart for that period.

<http://itunes.apple.com/itunes-u/enduring-love-for-ipod-iphone/id495106174>

We've also been involved in a range of activities:

- Led workshops on mixed methods research (using the Enduring Love? project as illustration) at The Open University's Students Association Conference (Milton Keynes, June 2012).
- Participated in a prestigious international symposium 'Beyond the East West Divide: Gender, Intimacy and Modernity and presented a paper titled 'Researching couple relationships and personal lives: A mixed methods approach' (Hong Kong, May 2012).
- Presented papers at the British Sociological Association Conference titled 'All you need is love? Couple relationships and negotiations of economic security' and 'Adult couple relationship support and education: Developments and tensions in policy making' (Leeds, April 2012).
- Attended the *Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships'* (TCCR) Parliamentary Briefing and Reception at the House of Commons (London, April 2012).  
<http://tccr.ac.uk/policy/policy-briefings>
- Participated in a symposium on 'Stable Relationships for a Stable Society', organised between St George's House and Relate (London, March 2012).
- Presented a paper at the American Association of Geographers Conference, titled 'What's love got to do with it? Negotiating home life, love life and the meanings and uses of household space in couple relationships' (New York, February 2012).

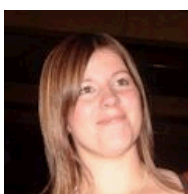
- Talked to trustees and supporters of *Marriage Care*, where Professors Scott Stanley and Dame Janet Walker also presented their latest research on support for marriage and cohabitation (London, February 2012).
- Engaged with local communities and health professionals in London and Milton Keynes in order to disseminate information about the project and recruit potential participants (ongoing).
- Reviewed Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts* (Polity Press, May 2012) for the LSE Review of Books and the publicly available OpenLearn site.

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/society/politics-policy-people/sociology/interrogation-modern-love>

In addition, two PhD students joined us in April 2012, bringing with them a fascinating set of interests around questions of long-term relationships.



**Thierry Chessum** is interested in issues of masculinity, theories of the emotions, problems in the philosophy of social sciences, and in linking theory and empirical work. He also has a strong interest in graphic novels and their use in disseminating complex ideas from the social sciences.



**Danni Pearson's** primary research interests surround sexuality, LGB individuals and relationships. Her PhD, co-funded by Relate, will look at young same-sex couples in long-term relationships as well as counsellors' experiences of working with same-sex couples.

## Dialogue

One of the project's aims is to facilitate dialogue with others working in the field of relationships in all their myriad and diverse forms. Here we highlight just a few of the ways that we're doing this.



## Blogging and print

**Meg Barker** is a member of the project's Dissemination and Media Strategy Group. Her blog continues to comment on relationship-related news and to build a list of links to others researching these areas. Recent posts include responses to reports on infidelity, body image and on mental illness in the NHS. Meg is also building up a series of resources for individuals and groups to accompany her new book, *Rewriting the Rules*).

<http://rewritingtherules.wordpress.com/>

Meg's work was picked up by Angela Neustatter in her discussion in *The Guardian/Observer* about managing love and relationships in a way that works for the 21st century. We were delighted that the *Enduring Love?* project was also mentioned in this high profile piece.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/12/angela-neustatter-accept-infidelity-in-marriage>

## Affiliates

A number of organisations, individuals and research centres are affiliated to the project. Below are some updates on their work. Please get in touch if you are an affiliate and would like your research featured here.

**OnePlusOne and Working Families** have just published a research report, titled 'Happy Homes and Productive Workplaces'. Its aim was to investigate the impact of personal and relationship well-being on work performance and vice versa. The research found that a positive association between relationship quality and work engagement existed independently of work-centric, relationship-centric and socio-demographic factors.

<http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/HHPW-full-report.pdf>

**Relative Strangers** is an ESRC funded research project, based at Manchester University, exploring how heterosexual and lesbian couples who conceive using donor sperm, eggs or embryos, negotiate telling parents and relatives about their decision to use a donor. The project team comprises Professor Carol Smart (Principal Investigator) and Dr Petra Nordqvist Research Associate and Co-Investigator).



[http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/research/relative-strangers/video/update\\_jan2012/index.html](http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/research/relative-strangers/video/update_jan2012/index.html)

Some agreements between lesbian couples and gay donor fathers about parenting after donor conception have ended up in court when agreements break down. Carol Smart has been looking at how courts are dealing with these disputes.

[http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/research/relative-strangers/video/legal\\_cases/index.html](http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/research/relative-strangers/video/legal_cases/index.html)

**Relate** is currently involved in a major evaluation project for the Department for Education (DfE) to evaluate the effectiveness of their Relationship counselling, provided both by phone and face to face. The evaluation may help to determine future funding decisions, as the DfE seeks the best ways of providing relationship support. The evaluation project will run until February 2013. If you would like more information on the project, or how to get involved, you can contact 0300 100 1234.

<http://www.relate.org.uk/news/73/index.html>

## What's happening out there?



Here are a range of resources that have caught our attention and which we thought may be also be of interest to some of you. Do contact us if you have either a recent publication or some research findings that you think would be of interest to readers of the project's newsletter

## Everyday lives

**Love and Marriage: A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Romance.** This three part series follows the history of marriage in Britain from the 1900s to the present day. It will be shown on BBC Four, beginning Tuesday 21 September at 21.00.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01msfkl>

**Keeping the Spark Alive.** Susan Quilliam, member of the project's Dissemination and Media Strategy Group (see below), will be hosting a live web chat on The Couple Connection website between 20.00 and 21.00 on Wednesday 26 September. Her focus is on what makes long lasting marriages and relationships.

<http://thecoupleconnection.net/>

**The Office for National Statistics (ONS).** For the first time in July 2012, the ONS published provisional annual 2011 and final annual 2010 civil partnership statistics for the UK.

[http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_274464.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_274464.pdf)

## Research findings and publications

A study by Robin Dunbar and others on mobile phone use, reported online by the publishers of *Nature*, shows how much romantic relationships appears to be 'driven by women', with striking sex differences in the gender-bias of preferred relationships that also vary across the lifespan.

<http://www.nature.com/srep/2012/120419/srep00370/full/srep00370.html>

Research on social and emotional support, from the ISER at the University of Essex, found that men who are partnered rely heavily on their spouse or partner for positive social support.

<http://research.understandingsociety.org.uk/files/research/findings/Understanding-Society-Findings-2012.pdf>

An article in the December 2010 issue of *Sociology*, titled 'Wives' Part-time Employment and Marital Stability in Great Britain, West Germany and the United States', has been nominated for a prestigious prize. Written by Dr Lynn Prince Cooke (University of Bath) and Dr Vanessa Gash (University of Manchester), it has been chosen as one of the finalists for the Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award. The authors used large-scale data sets in the US, UK and Germany, and found that the effects of women's part time or full time employment on marital stability varied across countries, reflecting differing socio-economic contexts for women's employment and the ways in which it affected their relationships.

## Project Team

### Principal Investigators



**Dr Jacqui Gabb**

My current research interests centre on interdisciplinary psycho-social approaches for researching and theorizing personal relationships and emotional wellbeing, with particular interest in the areas of families, intimacy, sexuality and gender.

[http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Jacqui\\_Gabb](http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Jacqui_Gabb)



**Dr Janet Fink**

My work has largely been focused upon 20th century Britain with an emphasis on how personal and family relationships were constituted, negotiated and represented not only in policy and legislation but also through popular culture.

[http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Janet\\_Fink](http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Janet_Fink)

### Research Associates



**Dr Martina Klett-Davies**

My research has specialised in relationships, family and gender studies and modern social theories, with a focus on the interplay between social identities, social policies and cultural understandings.

[http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Martina\\_Klett-Davies](http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Martina_Klett-Davies)



**Dr Tam Sanger**

My research interests broadly lie in the areas of gender, sexuality and intimacy. Previous research has focused upon the governance of trans people and their partners through their relations with one another, individuals outside of this relationship, identity-based groups, and the state.

<http://open.academia.edu/TamSanger/About>



**Dr Reenee Singh**

I am a family systemic psychotherapist, working at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. My research interests are in the interdisciplinary areas of constructions of 'the family', interracial couples, culture, migration, family life and the process of change.

[www.tavistockandportman.ac.uk/doctorateinsystemicpsychotherapy](http://www.tavistockandportman.ac.uk/doctorateinsystemicpsychotherapy)

### Dissemination and Media Strategy Group members



**Dr Meg Barker**

I am a senior lecturer in psychology at the Open University as well as being a qualified therapist working at the Lesbian and Gay Foundation. My research and therapy work focuses on relationships and sexuality. My recent book, and related blog, *Rewriting the Rules*, explores popular understandings of relationships and how these can be negotiated.

<http://www.megbarker.com/>



**Dr Susan Quilliam**

I am a psychologist with a particular commitment to exploring and enhancing intimate partnerships. I have published widely in this field. My career currently spans working as an agony aunt and coach; facilitating workshops and seminars both for the public and for health and education professionals; advising, campaigning and writing for several organisations.

<http://www.susanquilliam.com/>