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Intimacy and Happiness Examined in UCSB English Professor's First Book, 'Ordinary Pleasures'

There's an almost subliminal current of affection that underlies the words and phrases that make up the day-to-day banter of loving couples. Kay Young, an associate professor of English at UC Santa Barbara, noticed that these intimate, happiness-creating exchanges have been overlooked by an academic literary culture too focused on pain, exploitation, and power relations.

Young has used this insight to open up an entire new domain of literary analysis.

The result is "Ordinary Pleasures: Couples, Conversation and Comedy" (The Ohio State University Press 2001), Young's first book.

In her book, Young examines a diverse cast of fictional couples from modern culture -- Rochester and Jane of "Jane Eyre," Darcy and Elizabeth of "Pride and Prejudice," Rick and Ilsa of the film "Casablanca," Ricky and Lucy of television's "I Love Lucy," Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers of "Top Hat" and more -- to look for narrative representations of such interaction in novels, television, and film.

To Young, the verbal and physical dialogue between those famous pairs demonstrates -- often in comedic fashion -- that happiness is not beyond the reach of mortals but is available in no small measure even in places as ordinary as daily

conversation. The play between lovers reveals, perhaps most of all for Young, the fundamental desire of humans to know another and to be known by another deeply and fully and passionately by being alive to one another in everyday life.

"These figures and the stories they represent shed light on the ways that people really do feel.

They model for us ways that couples play together, struggle together, and return to one another to experience what it means to be in a relationship over time," Young believes.

Young recalls that listening to adult conversations at her parents' dinner parties, she noticed that couples who enjoyed each other's company seemed to engage in playful verbal sparring.

"I would sit and listen to these people who had been married for years talking about themselves and their lives, and I would begin to wonder, 'Why are they together?

What's going on between them?'" Young said.

"It seemed to me that couples that had a kind of schtick or routine going between them also had an aliveness that showed a great potential to share life and to sustain them," she said.

In writing *Ordinary Pleasures*, Young drew on this early insight to combine in new ways diverse critical traditions from philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and narrative theory. She's pleased that 11 years of work is now in material form.

Critics are pleased, too.

"Literary culture is absorbed with the relationship between lovers and conversation," wrote Mark Turner, a professor of English at the University of Maryland.

"How could it have taken so long for someone to write a book about it? There is no other work directly on this theme and nothing like Young's fresh and engaging study."

Young will be reading and discussing her book, as well as signing copies, at coming events in Malibu and Westlake Village.

She will appear at the Malibu Jewish Center and Synagogue, 24855 Pacific Coast Highway, at 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 13; and at the Barnes and Noble bookstore, 160 South Westlake Boulevard in Westlake Village, at 7 p.m., Monday, Feb. 25.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.