

Department of Psychology

Colloquium Series

Dr Nickola Overall from the School of Psychology, University of Auckland will be presenting her latest research on interpersonal processes and close personal relationships on **Wednesday 2nd December** at 4pm in **C5C498** (just above the Research Office).

Title: The costs and benefits of trying to improve close relationships

What are the consequences of attempts to change or improve intimate relationships? In stark contrast to the aim of improvement efforts, an initial series of studies found that attempts to change relationship partners reduced relationship quality. However, regulation success mitigated these negative associations. We next tested the success of different communication strategies exhibited within couples' recorded interactions in which partners were trying to produce desired changes in each other. Regulation strategies that varied in valence (positive versus negative) and directness (direct versus indirect) were associated with different costs (e.g., reducing relationship quality) and benefits (success in producing desired change), when contrasting concurrent (immediate) and longitudinal (long-term) outcomes. The results indicated that negative communication that directly engages the partner clearly conveys the severity of the problem and, thus, motivate change by the targeted partner. Moreover, a further set of studies revealed that soft and subtle attempts to accomplish change maintain harmony and satisfaction in the short-term, but ultimately fail to produce any real change and leave loyal individuals feeling unappreciated and ignored. The mechanisms underlying these findings will be discussed.

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