

Couple's Therapy: Theory and Practice

PCS 3033

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Loren Townsend
ltownsend@lpts.edu

Description

This course provides theological, theoretical and practical foundations for the practice of couple therapy. In this course, students will explore the development of marital therapy, foundations for assessment of couple problems, and the practical application of current evidence-based methods for assessing and treating couple problems. Readings, lectures and practical applications will be framed within a family systemic context and grounded within reflective theological understandings of the human person in relationship. Students will have the opportunity to experience a variety of intervention methods and begin the process of formulating a theological and personally integrated model of marital/couple therapy.

Definition

The terms “couple” and “marital” are used interchangeably in this course to describe relationships in which people have formed a covenant of exclusive commitment to each other. This definition does not rely on legal or religious affirmation of such a covenant, and is intended to be inclusive of heterosexual and same-sex couples. The course will be sensitive to a broad spectrum of couple, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity.

Objectives

<u><i>By the end of the semester, students will:</i></u>	<u><i>Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) & MFT Competencies (MFTC:)</i></u>	<u><i>Assessment Signature Assignments</i></u>
Understand and demonstrate the ability to use evidence-based approaches to couples therapy.	SLO 1: able to conduct multicultural, evidence-based therapy with individuals, couples and families that meets entry-level professional standards. SLO 2: Graduating students will demonstrate a broad knowledge of systemic theory and MFT treatment models and flexibly apply these in evidence-based practice. MFTC: .1.1.1 Understand systems concepts, theories, and techniques ...foundational to MFT, 1.1.2 Understand theories and techniques of individual, marital, couple, family, and group psychotherapy, 3.1.1 Know which models...are most effective for presenting problems 4.1.1-Comprehend a variety of individual and systemic therapeutic models... 6.1.1-Know the extant MFT literature, research...	Case Study (Rubric)
Demonstrate the ability to assess and plan treatment for a wide range of couples, couple problems and comorbidities.	SLO 1: able to conduct multicultural, evidence-based therapy with individuals, couples and families that meets entry-level professional standards.	Case Study (Rubric) Final Examination

	<p>MFTC: 1.1.4: Understand the risks and benefits of ...couples ... psychotherapy</p> <p>1.3.1: Gather and review intake information...balanced attention to individual, family, community... contextual factors</p> <p>1.4.1-Evaluate case for appropriateness...</p> <p>2.1.4-Comprehend...assessment...appropriate to presenting problem...</p> <p>2.1.3-Understand the clinical needs and implications of persons with comorbid disorders</p> <p>2.2.2...systematically integrate client report, observations...test results...to guide assessment process</p> <p>2.3.9-Elucidate presenting problem</p> <p>3.3.2-Prioritize treatment goals</p> <p>2.3.5 Screen and develop adequate safety plans for substance abuse, child/elder maltreatment, domestic violence, physical violence, suicide...</p> <p>3.4.3 Evaluate level of risks, management of risks, crises and emergencies</p> <p>4.5.3-Articulate rationales for interventions related to treatment...</p> <p>5.1.2 Know professional ethics and standards of practice [for] MFT</p>	
Demonstrate awareness and ability to assess of couple diversity (same sex, culturally diverse, etc.) and its impact on assessment, treatment and therapeutic processes.	<p>SLO 1: able to conduct multicultural, evidence-based therapy with individuals, couples and families that meets entry-level professional standards.</p> <p>SLO 4: able to use a multicultural approach to MFT that attends appropriately to religious, cultural, racial, economic, gender, and sexual orientation diversity in client systems, client-therapist systems, supervisory systems, and broader social systems.</p> <p>MCTC: 2.1.1 Understand principles of human development, sexuality, gender,...couple and family processes...</p> <p>4.3.2 Deliver interventions in a way that is sensitive to special needs of clients</p> <p>4.5.1 -Respect multiple perspectives</p>	<p>Case Study (Rubric)</p> <p>Class Presentation (Rubric)</p> <p>Theological papers (Rubric)</p> <p>Final Examination</p>
Demonstrate awareness and ability to assess and plan treatment for specialized issues related to couples therapy such as domestic violence, sexual problems, divorce, remarriage,	<p>SLO 4: able to use a multicultural approach to MFT that attends appropriately to religious, cultural, racial, economic, gender, and sexual orientation diversity in client systems, client-therapist systems, supervisory systems, and broader social systems.</p> <p>MFTC: 1.1.1 Understand systems concepts, theories, and techniques ...foundational to MFT.</p> <p>2.1.4 Comprehend...assessment... appropriate to presenting problem...</p> <p>4.1.1 Comprehend a variety of individual and systemic therapeutic models...</p> <p>4.3.1 Match treatment modalities...to client's needs, goals and values</p>	<p>Case Study (Rubric)</p> <p>Class Presentations (Rubric)</p>
Articulate a theological or spiritual framework that supports therapy with diverse couples and is useful in addressing religious issues that arise in couples therapy.	<p>SLO 5: able to use a theologically informed and clinically appropriate framework to integrate religious and spiritual factors into the practice of Marriage and Family Therapy.</p> <p>MFTC: 4.3.2 Deliver interventions in a way that is sensitive to special needs of clients</p>	Theological papers (Rubric)

4.5.1 -Respect multiple perspectives

Multicultural Therapy Definition: Multicultural Therapy, according to D. W. Sue and Torino (2005, p 3) “...can be defined as both a helping role and process that uses modalities and defines goals consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of clients, recognizes client identities to include individual, group, and universal dimensions, advocates the use of universal and culture-specific strategies and roles in the healing process, and balances the importance of individualism and collectivism in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of client and client systems.” Multicultural competence as a therapist includes: (1) therapist awareness of personal assumptions, values and biases, (2) understanding the worldview of diverse clients, and (3) facility with appropriate strategies and interventions consistent with the life experiences and values of culturally different clients. (Sue & Sue 2008)

Evidence-based Practice Definition: EBP is a “...practice-friendly approach to using research to enhance family therapy” (Gehard, 2010, 133). This approach looks to research to help clinicians make decisions in therapy about care for individual clients, couples and families. Evidence-based practice will (1) look to research for information about what treatments are most effective for specific problems, (2) critically examine that research for its validity and applicability to specific cases, and (3) evaluate how effective a selected method is for specific clients, couples and families (for example, using the ORS/SRS).

Method

This class will be a combination of lecture, participant presentation, theoretical discussion, and case demonstration. Through an integrating approach to the theoretical, theological and clinical material, participants will be exposed to a variety of couple’s therapy understandings, while being afforded the opportunity to explore one or two systems of change and therapy. Class time will be divided roughly equally between theoretical and practical concerns.

Requirements

All assignments must be turned in as downloads on CAMS unless otherwise specified.

Due Date Summary:

Theological Paper 1: March 25

Theological Paper 2: April 29

Case Study: May 6

Final Exam: Last Day of Finals

All Papers to be submitted on CAMS

1. ***Class Presentation.*** Each student will cooperate in a dyad or small group to lead class discussion related to one of the topics listed below. Class leaders are expected to begin preparation in class reading, but expand their investigation beyond the reading assigned to all.

Presentation 1 (March 11, Physical Aggression)

Presentation 2 (April 22, Affairs)

Presentation 3 (April 22, Drug & Alcohol Abuse)

Presentation 4 (April 29, Legal and Ethical Issues)

2. Case Study (Due: No later than 5:00 pm May 6) This is a two-part assignment.

A. Videotape a session with a mock client couple using couple therapy methods presented in class. After the videotaped session, review the tape with the client couple. Analyze the session with the couple and write a report summarizing what you and the couple found about the session:

- How well did the therapist connect with the clients?
- How well did the therapist define the presenting problem?
- Did the therapist help the clients set a reasonable goal?
- Identify specific segments of the tape where client behavior or comments validate the therapist's assessment conclusions (which will appear in the write-up below). That is, point out where you see pursuer-distancer relational dances, the Four Horsemen, attachment behavior, turning to or turning away, evidence about the marital friendship, etc.
- Identify specific sections of the tape where methods or interventions learned in class were implemented. Identify the theory or technique used. Analyze how well the intervention or approach was used and its effect on the session. (Did you, for example, use a Dreams within Conflict intervention, identify secondary reactive positions with clients, etc.)
- **Turn in only the report. Do not turn in your videotape.**

B. Write an Intake Evaluation for the couple you videotaped using the case study format provided in CAMS.

- The case study will observe, assess, conceptualize, and plan treatment for a couple organized by methods taught in class (Gottman, EFT, Schnarch, Behavioral Sex Therapies, Oliver). Be sure and use appropriate materials from your assessment package (II above).
- Use *footnotes* in your paper **to annotate how the theories you studied in class affect your assessment, conceptualization and treatment plan.** (For instance, you make a statement about your couple's conflict and make a conclusion about the conflict--supply a note to show me which theory is influencing you and how. I want to be able to read your paper and clearly track how you are using the theories studied in class.)
- **You must use assessment tools presented in class.** Select assessment tools relevant to the clients' presenting problem. Demonstrate that you know which assessment tools are appropriate and that you know how to use them. If you are presenting an actual couple, guard identities carefully and present your finding from assessment tools. If you are using mock clients, show the responses and results that clients MIGHT have had to justify your assessment and treatment plan. Include processes and findings in the Clinical Assessment section of the case study.
- **Your case study should be written as a profession document, not an essay. It should be well organized, direct, concise, and illustrate good clinical logic. You should be able to complete the report in no more than 5 pages (excluding any footnotes).**

V. Theological Integration Papers—You may work in groups of 3-4 and turn in one paper for the group.

Two theological reflection papers (maximum: 7 double-spaced pages each). Be sure to integrate

your study in other theological courses. *Your papers are not to be “fill-in-the-blank” or short answer responses to the questions posed. Use the questions below to formulate an essay reflecting your stands. Use citations where appropriate and make certain these citations are in APA form. Since these are short papers, you must write well.*

➤ **A working theology of marital problems (Due March 25)**

In order to provide good pastoral counseling to married couples, we must use our theological understanding of marriage, marital dysfunction, and sexuality to ground our understanding of marital problems and recovery. I am asking you in this paper to articulate:

1. What causes marital problems: Couples work requires that we have a theory/theology of why couples have problems that need treatment. In this assignment, I am asking you to move beyond what any one MFT theory says about marital dysfunction and look to our Christian understandings of creation, the human person, and couple-ness to provide a grounding context for relating pastorally and theologically to clients. I am asking you to think theologically about such questions as:
2. What needs to be changed or healed in couples seeking treatment? Think theologically. Relate this to what you stated above.
3. What is the role/function of the pastoral therapist when working with such couples?
4. How does your theological understanding of marital problems guide or influence your approach to couples in therapy?

➤ **A Reflection on Difference: What do GLBTQI voices and sources like Gay and Lesbian Theology, or Queer Theology have to offer our theological understanding of marriage and coupleness? (Due April 29)**

For this paper you will need to: 1) Read and explore Gay and Lesbian Theologies or Queer Theology sources, 2) initiate conversations with GLBT colleagues, and 3) think broadly and deeply about this issue. (A few resources will be on CAMS for this assignment.)

Consider the following:

1. How do our inherited or accepted theologies participate in what how we construct what is meant by “couple” or “married”?
2. What is the source of what traditional theologies’ conception of marriage and coupleness? What strengths and limits do these sources have?
3. What is your image of “what God intends” for human marital sexuality, and how do you support this? Pay careful attention to your hermeneutic approach and exegetical practice when supporting your arguments with authority from tradition and scripture. Be sure to attend to how your approach to issues and theology may be colored by unexamined teachings or assumptions.
4. Usually, theologies of coupleness and marriage are grounded in arguments of form or nature—only male/female coupling can produce children and therefore propagate the species. What do you make of these arguments, and what problems do you see with them, if any?

5. Consider sexuality in committed couples and marriage. How does your understanding of sexuality in marriage change by considering the experience of gay, lesbian, transgendered, and queer Christians?
6. How do you relate the scripture to your emerging theology of marriage, especially as it is informed by Gay, Lesbian, and Queer theologies?
7. What kinds of things might LGBTQ couples teach heterosexual couples about an adequate theology of coupleness, marriage, and sexuality?

VI. *Final examination (In Library Computer Lab, week of finals)*

Final exam will be a multiple choice examination on computer in the library. It is meant: 1) to test your mastery of the knowledge expected in this course, 2) approximate and prepare you for the MFT Exit Examination, and 3) help you prepare for the national MFT examination you must take prior to licensing.

Note: Students must score 80 or above on the final examination to receive a passing grade in the course. This material is fundamental to success in the program. Should a student receive a grade lower than 80 on the final, he or she must retake the test and score at least an 80 in order to pass the class. The first score (not the retake score) on the test will be used to figure the overall class grade.

Course Grade Weights

3. Two theological reflection papers—15% each (30%)
4. Class Presentation—15%
5. Case study and Evaluation Packet—30%
6. Final examination—25%

Texts

Required

Gottman, J. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically-based marital therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Johnson, S. (2005). *Becoming an emotionally focused couples therapist: The workbook*. New York: Routledge.

Maltz, W. (2012). *The sexual healing journey: A guide for survivors of sexual abuse*, 3rd ed. New York: Wm Morrow.

Oliver, Ms. (1994). *Conjugal Spirituality: The primacy of mutual love in Christian tradition*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward.

Gurman, A. ed. (2008). *Clinical handbook of couple therapy, 4th ed.* New York: Guilford Press.
(*Selected chapters*)

Selected reading from:

Schnarch, D. (1991). *Constructing the sexual crucible: An integration of sexual and marital therapy*. New York: Norton.

Townsend, L. (2000). *Pastoral care with stepfamilies: Mapping the wilderness*. St. Louis: Chalice Press.

Piercy, F. and D. Sprenkle. *The family therapy sourcebook*, 2nd ed. NY: Guilford, 1996. (***On library reserve***)

Recommended

O'Leary, K., Heyman, R., & Jongsma, A. (1998). The couples psychotherapy treatment planner. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Class Policies

Grading: Grade Scale and Philosophy

A	96.6-100
A-	93.6-96.5
B+	90.6-93.5
B	87.6-90.5
C	85.6-87.5
C+	83.6-85.5
C	81.6-83.5
C-	79.6-81.5
D	70.6-79.5
F	Below 70.6

Individuals admitted to graduate study are expected to perform consistently and well in academic work. This is translated into grades in the following way:

1. Basic mastery of the body of knowledge at a level expected in graduate study will earn scores in the B to B+ range.
2. Grades of A- are granted for work which demonstrates
 - basic mastery of the body of knowledge, and
 - independent thought about the subject matter.
3. Grades of A are granted for work which demonstrates
 - mastery of the required body of knowledge,
 - independent thought about the subject matter, and
 - creative/integrative use of the material, exceptional writing which integrates the material into a student's own system of thought, and/or exceptionally well done or articulate research.

SEMINARY POLICIES – See Student Handbook for policies on use of inclusive language, academic honesty, citation, attendance, and special accommodations. (NOTE FOR COAMFTE: These policies are normally inserted but removed due to space limitations for the self-study.)

Couples Therapy Comprehensive Rubric

Assessment Rubric: (Note to COAMFTE: Rubrics for assessing SLOs and Marriage and Family Therapy core competencies have been removed to meet self-study space limits. See SIE rubric which is used for all case studies in the MFT Program and see 1 sample comprehensive course rubric Bookmarks. All rubrics can be provided upon request.)