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Credit Hours: 3 (Wednesday evenings, 6pm – 8:45pm)

Course Objectives

This course will focus on introductory exposure to theory, research and clinical application of couples systems therapy. Focus will include the development of skills in the clinical practice of couple therapy from a systemic perspective. By the end of the course, students will have accomplished the following learning objectives:

1. Introduction to a spectrum of theoretical and clinical approaches to systemic couple therapy.

2. Examine and critically evaluate the theory and practice of systemic couple therapy in light of current research findings regarding couple interactions and treatment efficacy.

3. Acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of your own unique relational experience and how this impacts your work with couples.

4. Enhance your sensitivity to issues of gender, sexuality and cultural diversity while working with couples.

5. Review historical and current trends in the field of couple therapy.

6. Focus on special issues involving couples in therapy, such as child-rearing, sexuality, domestic violence, infidelity, substance abuse and depression that will aid in assessment and intervention.

7. Increase your understanding of assessment and treatment issues for couples within the developmental context of life cycle stages.
Course Requirements

Required Texts:


Description of Assignments

Relational Timeline: 5 points
Identify significant relational events throughout the course of your life, beginning with birth through the present (e.g., parental separations, divorce, beginning of new relationships, loss of significant relationships through break-ups or death). Draw a timeline on a piece of paper or poster board. Locate each event in a corresponding position on the timeline. Place a dot above the line to the degree that you consider the event/experience primarily positive, and below the timeline to the corresponding negative valence. Connect the dots using a different color ink from the timeline sketch. This assignment is the first step in completing the relational reaction paper. Its purpose is to help you begin to reflect on your own life from a relational viewpoint. Timelines will be returned with your relational awareness papers (so make a copy for your use in that subsequent assignment). (assignment due at the start of Session #2: 1/28/2004) (Late assignments will receive half-credit.)

Relational Awareness Paper 10 points
As therapists training in a mental health profession, we have an ethical and moral obligation to stay in touch with our own processes (particularly when entering into unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable areas). During this course, you are asked to write a reaction paper focusing on your own relational history and ways in which this may impact your work with couples. Use your relational timeline to reflect on significant relational events throughout the course of your life. Weeks & Treat (2001) identify a series of relational questions that are helpful to address when considering the impact of family-of-origin influences on intimate relationships in adulthood. These questions can also help the therapist in increasing awareness of ways in which personal experiences can impact clinical work with couples. The more conscious therapists are regarding their own processes, the less likely it is that “self-of-the-therapist” issues will negatively affect clinical sessions. Please address the following questions in writing your reaction paper:
What were the roles you observed in your parents’ (or primary caretakers’) relationship?
What did they appear to expect from each other?
What did you learn about being a husband? What did you learn about being a wife?
How much closeness/distance did you see in their marriage/relationship?
How did they handle their anger and conflict?
How did they show intimacy and affection?
How did they order their priorities among self, marriage, children, and work?
What emotions were encouraged, allowed, not allowed, denied, or considered “bad”?
Did your family members experience any traumas such as affairs, incest, unresolved grief, or psychological or medical problems?
What did you learn about intimacy from your parents and primary role-models?
In what ways have these family-of-origin issues impacted your adult relationships?
In reflecting on these questions, what do you suspect may be challenges for you in working with couples? What may be potential “blind spots” for you? (ask your partner, close friends or family members to help you identify potential difficulties/blind spots)
What strengths do you bring to working with couples?

Papers are due by the beginning of the specified class meeting. In order to earn full points for this assignment, all parts of the questions must be answered in full. You may also use this format to provide class feedback, discuss ways you are integrating course material into your professional work or personal life, or anything else you feel is important that you would like to share. The content of your reaction papers will only be viewed by the instructor (unless your permission is given for any additional use), and returned to you with comments, questions, feedback & musings. Recommended page length: 3-4 double-spaced, typed pages. (assignment due at the start of Session #5: 2/18/2004) (Late papers will receive half-credit.)

The “Healthy Couple” Interview: 20points
This assignment is designed to give you experience interviewing a couple in a non-threatening, non-crisis, and non-clinical situation. You will not be conducting therapy with this couple, and it will be your responsibility to clearly identify your role to the couple as that of an interested “interviewer” wanting to learn about their experience of being a couple and their “culture” (e.g., relational rules, roles, interactional dynamics). You can choose friends, acquaintances or classmates to participate in this interview. You are asked to audiotape the interview (to allow for your full attention & minimize note-taking). You will turn in the audiotape with your written report, cued to a 5-10 minute section of tape that is a good representation of the interview. (Be sure to secure written informed consent from the couple you interview, ensuring that they understand the purpose and use of interview material). Specific instructions for conducting the interview will be provided at a later date.

You are asked to complete a 2-3 page, double-spaced report summarizing your experience of meeting with the couple. The report should include the following:
- a brief description of the couple
- a brief overview of the interview
- a brief summary of the strengths of the couple
• any interesting impressions
• a final paragraph explaining at what point in the interview the audiotape is cued, a statement about what was happening at that point in the interview, and why you selected this section

These sections should comprise no more than one page. The bulk of the write-up should focus on your experience of what is was like to meet and talk with the couple. Please include discussion of relevant course and class material as it relates (or does not relate) to your interview experience.

assignment due at the start of Session #7: 3/3/2004 (Late assignments will receive half-credit.)

Clinical Intervention Group Presentation

30 points

Beginning with class #7, groups consisting of 2-3 students will present a clinical intervention to the class illustrating the theoretical orientation highlighted during that session. Each group will be asked to video-tape a segment of a session, illustrating the use of an intervention (or series of interventions) that would fit within the theoretical framework of the treatment model being highlighted during that class session. The therapy session is to be “scripted” by the group members, with roles of the couple being played by group members and/or outside parties. The role of the therapist is to be played by a group member. In other words, this is not a “real” therapy session, but a clinical simulation for the purpose of experiential learning. During the class presentation, each group will present a written handout to include a brief case description with genogram, brief description of the intervention, and relevant citation of source material. Group members are asked to creatively engage the class in the presentation of their taped clinical intervention (pretend that you are presenting material during a clinical workshop). Lengthy reading of written scripted material is strongly discouraged, and will result in the deduction of points from the total group score. The time allotted for group presentations will be 30-45 minutes. Sign-up for group presentations will occur during class #2.

Optional Assignment Selection:

10 points

Choose one of the following 3 assignments:

1. Movie Analysis
   Select a popular movie (or TV series) that includes couple or marital dynamics, and write a paper discussing the couple’s interactional patterns (using concepts discussed in class and course readings). Describe what you think the couple would benefit from working on in therapy, and the theoretical approach(s) you would utilize to achieve beneficial couple change. Describe what interventions you would use in therapy. Include a skeletal genogram of the main characters in the movie. (assignment due at the start of Session #10: 3/31/2004) (Late assignments will receive half-credit.)

2. Observation of Couples Therapy
   Since several members of class are currently seeing clients in practicum, discuss with one of them the opportunity to observe a session of couples therapy with that practicum student. You will receive points for either observing or being observed. (If you are not a counseling degree program student and would like an opportunity to observe a couple therapy session,
discuss this with course instructor so other arrangements can possibly be made).
If you are being observed, write a 2-page, double-spaced summary of the theoretical approach(s) and interventions used. If you are the observer, write a 2 page, double-spaced summary of what you observed (including theoretical approach(s) and techniques you observed). Turn in an additional copy that will be shared with your partner in this assignment. (assignment due at the start of Session #10: 3/31/2004) (Late assignments will receive half-credit.)

3. RELATE Experience:
A well-known and widely used premarital inventory is now available on-line (www.relate.byu.edu). For this assignment, you are asked to complete the RELATE questionnaire online with your partner (versions for individuals without current partners are also available) and review the computer-generated couple profile (there is a nominal fee for this service). Write a brief 1-2 page double-spaced reaction paper describing your experience of completing the inventory online, insights you gained through this exercise, and your assessment of the value of this service for couples with whom you might be working. (assignment due at the start of Session #10: 3/31/2004) (Late assignments will receive half-credit.)

**Final Take-Home Exam:** **25 points**
During class #10, you will have an opportunity to view a couple on tape. You are asked to compose a 3-page, double-spaced report including conceptualization of couple treatment plan, integration of a theoretical model(s), rationale for selection of that model(s), and specific interventions you would use with this couple. This will be an opportunity to integrate and apply course material to a clinical situation. Details will follow. (assignment due at the start of Session #13: 4/28/2004)

**Grading and Attendance**
Grades will be determined by the number of points accumulated out of a total of 100 possible points.

- A: 93 - 100 points
- A-: 90 - 92 points
- B+: 87 - 89 points
- B: 83 - 86 points
- B-: 80 - 82 points
- C+: 77 - 79 points
- C: 73 – 76 points
- C-: 70 - 72 points
- D+: 67 – 69 points
- D: 63 – 66 points
- D-: 60 – 62 points
- F: below 60 points

In order to realistically meet course objectives, class attendance is **required**. For every absence exceeding one, five points will be subtracted from your final grade. According to Seminary policy, students are required to notify the course instructor of any absences. No student may receive credit for a course if they miss more than ¼ of the class sessions.
Course Schedule

21 January (Session 1): Orientation and Organization: Syllabus Overview

28 January (Session 2): Issues and Challenges for Today’s Couples

Relational Timeline due

Readings:


Chapter 9: The power of two: Helping parents create a united front (pp. 168-193)

Chapter 10: Families under siege: Helping parents and children connect (pp. 194-216)

Chapter 11: At the Millennium: Toward a new paradigm for working with children and parents (pp. 217-240)


4 February (Session 3): Research & Theory: What Really Works?

Readings:


Chapter 1: Myths and mistakes of marital therapy (pp. 3-30)

Chapter 2: Repair and the core triad of balance (pp. 31-86)


11 February (Session 4): Assessment & Couple Orientation

Readings:
   Chapter 4: The Assessment of Marriage (pp. 113-160)
    Chapter 1: Assessment and case formulation (pp. 3-19)
    Chapter 2: Orienting couples to therapy (pp. 20-32)

18 February (Session 5): “The Basics” – Getting Started with Couples

Relational Awareness Paper due

Readings:
    Chapter 3: Balanced intervention (pp. 33-47)
    Chapter 4: Systemic intervention (pp. 48-56)
    Chapter 5: Moving from content to process (pp. 57-69)
    Chapter 6: Building and managing intensity (pp. 70-84)
    Chapter 7: Individual therapy and systemic intervention (pp. 85-95)
    Chapter 8: Working with the highly reactive and narcissistically wounded couples (pp. 96-106)

25 February (Session 6): IMAGO Therapy

Readings:
    Chapter 1: Introduction to IMAGO relationship theory and therapy (pp. 1-21)
    Chapter 2: Couples dialogue: The essential skill (pp. 23-39)
    Chapter 3: Session one: The cosmic journey, the brain, and couples dialogue (pp. 41-63)
    Chapter 4: Session two: Development, childhood wounds, and mate selection (pp. 65-80)
    Chapter 5: Session three: Developing empathy and reimagining the partners (pp. 81-95)
    Chapter 6: Session four: Reromanticizing the relationship (pp. 97-109)
    Chapter 7: Session five: Restructuring frustrations (pp. 111-127)
    Chapter 8: Session six: Resolving rage (pp. 129-145)
3 March (Session 7): Transgenerational Couple Therapy
Contextual Issues of Culture and Gender

**Healthy Couple Interview due**

**Transgenerational Couple Therapy Group Presentation**

**Readings:**


3 March No Class! (Reading Week)

17 March (Session 8): Structural – Strategic Couple Therapy
Domestic Violence

**Structural-Strategic Couple Therapy Group Presentation**

**Readings:**


24 March (Session 9): Cognitive – Behavioral Couple Therapy
   Same Sex Couples

**Cognitive - Behavioral Therapy Group Presentation**

**Readings:**

31 March (Session 10): Object Relations Couple Therapy
   Infidelity

**Movie Analysis, Couple Therapy Observation or RELATE Assignment due**

**Object Relations Couple Therapy Group Presentation**

**Readings:**

**Chapter 17: Treating the extramarital affair** (pp. 226-263)

7 April No Class!!! (Easter Holiday)

14 April (Session 11): Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy
   Pre-marital Counseling & Preventative Services
   Separation, Divorce and Remarriage

**Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy Group Presentation**
Readings:

21 April (Session 12): Narrative Couple Therapy
Alcohol & Addictions

Narrative Couple Therapy Group Presentation

Readings:

28 April (Session 13): Solution-Focused Couple Therapy
Infertility & Depression

Final Take Home Exam due:

Solution-Focused Couple Therapy Group Presentation

Readings: