

December 2023

The Love Consortium NEWSLETTER

As 2023 draws to a close, we at The Love Consortium can't help but reflect on what a full and rewarding year it has been. Whether you're new to our community or have been following us since the beginning—thank you for being here. We wish you all a warm holiday season and look forward to seeing what 2024 has in store!

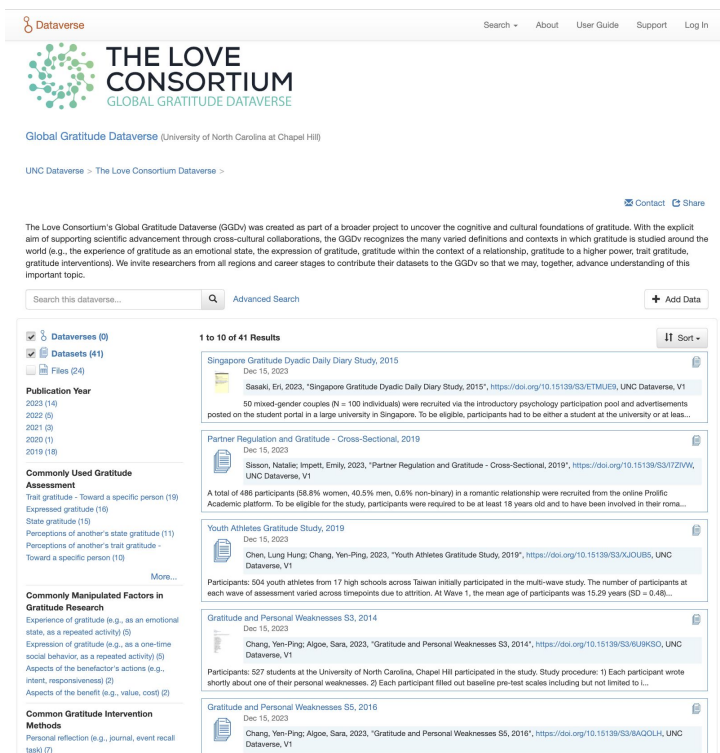


TLC staff connecting with researchers at the EASP General Meeting, Krakow, Poland

TLC Updates

Here's what The Love Consortium team has been up to since our last newsletter:

- **EASP:** TLC Director Sara Algoe and Program Manager Laura Kurtz attended the General Meeting of the European Association of Social Psychology in Krakow, Poland where they connected with researchers from around the world and shared more about TLC's new Global Gratitude Dataverse!



Search TLC's new Global Gratitude Dataverse:
<https://dataverse.unc.edu/dataverse/ggdv>

- **Global Gratitude Summit:** In September, TLC hosted our first ever Global Gratitude Summit—a virtual event featuring 20 speakers and panelists sharing and discussing the latest research on gratitude. Approximately 200 people from 32 countries registered for the event, making it the most geographically diverse event in TLC history! View the program [here](#).
- **Global Gratitude Dataverse:** The September Summit also marked the official launch of the [Global Gratitude Dataverse \(GGDv\)](#). This collaborative resource builds on the success we've seen with [The Love Consortium Dataverse](#) and seeks to advance research on gratitude through the use of archived data. There are now 41 datasets described on the GGDv, featuring a range of methods, measures, and contexts for studying gratitude. Search the GGDv or [contribute your datasets](#) today—you just might find your next great collaboration!
- **Gratitude Grants:** In addition to launching the GGDv, we announced [two funding opportunities](#) to advance research on gratitude: one for graduate students and another for early career scholars. Applications are currently under review and decisions will be announced by February 16, 2024.

Call for Speakers

Just under two weeks remain to submit your research for presentation at the 2024 TLC Love Conference, to take place May 15-17 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina!

We are accepting submissions for three presentation formats: posters, flash talks (5 minutes), and full talks (15-20 minutes). You may select any of those format(s) for which you'd like your research to be considered.

Submissions will be evaluated through peer-review according to the following criteria:

- Scientific contribution: To what extent does the research advance the science of love?
- Methodological quality: How sound are the methods, analyses, and conclusions?

[Learn more and submit your research today!](#)

Special Issue Alert: "Advances in the Science of Mating, Love, and Attachment in Romantic Relationships"

TLC Dataverse contributor, Adam Bode has asked that we share the following announcement:

"In this Special Issue [of *Behavioral Sciences*], we seek to cast a wide net to build a collection of studies that examine romantic relationships through a new lens or build on existing work. Specifically, this Special Issue on love, mating, and attachment will highlight studies that expand knowledge on questions and topics that never cease to captivate and motivate us and which are critical for the propagation and well-being of our species. We welcome papers from all fields that focus on mating, love, and attachment in romantic relationships/pair bonds and that use a variety of methodologies to examine these topics."

Submissions are due by May 31, 2024.

[Read more about the submission and review process here.](#)

Dr. Bianca P. Acevedo
Guest Editor

Adam Bode
Guest Editor Assistant



Statistics Support Program

Have you taken advantage of our new statistics support program yet? Anyone analyzing data posted to The Love Consortium Dataverse or Global Gratitude Dataverse is eligible for this free resource!

[Book one-on-one time](#) with [Dr. Amie Gordon](#) to ask her perspective on different analytical approaches for testing your research question, get feedback on your selected analyses and/or code, or tap her expertise for tackling tricky data structures or interpreting findings. Wherever you are in the data analysis process, Amie will help point you in the right direction.

New slots are added on a monthly basis, so if you don't see a time that works for you now, be sure to check back in the new year!

To submit an announcement, opportunity, or news item to be considered for inclusion in future TLC newsletters or other communications, please complete our

[Announcement Submission Form](#)

You've Got a Friend In Me: The Impact of Interpersonal Relationships at Work

Guest contributor: Lauren R. Locklear, PhD; Texas Tech University

Personal experience and anecdotal evidence underscore the importance of the connections we have with others at work.

Most people can recall enjoyable experiences they had working with a close coworker. The emphasis placed on our workplace connections can also be seen in idioms such as “the people make the place” and in colloquial terms like “work bestie” or “work wife.” Gallup polls show that having a best friend at work is associated with increased employee engagement and satisfaction, and reductions in turnover intentions ([Patel & Plowman, 2022](#)). Further, comparing these polls over time shows that workplace friendships have become even more important to employees in post-pandemic years. Decades of research in applied psychology and management has empirically supported the importance of interpersonal relationships at work. For example, one of the largest contributors to an employee’s job satisfaction is their coworker satisfaction ([Ironson et al., 1989](#)), and satisfaction with coworkers even impacts one’s life satisfaction ([Simon et al., 2010](#)).



Dr. Lauren Locklear

What are Interpersonal Relationships at Work?

The importance of workplace connections is evident in the myriad ways scholars attempt to explore the issue. Indeed, numerous constructs exist that capture the quality or quantity of interpersonal relationships an employee has at work. For example, scholars have examined constructs such as workplace social connections, workplace friendships, high-quality connections, coworker relationship closeness, and relational attachment.

Common among these definitions is an emphasis on interdependence and interaction as well as elements of affective, cognitive, and behavioral connection or closeness. Importantly, workplace interpersonal relationships go beyond the basic coworker relationships in that interpersonal relationships are communal and support-based whereas coworker relationships are instrumental and exchange-based ([Sias & Cahill, 1998](#)).

The Impact of Interpersonal Relationships at Work

Interpersonal relationships at work have long been thought of as universally positive phenomena, but recent research has begun to unpack the full spectrum of outcomes for employees. Though interpersonal relationships can positively impact employees, research shows that these relationships can also have unintended costs and consequences for employees and their organizations.

The Good

Interpersonal connections at work allow employees to have positive

emotional experiences, promote positive cognitions and motivations, and can foster desirable employee behaviors. Indeed, cultures in which interpersonal relationships are encouraged, such as in cultures of companionate love, can promote positive emotions and buffer against the effects of negative emotions like anxiety ([O’Neill et al., 2023](#)). Such cultures have also been shown to buffer against the negative effects of workplace loneliness ([Ozcelik, & Barsade, 2018](#)).

The impact of workplace relationships can also be seen in employees’ perceptions of themselves, their work, and their organization. For example, employees with relationships characterized by coworker closeness were more likely to feel that they mattered to others, which in turn decreased psychological distress ([Bonhag & Upenieks, 2023](#)). Similarly, workplace friendships have been linked to greater perceived job significance ([Mao et al., 2012](#)) as well as overall job satisfaction ([Morrison, 2009](#)), and organizational commitment ([Venkantaramani et al., 2013](#)).

Beyond perception, workplace relationships have been shown to promote desirable employee behaviors. One study found that workplace friendship promoted interpersonal citizenship behaviors via employees’ relational energy ([Xiao et al., 2020](#)), while another demonstrated a link between supervisors’ expressions of care and affection via companionate love and their employees’ felt gratitude and subsequent voice behaviors ([Belkin & Kong, 2022](#)).

Topic Deep Dive: You've Got a Friend In Me, *continued*

The Bad

Despite the many positive outcomes associated with workplace interpersonal relationships, not all interpersonal work relationships are created equal. Indeed, at times negative outcomes can arise when such relationships become “too close for comfort” or when the coworkers are dissimilar.

Research by [Ehrhardt and Ragins \(2019\)](#) deployed a complementary fit perspective to test whether there were limits to the observed positive effects of workplace relationships on employee perceptions and behaviors. They found that when an employee's relationships at work exceeded their individual relational needs, such as when they were provided too much social or instrumental support, they experienced less relational attachment to their workplace and were in turn less likely to engage in interpersonal citizenship behaviors.

Interpersonal relationships are also nuanced and not all attempts to build them are equally received. [Dumas et al. \(2013\)](#) found that integration behaviors such as attending company parties or discussing one's personal life with colleagues is associated with relationship closeness with coworkers, but this was only true for coworkers who were demographically similar. For coworkers who were demographically dissimilar, these integration behaviors did not lead to closeness. The authors show that this effect occurs because coworkers experience less comfort and enjoyment while integrating.

Even when relationships are positive and close, they can have unintended consequences. [Pillemer and Rothbard \(2018\)](#) explain that the goals and motivations of workplace friendships are often at odds with the goals of organizations. As such, close friendships at work can be detrimental to employee productivity, can promote conflict, can inhibit knowledge sharing, and can reduce perceptions of procedural and distributive justice.

Further, [Methot et al. \(2016\)](#) show that workplace friendships enhance positive affect, but also can reduce the performance of employees because many workplace friendships can cause exhaustion. Finally, when coworkers with high-quality interpersonal relationships express their companionate love, research shows that this can inhibit creativity ([Yang & Hung, 2015](#)) likely because of the effects of groupthink and a focus on positive relations rather than critical discernment.

Future Directions

Given the mix of positive and negative outcomes associated with workplace interpersonal relationships, more research is needed to understand whether and when these connections positively impact employees and their organizations. Several future directions could help answer these questions and others and continue to push forward the science of interpersonal relationships at work.

First, constructs and corresponding definitions have proliferated in the field. This construct proliferation makes integrating and synthesizing research on these concepts difficult. As such, future research on this topic would benefit from an integrative review in which these concepts and their definitions are clarified and perhaps, for some, even culled.

Second, and related to construct clarity, is the question of relationship quality versus quantity. Scholars tend to examine workplace relationships in several ways: as a binary “relationship / no relationship” variable, as a relationship quality rating, or even as a quantity of relationships (e.g., in social networks studies). The mixed findings in the literature might be better understood by separating out these ways of measuring interpersonal relationships at work.

Beyond conceptual and methodological directions, there are several substantive areas for future research.

As the incidence of virtual and hybrid work arrangements have become more common, particularly in a post-pandemic world, the nature and development of work relationships might differ in these settings. Indeed, most of the research reviewed here details studies of workers in traditional, face-to-face workplaces. Thus, future research should explore how interpersonal relationships in virtual settings might differ from traditional work arrangements. Further, the research reviewed highlighted in-group and similarity biases for the development of workplace relationships. That is, coworkers tend to be friends with people that they perceive to be similar to them in some way, whether in, for example gender or race (i.e., surface level diversity), or in personality and culture (i.e., deep level diversity). These similarity biases could be problematic for the development and maintenance of workplace relationships in the face of a diversifying workplace. Thus, future research would benefit from exploring the ways that surface and deep level diversity impact relationship development and the downstream consequences of friendships among diverse sets of employees.

Finally, future research might focus more intentionally on bridging the gap between basic understanding and applied science by developing interventions to promote high-quality connections at work. Practical ways to promote relationships among employees would not only serve as a valuable tool for managers, but a benefit to the field and organizations more broadly.

Have a topic you'd like to share with the TLC community?

[Submit an idea here!](#)

Spotlight Researcher: Dr. Jessica Methot

Jessica Methot is an Associate Professor of Human Resource Management at Rutgers University and a Distinguished Research Professor of Management at the University of Exeter Business School. Her research lies “at the intersection of interpersonal workplace relationships and social network dynamics, including how formal HR practices transform informal social networks, the functional and dysfunctional consequences of workplace relationships, and their temporal and multidimensional features.”



We’re particularly interested in your 2023 paper “[Unpacking the microdynamics of multiplex peer developmental relationships: A mutuality perspective](#).” Could you tell us what you set out to investigate with this study?

The motivation for this study was three-fold. First, as a social network analyst, I was interested in understanding how peers create a support system and how these relationships evolve over time. We all have constellations of relationships that provide different kinds of work and nonwork support, and often our relationships are complex and multi-faceted. We know from previous research that multi-dimensional relationships (what we academics term “multiplexity”)—those that involve the exchange of multiple different types of resources or support, such as advice and friendship—are critical for employees’ career success, identity formation, and well-being. But we didn’t have a good grasp on what factors help foster and strengthen these networks of relationships over time.

Second, we are also seeing a shift away from reliance on formal one-on-one organizationally-sponsored mentoring toward more informal *developmental networks*—informal connections inside and outside our organizations with people who take an active interest in and concerted action to advance our careers. Developmental networks offer a valuable alternative to formally managed mentoring programs; they’re able to provide a wider range of support and resources, and they allow us to be more entrepreneurial and thoughtful in our approach to building our networks. So, I wanted to learn more about this trend and how people are leveraging these informal developmental relationships with their peers.

Last, my coauthor had access to a great sample of participants in a Next Generation Leadership Program, where they were formally paired with a more senior mentor, but also progressed through the program over the course of several years with a

cohort of their peers. The organizers of this program were especially interested in uncovering how to boost engagement among participants, including with their mentors, peers, and program events. So, it was the perfect context to study how these peer developmental relationships (1) emerge, remain stable, or dissolve over time, (2) evolve into multidimensional relationships involving the joint exchange of both career support and emotional support, and, ultimately, which factors were most influential in creating a foundation for these relationships.

Overall, our goal was to “drill down” to the origins of these multiplex peer developmental relationships to identify drivers of their formation and change, which are important indicators of their long-term worth.

What were your most interesting findings? Was there anything that surprised you?

We drew from a theory called the *mutuality perspective*, which captures the sense that both people in a connection are engaged and actively participating. “Mutual” relationships embody three characteristics: reciprocity (where both parties are actively engaged in a “give and take”), trust (where a person is willing to be vulnerable to another), and trust symmetry (that there is shared vulnerability).

Decades of research has uncovered what basic factors can predict whether two people will form a connection—say, a friendship or the exchange of advice. These include individual factors like personality, as well as network tendencies like proximity (i.e., being in the same place at the same time) or the idea that we’re likely to become friends with our friends’ friends. So, we were really interested in seeing if, when we controlled for all these other factors that we know impact whether a relationship will form or strengthen over time, if “mutuality” factors still played a predictive role.

Spoiler alert: They do! Using a network analytic

Spotlight Researcher: Jessica Methot, *continued*

technique that regresses one network matrix on a series of other network matrices, we found that relationships characterized by mutuality factors—namely, reciprocity, trust, and shared perceptions of trust—were more likely to evolve into stronger, multiplex relationships. These findings reinforced the role of mutuality in generating developmental relationships beyond protégé factors (e.g., demographic variables), similarity (e.g., same gender), contextual factors (e.g., industry and organizational support), and structural features of one's network (e.g., third-party connections).

From our perspective, relationships embodying mutuality provide occasions for individuals to express and reinforce valued identities, offer cues that improve perceptions of meaningfulness in their work, and increase the likelihood they will consider criticism or negative feedback as opportunities for learning and improvement rather than failure. Our results demonstrate that “mutual” relationships are resource producing and have the power to propagate multidimensional exchanges that may not exist otherwise.

What's next for this line of work? Is there any particular aspect you're excited to pursue further?

Much of my research has been guided by the idea that employees can be strategic architects in crafting their professional and personal networks to maximize their benefit—be it career success, well-being, stress recovery, etc. In this way, quite a bit of our communication with colleagues, team members, and leaders is relatively formal, task driven, and transactional in an effort to get work done. But, I am also inspired by the fact that many of our daily interactions at work are fleeting, informal, and largely superficial.

So, I started to become interested in small talk at work—lighthearted, polite, scripted conversations that are not core to task completion.

Small talk is a polarizing topic: some people enjoy it, others absolutely hate it. But, it makes up a good chunk (about a third) of our conversations, and small talk with our colleagues is a social ritual that many of us had built into our days. I've been studying small talk at work for a few years now, and it's been vital in demonstrating how seemingly meaningless, spontaneous, informal interactions can be energizing and set the tone for stronger, positive, trusting work relationships.

What advice would you give to an early-career scholar aspiring to pursue a similar line of research?

One piece of advice I'd give is to become familiar with (and don't be intimidated by) many different research and statistical methods. When I first became interested in relationship science, I was only exposed to the study of workplace relationships through the lens of social network analysis. Social network analysis is a very quantitative approach, and it is really helpful in visualizing, analyzing, and theorizing about various individual, dyadic, team, and network level phenomenon. But it was only toward the end of my PhD program and in the early years of my time as an Assistant Professor that I learned about the rich qualitative work and rigorous experimental work being done by scholars at other institutions. Being able to not only pose a novel, important, and interesting research question, but being able to pair it with the most robust research method, is an important way to (1) advance science, (2) position your research in a relevant way to a broad audience, and (3) challenge yourself to learn something new on a daily basis. Some of the most impactful papers I've seen are multi-method, so read broadly, take methods workshops, and be agile in your approach to designing studies.

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