# Couples Research & Therapy NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Fall 2016

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## Letter from the Editors

We are delighted to share the Fall 2016 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG Newsletter with you. The newsletter is full of exciting updates from fellow couples SIG labs and information about this year’s ABCT convention!

Along with updates, we are pleased to share a shortened version of the recently published article, “A Randomized Waitlist-Controlled Trial of Culturally Sensitive Relationship Education for Male Same-Sex Couples” by Dr. Sarah Whitton and colleagues (pg. 6). Additionally, we are thrilled to include not just one, but two comprehensive book reviews in this edition. On page 11, Brianna Billotti provided a review of the book *The Dilemmas of Intimacy* by Dr. Karen Prager. Furthermore, on page 12, you will find Samantha Joseph’s review of the *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy, Fifth Edition* edited by Drs, Alan Gurman, Jay Lebow, and Douglas Snyder. Moreover, we want to thank everyone who sent in lab updates and reasons for celebration. Everyone is doing incredible work and we are happy to share your accomplishments with the SIG!

Finally, we want to wish everyone a happy conference in New York. **For more SIG specific conference information,** please read the letters from your SIG Co-Presidents, Drs. Katie and Brian Baucom (pg. 2), and your Student Co-Presidents, Kayla Knopp and Dev Crasta (pg. 3). We’ve also included a quick summary of SIG related events and a list of symposia that might be of interest to you (pg. 5). We hope everyone has an enjoyable and productive conference (and that at least a few of you scored tickets to Hamilton!)

**Thank you for making the Couples SIG Newsletter possible! We’ll see you in NYC!**

*Sarah Bannon, Annie Le, and Kate Nowlan*

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Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents
Brian & Katie Baucom
University of Utah

Hi, Everyone. We hope that this letter finds you all doing well. We are looking forward to this year’s conference in NYC just a few days away. We’re very much looking forward to our annual gathering and to seeing everyone who can make it this year and want to share some details about SIG events at this year’s conference.

Pre-conference event
We’re going to be treated to a panel discussion on translational work on using basic science findings to inform clinical intervention with couples, and vice versa, moderated by Keith Renshaw with panelists Drs. Donald Baucom, Sarah Campbell, and Melanie Fischer. The panel will be on Thursday evening from 7:00 to 8:00pm in the Liberty Room, which is on the 8th floor of the Marriott Marquis Hotel.

"Couples and psychopathology: Connecting basic and applied research”

This panel, which will include discussions from panelists and Q&A from the audience, will focus on research addressing psychopathology in the context of couples' relationships. Panelists will include Keith Renshaw (George Mason University), Sarah Campbell (VA Puget Sound HCS - Seattle), Donald Baucom (UNC - Chapel Hill), and Melanie Fischer (UNC - Chapel Hill). Drawing on their broad range of experience, panelists will discuss rationales for considering couple-based approaches to individual psychopathology and provide an overview of how couple processes and individual psychopathology can impact each other. Within this context, they will discuss common couple-level processes to consider in this type of research and intervention work. In addition, panelists will address the full circle of connections among basic and applied research, including: designing basic research studies with clinical implications in mind, building and then testing clinical interventions based on basic research findings, embedding basic research questions and designs in clinical interventions, and extending intervention study findings back to basic research questions. The panelists will also be able to speak about their experience conducting this type of research across multiple settings, including traditional academic departments, academic medical centers, and VA medical centers.

SIG Business Meeting
Our SIG Business Meeting is scheduled for Friday, October 28, from 1:30 - 2:30pm in the Wilder Room, which is on the 4th floor. We’ll be updating membership lists, seeking volunteers for the program committee, distributing awards for the Robert L. Weiss Student Research Award, and announcing the results of our first ever on-line elections for SIG President(s) and treasurer. Many thanks to CJ Eubanks for serving as treasurer and keeping the SIG in the black while helping us figure out how to have fun events in two very expensive conference locations. We would also like to thank everyone who has helped us with SIG-related tasks while we’ve had the honor of serving as Co-Presidents, and that’s especially true of anything that happened between late last December and mid-June; we don’t really remember much from that period but know that we couldn’t have done it without you.

As a reminder, we’ve moved to an on-line voting system for this year’s elections. The web address for the election website is: https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_4SZFHkeo3RPvFmR

The polls will be open from Tuesday, October 25th until 12:00pm on Friday, October 28th. If you have any difficulty of any kind accessing or using the voting website, please let us know at your earliest convenience (Brian: brian.baucom@psych.utah.edu; Katie: Katherine.baucom@psych.utah.edu).

Lastly, before we sign off, we wanted to take this opportunity to thank you all for giving us the opportunity to serve as SIG presidents and to do so together. We’ll spare you the sentimental gushing and instead just say that it was special for us for many reasons.

Looking forward to seeing you all soon,
Brian & Katie
Letter from the Student Co-Presidents
Dev Crasta\textsuperscript{1} & Kayla Knopp\textsuperscript{2}
\textsuperscript{1}University of Rochester; \textsuperscript{2}University of Denver

Greetings from your Student Co-Presidents! We’re excited for the ABCT conference in New York and hope to see you all there! There are plenty of exciting SIG and student SIG member events at this year’s ABCT conference:

This year’s annual Couples SIG Cocktail Party will take place at Réunion Bar. Réunion has a wide selection of craft brews and some light appetizers will be provided. Come enjoy great company - it is sure to be a fun evening!

**When:** Saturday, October 29\textsuperscript{th} from 7:00-9:30pm.
**Where:** Réunion Bar, 357 W. 44\textsuperscript{th} St, NY, 10036.
**Directions:** The restaurant is a 7-minute walk from the Marriott Marquis, on the NE Corner of 44\textsuperscript{th} St. & 9\textsuperscript{th} Avenue.

In accordance with tradition, the Student Cocktail Party will immediately follow the main event. All undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students are welcome to stay longer and have a chance to get to know each other better!

Finally, mark your itinerary for this year’s Couples SIG Student Symposium entitled, “State of the Art Couples Interventions: New Treatment Outcomes” on **Friday, October 28\textsuperscript{th} from 8:00-9:30am in the Majestic & Music Box room on the 6\textsuperscript{th} floor.** Papers will be presented by Kathryn Nowlan (University of Miami), McKenzie Roddy (University of Miami), Tara Guarino Fairbanks (Fuller Theological Seminary), and Hannah Williamson (University of California – Los Angeles). Dr. Galena Rhoades (University of Denver) will be our discussant. Hope to see you there!

We look forward to seeing you all soon!

Sincerely,

Dev (dev.crasta@rochester.edu) and Kayla (kayla.knopp@du.edu)
ABCT Couples SIG Treasurer’s Update

CJ Fleming

Hello SIG Members!

I hope that all of you are doing well and looking forward to an exciting conference! Here is an update of our membership status and dues:

Our current dues-paying membership, including those who have paid dues within the last 5 years, is 216 (81 professional, 134 students). This includes 6 new members (all students) since our last count. Please continue to spread the word and encourage others to join as we always love to welcome new members!

The balance at the last update was $1,312. Since that time, we have taken in $80 in dues leaving us with a balance of $1,392. We anticipate paying out $300 for poster awards, $500 for the party at the upcoming conference, and a $300 honorarium for a preconference speaker. Hopefully, we will bring in lots of dues at the conference! Thank you for your continued support!

As always, we will collect 2016 dues at the SIG business meeting during the upcoming conference. If you are not attending the conference or would like to pre-pay your 2016 dues, please pay electronically via PayPal (go to www.paypal.com and send money to cjeubanksfleming@gmail.com) or by mailing a check to the address below. If you pay by PayPal, it is important to designate the payment as a “send to friends and family” to avoid processing fees. Dues are $25 for professional members and $5 for students and retired members.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns about dues or membership.

Many thanks for your support of the SIG!

Best,

CJ Fleming

Send checks to:
CJ Fleming
111 Rosaline Ln
Durham, NC 27713

Media Coordinators Update

Marissa Bowsfield and Katie Lenger

If you ever have any information you would like to share with fellow SIG members via the listserv or website (e.g. job postings, study recruitment, or anything you believe will be of interest), please don’t hesitate to email us, Marissa Bowsfield (mlb9@sfu.ca) or Katie Lenger (klenger@vols.utk.edu) – we will be happy to disseminate that information to the SIG. Furthermore, please be in touch if ever your contact information needs updating on the website or listserv.

Thanks so much everyone and we look forward to seeing you in New York soon!

Marissa and Katie
SIG Related Events and Relevant Symposia

Here is a small list of relevant symposia, ticketed sessions, workshops, and other SIG related events that might be of interest to you. Please note that this list is not exhaustive! We hope you will consider attending some of the following talks/events to support others in the Couples SIG and learn more about the wonderful work our members are contributing to the field.

Symposia, ticketed sessions, and workshops that SIG members might enjoy:

- **AMASS 1** - Dyadic Data Analysis: An Introduction to the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Thursday, 10/27/16, 8:30am-12:30pm; Room: Lyceum & Carnegie; Floor: 5)
- **AMASS 2** - Intensive Longitudinal Methods: An Introduction to Diary and Experience Sampling Research (Thursday, 10/27/16, 1:00-5:00pm; Room: Lyceum & Carnegie; Floor: 5)

**Symposia**

- **Symposium 3** - State of the Art of Couples Interventions: New Treatment Outcomes (Friday, 10/28/16, 8:00-9:30am; Room: Majestic & Music Box; Floor: 6)
- **Symposium 15** - A Systems Approach to Modeling Intra- and Interpersonal Processes in Psychotherapy and Psychopathology (Friday, 10/28/16, 10:00-11:30am; Room: O’Neill; Floor: 4)
- **Symposium 33** - Two Heads are better than One: Novel Approaches to the Study and Treatment of Individual Psychopathology in a Couple Context (Friday, 10/28/16, 3:15-4:45pm; Room: Columbia & Duffy; Floor 7)

**Workshops**

- **Workshop 6** - Incorporating Significant Others to Maximize PTSD Treatment (Saturday, 10/29/16, 11:00am-2:00pm; Room: Edison & Booth; Floor: 5)

**SIG Events:**

- **SIG Pre-conference Event** - Couples and psychopathology: Connecting basic and applied research (Thursday, 10/27/16, 7:00-8:00pm; Room: Liberty; Floor: 8)
- **Couples SIG Business Meeting** - (Friday, 10/28/16, 1:30-2:30pm; Room: Wilder; Floor: 4)
- **Friday Night SIG Poster Expo** - (Friday, 10/28/16, 6:30-8:00pm; Room: Broadway Ballroom; Floor: 6)
- **Couples SIG Cocktail Party** - (Saturday, 10/29/16, 7:00-9:30pm; Réunion Bar, 357 W. 44th St, NY, 10036)
A Randomized Waitlist-Controlled Trial of Culturally Sensitive Relationship Education for Male Same-Sex Couples

Sarah W. Whitton, Eliza M. Weitbrecht; Amanda D. Kuryluk, David W. Hutsell

University of Cincinnati

Full article citation and for full list of references:


Recent years have seen dramatic increases in the social acceptance and legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Recent estimates indicate that over a million same-sex couples live in the U.S., 45% of whom are legally married (Gates & Brown, 2015). Consequently, clinicians who provide relationship-focused services are increasingly likely to encounter same-sex couples. Relationship education (RE), effective in improving relationship quality among different-sex couples, represents a promising and non-stigmatizing approach to promoting the health and stability of same-sex couples. Although existing RE programs were designed for different-sex couples, the core relationship processes targeted (communication, conflict resolution skills, commitment) are similar across couple type (e.g., Kurdek, 2005) and are predictive of same-sex couple outcomes (e.g., Gottman et al., 2003; Khaddouma, Norona, & Whitton, 2015). Further, same-sex couples face unique challenges including social pressures to conceal or deny their relationships, lack of socially prescribed relationship norms, and low social support from family (Green, 2004). RE might empower same-sex couples to successfully meet these challenges by providing skills for coping with discrimination as a team, negotiating relationship roles and expectations, and building non-familial social support.

Despite the potential for RE to benefit same-sex couples, established evidence-based programs - which were developed for and evaluated on different-sex couples - may not be appropriate, relevant, or helpful for this population. Guidelines for culturally-competent psychological practice highlight the importance of ensuring that interventions developed in one cultural context are acceptable when offered in another and do not have unintended harmful effects because of differences in values, beliefs, or practices (e.g., APA, 2003). Gay affirmative approaches specifically (i.e., culturally competent interventions with LGB individuals; Johnson, 2012) must be sure to not explicitly or implicitly reinforce heterosexist biases, which might reduce program efficacy and increase minority stress among participants. Unfortunately, practitioners have described considerable heterosexist bias in existing RE programs (Whitton & Buzzella, 2012). Specifically, program materials (e.g., slides, workbooks, instructional videos) depict only different-sex couples, which can be alienating and interfere with same-sex couple’s ability to learn the relationship skills. Further, some content is irrelevant to same-sex couples (e.g., gender differences), and several unique needs of same-sex couples (e.g., managing
discrimination, building gay-affirmative social support) are not addressed. Same-sex couples perceive multiple barriers to participation in RE, including concerns about heteronormative material and lack of acceptance by leaders or other group members (Scott & Rhoades, 2014). Consistent with guidelines for culturally-sensitive program adaptation (APA, 2003;), the Strengthening Same-Sex Relationships (SSSR) program for male couples (Buzzella & Whitton, 2009) was developed by adapting evidence-based curriculum in ways suggested by the perspectives of same-sex couples and the clinicians who work with them. The program was designed for male couples specifically (vs. all same-sex couples) based on couples’ preference for groups comprised only of men, materials depicting only male couples, and interest in content less relevant to lesbians (e.g., non-monogamy agreements). We sought to sufficiently adapt program content so that it was perceived as relevant, responsive, and culturally appealing to male same-sex couples – thereby improving participant engagement and program acceptability – while maintaining fidelity to the core content that leads to positive outcomes. All language is specific to male same-sex couples, no assumptions are made regarding access to marriage or social approval, and content is sensitive to behavioral diversity in same-sex relationships (e.g., flexible gender roles, negotiated non-monogamy). Program materials, including power point slides, vignettes, participant workbooks, and video demonstrations of skills, all depict male same-sex couples. An initial pilot study with 12 couples (Buzzella, Whitton, & Tompson, 2012) indicated program acceptability and aided in program refinement.

The SSSR program includes core content common to most skills-based CRE programs (protecting positives, reducing destructive conflict, effective communication skills, active listening; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003), plus new units designed to address the unique needs of same-sex couples: negotiating clear relationship expectations in areas that commonly hold ambiguity for male same-sex couples (e.g., if and how to have children, non-monogamous sexual agreements; coping with minority stress and discrimination, which helps couples identify and replace maladaptive individual and couple-level coping responses; and building supportive social networks SSSR is a 10-hour program delivered in a group format to groups of 3-8 couples. For each unit, facilitators present a short lecture with slides and, often, video demonstrations of the relationship skill. Couples then practice these skills with guidance and corrective feedback from group facilitators.

The present study was designed to evaluate the acceptability of the SSSR program for male couples and assess its efficacy in improving three risk factors (couple communication, perceived stress, social support) and two indices of global relationship quality (satisfaction and instability).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 20 male same-sex couples in cohabiting, committed relationships of at least 6 months recruited via LGBT-focused publications, social networking websites, and LGBT organizations (83% White; Mean age = 40 years; Mean income = $52,000; Mean years of education = 16). Relationship length ranged from 8 months - 29 years. Couples were then
randomized to either an immediate intervention condition (11 couples) or a waitlist condition with delayed treatment after a four-week wait period (9 couples). Conditions did not differ on any demographic or relationship variable.

Participants completed assessments at intake, post-waitlist (for the control condition), post-program, and 3-month follow-up. Each assessment included informed consent, self-report measures, and a 10-15 minute videotaped couple discussion of their top relationship problem. Measures

Objective ratings of negative ($\alpha = .85$; ICC = .85) and positive communication ($\alpha = .90$; ICC = .87) during the videotaped problem discussions were coded using the Interactional Dimensions Coding System (Kline et al., 2004). Participants self-reported on couple communication using the 8-item negative communication ($\alpha = .88$) and positive communication ($\alpha = .76$) subscales of the Communication Skills Test (CST; Jenkins & Saiz, 1995). Men also completed the Perceived Stress Scale ($\alpha = .89$; Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein, 1983), the Social Support for the Relationship Measure ($\alpha = .70$; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992), a 12-item measure of weekly relationship satisfaction (Whitton, Stanley, Markman, & Baucom, 2008) and the 4-item Relationship Instability Index ($\alpha = .91$; Whitton, Kuryluk, & Khouddouma, 2015). Post-program, participants provided ratings of program satisfaction.

Results

Analyses to assess program effects on targeted couple outcomes were conducted using SPSS version 21. Because the dataset included repeated measures nested within individuals, nested within indistinguishable dyads, we used a dyadic overtime multilevel modeling approach (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) with Restricted Maximum Likelihood Estimation (for small samples). For details, see our full article.

Within-person analyses from the full sample indicated positive within-person changes in communication ($ds = .67-.71$ for observational data; $ds = .39-.48$ for self-reports) and perceived stress $d = .41$ that were maintained at follow-up. Social support, satisfaction, and instability did not improve from pre- to post-program, but did improve by 3-month follow-up ($ds = .30, .18, and .31$, respectively). Comparisons by condition (immediate treatment vs. waitlist controls) indicated positive program effects on negative and positive communication according to self-report and observational data (medium to large effect sizes), perceived stress (medium effect), and relationship (small effect). Social support and relationship instability did not differ by condition. Regarding program acceptability, men rated the overall program as very helpful in maintaining relationship satisfaction ($M = 6.20 SD = 1.64$) and indicated they would be very confident recommending the program to a friend ($M = 7.23 SD = 1.03$).

Discussion

Overall, findings from this small trial were supportive of the feasibility, efficacy, and acceptability of the Strengthening Same Sex Relationships (SSSR) Program for Male couples. Participating couples reported high satisfaction with the program, which showed immediate,
sustained positive effects on two key risk factors -- couple communication behaviors and perceived stress-- as well as effects on social support, relationship satisfaction, and relationship instability that were evident by 3-month follow-up. Of note, effect sizes for communication were similar to or larger than those of standard RE programs with different-sex couples ($d s = .43-.45$; Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008), suggesting that adaptations to enhance cultural sensitivity did not reduce efficacy. The observed program effects on perceived stress and social support are particularly significant given that same-sex couples experience more stress (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010) and lower social support (particularly from family; Green, 2004) than different-sex couples.

Study limitations include the small sample size, lack of controlled comparisons at follow-up, and a non-diverse sample. Despite these limitations, study results support the feasibility, acceptability, and efficacy of the SSSR program for male couples. More broadly, the findings suggest that RE is a promising approach to promoting relationship health and stability among LGBT individuals. As such, they support initiatives to broaden the use of culturally-sensitive adaptations of healthy relationship programming with sexual minorities (Whitton, 2015), including programs for female same-sex couples (Whitton, Scott, & Buzzella, 2013) and LGBT youth (Mustanski et al., 2015). Further, they highlight the importance of disseminating evidence-based, culturally sensitive same-sex RE programs to practicing clinicians, given that demand will likely increase along with the legal and societal recognition of same-sex relationships.

References


The Dilemmas of Intimacy

Book Review by: Brianna Billotti, BA
St. Joseph’s College

The Dilemmas of Intimacy addresses the risks and rewards of intimacy based on a three-part dilemma model, as well as how to treat distressed couples from a cognitive-behavioral approach. Dr. Karen Prager explains the concept of an Intimacy Signature, or a unique configuration of individual and relational characteristics based on behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects. This Intimacy Signature affects couple satisfaction, harmony, stability, and individual mental health and well-being, making it a valuable clinical tool. The three intimacy dilemmas described include: “joy vs. protection from hurt”, “I vs. we”, and “the past lives in the present.”

Intimacy Issues in the presenting problem ordinarily consist of one of the following: lack of intimacy, conflict over intimacy, repetitive or unresolved conflicts, or lost love. The objectives of determining an intimacy problem involve presenting the problem in a relationship in the context of individual and relational factors, identifying a couple’s potential for future or likelihood of separation, and, finally, suggesting treatment interventions.

During the assessment process, intimacy problems are evaluated at both the couple and individual level. Initial couple interviews consist of a series of structured questions to assess the broad environmental context of the couple and to gather a relationship history in order to identify events linked to relational stress or decline. Couples are then interviewed individually to assess individual needs and fears, and to foster individual trust with the therapist. Current relationship functioning is determined by analyzing the couple’s functioning in key areas outside of the presenting problem such as their social life, decision making process, relationships with extended family, sexual relationship, shared leisure activities/interests, and religious/spiritual life. In order to establish a safe environment, the therapist normalizes both the couple and the individual experience, and temporarily fulfills each partner’s need for acceptance, validation, and understanding. After a therapeutic alliance has been established, couple-level goals are implemented, along with individual level goals that focus on each distressed individual’s specific intimacy issues.

Behavioral interventions are used to help couples change intimacy-sabotaging patterns of behavior, as well as teach new skills that can be beneficial for communication and problem solving. Expanded cognitive-behavioral therapy helps distressed couples break negative thinking patterns and interact in more constructive ways. Behavioral contracting ensures a mutual agreement to reduce anxiety about future commitments and gives the partners more freedom to comfortably try different approaches to the areas of conflict. For example, behavioral exchange involves identifying days for increased reciprocity of positive action. Affective interventions are appropriate for partners who have difficulty controlling the intensity of their negative emotions resulting from unclear thinking and poor coping strategies. The clinician can then teach self-soothing techniques, such as progressive relaxation, three-part breathing, and emotional regulation training. Cognitive interventions target schemas or building blocks of negative thinking patterns and emotions. Furthermore, automatic thoughts are evaluated during couple sessions and modified in order to develop realistic expectations and goals.

Signs of success or improvement are evaluated by a new way of thinking about themselves and their partner, not by personality of the individuals changing. Even if couples report increased intimacy by end of treatment, they are taught to utilize their newly learned skills to efficiently cope and resolve their problems. Behavioral, affective, and cognitive interventions vary slightly depending on which intimacy dilemma a couple is facing as well as the orientation of the clinician.

Overall, this book is a great tool for clinicians to help them organize and conceptualize treatment for clients and couples with intimacy issues.

About the Author:
Karen J. Prager, PhD, is a Professor of Psychology and program head for Gender Studies at The University of Texas at Dallas. She has years of experience working with couples and offers supervision and continuing education for therapists on couple therapy.
This handbook comes at a crucial moment in the field of couple therapy, when the environment for couples is changing and more and more diverse couples exist with unique treatment needs. In response to this need, this handbook describes key theoretical approaches to couple therapy, cutting-edge applications for all kinds of couples with unique presenting problems and needs such as blended families, LGBT couples, and separated couples. In addition, there are also applications for couples experiencing specific clinical problems, such as partner aggression, psychological disorders, and medical issues. The first chapter facilitates a broad understanding of the theory and practice of couple therapy. Following this initial chapter, the book is divided into two parts.

**Part I: “Models of Couple Therapy”**

This section is organized by approach types. The more behavioral approaches include Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT) and Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (IBCT). While these treatments differ in some of their techniques and goals, they both highlight the importance of behavior in couple interactions. CBCT tends to be more focused on how partners can change their patterns and the cognitions that influence these interaction processes. On the other hand, IBCT focuses both on change and acceptance, such as promoting more understanding and acceptance of how natural differences between partners impact couples’ interactions. The emotion-centered approaches include Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT) and Gottman Couple Narrative Therapy. These approaches emphasize the importance of emotions in relationships. A principle of EFT is that emotion is the key to organizing attachment behaviors and how someone experiences interpersonal relationships. Gottman Narrative Couple Therapy focuses on emotion slightly different by emphasizing the down regulation of negative affect and the up regulation of positive affect. The psychodynamic and multigenerational approaches include Integrative Problem-Centered Metaframeworks Approach (IPCM), Functional Analytic Couple Therapy (FACT), Object Relations Couple Therapy, and Bowen Family Systems Couple Coaching. Each of these approaches shares its foundation with psychodynamic theory. These approaches delve further into how family systems and early relational experiences impact the members of the couple. In this way, these approaches look beyond current couple interactions and take into account external factors. IPCM’s framework has couples hypothesize their issues at a personal, family, and community level. Similarly, FACT addresses how relationships are constantly changing with social, religious, and economic values. Object Relations Couple Therapy explores the idea that core aspects of self are formed through early relationships. Moreover, Bowen Family Systems looks not only at the individual and the couple, but the family as well. The social constructionist approaches include Narrative Couple Therapy and Solution-Focused Couple Therapy. These approaches focus on people finding new meaning through their lives in how they experience, tell, and circulate their story and how it relates to what the standardized norm may be. Solution-Focused Couple Therapy aims to have the clients design what they consider to be a solution or success. Both approaches view therapy as taking place in a social setting and
the couples have the power to construct their narrative or solution. The systematic approaches include Brief Strategic Couple Therapy and Structural Couple Therapy (SCT.) Brief Strategic Couple Therapy involves interrupting ironic processes, creating strategic objectives, and solidifying these changes. SCT looks at the couple as a system that has boundaries and involves complex interactions. SCT views change as affecting the system as a whole. These approaches inherently view and treat couples’ interactions in a systematic way.

Part II: “Applications of Couple Therapy: Special Populations, Problems, and Issues”

Part II is organized into four sections. The first section focuses on violence, affairs, and divorce. Violence and partner aggression negative impact couples physically, mentally, and emotionally. Gender-specific treatment groups and conjoint couple therapies, primarily cognitive-behavioral therapy, are advocated as treatments for this subgroup. The chapter on affairs encourages integrative treatment for couples who are experiencing distress from infidelity. This treatment pulls from both cognitive-behavioral and insight-oriented approaches. Furthermore, using trauma and forgiveness frameworks makes it more effective for treating affairs. Lastly, this section looks at separation and divorce and addresses when an outcome of therapy is divorce or separation and how therapists can best aid in these situations.

The second section focuses on couple therapy in diverse relationships. These diverse relationships include stepfamilies, intercultural, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual couples and the handbook addresses the issues they face. These diverse groups build their relationships on different foundations than other groups and face more unique struggles. For couples dealing with problems related to being a stepfamily, the architecture of the family unit is addressed. The chapter on gay, lesbian, and bisexual couples includes intervention techniques which address how to counter minority stress and relational ambiguity. The chapter also stresses effective ways to help build a social support network for these couples. For intercultural couples, the chapter discusses how therapists can be more adept at addressing the numerous ways intercultural couples differ from culturally homogenous couples and how this impacts their relationships. The third section focuses on couple therapy and psychological disorders. This section includes chapters on post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol problems, depression, borderline personality disorder, and sexual problems. Each chapter addresses each unique issue within the context of a couple and ways therapists can treat these specific issues in therapy to ameliorate couple distress. Lastly the fourth section deals with the cross-section of couple therapy, medical issues, and interpersonal neurobiology. The chapter on medical illnesses explores how couples need to adapt to illness and how this can be accomplished through therapy. The chapter on interpersonal neurobiology discusses the human brain, how neurobiology impacts our relationships, and how “neuroeducation” is a critical for couples.

In conclusion, this handbook houses the most efficacious and widely studied approaches to couple therapy, most of which are described by the experts in that particular approach. I greatly enjoyed reading the case examples and conceptualization of “well-functioning vs. dysfunctional relationships” at the end of each treatment. These are effective at helping readers conceptualize couple interactions within each treatment approach. Furthermore, Part II underscores the importance of recognizing that certain couples present to treatment with unique needs and that different treatment approaches should be used to bolster couple dynamics. Overall, the handbook provides academics and clinicians an “all-in-one” reference book to working with couples, whether they are interested in learning about and comparing specific approaches to couple therapy or attempting to conceptualize and treat a specific couple issue.

About the Editors:
Alan S. Gurman, PhD was Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health until his death in 2013.
Jay L. Lebow, PhD is Clinical Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University and a therapist at The Family Institute. Dr. Lebow has over 30 years of experience in the practice and research of couple and family therapy.
Douglas K. Snyder, PhD is a Professor of Psychology at Texas A&M University where he also served as Director of Clinical Training for 20 years. Dr. Snyder currently resides in College Station, Texas where he also holds a private practice.
KUDOS!!!

We’d like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!

Dr. Rebecca Cobb’s SFU Close Relationships Lab

☉ PhD candidate, Roanne Millman, received the Marilyn Bowman Award in recognition of her research excellence.
☉ PhD candidate, Jill Logan, received the SFU President’s PhD Scholarship in recognition of her excellent progress in her degree, demonstration of academic excellence, and substantial scholarly output and leadership.
☉ Master’s student, Marissa Bowsfield, received the MD Angus & Associates Graduate Fellowship in Psychology to support the development of a measure of body image, which assesses perceptions of the self, the partner, and beliefs about the partner’s satisfaction with the individual’s body.

Dr. Kristina Coop Gordon’s Gordon Couples Research Lab

☉ Alex Khaddouma successfully defended his dissertation examining the role of mindfulness in the longitudinal relationship quality and stability of young adult dating couples.
☉ Jerika Norona successfully defended her dissertation examining emerging adults’ motivations for breaking up and engaging in infidelity and how these romantic experiences are related to developmental tasks.

Dr. Donald Baucom’s UNC Couples Lab at UNC Chapel Hill

☉ Dr. Melanie Fischer received her Ph.D. in August, 2016-- congrats! After completing her internship at the Charleston Consortium Internship Program (Medical University of South Carolina/Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center), she has returned to the UNC campus as a Postdoctoral Fellow, working both within the UNC Department of Psychology & Neuroscience and at UNC Department of Psychiatry’s Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders (CEED).
☉ Danielle Weber joined Dr. Don Baucom’s lab at UNC as a new graduate student this fall, coming from American University with her Master’s degree in psychology. We are very excited to have her join the lab!

Dr. Christina Balderrama-Durbin’s Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory at Binghamton University – SUNY

☉ The lab enthusiastically welcomed two talented doctoral-students – Seigie Butler and Alex Wang! We will also be welcoming the lab’s newest and tiniest junior scientist in November – Christina Balderrama-Durbin and her husband are greatly anticipating the arrival of their second daughter!
We’d like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following SIG members. Congratulations to you!

Dr. James V. Córdova’s The Marriage Checkup Project at Clark University

☺ The lab would like to congratulate James Cordova on the release of his Children’s Book, The Story of Mu, currently available from Wisdom Publications.

Dr. Keith Sanford’s lab at Baylor University

☺ Elizabeth Coe began an internship at The Help Group
☺ Cecily Anders began a postdoctoral position at the SoHo CBT and Mindfulness center
☺ Lindsey Backer-Fulghum began a postdoctoral re-specialization program at Suffolk University
☺ Priscilla Layman (nee Maranville) was married in May 2015.

Dr. Keith Renshaw’s Anxiety, Stress, & Relationships Lab at George Mason

☺ Sarah Campbell and Hilary Weingarden both completed their NIMH-funded training grants and graduated this past year. Sarah is now a postdoctoral fellow at VA Puget Sound HCS – Seattle, and Hilary is a postdoctoral fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital.
☺ Sarah Carter was awarded an F31 National Research Service Award from NIMH last year, as well as additional awards from APA Division 19 (Military Psychology) and the Military Suicide Research Consortium to support her dissertation focused on the suicidal soldiers and their partners.
☺ Jennifer DiMauro received an award from the George Mason Provost’s Office and the George Mason Psychology Department to support her dissertation focused on relationship processes in sexual assault survivors.

Dr. Annmarie Cano’s Relationships and Health Lab at Wayne State University

☺ Welcome to Hallie George, who began the doctoral program in clinical psychology at WSU this fall (B.A., Rochester Institute of Technology).
☺ Congrats to Dana May as she begins a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan.
☺ Dr. Cano was PI of a 2016 APA Summer Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program at Wayne State University in Detroit.
☺ Dr. Cano completed the APA Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology in March 2016 and was recently elected a Fellow in Div. 38 (Health Psychology) and Div. 43 (Couple and Family Psychology).
Lab Updates
Please take some time to read about what all of the wonderful Couples Labs are up to.
With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start thinking about your updates for the Spring 2017 Newsletter.
We’d love to hear from you!

Annmarie Cano, Ph.D.
Relationships and Health Lab
Professor of Psychology Department
Wayne State University

We continue to examine emotion regulation in couples facing chronic health conditions with an emphasis on emotional disclosure of health distress and partner responsiveness and empathic responses. We have completed Phase 1 of our NIH/NCCIH study aimed at developing a couple-based mindfulness and acceptance intervention for chronic pain and are in the process of setting goals for Phase 2. New to our lab, we are also in the process of running studies examining predictors of graduate student success, including examining the role of implicit bias in graduate admissions.

Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.
Couple Adjustment to Stress and Trauma (CAST) Laboratory
Assistant Professor of Psychology
Binghamton University – SUNY

The CAST lab has been full speed ahead this fall with the support of a bright and energetic team! We have launched active recruitment for a multidimensional study examining acute stress reactivity and recovery in community couples. Our efforts are aimed at understanding and promoting couple resilience following acute stress and trauma.

Donald Baucom, Ph.D.
UNC Couples Lab
Distinguished Professor of Psychology
UNC Chapel Hill

Our lab is continuing to collaborate with the National Health Service in England to offer training to therapists to provide couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner is depressed. This is part of England’s nationwide IAPT program to provide empirically supported interventions to the public. In addition to providing clinical services, these efforts will result in a large scale effectiveness treatment study of couple-based treatment for depression in routine outpatient clinics around the country. Dr. Baucom and Dr. Melanie Fischer lead the US component of this effort. We also have established a network of some of our former lab members and UNC graduates in which we provide ongoing supervision to about 80 therapists in England through video conferencing, a unique and gratifying challenge.
We currently have two projects underway as part of our lab’s broader effort, in collaboration with Dr. Cindy Bulik and the UNC Center for Excellence in Eating Disorders, to develop psychological interventions for couples around eating disorders. First, our randomized clinical trial of our couple-based treatment for anorexia nervosa (Uniting Couples in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa - UCAN) is in its fourth year of treatment. In addition, we have just completed a pilot study called UNITE (UNiting couples In the Treatment of Eating disorders) which focuses on working with couples in which one partner has binge eating disorder.

Our lab has continued our collaboration with Dr. Kevin Guskiewicz at the UNC Department of Exercise and Sport Science to pilot test a couple-based treatment which we have developed for couples where one member is a former NFL player with depression.

Our lab is collaborating with Dr. Jon Abramowitz’s lab at UNC to develop and evaluate a couple-based treatment for body dysmorphic disorder under the leadership of Dr. Melanie Fischer and Lillian Reuman. Treatment development is completed and recruitment for our pilot study has begun this fall.

Our lab is collaborating with Dr. Sean Drummond in Australia and Dr. Melissa Jenkins, a former UNC doctoral student, on a randomized controlled trial to treat insomnia with a couple-based intervention, expanding our couples and psychopathology work to a new disorder.

James V. Córdova, Ph.D.
The Marriage Checkup Project
Professor of Psychology
Clark University

James Cordova is working on disseminating and implementing the Marriage Checkup for a wide range of couples. We are collaborating with Dr. Cigrang and his Air Force team on an RCT adapting the Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. Dr. Cordova is also in the process of testing an online platform for the Checkup, allowing couples in any geographical region easy access to a well-trained Marriage Checkup clinician. He recently published a children’s book based on the famous Zen koan Mu, titled, “The Story of Mu”, currently available from Wisdom Publications. Ellen Darling will be defending her dissertation: The Before Baby Relationship Checkup, a pilot study of a couples-based preventative intervention for perinatal depression co-located in obstetric clinics, this month. She then begins a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Brown University, where she’ll work in student counseling and assist with suicide prevention research. Tatiana Gray successfully defended her dissertation on the therapeutic mechanisms within the Marriage Checkup in August, and started her internship at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial VA in Bedford Massachusetts in September. She continues to be involved in the dissemination and implementation of the Marriage Checkup for a wide range of couples. Matt Havril is preparing to defend his dissertation proposal, which explores heterogeneity in processes and outcomes of couples skills-based preventive interventions. He's also applying for internship. Liz Ollen is applying to internship this fall and is continuing to recruit for her dissertation on help seeking for relationship abuse among sexual minority women. Justin Laplante is working on his dissertation proposal on the effects of meditation on relationships throughout the lifespan. He is also working on other mindfulness and relationship related studies, as well as teaching cognitive psychology this fall. Emily Maher is continuing work on her Master's thesis project examining the link between meditation practice and relationship health. She is also working at UMass Medical School on a treatment study for Alcohol Behavioral Couples Therapy. Taylor Dovala is beginning to collect data on her Master’s thesis project analyzing the connection between the implicit theories couples hold about relationships and the interaction patterns they use, in efforts to better understand the factors that lead couples to respond to conflict in the way they do. Nick Canby is a first year
doctoral student in the Cordova lab. He is currently working on research investigating the mediating effects of social relationships on depression outcomes and effects of the meditation teacher-student relationship. His long term interests are in the social contagion of the benefits from mindfulness practice.

Keith Sanford, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience
Baylor University

We have been conducting studies investigating associations between couple resilience behavior and life wellbeing in people experiencing a range of stressful life effects, including samples of people experiencing a financial hardship, death of a family member, and serious medical condition in oneself and in a child. In addition, we are testing new methods for assessing interpersonal alliances and validating a measure of interactions between patients and medical practitioners. Finally, we recently developed a new measure assessing the concerns of parents who are going through a divorce and are investigating associations between concerns and outcomes in recently divorced families. This year, three new graduate students joined our lab: Kiley Hiett, Shelby Rivers, and Brittany Sherrill.

Kristina Coop Gordon, Ph.D.
Gordon Couples Research Lab
Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology
University of Tennessee

The Gordon lab is busy with multiple projects including analyzing data from Relationship Rx, a large collaborative project with James Cordova’s lab to implement the Marriage Checkup in community based integrative health-care facilities in Tennessee and with a low-income population. In particular, we are examining (a) couple typologies and their response to treatment (Patricia Roberson), (b) relationship quality and individual health outcomes (Patricia Roberson), and (c) predictors of retention/drop out (DJ Garcia). In addition, we have several ongoing projects utilizing data from Un Tiempo para Las Parejas - a collaborative project with the Duke University Medical Center that implemented a couples-based smoking intervention program for Latino families (studies using this data are headed by DJ Garcia). Alex Khaddouma is currently analyzing data from his dissertation project - a longitudinal study of the relationships among mindfulness, sexual health, and relationship health in young adult dating couples. Jerika Norona is piloting a randomized controlled trial at Cornerstone of Recovery, an inpatient residential treatment center for chemical dependence, on the efficacy of group therapy for romantic partners of patients who struggle with the process of forgiveness. Katie Lenger is preparing to defend her master’s thesis. Rebecca Shorter, a new addition to the lab, recently completed her master’s thesis on relational and contextual family environment variables and adjustment outcomes in rural Appalachian youth. Rebecca is also involved in a research study examining the effectiveness of an integrative healthcare program for cancer patients in improving quality of life and reducing emotional distress. Finally, Kristi Gordon is part of a large community based program to provide empirically supported relationship education via church volunteers throughout Knoxville. This project just completed a pilot program in which 5 churches participated, and 5 more were trained and will begin data collection in January 2017. Thirty-two more churches are on a waitlist to participate.
Steffany J. Fredman, Ph.D.
Couple and Family Adaptation to Stress (CFAS) Lab
Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies
The Pennsylvania State University

The Penn State CFAS Lab has been working on a number of basic and treatment outcome studies focused on improving the health and well-being of couples and families under stress. We’ve recently completed our first cohort of couples for our grant funded by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs through the Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (CAP) to test an accelerated, multi-couple weekend version of CBCT for PTSD (Monson & Fredman, 2012) for Service Members and Veterans with PTSD (PI: Fredman). Co-Investigators include Galena Rhoades, Alex Macdonald, and Candice Monson. Other lab projects are focused on the associations among PTSD symptoms, interpersonal adjustment, and academic functioning among partnered student Service Members and Veterans and the associations among PTSD symptoms, couple functioning, and parenting stress among first-time parents during the transition to parenthood.

Yunying (Annie) Le defended her Master’s thesis on the mediating role of parenting stress in the association between neuroticism and harsh parenting in first-time parents during the transition from late toddlerhood to the early preschool years and has passed her candidacy exam. August Jenkins, who graduated from Michigan State, recently joined our lab as a first-year Ph.D. student in HDFS this fall and is applying for a Ford Foundation fellowship to study the intersection between PTSD symptoms and relationship adjustment in African-American couples. Aubrey Rafinsky is our newest undergraduate research assistant and is working on her thesis related to academic adjustment in student veterans.

Keith Renshaw, Ph.D.
Anxiety, Stress, & Relationships Lab
Associate Professor of Psychology
George Mason University

The Anxiety, Stress, and Relationships Lab is continuing to run a number of studies, stress, trauma, and couples. Jennifer DiMauro just completed data collection for her dissertation project on relationship processes in sexual assault survivors as compared to combat veterans. After a year-long battle with bureaucracy, Sarah Carter finally got IRB approval to collect daily data from 50 active duty soldiers at high risk for suicide and their partners! Lauren Paige recently completed her study of cognitive interventions after distressing films, and we are preparing to use the distressing film paradigm in future studies of couples responding to stress. Our newest lab members, Annie Ledoux and Sarah Thomas, as well as two of our amazing post-baccalaureate RAs (Christopher Summers and Jenny Stewart) are all presenting posters at the upcoming ABCT conference. Finally, we are also preparing to being coding of videotaped discussions of 60 community couples in a microanalytic study of couples’ processes.

Rebecca Cobb, Ph.D.
SFU Close Relationships Lab
Assistant Clinical Professor
Seattle University

This past year, the Close Relationships Lab participated in a multi-site (16 labs in 5 countries) Registered Replication project to replicate an experiment by Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, and Hannon (2002). In the
original study, participants who received a high commitment manipulation were more willing to forgive a hypothetical relationship transgression than participants who received no such prime. The manipulation check failed in all participating labs and thus we failed to replicate the original results. Read the replication report here: http://pps.sagepub.com/content/11/5/750.abstract

Dr. Jennifer Trew, a post-doc in the Close Relationships Lab, has wrapped up data collection on her longitudinal study on attraction and the formation of romantic relationships (in a speed dating paradigm) funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

We have begun a new daily diary study of how married couples manage hurt feelings from day to day, and how sexual communication and sexual problems relate to daily fluctuations in sexual satisfaction and mood. This study is funded by a Vice President's Research Grant and a Psychology Department Research Grant.

For her undergraduate honours thesis, Brittany Lasanen has spearheaded a longitudinal study examining how couples navigate long distance relationships. She is interested in how self-expansion and attachment security play a role in buffering relationship decline during this challenging and stressful experience.

In June, lab members Marissa Bowsfield, Jennifer Pink, and Jennifer Trew presented a symposium at the Canadian Psychological Association’s convention in Victoria, British Columbia, entitled "Individual and Relational Predictors of Intimate Partners’ Sexual Satisfaction." Some teaser findings from our one-year study on sexuality in relationships: constructive verbal communication about sexual issues mediates links between attachment security and both spouses’ sexual satisfaction; non-verbal sexual communication during sexual activity fosters sexual satisfaction, but verbal communication during sex does not; sexual anxiety mediates links between negative body image and sexual satisfaction.

The graduate students and Dr. Cobb also went on their annual writing retreat to beautiful Thetis Island, British Columbia! Despite what you might think from our photo, work was accomplished! (From left to right: Jennifer Pink, Jessica Ferreira, Roanne Millman, Jill Logan, and Marissa Bowsfield. Rebecca Cobb is the big head in front).
Richard Mattson, Ph.D.
Center for Transdisciplinary Research on Intimate Research
Associated Professor of psychology
Binghamton University

Our lab is continuing to analyze data on the Individual and Marital Well Being Study, where we have just received analysis of the DNA samples. Some graduate students in the lab are working on individual grant and fellowship proposals such as the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program.

Sarah Whitton, Ph.D.
The Today’s Couples and Families Research Program
Associate Professor of Psychology
University of Cincinnati

We are excited to report on both new and ongoing projects happening in our lab!

This summer, we launched a NICHD-funded 5-year longitudinal study of female-born sexual minority adolescents and young adults. FAB400, as we call it, is being conducted in collaboration with the Northwestern Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing. Though largely focused on the youth’s romantic relationships and factors that differentiate healthy from unhealthy or violent relationships, the study will also examine other factors that may contribute to the health disparities faced by LGBT women.

This fall, in collaboration with the Talbert House Fatherhood Project, we just launched a small RCT of enhanced coparenting services to be delivered as part of a fatherhood program for low-income, non-residential fathers. This project is funded by the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network.

We also continue to collect data for our 2-year study (funded by the American Heart Association), which is assessing the efficacy of a newly developed, couple-based smoking cessation program (PACT). PACT integrates relationship education strategies to improve couple support-related skills into standard CBT smoking cessation treatment. It is still too early to evaluate program effects, but most couples report enjoying it and many smokers have successfully quit!

Finally, graduate student Neslihan James-Kangal continues to run focus groups for her qualitative project exploring how young adults manage conflict (or don’t) in their uncommitted or ambiguous romantic and sexual relationships.

We also have two new wonderful lab members: Lisa Godfrey started this fall as a student in our doctoral program, and Christina Dyar joined us as a postdoctoral fellow on the FAB400 project.
HOT off the Press

In Press and Recently Published Literature


