

WAYNE STATE  
UNIVERSITY

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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

MASTER SYLLABUS

**Social Work 8620: *Advanced Interpersonal Practice: Couples Therapy*, 2 Credits**

**I. Course Domain and Boundaries**

Successful work with couples requires an understanding of the dynamics unique to intimate couple relationships in addition to theories and hypotheses that seek to explain individual behavior or behavior within social groups of unrelated individuals. Social workers who work with couples need an understanding of what promotes equality, trust, intimacy, and a desire for a shared future within committed couples.

Couples' problems sometimes present as well encapsulated relationship conflicts requiring brief intervention to reduce relationship distress and provide skills in interpersonal behavior. However, couples often present with deeply ingrained patterns of negative interaction, negative attributions, and heightened negative emotions or a profound loss of passion for the partner and the intimate partner relationship. In addition, couples' problems seldom exist as the single symptom in the couple's lives. Frequently, relationship conflicts interact with other emotional, medical, or social problems, especially with anxiety and mood disorders, sexual problems, substance abuse, physical aggression, personality disorders, bereavement, and physical illness. Relationship conflicts both contribute to and are exacerbated by problems within the individuals and their social situation. Couples' problems are affected by culture, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as by socio-economic status.

This course is designed to teach some well-known and respected models of couple's therapy. Students will be encouraged to understand that no one model of couples therapy adequately addresses the complex system of social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal conditions that come together to create distress and conflict between intimate partners. On the other hand, students will also be encouraged to understand that a haphazard, eclectic approach to couples therapy that removes technical applications from the theory and practice strategies that drive them and give them coherence and power often leads to ineffective or even harmful outcomes. Therefore, students will be introduced to a system of assessment and practice that is pluralistic and integrative in nature.

**II. KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES**

1. Acquire an introduction to the couples therapy literature
2. Understand couples from a pluralistic systems perspective, including the influence of culture and the social environment
3. Understand the principles of integrating couples therapy models
4. Understand how to shape couples therapy to the diverse problems, issues, and relationship styles encountered in social work practice
5. Gain understanding of intimate partner relationship dynamics
6. Gain knowledge of contrasting (specific) models of couples therapy

7. Understand how mental illness and the emotional problems of the individual impact intimate partner relationships and how these problems must be addressed in the treatment of relationship problems
8. Understand issues of marital dissolution and divorce
9. Understand important ethical issues unique to couples therapy

### **SKILL OBJECTIVES**

1. Gain the ability to assess and address couples conflict
2. Gain the ability to formulate couples therapy treatment strategies based on assessment and grounded in knowledge of couples therapy that is integrative and pluralistic
3. Apply couples therapy concepts and treatment strategies to common issues faced by couples
4. Apply knowledge of current couples therapy outcome research to formulating an intervention plan

### **III. PERFORMANCE CRITERIA**

Students' understanding of couples therapy theories and their ability to apply the theories will be measured by performance on exams, a paper, and participation in class discussions.

### **IV. TEXT**

Texts available at Marwil Bookstore. Some articles are in the on-line course reserves [link is on Blackboard site for this class].

Hendrix, H. (1988). *Getting the love you want. A guide for couples*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

Johnson, S. M. (2004). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection, 2nd Edition*, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

### **V. ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE**

The content of the course is divided into four units as follows:

Unit 1: Overview of couple dynamics and therapy, dynamics of diverse couples

Unit 2: Hendrix model

Unit 3: Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy

Unit 4. Comparison of models, ethics in couples intervention, couples with psychiatric disorders see sessional outline. Please complete required readings prior to the class.

### **VI. ROLE OF THE STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR**

See University Statement of Obligation of Students and Faculty Members to the Teaching/Learning Process.

## VII. COURSE OUTLINE/SESSIONAL CALENDAR

### Session/Topic

#### 1. Sept 07

Introduction to the Course, Expectations, and Assignments

Introductory lecture

Review of research findings on the effectiveness of couples therapy. Association between couple distress and psychiatric disorders

Distinguishing single model practice from eclecticism, pluralism, and integration

#### 2. Sept 14

Beginning to do couples therapy: opening session and assessment, initial consultation

Assessing the issues: depth of problem, role of culture; complications; use of assessment tools;

Setting up treatment contract

The first treatment session and subsequent treatment sessions

#### READINGS

Bischof, G. H. & Helmeke, K. B. (2003). Couple therapy. In L. Hecker & J. L. Wetchler (Eds.). *An introduction to marriage and family therapy* (pp.297-336). NY: Haworth.

#### 3. Sept 21

Working with diverse couples: gay and lesbian couples

#### READINGS

Sanders, G. L. (2000). Men together: Working with gay couples in contemporary times. In P. Papp (Ed.). *Couples on the fault line: New directions for therapists*, (pp.224-258). NY: Guilford.

Marvin, C. & Miller, D. (2000). Lesbian couples entering the 21st century. In P. Papp (Ed.). *Couples on the fault line: New directions for therapists*, (pp.259-283). NY: Guilford.

#### 4. Sept 28

Common Marital Therapy Strategies and Issues. Prepare/Enrich

Speaker/Listener Technique; Hendrix's Imago Therapy Approach

#### READINGS

Hendrix's Imago Therapy, part 1 pp.3-84

#### 5. Oct 5.

Hendrix's Imago Therapy Approach continued

#### READINGS

Hendrix's Imago Therapy, part 2 pp.85-156, pp. 247-269

6. Oct 12.

Hendrix's Imago Therapy Approach continued

READINGS

Hendrix's Imago Therapy, part 3, pp. 157-246, pp. 270-280

7. Oct 19.

An Experiential Approach

READINGS

Johnson's Emotionally Focused Marital Therapy, pp 1-71

8. Oct 26.

An Experiential Approach Continued

READINGS

Emotionally Focused Marital Therapy, pp 72-146

9. Nov.2.

An Experiential Approach Continued

READINGS

Emotionally Focused Marital Therapy, pp 147-241

10. Nov.9.

A framework for comparison of models of couple therapy

READINGS

Emotionally Focused Marital Therapy, pp 243-322

Be prepared to discuss The Peanut Butter Incident (Ch. 13) in detail

11. Nov.16.

Marital affairs and forgiveness in intimate partner relationship; how couples divorce

READINGS

Lusterman, D. D. (2005). Infidelity: Theory and treatment. In M. Harway (Ed.).  
*Handbook of couples therapy*, (pp. 237-251). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Rice, J. (2005). Divorcing couples. In M. Harway (Ed.). *Handbook of couples therapy*,  
(pp. 405-430). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

12. Nov.21 **NOTE: CLASS MEETS ON TUESDAY THIS WEEK**

Ethical Concerns

Ethical Marital Therapy Practice

READINGS

Magee, R. D. (1997). Ethical Issues in couple therapy: Therapist competence and values.  
In D. T. Marsh, & R. D. Magee, (Eds). (1997). *Ethical and legal issues in professional  
practice with families* (pp. 112-139). NY: John Wiley & Sons.

13. Nov.30.

Treatment of couples with psychiatric disorders and/or severely emotionally dysfunctional couples

**READINGS**

Gollan, J.K., Friedman, M.A. & Miller, I. W. (2002). Couple Therapy in the Treatment of Major Depression. In A. S. Gurman, & N. S. Jacobson. (Eds.). *Clinical handbook of couple therapy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed* (pp.653-676). New York: Guilford Press.

Miklowitz, D.J.& George, E. L. (2002). Couple Therapy Complicated by a Biologically Based Psychiatric Disorder. In A. S. Gurman, & N. S. Jacobson. (Eds.). *Clinical handbook of couple therapy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed* (pp.677-698). New York: Guilford Press.

14. Dec. 7

Review: Pulling together the pieces; Final Quiz

Paper due

**VIII. ASSIGNMENTS**

Quizzes: worth 40% of your grade

Four quizzes will be given at the beginning of class sessions. The dates of 3 of them are unannounced, and the 4<sup>th</sup> is the last week of class. Three quiz grades will be averaged for this 40% of your grade. There will be no make-up quizzes. If all 4 are taken, the lowest grade will be dropped. If you complete less than 3 quizzes, your grade will suffer a great deal. In addition, if you are late to class, you will have only the remaining time to complete the quiz.

Paper worth 50% of your grade.

Students must prepare a paper based on a topic that be chosen from a list provided by the instructor within the first four weeks of class. Each student will report on at least 3 scholarly articles (one book chapter may be used) on the topic chosen. No credit will be given for reading things that were assigned in other classes that you took. The idea is to read something new and learn something new. You must rephrase rather than quote the articles/chapter in order to show that you thought about and integrated the meaning of your reading. The paper will also include references to the assigned readings and should be 10-12 pages long. You must use APA style. The paper will discuss how the articles and assigned readings helped the student understand the topic. You must turn in copies of the articles/chapters with your paper. Late papers will receive a 5-point grade deduction.

## Grading Scheme for paper

\_\_\_\_\_ (15 points) A thorough discussion of one article or book chapter, showing you understood the article

\_\_\_\_\_ (10 points) Demonstration that you can thoughtfully apply knowledge from the first article to the topic you selected.

\_\_\_\_\_ (15 points) A thorough discussion of a second article, showing you understood the article.

\_\_\_\_\_ (10 points) Demonstration that you can thoughtfully apply knowledge from the second article to the topic you selected.

\_\_\_\_\_ (15 points) A thorough discussion of the third article or book chapter, showing you understood the article

\_\_\_\_\_ (10 points) Demonstration that you can thoughtfully apply knowledge from the third article to the topic you selected.

\_\_\_\_\_ (15 points) Thorough citations to the assigned readings that are relevant to your topic, with evidence that you have grasped the meaning of these readings and can show evidence of critical thinking/analysis. You must rephrase rather than quote the readings in order to show that you thought about and integrated the meaning of the readings. You must include references (APA style) in the body of the text in order to receive credit.

\_\_\_\_\_ (10 points) Clarity in communicating your ideas, including grammar, spelling, etc.

### **Attendance and class participation: 10% of your grade**

Starting with 100 points for this portion of the grade (provided the student is an attentive, responsible class participant), a student will lose 2 points for each absence and one point for arriving late to class, returning late from break, or leaving class early.

### **Grading system**

All written work and exams will be graded with the following grading scale.

95.0-100	A	83.0-86.9	B	73.0-76.9	C
90.0-94.9	A-	80.0-82.9	B-	70.0-72.9	C-
87.0-89.9	B+	77.0-79.9	C+		

## Bibliography

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- Boyd-Franklin, N. (2003). *Black families in therapy: Understanding the African American experience* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Carrington, C. (1999). *No place like home: Relationships and family life among lesbians and gay men*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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- Doherty, W. J. (2001). *Take back your marriage*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Doherty, W. J. (2006) Couples on the Brink. *Psychotherapy Networker*. 31. March/April, pp. 31-35.
- Evans, P. (1992). *The verbally abusive relationship: How to recognize it and how to respond*. Avon, Mass: Adams Media Corp.
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- Hamburg, S. R. (2000). *Will our love last? A couple's road map*. New York: Scribner.
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- Markman, H., Stanley, S., & Blumberg, S. (1994). *Fighting for your marriage: Positive steps for preventing divorce and preserving a lasting love*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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- Spring, J. A. (1997). *After the affair*. New York: Harpercollins.
- Wallerstein, J. S. & Blakeslee, S. (1995). *The good marriage: How & why love lasts*. New York: Warner.
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