

Couples Research & Therapy *NEWSLETTER*

The Newsletter of the Couples Research & Therapy ABCT–SIG, Fall 2013

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Couples SIG Newsletter Editors:

Tatiana Gray, M.A.
Clark University
Worcester, MA

Judith Biesen, M.A.
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN

tsettles@clarku.edu
judithbiesen@gmail.com

A Final Thank You and Goodbye to Alan Gurman

Kristina Coop Gordon
University of Tennessee



Our field lost a great man this year when we lost Alan Gurman. Al was a wonderful, brilliant, and exceedingly warm and joyful man who contributed in countless ways to our field. Many SIG members are probably most familiar with him through his important work editing the *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, perhaps the most influential and prestigious edited Handbook in our field. At the time of his death he was in the middle of editing the fifth edition and that number alone tells you how successful and highly valued this work was. Thankfully, Jay Lebow and Doug Snyder stepped in to ensure that the *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy* would still be finished as a way to honor Al's work and contributions to this extremely influential project. However, Al accomplished much, much more than this handbook. He was on faculty in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin Medical School in Madison for over 38 years and at the time of his passing he was a Clinical Professor at the Family Institute at Northwestern and a Visiting Professor of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School/Cambridge Health Alliance. Over the course of his career, he edited the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* for a full decade, and authored/edited over 20 books on couple and family therapy and 97 peer-reviewed articles.

Al's articles and books were invariably incisive, integrative, and inordinately intelligent commentaries on the state of research and therapy in the couple and family field. He continually pushed us all in his work and in his editing to be better than we were. Al was passionate about understanding couple and family therapy, but he also was dispassionate in that he was wedded to no particular model, only to what was most effective. He also was not in this field for his ego. This ability to stand somewhat outside of the fray enabled him to see it more clearly. Thus, he looked beyond the current "best practices" to see what was missing and what was coming next that might fill these gaps. As a result, his critiques made us all better and the field will be poorer in his loss. In response to his influential contributions, almost every existing family therapy organization honored him during his lifetime with distinguished achievement and service awards. A short list of these awards

Letter from the Editors

Judith and I are pleased to bring you the Fall 2013 edition of the ABCT Couples SIG newsletter. We have so many wonderful contributions this time around. We are very appreciative to have an article by Sara Boeding, Christine Paprocki, Donald Baucom, Jonathan Abramowitz, Michael Wheaton, Laura Fabricant, and Melanie Fischer. They have submitted a shortened version of their recent publication "Let Me Check That for You: Symptom Accommodation in Romantic Partners of Adults with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder." You can find their report on page 6.

Additionally, we extend our extreme gratitude to Kristina Coop-Gordon, Ph.D. (and colleagues) for her beautiful and heartwarming tribute to Alan Gurman on page 1. Last but not least we're pleased to present many fantastic Lab Updates. It looks like it's been a busy and productive year for us SIGgers - keep up the good work!

Finally, Judith and I will be passing the torch to two new newsletter editors after this edition (and just when we were finally getting the hang of it)! It has truly been a pleasure to bring together all of your wonderful work for the past two years and we thank you for the amazing opportunity!

Thank you for making the Couples SIG Newsletter possible!

Tatiana Gray & Judith Biesen

include: Excellence in Internship Training Award for Distinguished Achievement in Teaching and Training from the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers, Distinguished Contribution to Family Psychology Award from the Society for Family Psychology, Distinguished Contribution to Family Therapy Research Award from the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and the Distinguished Achievement in Family Therapy Research Award from the American Family Therapy Academy (first recipient). Belatedly, in light of his immense role in shaping our field, the Couples SIG also will spend time honoring his life and contributions during our business meeting.

However, although we could fill pages of this newsletter with Al's achievements, these professional contributions perhaps are surpassed by the kind of person that Al was. When we learned about his passing on Sept 7th of this year, there was an outpouring of grief and affection for Al on various listservs. It was clear that the loss was not just professional for people who had interacted with him; it also was deeply personal. So many people had warm memories of Al and wanted to share them with the community. Consequently, when I agreed to write this piece about Al, I also asked some of the people who knew him if they would be willing to contribute their recollections of him. Below are some of the wonderful remembrances shared with me; each of them capture an essential piece of Alan – his scholarship, his generosity, his warmth, and his mentorship.

- *From Jay Lebow:* Alan Gurman was a great human being, a wonderful friend, colleague, a family member. Generations of psychologists speak to his superb qualities as a mentor over a period of four decades. However, in this short piece, I want to speak to one aspect of Alan's career, his relationship to behavioral couple and family therapy. In a workshop Alan and I did at a conference earlier this year, Alan, when asked to give his work a label, described himself as a behavioral couple therapist. But what a behavior therapist! Alan laid the foundation in several early articles and books for evidence based couple and family therapy at a time when few others were attending to evidence. And Alan challenged the early mechanistic qualities of behavioral couple and family therapy, leading to one of the liveliest dialogues in academic history with Neil Jacobson and others. The synthesis which ensued left his fingerprints all over today's cognitive-behavioral couple therapy. What originally looked like doubt ultimately led to synergy and development. All couple and family therapists owe a great deal to Alan and he sorely will be missed.

- *From Andy Christensen:* Al and I had an electronic relationship. I don't recall us ever meeting personally but we had many e-mail exchanges. I recall one series a few years ago with mixed feelings -- he pushed me to make revisions on a chapter that I really didn't want to work on anymore. But of course, as a result of his pushing and direction, the article was substantially improved. One series of e-mails this year revealed Al's intellectual spirit and generosity. He was an anonymous reviewer of an article whose senior author was one of my graduate students, Lisa Benson. Al liked the article even though one of the reviewers definitely did not, and he got permission from the editor to reveal his identity to us and write us about the article. His comments spurred the editor to publish our article as well as a series of comments about the article, including Al's review, the very critical review of our paper, and our response. In his commentary Al quoted a favorite quotation of his from the late Frank Pittman: "None of us understands psychotherapy well enough to stop learning from all of us." He was that kind of a scholar, going out of his way to encourage other scholars, never afraid of controversy, and, knowing acutely the limits of our knowledge, pushing for open dialogue. I will miss him.
- *From Melinda Morrill:* I knew Al Gurman only a bit -- had co-authored a book chapter in his 2010 handbook with James Cordova, and enjoyed his kindness and whimsical e-mails. He gave generous compliments and a couple of times followed up with me about when I would be doing internship, etc. I met him in person at the Family Process celebration in 2011 and emailed with him afterwards, as well as while I was going through internship interviews last winter and he was telling me about helping with mock interviews at UW. He just seemed so full of life, his passing was really shocking and heart breaking. I can only imagine how much that loss hurt to those who knew him very well, but clearly his legacy will live on strong.
- *From Nadine Kaslow:* What is most noteworthy about Alan were his qualities as a human being. The outpouring of love and support on the listservs after his death was shared, highlighted that for Alan his relationships were what was central in his life. Alan was universally liked, even loved, and respected. Everyone appreciated his great sense of humor and his joie de vivre. Down to earth and very genuine and trustworthy, he was always fair in his interpersonal dealings. Alan was an incredibly generous mentor and colleague and offered wonderful opportunities to his students and junior colleagues. He never sought glory for himself. There is no question that Al was incredibly devoted and loving toward his own family. Alan was one of my most significant clinical and clinical-research teachers and mentors and a very special friend. I credit him, along with David Rice, for teaching me to think and behave like an integrationist. I am grateful to him for inculcating in me a love for working with couples and for growing as a person while helping couples to flourish. He encouraged me (and so many others) to use my head and my heart in doing couples therapy. The first time I served on an editorial board was when he invited me to do so and he served as a great role model when it came to editing. He was one of my most significant mentors and I know this is true for many people over the generations. I trust that what Al would want would be for us to not mourn his passing, but to continue on his amazing work and his value of connections. We are all enriched by our interactions with him and his landmark contributions to our field.

As you can see, across all of these recollections, Al's warmth, joy, passion for his work and his care for others are consistent threads. Al's life was too short but he squeezed an enormous amount of joy and value out of it. It is difficult to believe that such a larger than life person is no longer with us. I feel privileged to have known him and I know my many interactions with him stretched me in ways that have made me a better scientist and practitioner. It is clear that he had that effect on many people who knew him well and on the field at large. We thank him and his big heart for all he did for us and we wish comfort for his wife Gerri, and his children, Jesse and Ted, as they cope with this tremendous loss. He will be missed.

Letter from the SIG Co-Presidents

Robin Barry¹ & Steffany Fredman²

¹ *University of Maryland Baltimore County,*

² *Massachusetts General Hospital*

Hello, everyone. We're looking forward to the upcoming conference in Nashville and are very excited about a number of upcoming SIG conference activities.

We hope that you'll be able to join us in kicking off the conference with the **Couples SIG preconference event** from 6:30-8:00 PM on Thursday, November 21 in Ryman Room N. For this year's preconference event, we're delighted to have **a panel of distinguished researchers who will share with us their strategies for successfully securing grants for couple-based research.** We're fortunate to have on our panel the following investigators: **Don Baucom, Ph.D.**, Distinguished Professor, Department of Psychology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; **Frank Fincham, Ph.D.**, Eminent Scholar and Director, Family Institute, The Florida State University; **Kristi Gordon, Ph.D.**, Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Tennessee-Knoxville; **Rick Heyman, Ph.D.**, Professor, Department of Cariology and Comprehensive Care, New York University; **Howard Markman, Ph.D.**, Distinguished Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Denver; **Keith Renshaw, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, George Mason University; **Galena Rhoades, Ph.D.**, Research Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Denver, **Amy Slep, Ph.D.**, Professor, Department of Cariology and Comprehensive Care, New York University; and, **Scott Stanley, Ph.D.**, Research Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Denver. Following presentations by our panelists, audience members will have the opportunity to ask questions, share their own secrets of success, and discuss how SIG members can contribute to the important efforts of a Couples SIG working group advocating for more funding for couples research from the NIH. We look forward to what is sure to be a lively and informative discussion!

Our **SIG Business Meeting** will be from 2:45-4:15 pm on Friday, November 22 in Presidential Chamber A. We'll be updating membership lists, seeking volunteers for the program committee, distributing awards for the **Robert L. Weiss Student Research Award**, and having **elections** for the positions of **student co-presidents, newsletter co-editors, and media coordinators.** Many thanks to Lisa Benson and Emily Georgia for their work as student co-presidents; Tatiana Gray and Judith Biesen for their work as newsletter co-editors; and Jill Logan and Roanne Millman for their work as media coordinators over the past two years. If you're interested in serving on the program committee or being nominated for one of the SIG officer positions, please feel free to contact Steffany (sjf23@psu.edu) in advance or at the conference.

We will also be having a **tribute to Dr. Alan Gurman**, who passed away unexpectedly earlier this fall. Dr. Gurman was actually scheduled to attend his first ABCT conference this year and was looking forward to becoming an active member of our Couples SIG community. Shortly before his untimely death, Dr. Gurman generously volunteered his time to serve as a reviewer for abstracts for the SIG poster exposition, along with Dr. Brian Baucom and Dr. Mari Clements. We're very appreciative of Dr. Kristi Gordon's work in coordinating this opportunity to honor Dr. Gurman and his important contributions to the field of family psychology.

We look forward to seeing you all in Nashville and are sending our best wishes for a good fall.

Steffany & Robin

KUDOS!!!

We'd like to celebrate these special events in the lives of the following Siggers. Congratulations to you!

☺ **Rosaura Orengo**, a graduate student working with Erika Lawrence at the University of Iowa (and the SIG's Treasurer) recently received a dissertation grant from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). Her dissertation will test the effectiveness of an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)-based skills group in reducing aggression, impulsivity, and in improving mental health outcomes among a high-risk, multi-problem sample of incarcerated domestic violence offenders.

☺ **Karen Prager** had her book "Dilemmas of Intimacy" published by Routledge. Click [here](#) to learn more.

☺ Congratulations to **Kristi Gordon** who was recently elected as president of Division 43 (Society of Family Psychology) of the American Psychological Association! She also was elected Fellow of this Division as well. Another congratulations to Kristi for receiving the Faculty Academic Outreach Award from the University of Tennessee College of Arts and Sciences.

☺ **Shelby Scott**, a graduate student at the University of Denver, was awarded the American Psychological Foundation's Roy Scrivner Memorial Grant for 2013. This is for her dissertation project "Understanding Unique Challenges and Communication in Lesbian Romantic Relationships: Developing Guidelines for Practitioners." The study is examining how three important issues to lesbian couples are related to their relationship functioning (satisfaction, adjustment, and commitment) including (1) gay-related stressors, (2) physical and emotional intimacy, and (3) communication styles.

☺ **Sarah Campbell**, a graduate student at George Mason University, has received three separate funding awards for her dissertation, which is a 2-week daily diary study of PTSD and interpersonal processes in military couples. A National Research Service Award (NRSA) from NIMH will provide her stipend and fund additional training, and other elements of the research project are being funded by the APF Randy Gerson Memorial Grant, and the ISTSS Frank W. Putnam Trauma Research Scholar Award.

☺ **Amy Holtzworth-Monroe**, together with **Connie Beck** from the University of Arizona, received a multi-year research award from the National Institute of Justice. The name of the project is: Intimate Partner Violence and Custody Decisions: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Outcomes from Family Court, Shuttle Mediation, and Videoconferencing Mediation.

☺ **Hannah Williamson**, a graduate student at UCLA, was awarded the APA/Psi Chi Edwin B. Newman Graduate Research Award for her paper 'Does premarital education decrease or increase couples' later help-seeking?' (see 'Hot of the Press' section).

Let Me Check That for You: Symptom Accommodation in Romantic Partners of Adults with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Brief Report

Sara E. Boeding, Christine M. Paprocki, Donald H. Baucom, Jonathan S. Abramowitz, Michael G. Wheaton, Laura E. Fabricant, and Melanie S. Fischer

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder that involves *obsessions*—recurrent and unwanted thoughts, images, or impulses that provoke anxiety—and *compulsions*—behavioral or mental or rituals which are performed to reduce the anxiety arising from the obsessions. Affecting 2.3% of the population in the United States, OCD can be a particularly disabling disorder associated with significant interference in social functioning, in the workplace, and at home. Although OCD is typically considered an individual phenomenon, it often occurs in an interpersonal context which can both impact and be impacted by obsessional fear and compulsive rituals. One important but understudied interpersonal phenomenon

Treasurer's Update

Dear SIG Members,

I hope this message finds you well! It has been a pleasure serving as your treasurer thus far and I am looking forward to seeing many of you at ABCT in the fall.

Since the last update, 5 new student members and 2 new professional members have joined us! Welcome to our Couples SIG! Our dues-paying membership (members who have paid dues within the last 5 years) is currently at 179 (66 professionals and 113 students).

At the moment, our SIG balance is \$1,230.30. Our balance at the last update was \$1,170.08. This year (2013) our only expense has been \$27.15 on our web domain. Thank you for your continued support!

As always, we will collect dues for 2014 at our SIG business meeting during the ABCT conference. If you are not attending the conference or would like to pre-pay your 2014 dues, please pay electronically via PayPal (go to www.paypal.com and send money to rosauraorengo@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 "gift" to avoid processing fees. Dues are \$25 for professional members and \$5 for students, post-docs, 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,
Rosaura

Send checks to:
Rosaura Orenge-Aguayo, M.A.

which often arises in response to OCD, but which also negatively impacts OCD course and treatment, is family accommodation.

Accommodation refers to various behaviors that family members engage in either to prevent or alleviate the patient's anxiety. For example, family members might assist with the patient's rituals (e.g., agreeing to check locks and appliances for the patient), provide excessive reassurance regarding obsessional anxiety (e.g., answering frequent questions about the probability of harm), or aid the patient in avoiding obsessional stimuli (e.g., removing all "contaminated" work clothes before entering the home; Calvocoressi et al., 1995). Although clinical observation suggests that partners often engage in accommodation in order to express care and concern for (i.e., to "help") their loved one with OCD, accommodation is actually associated with greater OCD symptom severity and functional impairment (e.g., Van Noppen & Steketee, 2009), greater distress for the caregiver (e.g., Amir, Freshman, & Foa, 2000), and attenuated treatment outcome (e.g., Garcia et al., 2010).

Overall, accommodation appears to be problematic for both patients and their caregivers. However, research regarding accommodation is limited, and to date the focus has either been on parental accommodation in pediatric OCD or caregiver accommodation in adult OCD, where "caregiver" might refer to *any* family member. Thus, the nature, extent, and correlates of accommodation within specific types of adult relationships are unclear. In the present study, we sought to extend the existing literature by examining accommodation in the context of solely adult romantic relationships. We specifically aimed to determine the extent of accommodation and determine associations between accommodation and patient functioning (global OCD symptom severity, specific OCD symptom dimensions, and impairment), and relationship functioning (relationship adjustment and perceived criticism). We also examined accommodation as a predictor of response to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for OCD.

Method

As part of our open-trial of couple-based cognitive-behavioral treatment for OCD, 20 couples were assessed for accommodation behaviors, OCD symptoms, and relationship functioning before and after 16-sessions of cognitive-behavioral treatment. The treatment included several components, such as psychoeducation, partner-assisted exposure and response prevention, identifying and altering accommodation behaviors, and addressing communication and broader relevant couple issues (see Abramowitz et al, 2013a for additional details)

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Pre-treatment means indicated that there were clinically significant and moderate to severe levels of OCD symptoms in this sample, along with moderate impairment in work and social functioning and severe impairment in family/home functioning. At pre-treatment, 100% of partners reported at least some accommodation behavior toward their loved one with OCD; there was a moderate degree of accommodation on average, with some couples scoring in the severe range. Our couples were not particularly relationally distressed on average, but not highly satisfied either. Patients perceived their partners as moderately critical of them in general, as they are of their partners. Patients also perceived their partners as moderately critical of patients regarding how the patients manage OCD-related matters specifically; similarly, patients are moderately critical of how their partners handles OCD specifically.

Correlations between Partner Accommodation and Study Measures

OCD symptoms. At pre-treatment, higher levels of partner accommodation (i.e., FAS scores) were associated with more severe OCD symptoms overall. However, whereas accommodation scores were significantly correlated with the severity of compulsions, there was no significant association between partner accommodation and obsessions. Correlations with various symptom dimensions (i.e., DOCs subscales) revealed that contamination was the only OCD symptom dimension significantly related to

partner accommodation, and this association was quite strong.

Functional impairment. Accommodation was not significantly related to any of the impairment subscales on the Sheehan Disability Scale. A non-significant trend, however, did emerge for the moderate relationship with family/home impairment ($p = .06$).

Relationship functioning. Finally, accommodation was significantly negatively correlated with the partner's, but not the patient's, rating of relationship functioning (i.e., DAS). Additionally, the degree of perceived criticism that the patient gives to, and receives from, his or her partner regarding OCD (but not other) was significantly and strongly associated with accommodation.

Associations Between Partner Accommodation and Treatment Outcome

Sixteen of the 20 couples completed the CBT program and their mean post-treatment Y-BOCS total score (OCD symptoms) indicated mild post-treatment OCD symptoms and substantial and statistically significant improvement from pre-treatment (55% Y-BOCS reduction). In step 1 of our regression model, pre-treatment Y-BOCS explained only 7% of the variance in post-treatment Y-BOCS scores, and this was not significant. Addition of the pre- and post-treatment accommodation scores (FAS) in step 2, however, explained significant additional variance (68%) in post-treatment Y-BOCS scores. The final model accounted for 75% of the variance and only the post-treatment FAS emerged as a significant individual predictor of Y-BOCS scores at post-treatment.

Discussion

Individuals with OCD often spend considerable time and energy structuring their environment to reduce or prevent anxiety, and we have observed that romantic partners tend to respond in kind through accommodation behaviors. Prior to treatment, all partners in the present sample reported at least some accommodation behavior, with partners reporting accommodating to a moderate degree on average. These findings are consistent with previous

research on mixed caregiver samples, and suggest that accommodation is just as common, if not slightly more, among romantic couples in which one partner has OCD.

For most partners, accommodation is carried out with good intentions: partners do not like to see their loved ones in distress. Accordingly, they engage in activities that immediately reduce the patient's obsessional distress. However, our findings are consistent with previous research and current conceptual models of OCD which indicate that despite these good intentions, accommodation is associated with greater symptom severity and impairment, poorer relationship functioning (i.e., lower relationship satisfaction and more perceived criticism), and attenuated treatment outcome (i.e., greater severity of post-treatment OCD symptoms).

Whereas accommodation might contribute to more severe OCD symptoms, the reverse might also be true. That is, when symptoms are less severe, the partner might be less likely to accommodate to them. However, when the patient experiences high levels of OCD, they might request more assistance from the partner to lower their anxiety, or the partner might be more aware of the patient's distress. Interestingly, the association between higher accommodation and more severe and frequent compulsions was strongest for contamination-related OCD symptoms, perhaps because it might be easier for partners to accommodate such explicit and salient symptoms. Given that it can be painful to observe a loved one in distress, the partner's accommodation might also be oriented to lowering their own distress, in addition to the patient's.

In addition to being associated with poorer individual functioning, accommodation was associated with poorer relationship functioning. Specifically, greater partner accommodation was associated with lower relationship adjustment for partners, yet not for patients. This finding supports clinical observations that partners find accommodating a loved one's OCD symptoms taxing and frustrating, and that this is linked to a broader frustration with the relationship itself. Moreover, our findings regarding perceived criticism suggest that patients are aware of their partner's frustration and dissatisfaction. Indeed, on average, patients perceived partners who accommodated more as also being more

critical about the patient's OCD. Likewise, patients who report being more critical of their partners with regards to handling OCD-related matters also reported that their partners accommodated more. In concert, these findings suggest that a partner's accommodation of symptoms is not experienced by the patient nor partner as occurring in a supportive context. Although accommodation might serve to alleviate patient distress momentarily, it does not do so within the framework of a positive, satisfying relationship.

Finally, greater engagement in accommodation by the partner at post-treatment was associated with greater OCD symptom severity for the patient at post-treatment. Indeed, the degree to which partners still engaged in accommodation following treatment explained nearly two-thirds of the variance in post-treatment Y-BOCS scores. The direction of causality is unclear. Continued accommodation from a partner might interfere with treatment gains, or individuals who continue to struggle with OCD after

treatment might elicit more accommodation. In either case, the findings suggest that couple-based interventions for OCD would be fruitful. Unless couples learn how to change their interaction patterns that include accommodation, the long-term effectiveness of exposure-based CBT for OCD patients is likely to be limited. This finding is encouraging, however, because it suggests that CBT for OCD, which is highly effective, can be enhanced even further for patients in such relationships by involving the partner in treatment and helping him or her to understand that while their attempts to "help" are understandable, they actually do not aid the patient in the long-run. The current investigators have developed such an intervention and the initial findings are quite promising (Abramowitz et al., 2013a and 2013b). Further research should continue to elucidate factors which contribute to accommodation behaviors and which may further enhance couple-based treatments.

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Letter from the Student Co-Presidents

Lisa Benson¹ & Emily Georgia²

1 University of California, Los Angeles, 2 University of Miami

Are you ready for Nashville? We hope you're as excited as we are! Here are a few of the exciting SIG events at this year's ABCT:

The **SIG Cocktail Party** will be held in historic Printer's Alley in downtown Nashville. We're meeting at Fleet Street Pub, a British pub with some great beers on tap. We'll have a spread of sliders, beet salad, deviled eggs, and more, so come have a light dinner on us (or stay and order one of the shepherd's pies!).

When: Saturday, November 23rd from 7:00pm to 9:00pm.

Where: 207 Printer's Alley, in the heart of downtown Nashville (www.fleetstreetpub.com).

Transportation: We know many of you will be attending Dr. Hofmann's Presidential Address until 6:30pm at the Gaylord. Downtown is about a 15 minute drive from there. If any SIG members want to share taxis, we can organize groups (during the SIG meeting on Friday) to leave from the Gaylord at 6:30pm and 6:45pm.

In accordance with tradition, the **Student Cocktail Party** will immediately follow the main event. Any undergraduate, post-bacc, or graduate students who want to stay longer at Fleet Street and get to know each other better are welcome!

We would also like to invite you to this year's **Student Symposium**, entitled "Early, Preventative, and Low-Intensity Relationship Interventions."

When: Friday, November 22nd, from 1:00 to 2:30pm (immediately prior to the SIG Business Meeting).

Where: Presidential Chamber A.

Emily Georgia (University of Miami) will discuss the reach of a web-based relationship intervention program, Matt Hawrilenko (Clark University) will review the results of the two year follow-up of the Marriage Checkup program, Hannah Williamson (UCLA) will address predictors of success in PREP and CARE, Ellen Darling (Clark University) will present data suggesting the usefulness of mindfulness training in improving relationship quality, Kara Emery (Baylor) will describe an online motivational enhancement program aiming to help couples overcome barriers to couple interventions, and Dr. Galena Rhoades will be our discussant. We hope to see you all there!

We also want to remind you that in addition to our overall SIG listserv (couples-sig@sfu.ca), we have a Couples SIG Facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=266082574771>) and a student-specific facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=82988514892>). Feel free to email us if you would like to be added or removed from these groups.

Lastly, we will be ending our term as Student Co-Presidents this fall, so we encourage all student SIG members to start thinking about whether you would like to run for Co-President. It's an amazing opportunity to get more involved with the SIG and get to know all the wonderful members. Elections will be held at the Business Meeting (Friday 11/2 at 2:45pm.) As always, please feel free to email us with any suggestions, questions, or concerns. See you in Nashville!

Sincerely,

Lisa Benson (lbenson1@ucla.edu) & *Emily Georgia* (egeorgia@psy.miami.edu)

Kristina Coop Gordon, PhD

Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
University of Tennessee – Knoxville

We are currently involved in several ongoing projects here at the Gordon Couples Research Lab. One of our larger ongoing studies involves working with James Cordova's lab to implement the Marriage Checkup (referred to here as Relationship Rx) in community based integrative health-care facilities in Tennessee and with a low-income population. In addition, we are currently analyzing data from Un Tiempo para Las Parejas (a couples-based intervention program that targeted Latino couples in which the males smoke) that was conducted in collaboration with researchers from the Cancer Prevention, Detection, & Control Research Program at Duke University Medical Center. Finally, we are also busy collecting data for the second wave of the Mindfulness and Relationship Health Study – a small-scale longitudinal study that examines relationship changes in couples undergoing a mindfulness-skills training course at the University of Tennessee.

We are excited to congratulate our lab members on a number of accomplishments. Sarah Gilbert is busy completing her internship at Columbia University Medical Center, and we are happy to report that she is enjoying her time in New York City. Maria Rowley is currently busy collecting and analyzing data for her doctoral dissertation which focuses on interdependent relational self-construal and relationship maintenance strategy differences between polyamorous vs. non-polyamorous individuals. Katie Wischkaemper successfully defended her master's thesis project which focused on developing a relationship support scale for couples in which one partner had type II diabetes. Sarah Mauck is working on a project examining intimate partner violence with Todd Moore's research lab. Jessica Hughes is working on her master's thesis which examines the effects of relationship health and acculturation on post-partum depression in Latino couples, as well as working on a project with Dr. Mark Whisman at UC Boulder examining predictors of infidelity in Latino couples. Alex Khaddouma is currently working on his master's thesis which focuses on the impact of relationship health on men's motivation to quit smoking, as well as several projects that focus on the role of mindfulness in married and dating relationship health.

Brian Baucom, PhD

Assistant Professor of Psychology
Director: Couples Laboratory for Observational StudiEs (CLOSE)
Department of Psychology
University of Utah

We are excited to begin our second year in the CLOSE lab and delighted to have two new graduate students, Jasara Hogan and Alex Crenshaw, join our team. Our current projects focus on understanding the dynamic interplay between behavior, emotion, and cognition across a range of interpersonal (e.g., empathy) and relational (e.g., demand-withdraw) processes.

Ambulatory Technology for Home-based Observational of Marriage and Emotion (AT-HOME)

Our major current project is the AT-HOME study. The main aim of AT-HOME is to study physiological reactivity to marital conflict during daily life. In addition to completing a standard laboratory-based interaction protocol, couples wear a set of miniaturized biosensors to continuously record their cardiovascular and electrodermal functioning for about a week and provide EMA reports of stressors (including marital conflict) throughout the day. As part of the project, we are also working to develop computational and statistical methods for tackling this and related questions as "big data" problems.

Doug Snyder, Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
Texas A&M University

Our happy lab family is growing! We're thrilled to have welcomed two new students to the Snyder lab – Laura Osborne whom we recruited from Howard Markman's lab and Kimberly Stanton whom we recruited from Brian Doss. We also have two "veterans" making their way out. Christina Balderrama-Durbin and Caitlin Fissette will be leaving for internship after this year. Our lab has had the privilege of hosting a visiting scholar from Asia University – Taiwan, Dr. Yu-Chiung Lou! She is completing work on the psychometric evaluation of a Chinese adaptation of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R).

Much has happened in the past year for the Snyder lab. We continue to focus much of our energy on military couples and couple assessment. The lab, in conjunction with our collaborators at New York University (Rick Heyman and Amy Slep Smith), has recently completed delivering a series of trainings in a newly developed relationship distress prevention/intervention program designed for service members and their partners. We've also continued to offer relationship enhancement workshops to Army couples at Fort Hood. Laura and Kim have made some initial efforts toward developing a military couple therapy specialty clinic at the Texas A&M Psychology Clinic. On the topic of military involvement, Caitlin has officially commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Air Force Reserves! We are so very proud. Here is hoping for another exciting and productive year!

**Lab Updates:**

With all your new research ideas and grant proposals brewing, please start thinking about your updates for the Spring 2014 Newsletter. We'd love to hear from you!

Don Baucom, PhD

Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
UNC Chapel Hill

The couples lab at UNC continues to enjoy its many rewarding research experiences and collaborations with colleagues within the university, elsewhere in the United States, and in other countries. There are several themes that guide our work at present. First, we are heavily involved in attempting to integrate relationship and individual functioning, both in basic and treatment research. In doing so, we continue our commitment to couple-based intervention research, such as our current investigations focusing upon couple-based strategies to assist couples in which one partner has an eating disorder or has a child with cancer. We are in the midst of a large-scale couple treatment study for anorexia and currently are developing new couple-based interventions for bulimia and binge eating disorder. We continue our interest in couples and anxiety (outcome research on couples and OCD) and recently have developed and are evaluating a brief treatment for couples in which one partner has notable anxiety about the relationship itself. Whereas our previous couples and health investigations have focused upon the medical problems of one partner, we are expanding our treatment to focus upon couples who have a child with cancer.

In addition to our psychotherapy research, we continue our commitment to studying couples' interaction. At present, this emphasizes communication and interaction patterns that are focal to one person's disorder, such as OCD or anorexia, developing observational coding systems to explore disorder-specific communication. We also are collaborating with colleagues in Germany and elsewhere in the United States to understand emotional arousal during couples' interactions as indicated through voice stress and how this differs across different disorders. We also are intrigued with strategies that couples employ to interact and attempt to maintain their relationships while living apart, so we are exploring the use of various media for communication in couples' long distance relationships.

Of course, we continue to be intrigued and stimulated by new, creative ideas from current lab members and collaborators around the world on an ongoing basis. It is these relationships with each other that fuel our passion for addressing the relationship issues that couples present to us.

Richard Mattson, PhD

Associate Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
SUNY Binghamton

I'm glad to report that I've recently received a grant from the SUNY Research Foundation Collaborative Fund. The award is for \$100,000 over a 2-year period. The Co-PIs include Matthew D. Johnson (SUNY Binghamton) and Joanne Davila (SUNY Stony Brook), as well as Nicole Cameron (Binghamton) and Frank Middleton (SUNY Upstate Medical University). The rather protracted title of the grant is: "The Interplay of Genetic, Neurobiological, and Developmental Factors in the Association between Social Support in Marriage and Physical and Mental Health: Toward an Integrated Model". Below is a blurb about the project.

Life stress has long-term physical and mental health consequences. Accordingly, pharmacological and psychosocial interventions for mitigating the negative health consequences of life stress are aggressively sought. Decades of research indicate that social support buffers the negative consequences of stress by down-regulating biological responses, and there is also promising research showing that biological interventions can increase the solicitation of social support in times of stress. Considered together, the modification of social support behavior through biology – or vice versa – is a promising avenue of health care for a host of stress-related problems. However, the full story – which likely involves interplaying genetic and developmental factors – is far from understood. The aim of the current project is to develop an integrative genetic, developmental, and psychosocial framework linking together social support and improved health outcomes in order to develop treatments targeting stress and its negative consequences.

James V. Córdova, Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology
 Director: The Marriage Checkup Project
 Department of Psychology
 Clark University

We are currently in the process of analyzing and writing up our findings from the Marriage Checkup project at Clark University. We are also involved in multiple exciting collaborations. We are still working with Kristina Coop Gordon's lab to implement the Marriage Checkup (referred to in this case as a Relationship Checkup) in a community based integrative health-care facility in Tennessee. We are also working closely with Lt. Colonel Jeffrey Cigrang and his Air Force team to implement the Marriage Checkup for military couples in a primary care setting. We are also collaborating with Tea Trillingsgaard, Hanne Noer, Mattias Due, Signe Steenberger, and Soeren Marcussen of Aarhus University and The Center for Familieudvikling on an RCT of the Marriage Checkup in Denmark (called Par-tjek). In addition, we are currently working on the development of a website for use by individuals, couples, and therapists, to make the Marriage Checkup more widely accessible. Lastly, Dr. Cordova's Treatment Manual "The Marriage Checkup Practitioner's Guide: Promoting Lifelong Relationship Health" will be available for purchase from APA Press on December 15.

Melinda Ippolito Morrill is currently a predoctoral clinical psychology intern at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center/Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital. She will be defending her dissertation entitled *Using Longitudinal Dyadic Multilevel Modeling to Investigate the Role of Couples' Acceptance in Mothers' and Fathers' Positive Parenting* this year. CJ is still on internship at the Durham VAMC in Durham, NC. She is looking forward to defending her dissertation in the spring. Ellen Darling is planning her dissertation research in the area of mindfulness, relationship satisfaction, and perinatal mental health. Julia Sollenberger is working on her dissertation examining the association between partners' implicit theories of relationships and relationship satisfaction. She is also collaborating with Tatiana Gray on writing a paper on how couples' strengths can be used as an assessment tool in therapy. In addition to the study on couples strengths, Tatiana is in the process of publishing a paper on how dating couples transition out of conflict conversations. She is also working closely with the lab to examine various health outcomes in the Marriage Checkup. Matt Hawrilenko is looking at mediators in the Marriage Checkup, trying to understand subgroups of participants with different types of treatment response. We would also like to congratulate Amanda Harp on the birth of her baby boy in September!



2nd row: Tatiana Gray, James Córdova, Melinda Ippolito Morrill, CJ Fleming, 1st row: Ellen Darling & baby Natasha, Julia Sollenberger, Matt Hawrilenko.

Joanne Davila, PhD

Professor of Psychology

Director: SBU Relationship Development Center

Graduate Students: Brain Feinstein, Vickie Bhatia, Jess Latack

The Relationship Development Center continues its work on adolescent and adult romantic relationships and well being. We are conducting ongoing survey research on associations among quality of social networking relationships and mental health, as well as studies of romantic competence in emerging adults. The graduate students are all actively working on lab-based and individual projects, including studies of well being among LGB individuals (Brian), studies on sexual violence and risky sexual outcomes (Jess), and studies on personality and risky romantic and sexual outcomes (Vickie). And Joanne is writing a book for emerging adult women on how to have healthy relationships, to be published by Guilford next year.

We're happy to report that our former students are doing quite well. Lisa Starr is now an Assistant Professor in the clinical psychology program at the University of Rochester, where she continues her research on depression, anxiety, and interpersonal functioning, and Rachel Hershenberg is a postdoc at the Philadelphia VA, where she continues her research on depression and close relationships.

HOT off the Press

In Press and Recently Published Literature

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Farewell from this Post

At last, we would like to thank you for all you've done to help us spread the news about the fascinating couples work being accomplished across the globe by our fellow SIGgers.

We wish you the best in all your endeavors and anticipate reading more about your research and projects in the next issues of our beloved newsletter.

Cheers,

Tatiana Gray & Judith Biesen