

**University of Pennsylvania**  
School of Social Policy & Practice  
SWRK 798-002  
**Social Work Practice with Couples**  
Fall 2016

***Instructor:***

Office Hours Thursdays by Appointment

*Please be sure to check Canvas and your email for any announcements before class each week.*

*In the event of inclement weather, I will post an announcement to Canvas as well as send an email to the class. Also, be sure to check the university website and/or call (215) 898-6358 = (215) 898-MELT.*

***Course Description***

This course provides an overview of the history and traditions, fundamental concepts, major principles, and empirical foundations of couple therapy theory and practice. The approach will be to view dyadic therapy as a distinct discipline with a rich history based in both individual and systemic theory. A multidisciplinary approach will be taken to explore a broad range of foundational theories and clinical applications in couple therapy. Throughout the course, contextual issues will be highlighted such as: cultural and developmental life cycle influences, ethnicity, orientation, generational experiences, gender, power, money, and class. Specific topics such as affairs, partner violence, separation, and divorce will be discussed. The practice of couple therapy will illustrate various theoretical frameworks. This course builds on theories of individual and family functioning in SW 602 and SW 604 and advanced clinical practice with individuals and families in SW 704 and SW 714.

***Course Objectives***

1. Students will acquire an understanding of the primary concepts, principles, and empirical foundations of Couple Therapy and be able to critique the strengths and weaknesses of each as applied to couples' issues and challenges.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate the application of practice skills based on conceptual frameworks and relevant theories with individuals and couples.

3. Students will gain an awareness of the role of life cycle stages and transitions and its effect on individuals and couples.
4. Students will identify the important role of contextual factors such as: race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, and orientation on individuals and families. Students will integrate an awareness of issues of diversity in developing culturally sensitive practices, including issues of social and economic justice.
5. Students will be able to assess the effectiveness of practice interventions with couples.

### ***Required Readings***

--Gurman, A.S. (Ed.) (2015) *Clinical handbook of couple therapy*. (5<sup>th</sup> Edition). New York: Guilford Press.

--Additional Required Readings on Course Canvas Site

### ***Recommended Readings***

Berk, L.E. (2007). *Development through the lifespan*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Betchen, S.J. (2005). *Intrusive partners elusive mates*. New York: Routledge Press.

Betchen, S.J. (2010). *Magnetic Partners*. New York: Free Press, Simon and Schuster.

Imber-Black, E. (2010). (Ed). *Innovations in Couple and Family Therapy and Practice*. *Family Process*, 49(3), 265-435.

Vaughan, D. (1990) *Uncoupling: Turning points in relationships*: New York: Vintage Books.

\*Weeks, G. (1989). (Ed.). *Treating couples: The Intersystem Model of the Marriage Council of Philadelphia*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

\*Weeks, G. & Treat, S. (1992). (Eds.). *Couples in treatment*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

[*Note: The above Weeks (1989) and Weeks & Treat (1992) readings are seminal texts that outline the original intersystems approach to treating couples*].

### ***Reading Assignments***

Students are expected to reference required readings within written assignments.

Individual topics and issues discussed in the required or recommended readings will be welcomed as topics of discussion throughout the course.

**An extensive list of suggested readings will be handed out in the first class.**

***Course Expectations***

Students are expected to:

1. Read and complete assignments before class.
2. Attend class. Classroom learning is a fundamental component of your professional education. Attendance is therefore expected and will be considered in the determination of overall achievement of class learning objectives. In the event that you are sick or cannot attend class for other reasons, you should notify me as soon as possible.
3. Fully participate in class discussions.
4. Satisfactorily complete written assignments.
5. Provide direct and balanced feedback of the course and instructor throughout the semester. My hope is that together we will make this course as valuable as possible for each of us.

***Academic Integrity***

Students are expected to conduct themselves consistent with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions and other actions. Students are expected to be familiar with the Code, which can be found at <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity>

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***Grading Policy***

Four written assignments (see below): 20 % each of your total class grade.  
Class participation: 20% of your total class grade class

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**COURSE OUTLINE**

Each class will begin with a brief review of primary points from the previous class. The last half hour of each class will focus on a discussion of a specific clinical issue presented by couples in practice.

**DATE**

**TOPICS**

**September 1**

**Course Overview**

**Introduction – Distinct History of Couple Therapy vs. Family Therapy**

**Theoretical Approach - Intersystems Model – A multi-disciplinary / integrative model with particular influences from Phenomenology**

**Reading Assignment:**

Gurman, A.S. & Fraenkel, P. (2002). The history of couple therapy: A millennial review. *Family Process, 41*, 199-260.

**September 8**

**Foundations of Couple Therapy Practice**

**Identifying clients, initial interview, termination, and beyond**

**Discussion of the Field of Couple Therapy Education and Practice**

**Reading Assignment:**

Doherty, W. (2003). Bad couples therapy: Getting past the myth of therapist neutrality. *Psychotherapy Networker*.

\*Groome, E.R. (1989). Goal setting and marital therapy. In G. Weeks. (Ed.). *Treating couples: The Intersystem Model of the Marriage Council of Philadelphia*. New York: Brunner/Mazel. (pp. 22-37).

\*Weeks, G. R. & Treat, S. (1992). *Couples in treatment: Techniques and approaches for effective practice*. New York: Brunner/Mazel. (Chapter 2, Orienting Couples to Therapy, pp. 19-31).

*\*(seminal readings)*

**September 15**

**Individual and Relationship Life Cycle Theory**

**Reading Assignment:**

\*Monte, E. (1989). The relationship life cycle. In G. Weeks. (Ed.). *Treating Couples: The Intersystem Model of the Marriage Council of Philadelphia*. New York: Brunner/Mazel. (pp. 287-316).

\*(seminal reading)

***FIRST PAPER DUE – on September 15***

**September 22, September 29      The Use of Genograms in Couple Therapy**

**Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Bowen Family Systems (chp. 9). pp. 246-267.

Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (2005). *The expanded family life cycle: Individual, family, and social perspectives*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon. (pp. 1-25).

Gerson, R., McGoldrick, M., & Petry, S. (2008). *Genograms: Assessment and intervention*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc..

**NO CLASS OCTOBER 6<sup>TH</sup> FALL BREAK**

**Systems Theory Approaches:  
October 13 and October 20      Application to Couple Therapy**

**Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Brief Strategic Couple Therapy (chp. 12). pp. 335-357.  
--Structural Couple Therapy (chp. 13). pp. 358-384.  
--Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (chp. 4). pp. 97-128.

Walsh, F. (2003). *Normal family processes*. New York: Guilford Press. (Chapter 2, Clinical Views of Family Normality, Health, and Dysfunction: From Deficit to Strengths Perspective, pp. 27-57).

***SECOND PAPER DUE- on October 13***

**October 27**

**Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse**

**Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Couple Therapy for Partner Aggression (chp. 14). pp. 389-411.

Cavanaugh, M.M., & Gelles, R.J. (2005). The utility of male domestic violence offender typologies: New directions, for research, policy, and practice. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 20*, 155-166.

Hegarty, K., Taft, A., & Feder, G. (2008). Violence between intimate partners: Working with the whole family. *British Medical Journal, 337*, pp. 346-351

\* *Additional readings will be posted to Blackboard*

**November 3**

**Intimacy – Core Component of Couple Therapy**

**Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Object Relations Couple Therapy (chp. 8). pp. 224-245.

\*Weeks, G. R. & Treat, S. (1992). *Couples in treatment: Techniques and approaches for effective practice*. New York: Brunner/Mazel. (Chapter 8, Enhancing Intimacy in Relationships, pp. 101-117).

\*(*seminal reading*)

**November 10**

**Couple Therapy and Gender Issues**

**Integration of Couple and Sex Therapy**

***THIRD PAPER DUE – on November 10***

**Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Couple Therapy and Sexual Problems (chp. 24). pp. 635-658.

Fox, L.G. & Murry, V.M. (2000). Gender and families: Feminist perspectives and family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*, 1160-1172.

**November 17 Affairs – Impact, Meaning, and Survival**

### **Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Couple Therapy and the Treatment of Affairs (chp. 15). pp. 412-444.

Gordon, K.C., Baucom, D.H., & Snyder, D.K. (2004). An integrative intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 30(2), 213-231.

Scheinkman, M. (2005). Beyond the trauma of betrayal: Reconsidering affairs in Couples Therapy. *Family Process*, 44, 227-244.

\*Westfall, A. (1989). In G. Weeks. (Ed.). *Treating Couples: The Intersystem Model of the Marriage Council of Philadelphia*. New York: Brunner/Mazel. (pp. 163-190).

\*(seminal reading)

### **November 22 (TUESDAY) Separation and Divorce**

#### **Remarried Couples**

### **No Class November 27 – Thanksgiving Day**

### **Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): -- Separation and Divorce Issues in Couple Therapy (chp. 16). pp. 445-466.  
-- Therapy with Couples in Stepfamilies (chp. 17). pp. 467-488.

Peters, B., & Ehrenberg, M.F. (2008). The influence of parental separation and divorce on father-child relationships. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 49(1), 78-109.

### **December 1 Sexual Orientation and Couple Therapy**

### **Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Couples Therapy (chp. 18). pp. 489-511.

Bepko, C., & Johnson, T. (2000). Gay and lesbian couples in therapy: Perspectives for the contemporary family therapist. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 26(4), 409-419.

Weitzman, G. (2006). *Therapy with clients who are bisexual and polyamorous*.  
Haworth Press.

**December 8**

**Selected Clinical and Contextual Issues**

**Reading Assignment:**

Gurman (2015): --Couple Therapy and Intercultural Relationships (chp. 19). pp. 512-530.

Orbuch, T.L., Verhoff, J., Hassan, H., & Horrocks, J. (2002). Who will divorce: A 14-year longitudinal study of Black couples and White couples. *Journal of Personal and Social Relationships, 19*, 179-202.

***FINAL PAPER DUE - on December 8***

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**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

Written work must be submitted by the beginning of class on the due date. Electronic submissions are preferred but hard copies will be accepted in class (on the day of class). There are no extensions on written work for any reason without the prior permission of your instructor.

All written work must be submitted typed and double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, 1" margins. All written work is to be original with citations properly referenced according to the American Psychological Association (APA) style manual. Consult the Student Manual for a complete discussion of plagiarism.

Each paper must be **FIVE (5) pages in length**..... not four and definitely not 6 or 7. Please draw from, integrate, and cite literature from the course syllabus and outside readings.

**NOTE: I would like you to carefully and thoughtfully consider each topic and to think critically about it and the literature referenced within it. I am most interested in knowing what YOU think and believe. I would like you to use the readings / literature to *support* and/or to *challenge* your beliefs. Do not simply tell me what the readings / literature states... THESE PAPERS ARE NOT BOOK REPORTS!!!!**



Please be aware that these papers are short in length and therefore must be concise while rich in content – often a much more difficult task than a longer assignment. Remember each paper counts for 20% of your grade.

### **PAPER 1**

*DUE September 15*

**TOPIC:** Describe what primary characteristics, attributes, and/or relational dynamics you believe contribute to a healthy couple relationship.

- You may describe any relationship between two adults that you choose.
- It does not have to be a relationship that actually exists.
- Be clear / specific in your description of the characteristics that you choose.
- What characteristics would this relationship have/not have?
- Explain carefully why you believe it to be a healthy relationship.
- How did you come to believe this?
- ONE reference is required for this paper.

### **PAPER 2**

*DUE October 13*

**TOPIC:** Describe what primary characteristics, attributes, and/or relational dynamics you believe contribute to an unhealthy couple relationship.

- You are free to describe any relationship between two adults you choose.
- Describe clearly what kind / type of characteristics, attributes and/or relational dynamics you have chosen.
- Explain why you believe what you have chosen constitutes a lack of health.
- Where and how did you come to believe this?
- Do you believe, or not (and why) a couple's relationship can recover from the dysfunction you have described?
- ONE reference is required for this paper.

(Note: You are free to go beyond the above-mentioned points).

### **PAPER 3**

*DUE November 10*

**PLEASE CHOOSE OPTION 1 OR OPTION 2**

#### **OPTION #1**

**TOPIC:** Choose a topic from ONLY those discussed in the course to this point. Narrow your focus as much as possible from the broader topic. For example, 'the impact of life cycle stages on a marriage' should be narrowed to something more specific such as, 'the impact of turning 40 for men in a long term marriage'.

- After you have narrowed your topic, use class readings and outside references (FOUR references maximum) to support your topic.

- **Areas to consider (this list is not exhaustive):**
  - **Critically think about what the literature states regarding your topic. That is, what are the key points; what may be lacking in the discussion on your topic; what biases exist around this topic, and why, etc. (Remember, do not simply tell me what the literature states).**
  - **Explain why this topic is particularly relevant.**
  - **What are the implications of your topic to practice?**
  - **Be creative: in not only narrowing down your topic but in how you think about it as you delve into the readings / literature.**

**(Note: You are free to go beyond the above-mentioned points).**

## **OPTION #2**

- **Read the book *Uncoupling: Turning Points in Relationships* by Diane Vaughan.**
- **In your paper, discuss what you learned from this book that would help you facilitate effective relationship therapy**
- **After reading the book, discuss at least two conceptual frameworks that you could utilize to help couples explore the decision to remain in the relationship or uncouple.**
- **Be creative in your approach.**

## **PAPER 4**

***DUE December 8 (Last Class)***

**PLEASE CHOOSE OPTION 1 OR OPTION 2**

### **OPTION #1**

**TOPIC: Choose a relational clinical issue/challenge discussed in this course. Carefully describe how you would approach this issue/challenge in practice theoretically and describe the corresponding practice interventions you might utilize.**

- **You are to use your class readings as well as outside references (You must use 4 references).**
- **Describe the significance of the issue/challenge you have chosen.**
- **Describe why you have chosen the clinical approach that you have.**
- **How will you implement your approach?**
- **What are its strengths and weaknesses?**
- **What challenges might you face in its implementation and how might you overcome those challenges?**

**(Note: You are free to go beyond the above-mentioned points).**

### **OPTION #2**

**TOPIC: Choose a relational clinical issue/challenge discussed in this course. Carefully describe how you would approach this issue/challenge in practice with diverse couples theoretically and describe the corresponding practice interventions you might utilize. What interventions would be appropriate or inappropriate for couples facing challenges related to diversity (examples of diversity include but are not limited to; gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, veterans status, or LGBTQ) How can you honor/respect diversity in practice and address issues related to diversity and oppression in couples therapy?**

- You are to use your class readings as well as outside references (You must use 4 references).
- Describe the significance of the issue/challenge you have chosen.
- Describe why you have chosen the clinical approach that you have.
- How will you implement your approach?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- What challenges might you face in its implementation related to issues of diversity and how might you overcome those challenges?

(Note: You are free to go beyond the above-mentioned points).