

September 2026

The Love Consortium NEWSLETTER

There's been plenty happening at The Love Consortium! From a new publication featuring contributions from researchers around the world to a workshop convening early career scholars across psychology's diverse subfields, this season has created exciting opportunities for building a more comprehensive science of love. We hope you enjoy catching up on everything our community has been building together.



TLC community members in Glasgow, Scotland for the IARR 2026 Conference

Recent Highlights

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

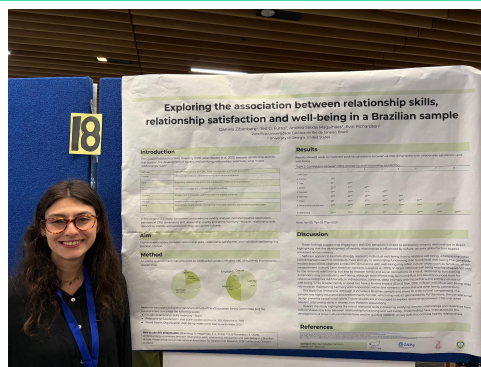
New Publication from the TLC Advisory Board and Global Ambassadors

We are delighted to share a new paper from members of the TLC [Advisory Board](#) and [Global Ambassadors](#). Involving authors from 18 countries, this article helps illuminate opportunities for a comprehensive science of love by opening collaborative opportunities worldwide. Be sure to read "[Globalizing the science of love: Toward a comprehensive science of care and connection](#)," published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*.

TLC Journal Club Hosted by the TLC Events Committee

The [TLC Events Committee](#) hosted the inaugural TLC Journal Club, bringing together researchers for a discussion of "[Can generative AI chatbots emulate human connection? A relationship science perspective](#)" by Molly Smith, Thomas Bradbury, and Benjamin Karney. The session opened with a moderated discussion and audience Q&A with the authors, followed by small-group breakout discussions facilitated by the committee.

TLC Community at IARR: Highlights



1. [TLC Fellows](#) Claire Shimshock, Hanieh Naeimi, Eri Sasaki, and Haeyoung Gideon Park shared findings from their projects using archived data available on the [Global Gratitude Dataverse](#) at the symposium, "New Advances in the Science of Gratitude in Close Relationships."
2. [TLC Global Ambassador](#) Daniela Zibenberg presented her poster, "Exploring the association between relationship skills, relationship satisfaction and well-being in a Brazilian sample."
3. [TLC Marketing and Public Relations Committee](#) member Kristina Castaneto gave her talk, "Hello again: Reaching out to old friends promotes happiness," at a symposium on how non-romantic relationships shape our lives.

Connect with TLC on social media for more frequent updates!



Looking Ahead

Here's what The Love Consortium has planned in the months ahead:

2026 TLC Virtual Love Conference



Join us virtually on **October 13, 2026 from 9 AM to 4 PM Eastern Time** for our fourth Love Conference! This free scientific meeting brings together researchers from around the world and across disciplines to engage with the latest evidence on love. Sessions will cover topics including love and morality, cultural perspectives on love, and [more](#), focusing on love within a range of relationship types. TLC Director Sara Algae, back from her year away, will give a keynote on the future of love research.

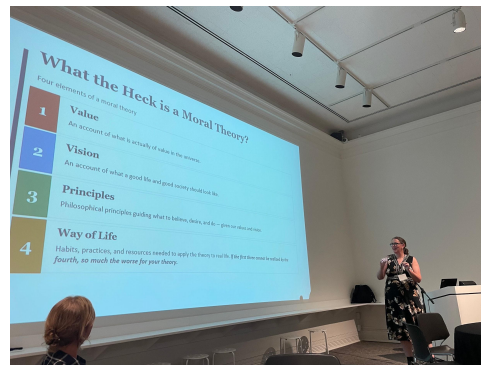
[REGISTER HERE!](#)

The Love Ethic Project

Last year, we joined a new project on love as a foundation for moral frameworks. [The Love Ethic Project](#) has seen significant progress in recent months, with even more on the horizon. Here's a look at the latest updates and upcoming opportunities from The Love Consortium's corner of The Love Ethic Project:

TLC Workshop on Love

Led by TLC Director Sara Algae and Advisory Board members Kristina Coop-Gordon and Amrisha Vaish, this three-and-a-half day invited workshop brought together [13 early career scholars](#) from across scientific disciplines to deeply connect about the current and future science of love. View the program [here](#).



The workshop opened with a keynote from [Meghan Sullivan](#), Founding Director of the [Institute for Ethics and the Common Good](#) at the University of Notre Dame. Learn more about the Love Ethic from Meghan [here](#).

Meet the Love Ethic Project Advisory Board

This project brings together scholars from Developmental, Clinical, and Social Psychology whose work informs how we understand the role of love in society. Their leadership as [TLC's Project Advisory Board](#) will deepen our community's contributions to a truly integrative understanding of the foundational role of love in today's world.

Early Career Research Grants to Advance the Science of a Love Ethic

Grants of up to \$20,000 USD each will be awarded to four early career scholars proposing research foundational to understanding an ethic of love, with the funding period beginning in May 2027. Stay tuned for the call for proposals opening in October 2026!

Connect with TLC on social media for more frequent updates!



The Love Consortium Dataverse

Looking for datasets for your next project? Explore the 18 new dataset descriptions added to [The Love Consortium Dataverse](#) so far this year, spanning dozens of countries and research topics—including new longitudinal data from Turkey, cultural studies in Spain and Brazil, and the Africa Long Life Study.



Sarah Galdiolo

[Development of Personality Traits, Attachment..., 2012](#)

[Family Alliance and Parents' Characteristics, 2014](#)

[Attentional and Memory Biases in Parents of Children..., 2017](#)

[Longitudinal Data on Couples During Lockdown, 2020](#)



Gül Gunaydin

[Turkey Couples Longitudinal Datasets](#)

- [Sample 1](#)
- [Sample 2](#)
- [Sample 3](#)
- [Sample 4](#)
- [Sample 5](#)

[Turkey Minimal Social Interactions Diary Study, 2024](#)



Saida Heshmati

[Cultural Models of Everyday Love in Contemporary Spain: A Mixed-Methods Cultural Consensus Study, 2025](#)

[A Mixed-Methods Cultural Investigation of Love in Everyday Life and Well-Being in Contemporary Brazil, 2026](#)



Kuba Krysz

[Happiness Meanders Study: A Cross-Cultural Dataset on Happiness, Emotions, and Models of Selfhood Across 48 Countries, 2019](#)



Amber Gayle Thalmayer

[Africa Long Life Study \(ALLS\), 2022-2026](#)



Alexa Weiss

[Moral Hypercrisis in Close Relationships](#)

- [Study 1, 2020](#)
- [Study 2, 2018](#)
- [Study 3, 2017](#)
- [Study 4, 2018](#)

Let Us Help!

Have you ever thought, *"I'd love to post a dataset description to The Love Consortium Dataverse, but I just don't have the time..."*?

We get it. It's hard to add another thing to an already full to-do list. So, let us help! Send us a paper, presentation, or other study materials that include information about your dataset (e.g., procedure, sample characteristics, measures), and we'll put together a first draft of a description for you. You can then review the draft for accuracy and fill in any extra details we may have missed.

You save time while opening the door for new collaborations. We get to add another great dataset description to the Dataverse! Win-win. Email us at theloveconsortium@unc.edu to get started!

The Love Consortium Skillverse

Have you checked out [The Love Consortium Skillverse](#) yet? Whether you're needing advice about incorporating a measure or method into your research, seeking someone to help you run unfamiliar analyses, or looking for a collaborator for a grant proposal you're drafting, our newest collaborative resource has you covered!

START HERE!

"I have twice posted a message on the Skillverse and have been very pleased with the results. In one post, I requested statistical analyses from an expert whose knowledge of multilevel modeling far exceeds mine. I was happy to receive a prompt reply from an expert who ran the analyses, wrote up publication-ready results, and charged a highly reasonable rate for just a few hours. I plan to continue to take advantage of the Skillverse—an excellent resource!"

—Dr. Erika Koch, St. Francis Xavier University



The Love Consortium Statistics Decision Tree

Choosing the right analysis is often the hardest part of a project. [The Love Consortium Statistics Decision Tree](#), developed by [Dr. Amie Gordon](#), is a "choose-your-own-adventure" guide to help you identify the best analyses for your specific dataset and research question. As you answer a series of prompts, the tree branches in different directions, leading you through analytical recommendations tailored to your data.

Working with data on social connection can be complicated. [The Love Consortium Statistics Decision Tree](#) takes some of the guesswork out of the process. Try it today and be sure to offer your feedback at the end!

Featured Publication

Congratulations to [TLC Love Fellow Tatum Jolink](#) and her collaborators on a new publication! Data from this line of work is described on [The Love Consortium Dataverse](#).

Check out ["Enacted love: Capitalization responses signal love, including toward strangers,"](#) published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*.

Don't forget to cite your dataset in any future publications!



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](#)

Minimal social interactions with strangers

Guest contributor: [Gillian Sandstrom, PhD](#); University of Sussex

It used to be harder to avoid talking to strangers.

A few short decades ago, there were no self-checkouts, no online shopping, and little remote working. Now, it takes no effort at all. Ironically, as it's become easier, I've gone from being a shy teenager trying to avoid strangers to someone who seeks them out. This personal evolution and its impact on my life inspired my research on minimal social interactions: interactions with strangers and acquaintances, as opposed to close others.

For me, talking to strangers is enjoyable, valuable, and meaningful. Research is starting to find evidence for a growing list of benefits. Both the person initiating the conversation and their conversation partner experience mood benefits, feel more connected, and learn more than they expect to.^{1,2,3} Even when the interaction doesn't involve a full-

fledged conversation, there are benefits: Simply greeting or thanking someone benefits a person's mood (in the moment and the next day^{4,5}) and merely making eye contact with (vs. looking past) someone increases their feelings of connection.⁶

Despite all these benefits, people regularly avoid talking to strangers. One theoretical model identifies likely barriers: lack of opportunities, lack of intention/desire, and (perceived) lack of competence.⁷ Empirical studies find evidence that we worry neither of us will enjoy the conversation, we won't like each other, and we won't know what to say.^{1,8,9} We worry it will feel awkward to compliment a stranger,¹⁰ or ask for help or support.^{11,12} Fortunately, these same studies find that we worry far too much—conversations with strangers generally go much better than we expect. We even underestimate how much we'll enjoy talking about boring topics!¹³

Our misjudgments don't stop once the conversation begins. One misestimation emerges *after* talking to a stranger. Research on the "liking gap" finds that we (wrongly) think that we liked our conversation partner more than they liked us.^{14,15} This tendency emerges at a young age¹⁶ and is surprisingly sticky: Roommates who've lived together and colleagues who've worked



together for several months still underestimate how much they're liked.¹⁷

Given that experience doesn't seem to correct these misestimations, where do they come from? Nicholas Epley and his colleagues suggest that these misestimations stem from the conversation initiator focusing more on their own competence (which they doubt¹⁸), while their partner focuses more on the warmth that the initiator is demonstrating.¹⁹ Elizabeth Trinh, Nicole Thio, and Nadav Klein offer a different explanation: We base predictions on static features like who our conversation partner is or what topics we will discuss, but the actual experience depends on dynamic features that we can't anticipate in advance, such as disclosure, listening, and responsiveness.¹³



Dr. Gillian Sandstrom

Continued on next page →

Topic Deep Dive, *continued*



The benefits and barriers differ depending on the individual and the situation. To date, research finds little evidence that personality moderates post-conversation benefits. In terms of predictions, however, people who are more shy tend to be more pessimistic.²⁰ Evidence for introversion is more mixed: Some studies find that people who are more introverted tend to make more pessimistic predictions before talking to a stranger, while others don't find evidence of moderation.^{1,9} Although minimal interactions surely work differently in different places, initial research finds that in Turkey²¹ and Japan²², as in Western samples, people who report talking to strangers more often tend to report higher life satisfaction.

To help people access the benefits of talking to strangers—and avoid

the health and social costs of loneliness—researchers have tested interventions to increase sociability. In one study, people choosing where to eat their food in an outdoor seating area were told that the color of someone's plate signaled whether that person was interested in talking. Participants were more likely to start a conversation with a study confederate whose plate signaled interest in talking than with one whose plate signaled a desire to be alone or one whose plate color wasn't defined to the participant.²³ In another study, repeatedly practicing talking to strangers reduced worries about rejection and increased feelings of competence—and showed some signs of encouraging people to initiate more conversations.²⁴

Research on minimal social interactions is still relatively young, leaving many avenues to explore. Future work will identify additional benefits, potentially including health (e.g., improving sleep, lowering stress) and community benefits (e.g., increasing trust, prosociality). Increasing sociability will remain a priority and will require new methods (e.g., using chatbots to provide practice opportunities). To optimize the effectiveness of these interventions, we need to better understand contextual effects, including possible limitations. A consortium of researchers from 70 countries will soon be collecting

data that will help us gain insight into the cultural and individual factors that moderate the relationship between minimal social interactions and well-being (see [Spotlight Researcher](#)).

In an age of widespread loneliness, minimal social interactions are valuable both because they contribute to feelings of belonging and because they are the building blocks of closer relationships. Research in our field has the potential to serve the world by giving people reason *not* to avoid interactions with strangers.

Learn more about minimal social interactions in Gillian's new book, [*Once Upon a Stranger: The Science of How "Small" Talk Can Add Up to a Big Life!*](#)



The Love Consortium is currently seeking guest contributors for future newsletters!

If you are interested in writing a deep dive about a topic related to social connection, want to suggest a researcher for us to spotlight in future newsletters, or would like to learn more about other science writing opportunities with TLC, please complete our

[Science Writing Contributor Interest Form](#)

Spotlight Researcher: Dr. Esra Ascigil

Dr. Esra Ascigil is a Postdoctoral Associate at Brandeis University. Her research examines how everyday social interactions, from close relationships to brief encounters with strangers, influence health and well-being. Her recent work focuses on understanding how these processes vary across cultures and across the lifespan.



What originally sparked your interest in conducting research in this field?

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, I was studying close relationships as part of my Ph.D. and hadn't given much thought to how interactions with people outside our close social circles could contribute to our well-being. Like many people, I suddenly found myself missing the small moments I had always taken for granted, like saying good morning to the bus driver or chatting with someone by the coffee machine. At one point, grocery stores allowed only one person from each household to shop at a time. If I was the one who went in, I would excitedly tell my husband about my 30-second conversation with the cashier, and he would joke, "You're so lucky you got to talk to another human being." Those everyday interactions suddenly felt surprisingly meaningful.

The more direct spark, though, came from someone who, at the time, was what psychologists would call a "weak tie"—someone I knew but wasn't close to. As I was finishing my Ph.D. and looking for postdoctoral positions in Turkey, my long-time mentor Emre Selcuk connected me with Gül Gunaydin, who was recruiting for a project on social interactions with strangers and weak ties. Joining her project gave me a completely new perspective on social relationships and sparked a lasting interest in understanding how even brief interactions with strangers and acquaintances can meaningfully influence our daily lives.

We're particularly interested in your 2025 paper "Minimal social interactions and life satisfaction: The role of greeting, thanking, and conversing." Could you tell us what you set out to investigate?

Previous research had shown that conversations with strangers and acquaintances could make people feel better, but we wanted to know whether even more minimal interactions, such as greeting an acquaintance or thanking someone who provides a service, could also contribute to well-being. This was an important gap in the literature because people

tend to avoid starting conversations with strangers and acquaintances. They often worry that they will not know what to say or that the conversation will be awkward. A simple hello or thank you, however, is much lower stakes and may feel more approachable. Because cultural norms shape how people interact with strangers, we also wanted to examine whether these associations extended beyond the Western countries where most previous research had been conducted. We tested our research questions in a nationally representative sample from Turkey, a relatively tight and collectivist culture where people tend to be more cautious about interacting with strangers.

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

We found that conversing with strangers and acquaintances was associated with greater life satisfaction in our sample from Turkey, replicating previous research findings in a different cultural setting. An even more interesting finding was that momentary interactions like greeting and thanking acquaintances were also associated with greater life satisfaction. This was an encouraging finding because greeting and thanking can be easy to incorporate into everyday life, making them a promising target for intervention efforts.

What surprised me the most, however, came from our supplementary analyses. We explored whether minimal interactions might be especially beneficial when our close relationships are falling short. Although we didn't have a direct measure of close relationship quality, we found that conversations with strangers were more strongly associated with life satisfaction among people who reported receiving less kindness from close others than among those who reported receiving more kindness from close others. We were able to test this idea more directly in a later diary study.* On days when people perceived their close others as less responsive than usual, engaging in minimal interactions was

Spotlight Researcher: Dr. Esra Ascigil, *continued*

associated with greater happiness. On days when close others were more responsive, minimal interactions were not associated with happiness. We are now conducting more studies to better understand this pattern. If these findings continue to hold, they suggest that interactions with strangers and acquaintances may be especially important during times when our close relationships do not fully meet our social needs.

In line with our [Topic Deep Dive](#), what takeaways or implications might one draw from your work regarding the benefits of talking to strangers?

Many efforts to improve social connection and well-being focus on strengthening close relationships, and those relationships are incredibly important. Our research suggests that we shouldn't overlook another source of connection: the brief interactions we have with people outside our close social circles. My hope is that our work encourages people to be more open to the opportunities for social connection that are abundant in everyday life. Whether it's saying hello to a neighbor, thanking a bus driver, or exchanging a few words while waiting in line, these small moments can help us feel more connected.

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

I'm very excited to learn more about how culture

shapes minimal social interactions and their well-being benefits. Most of what we know about interactions with strangers and acquaintances comes from research conducted in Western countries, so an important next step is to study these interactions through a cross-cultural lens.

We are currently working on a large international collaboration involving researchers from more than 70 countries. The Stage 1 Registered Report for this project has been accepted in principle at the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. We are now entering the data collection phase. Together, we are examining whether the positive association between minimal interactions and well-being holds across the globe, and which individual or cultural factors strengthen or weaken that association. It's been especially exciting to work with researchers from around the world, whose perspectives have helped us think more broadly about what minimal interactions look like in different cultural contexts. If you are from one of [these countries](#) and interested in contributing to this project, please reach out to me at esra@brandeis.edu.

*Check out another one of Esra's papers, "[When close ties falter, do minimal interactions matter? Daily dynamics of social connections and well-being](#)" and the [related dataset](#), described on [The Love Consortium Dataverse](#)!

TLC Community Member Announcements

Reviewer Zero Survey of Reviewers and Editors in Psychological Science

To support greater representation of diverse perspectives in the science of human connection, we're pleased to share this announcement on behalf of our colleagues at [Reviewer Zero](#).

Peer review is essential for our scientific enterprise, yet we know little about how reviewers and editors navigate this process. We seek to explore the experiences and perspectives of reviewers and editors of academic peer-reviewed journals across subdisciplines of psychological and behavioral science. If you have a graduate degree in a subdiscipline of psychology, human development, neuroscience, or related fields and have served as a peer reviewer or an action editor (associate editor, special issue editor, editor-in-chief) for an academic peer-reviewed English language journal in these fields, we invite you to complete [this survey](#).

2026 [loveresearch.info](#) Symposium

Each year, [loveresearch.info](#) hosts a symposium for researchers to present their findings on love in romantic relationships. The 2026 [loveresearch.info](#) Symposium will be held on **October 30, 2026** via Zoom. Presentations will be 12 minutes with 3 minutes for questions. **Abstract submission is open [here](#)**. The submission deadline is **October 4**. Successful applicants will be informed on October 5. Please note that presentations must relate to the science of love in romantic relationships (e.g., romantic love, passionate love, companionate love, intimacy, passion, commitment, pair bonds) rather than simply romantic relationships.