

# Couples Research & Therapy Newsletter

The Newsletter of Couples Research & Therapy AABT–SIG Spring/Summer '05

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## Counsel from the Co-Presidents

Hello all. We hope everyone had a great spring semester. There have been several SIG-related activities that have been going on since the last conference, and we thought we'd take this opportunity to update you all on them. As always, we welcome your comments and feedback.

### 1) Planning the SIG Pre-Conference in DC

We are continuing to plan our SIG pre-conference workshop for the upcoming ABCT convention. We are pleased to announce that the topic of this year's Couples SIG workshop will be developing the Couple Research Practice Network. This topic generated a great deal of interest from our membership when we asked the listserv to brainstorm about possible workshop speakers.

We are delighted that Dr. Tom Borkovec accepted our invitation and is confirmed as our speaker for the workshop! Dr. Borkovec is a leading expert in the formation of research practice networks (see more information about this below), and we are extremely fortunate to have an opportunity to learn from him. His talk will be from 6:30-8:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 17. We know that this is later than usual for our pre-conference event, but due to room availability, this time will maximize attendance. We recently sent the listserv a few of Dr. Borkovec's publications on research practice networks. Our webmaster, Brian Baucom, has volunteered to post these articles on the Couple SIG website in the near future for those who were unable to receive the attachments.

### 2) Planning the SIG Social Event for November's conference in DC

Our webmaster, Brian Baucom, oversaw a SIG vote to decide whether the group would prefer to have a dinner or cocktail party for our SIG social event at the next conference. The SIG voted overwhelmingly to have a cocktail party, and our Student Co-Presidents Susan Stanton and Sara Steinberg are in the process of planning this event. However, there has also been a request to organize some sort of group activity like we used to have at the dinners, most recently the "Family Tree" that Kristi Coop-Gordon organized at the dinner a few years ago. Susan (sstanton@email.unc.edu) and Sara (sara.j.steinberg@sunysb.edu) are in the process of brainstorming suggestions for this coming year's activity, and any and all ideas are welcome.

### 3) Update on the Best Practices Website Committee

At our SIG business meeting last November, Andy Christensen suggested that we establish a committee to examine the feasibility of creating a "best practices" database. As Andy stated, "This kind of collaborative endeavor is extremely important to our field if we are going to learn more about the outcome of couple therapy and demonstrate to the public that couple therapy is a viable and valuable treatment. If people like us don't establish this kind of database, who will?" Such a database would also improve our clinical work in that it would encourage clinicians to track couple change more closely. This



### Couples SIG Newsletter

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## TREASURER UPDATE

Dear SIGers,

Currently, our treasury balance is \$1494. We have 92 members, of which 48 are full members, and 44 are student members. Both our bank account balance and our membership numbers are lower than in previous years. For example, we have a list of 218 people who have paid dues at least once since 1999, which means that less than half of the people who are interested in couples research and therapy are currently paying their dues. This is particularly troubling because ABCT does not recognize those who are not current with their dues as couples SIG members, and thus our strong reputation with ABCT could decline from sheer lack of numbers. Another reason to pay dues is to ensure funding for our conference activities, and prevent our yearly scramble to fund our speakers, rooms, gatherings, etc.

The good news is that every year, our meeting rooms are consistently overflowing, our listserv stays vital, and we hold great pre-conference activities. Thus, it is likely that many of us didn't have cash or our checkbooks handy at the SIG meeting, or missed the meeting and then just forgot to pay. Also, please note that monies paid at the door at the SIG cocktail party went to fund the party, rather than to pay dues. So feel free to contact me to determine your membership status. Membership fees are \$20 for faculty members/professionals and \$5 for students/1<sup>st</sup> year postdocs. To pay your 2004-2005 dues or even pay your fall 2005-2006 dues in advance, please put "ABCT Couples SIG" in the memo line of your check and make it payable to me at the address below. Please include your current contact information and professional versus student status. All payments will be acknowledged with an email receipt.

Finally, as an additional incentive to pay your dues, I am

suggestion was met with tremendous enthusiasm by the SIG. Below is a progress report on the development of this committee.

The goals at this point are:

- To establish best-practice assessment procedures for couple therapy that are widely accepted in the SIG
- To establish procedures and set up a Research Practice Network throughout the SIG
- To maintain the SIG Research Practice Network and establish principles for publication from the database

The plan at this point is:

- To build knowledge and consensus for a Research Practice Network in the SIG (e.g., by holding our pre-conference workshop on it this year and discussing at the annual ABCT meeting)
- To gather information about existing Research Practice Networks (e.g., by meeting with Tom Borkovec during the pre-conference workshop) and how they operate (e.g., human subjects issues, confidentiality issues)
- To do a simple web survey of the SIG to see how many people would participate in the network and how many couples each year that they might see (to get an idea if the network is feasible and the database would be large enough to be useful)
- To develop the best-practice assessment procedures (some models for this already exist, e.g., see Brian Doss). Measures would need to be brief and limited and would likely include a short measure to be completed at the beginning of each session (e.g., the Norton QMI, ratings of target behaviors)

Co-chairs and members of this committee are being finalized. At present, Andy is the contact person for this committee ([christensen@psych.ucla.edu](mailto:christensen@psych.ucla.edu)), although once the co-chairs have been established (likely Barb Kistenmacher and Jaslean La Taillade), an E-Mail will be sent to the listserv with their names. We look forward to making substantial progress on these issues this year at ABCT!

#### 4) Update on the Relational Diagnoses Committee

Brian Doss and Erika Lawrence are co-chairing the Relational Diagnoses Committee through Division 43 (Family Psychology) of the APA. The purpose of this committee is to begin to gather information and oversee a discussion about whether or not we want to pursue the inclusion of a Relational Diagnoses section in the DSM-V. Brian and Erika will be addressing a multitude of qualitative, categorical, and political/practical questions such as:

- a. Is a relationship diagnosis an individual, dyadic, triadic, or larger construct?
- b. Is there a single "relationship dysfunction" diagnosis or are there multiple types/subtypes (e.g., conflictual, lacking love, violent)?
- c. What combination of behavioral, cognitive, or affective problems would serve as criteria for a relationship disorder?
- d. Assuming the structure of the DSM-V remains similar to the DSM-IV, what axis would a relationship disorder best be categorized on?
- e. How do we respond to questions such as "What are we going to pathologize next?"

Members of this committee are being finalized. Erika ([erika-lawrence@uiowa.edu](mailto:erika-lawrence@uiowa.edu)) and Brian ([doss@psyc.tamu.edu](mailto:doss@psyc.tamu.edu)) are the contact people for this committee, and they will be sending an E-Mail to the SIG listserv about this issue over the summer.

asking “each on to reach one” towards bringing more members into our SIG. Thus, if you refer someone as a new member or remind someone to become financially active, tell the person to let me know when s/he pays dues. In my fall report, I will give a special acknowledgement to the professional and student members who have recruited the most new and returning SIGers.

Take care, and I hope to hear from many of you soon!

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**Don't Forget to  
 Pay Your Dues!  
 Our SIG Needs  
 Your Support!!**

### Editors' Note

This is an exciting time in the Couples SIG! Erika, Greg, and others have been working hard on a number of projects, including a Research Practice Network for the SIG, a Relational Diagnosis Committee, and an Informed Dissemination Committee. As the SIG puts more energy into publicizing our work, we are delighted to include an article in this issue from the father of couples research on dissemination.

At the same time, exciting new research is being conducted in our field. We have the pleasure of presenting an article on research in couples and mindfulness, and many more topics of research are covered in the Hot Off the Press abstracts. Keep up the good work, everyone!

Eric & Farrah

### 5) Update on the Informed Dissemination Committee

At our SIG business meeting in November, Frank Fincham suggested that we establish a committee that would allow our SIG to proactively participate in the type of information that is being disseminated to the public about couple research and intervention. The committee could be used to disseminate basic knowledge as well as to discuss interventions. This suggestion was met with enthusiasm and a committee was established.

Potential goals of the committee:

- Creating a column on each of our research interests that would change each month
- Having formal SIG press releases on couple research findings of interest to the public

Frank has offered to be the chair of this committee and to base the committee's work at his Family Studies Institute in Florida (ffincham@fsu.edu). Please contact him for more information on the status of this committee.

### 6) New ABCT Rule: SIG members must be ABCT members

Just a reminder that we are now only allowed to formally count you as a SIG member if you are a dues-paying member to ABCT also. (This is an ABCT rule, not ours.) However, this rule has no bearing on whether you can attend SIG meetings and SIG social events at ABCT, whether you are on the SIG listserv, whether you can access the SIG website, etc. Our official numbers do impact how much influence we have as a SIG on ABCT in terms of the room size we get for our business meeting, whether couple-related conference events are double-booked, etc., so it is to our benefit to keep our official numbers high. In addition, your paid dues are crucial for the financial stability of the SIG and influence the services that we are able to offer to the membership. At present, we are the largest SIG in ABCT!

### 7) Clarification of SIG Offices, Duties, and Elections

We thought it would be helpful to have the SIG offices and the duties required for each office listed on the SIG website. This website addition would serve several functions. First, it would allow all of you to know who to contact when you have SIG-related questions. Second, it would allow those of you who wish to run for these offices in the future to have a clearer understanding of what is involved. Third, a suggestion was made at last year's SIG business meeting that we move to having more formal elections for the offices in the future. For example, we have discussed the possibility of gathering all nominations in advance of the conference. No decisions about this issue have been made yet, and we will soon be sending an E-Mail to the listserv asking for your opinions about the proposed streamlining of the election process (e.g., gathering nominations in advance, voting in a more formal way). One possibility for your consideration could be to have a more formal election for some offices (e.g., SIG Co-Presidents, Treasurer) but not others. Regardless, one advantage of streamlining the election process would be that it would allow us to more effectively use the time allotted for the business meeting.

As always, please feel free to contact either of us with any questions, comments, or suggestions. Thanks so much for all of your support. Have a great summer!

Erika and Greg

Surf the Internet without guilt!	Visit the AABT Couples SIG website: <a href="http://www.aabtcouples.org/home.htm">www.aabtcouples.org/home.htm</a> Webmaster: Brian Baucom, <a href="mailto:bbaucom@ucla.edu">bbaucom@ucla.edu</a>
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# Special Joys of Internship Application When You Are a “Couples Person”

By Susan Stanton and Sara Steinberg, Student Co-Presidents

Applying for internship—it's never an entirely fun process, but it can be particularly challenging for graduate students with a focus on close relationships. The scarcity of sites with major rotations in couples therapy may create complications in all aspects of the internship process, from selecting sites and writing essays to interviewing and matching. The highly biased advice to follow is from our internship experiences and advice and comments we received from recent internship applicants in the SIG. However, one of the main things we learned during the process is how different it is for everyone. We hope these comments serve as areas for consideration, but they do not describe the only way to match successfully.

## *Challenge #1: Finding sites*

In general, one of the most important things to keep in mind when searching for internship sites is whether or not the site is a good match for you. It is helpful to keep in mind what your priorities are, whether they are having a couple's rotation or staying in one geographic area. For people not limited by geographical concerns, there are a small number of well-regarded sites with major rotations in couple's therapy, which may mean spending from 10-20 hours a week working with couples. Based on previous feedback from the SIG, there are approximately 20 sites with such major rotations, although there may be more. A larger number of sites have minor rotations in couple therapy, which often refers to spending 4-5 hours a week with couples. Sites with either a major or minor rotation may be found by entering couples in your search criteria under rotations when locating internship sites at [appic.org](http://appic.org). Finally, internships may not have a formal rotation with couples but may allow interns to see couples who present through the other rotations, which seems to translate into about 5 cases a year depending on demand and other interns' requests. Sites may mention this in their brochures under certain rotations but it can vary widely. The Spring-Summer 2001 newsletter found on the website has a table at the end with a list of couples-friendly sites gathered from the SIG, although the list is not comprehensive. Additional sites not in the past newsletter reportedly having major rotations in couples therapy besides those listed in the newsletter are UCSD-San Diego VA, Baltimore VA, and Boston Consortium. Perhaps members who know of other places can post it to the listserv.

The APPIC surveys show that most graduate students' priority in choosing sites is geographical location. As this limits choices greatly, it can be difficult

to find many sites with couples opportunities. For example, Susan applied to the Southern California area, where she found approximately 30 internship sites with adult tracks. However, only 1 had a major rotation of 10 hours or more a week in couples therapy and 2 or 3 had formalized minor rotations. The remainder advertised the possibility of seeing couples but noted the number of cases available were unpredictable. Sara applied only in the northeast, with a primary focus in the New York metropolitan area. While very few sites had couples rotations, many had opportunities to work with families, which is something that interested her. When choosing sites geographically, therefore, it is important to consider other areas of training important to you because most of your time will be spent in non-couple-related activities. Think about your goals after graduate school and how you might supplement your skills through internship.

## *Challenge #2: Writing essays and the APPIC application*

For most issues regarding the APPIC application, we refer you to *Internships In Psychology, 2005-2006: The APAGS Workbook for Writing Successful Applications and Finding the Right Match (Williams-Nickelson & Prinstein, \$16.47 at Amazon.com)*. However, the essays require special care for graduate students specializing in couples issues. Although truthfulness about your experiences and interests is essential, it is also necessary to appeal to the opportunities available at your sites. Solely focusing on couples experiences or interests will cause sites with minor or no rotations to wonder what they might offer you. The APAGS' workbook argues that internships are evaluating what applicants can bring to the sites as well as the training opportunities they might offer.

Therefore, be yourself but include information pertinent to all your goals for internship in addition to those related to couples therapy and research. When writing, remember the wide range of experiences you have received in practica or classes. Be creative about how your research and study of couple functioning influence your more general clinical skills and may serve as an asset on various rotations. For example, working with couples may bring an interpersonal perspective to work with individual clients. Seeing couples from various ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds may be applicable to groups or assessments with diverse clients. At the same time, many applicants have not had opportunities to work with couples in graduate school, making you unique to many sites. Overall, seek a balance

between your couples interests and other goals, particularly for sites without a major couples focus.

*Challenge #3: Interviewing*

Interviewing entails many of the pitfalls of writing essays in which you want to represent all your interests and experiences equally. Some people have noted that interviewers have questioned their fit at sites with 4 hours or less of couples therapy available a week. Even in sites with a major rotation, you should convince them that you will be happy with the other 25% of your time. Sites may appreciate couples experiences but they do not want to have interns disappointed by doing primarily group, individual, and assessment activities.

Demonstrating interest in specific non-couples rotations that may complete gaps in your training or may relate to your research interests and future goals may help to alleviate such fears. For example, as a couples and health researcher, Susan emphasized her desire for a site with a behavioral medicine rotation. She explained that she had worked with many couples clinically but had not had a practicum with a health population despite research with that population. A similar argument may be made for those who study couples and psychopathology. Students interested in domestic violence may point to the ability to work with forensic populations, or conduct anger management groups on internship. If your research focuses on "traditional" couples areas that are difficult to apply to individual or group work on specific problems, you may focus on the theory, supervision, and populations available rather than on substantive rotations such as substance abuse. That is, your research may benefit from learning additional theoretical perspectives, receiving supervision from psychologists outside your area, or working with new populations. For example, veterans hospitals provide opportunities for working with older men who are often less represented in other practica sites.

In addition to presenting yourself as a good match to the site, you are evaluating their fit for you. Thus recent interns have recommended asking about couples

opportunities, including the type of supervision, number of couples and hours of therapy expected. Opportunities also may present itself in less traditional ways than couples therapy, such as working with families coping with chronic illnesses or leading groups for individuals that focus on relationship issues. Furthermore, sites may offer advantages such as research time or shorter hours (i.e., 40 rather than 60 hours a week) that can allow you to work on outside couples-related projects. Additional time during internship also might be helpful if you are applying for jobs or post-docs for the following year.

*Challenge #4: Match*

When it is time for match, the advice is not different from that provided to all applicants in the APAGS' work book. Follow your goals and your instincts, and trust the match to work! Unless you are only applying to a few places, the odds of getting an internship are very good. (And we all know that the SIG is full of awesome applicants!) Recent applicants cautioned against ranking places you did not like because a year can be a loong time when you are unhappy. On the other hand, a year is a short time in the life of graduate school — enjoy this last, supervised clinical time even if it does not have everything you want!

For internship next year, Susan will be at the VA Los Angeles Ambulatory Care Center and Sara will be at Long Island Jewish Hospital in New York. Neither place has any specific couples rotations, but there are informal possibilities to work with couples and families. We survived and so will you!

**Comments? Criticism? Suggestions? Notes of affection? Crazy ideas? Send them to the editors!**

*Contact Eric at [gadol@unc.edu](mailto:gadol@unc.edu) and Farrah at [fhughes@utk.edu](mailto:fhughes@utk.edu)*



*Kudos to the following people...*

- Mia Sevier for her new tenure-track position at California State University, Fullerton in the Human Services Department!
- Kristi Gordon for the recent arrival of Lucia "Lucy" Nye Gordon, born March 30!
- Jenny Langhinrichsen-Rohling for her appointment at the University of South Alabama as the Youth Violence Research Scholar and for receiving the Phi Kappa Phi university-wide scholarship award!
- Shalonda Kelly for her promotion and tenure at Rutgers University!



**Don't forget to mark your calendars for the Couples SIG Pre-Conference!**

**Dr. Tom Borkovec will be speaking on research practice networks  
on November 17, 2005, 6:30-8:30**

# Dissemination Anyone?

Robert L. Weiss  
University of Oregon

At our last SIG meeting I foolishly suggested that we consider disseminating our work and reputation to broader audiences by becoming spokespersons for information about couples. “Foolishly,” since that boomerang has now come back to me. Since I have no credible experience in operational matters of public influence, nor with dissemination in general, I am not the best person to preach to others. But ignorance is not a sufficient reason to stop me. Herewith, to be taken with caution are some thoughts on the assignment, viewed as a structural framework that may help in addressing whether, and then how, the SIG might consider dissemination options.

*Your assignment should you agree to undertake it...*

To recapitulate the suggestion: would it be feasible, in this information age, for the SIG to establish itself as a sort of clearinghouse for evidence based information about relationships, ranging from results of studies of basic processes, to various levels of prevention and remediation packages. Unlike existing “clearinghouse” operations (e.g., Diane Sollee’s *Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples*) the narrower aim could be to speak to public opinion makers who in turn would utilize the information as basis for their own information articles and reports. Ours would be the source that writers or decision makers would come to for authentication of information or a source for statements that would be relevant to those making policy decisions.

Any public-opinion-functionary can call upon individuals in our, or anyone else’s field, for “story” material. This may occur either in response to some current flash-in-the-pan issue or as part of a more thoughtful featured investigative story. Indeed, this type of targeted contact happens with regularity and sometimes with less than desirable results (e.g., the story either contains inaccuracies or misrepresentations, etc.); many of us have had bad personal experiences while trying to be cooperative. Equally important, by our very choice of professional activity, we eschew popularizations of our scholarship. Self-promotion (unless for obtaining grants!) is frowned upon, and brother and sisters who have traveled that road are often dismissed as less credible and judged unworthy of redemption. More on the dangers of self-promotion later.

Can we do it better if we were to capitalize on the fact that collectively we are an organization whose members hold applied clinical work to very high standards? Is there a signature theme that, while making

the SIG personally and professionally a unique opportunity for students and faculty, that would also make it worthwhile to expand our sphere of influence? That is the question I have tried to address in terms of desirability and feasibility. These reflections may merely prove to be a flicker, but even so, everything has a first step (or a self organizing event).

*Dissemination of What by Whom to Whom for Whom?*

It may be helpful to parse ‘dissemination’ into the relevant options: What is being disseminated on whose authority to whom and for whose benefit.

The ‘what’ of dissemination most often is discussed in the context of either intervention or prevention. Stirman, Crist-Christoph, and DeRubeis (2004) summarize in detail the prominent models for the dissemination of therapies. Kistenmacher & Biglan (2000) added a further refinement to the discussion of dissemination by relating it to a public health perspective. The latter, public health policy, embraces epidemiological tools for determining incidence and prevalence of some “disease phenomena,” with the ultimate goal of insinuating appropriate steps in prevention. Having reliable knowledge about the phenomena to prevent on a very wide scale can fail more in the promise than the execution (e.g., estimating the prevalence of clinically significant marital discord). It may seem that the therapy piece is more likely to succeed for folks like us, whereas the prevention piece often requires a major edifice of community (and more recently governmental) involvement, as clearly attested to by the programs developed by Markman and Stanley.

What then does the SIG, as an applied clinical science based entity, have to disseminate? There appear to be three main categories of the ‘what’: empirical information (a) about relationship processes, (b) the utility of couples therapy, and (c) program packages designed to prevent marital discord. Thus the ‘what’ is comprised of informational packages, as it were, with more or less direct opportunities for implementation (e.g., (b) and (c)).

Consider the ‘by whom to whom’ or agency piece of the dissemination equation: the available options here are (a) the practitioner, (b) an educative agency (e.g., schools), (c) a professional organization (e.g., ACBT, SIGs), or (d) a governmental agency (e.g., local, state, federal). In this progression there is an increasingly more complex system of intermediaries coming on board; more intermediaries between the agent developing the knowledge base and the ultimate target. A can influence B who in turn seeks to affect the behavior of C.

For 'whom' is determined in large part by the agency itself. If it is a matter of therapists teaching therapists the ultimate consumer is a therapist's client (s). If the agency is a school system, for example, there is an immediate child focus with a secondary family focus of benefit. As governmental units become the agency the approach becomes more clearly a public health application to a broad spectrum of the population. (In the latter case the success of the application is based on percentages, often small, of successful influence.)

Is there a danger in disseminating information about the efficacy of marital therapy interventions? Shadish and Bladwin (2005) report a meta analysis of the effects of behavioral marital therapy that is less than a rousing endorsement of efficacy. And the popular press (*New York Times*) has recently published a rather damning account of the utility of marital counseling for all but Johnson's emotionally focused marital therapy. Putting aside the possibility that a bit of self-promotion was involved here, taken together with the 1995 *Consumer Reports* survey of satisfaction with marital therapy, the message to the public certainly does not encourage acceptance of this form of help.

The danger, as I see it, is that we run the risk of trying to disseminate something that is still changing and accrues all sorts of qualifications. I don't think we are even dealing with a beta version of our product and we may fall into the trap of making statements that are not adequately supported by the data.

#### *Finding a niche*

Does any of this description of the dissemination landscape spark any SIG-wide interest? Is SIG-based dissemination even desirable to consider? If it is thought to be worth considering the first step would be organizational: the SIG lives under the umbrella of ACBT. Would we be allowed to represent ourselves as an informational entity either as part of the parent organization or as an emancipated offspring? Or, would it make more sense to establish a nonprofit educational entity whose purpose is the dissemination of empirically based couples information and practices? In this day and age the later could be realized by acquiring a web domain that would be the home base.

As an example, I spoke with a friend and former dean of the school of journalism to get a sense of how we might address the goal of being seen as a dissemination source. He agreed that having organizational credibility is a good first step. Then having feature pieces that we might shop to the larger news agencies would be a next step. There really didn't seem to be much mystery in all this; it is a matter of gaining access based on credibility and appeal of the information.

Clearly finding a niche is made more difficult by making public claims of success rates, predicting divorce, or expounding this or that version of pop family psychology; it has become an aversive practice to many

of us. I see it not so much as a matter of therefore avoiding it altogether as more how to do it better. A SIG-based clearinghouse, as it were, would be a step in that direction; perhaps something like having peer reviewed dissemination projects. This would not limit those individuals who choose to go it alone to do so, but there would be, in the wings, an organization that promotes accuracy and when necessary caution. In time (oh yes, did I mention it would not be an over the night project?) the respectability of the organization would make it possible to do it better.

#### *The Devil in the Details*

Assuming that the members would wish to pursue this grand plan, what next and where to begin? My suggestion would be to establish a steering committee who would explore the likely status such an organization vis a vis ACBT. That is, what would our standing be and what oversight would AACBT require? If it were found to be not possible within the parent organization, then what sort of association could be formed that represented the interests of the current membership without disengaging from ACBT?

The steering committee would solicit interest and ability of persons to proceed with the clearinghouse review process. They would be charged with developing a pool of topics to be represented for dissemination to the options I outlines above (e.g., specific information to whom). Basically, the steering committee would have major responsibility for coordinating the pieces of the puzzle (e.g., what are realistic public interest sources, how to establish a communications network, etc.).

Ultimately, this will come down to whose is going to make the coffee. But it could be a fun undertaking and this is how professional groups can have a community wide influence. Are we the ones to do it? That remains to be seen. Next step is to hear members' reactions to this idea with as many specific responses to what might and might not work.

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# Mindfulness and Intimate Relationships: Towards a Theory of Mindful Relating

Karen Wachs and James Cordova  
Clark University

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The state of popular opinion on the effectiveness of marital therapy can be discouraging. A recent New York Times article entitled, "Married With Problems? Therapy May Not Help," proclaimed that two years after couple counseling, "25 percent of couples are worse off than they were when they started, and after four years, up to 38 percent are divorced." Meta-analytic reviews use a kinder emphasis, stating that marital interventions produce clinically significant results in about forty to fifty percent of cases (Shadish & Baldwin, 2003). Whether the glass is seen as half empty or half full, however, there is clearly room for improvement. Data currently suggest that there is little reason to believe one form of couples' therapy is more effective than another (Shadish & Baldwin). Therapist expertise may play a role in such outcomes, however another explanation is that couples tend to get mired in certain beliefs or behaviors which extant therapies lack either the theory or specific technologies to address. Such challenges may be characterized as: 1) "stuckness" in habitual patterns that couples feel powerless to undo; 2) inability to implement problem-solving and communication skills in an emotionally challenging climate; 3) fear of powerful emotions as an obstacle to maintaining and building intimacy; 4) focus on changing the partner or situation, where change may be impossible or impractical. Couples in distress have been shown to experience high rates of negativity in their relationships (e.g., Gottman, 1994), likely contributing to an overall emotional relationship climate overwhelmingly comprising negative emotions such as sadness, fear, and resentment. One possible way of conceptualizing the above challenges to therapy is as a set of maladaptive responses to the 'problem' of such negative emotions. One promising direction to explore in terms of addressing such problems is the emerging area of mindfulness training.

This paper will present a theory of the potential role of mindfulness in couple and family functioning, and introduce new but promising research informing a potentially powerful role for mindfulness training in couple therapy.

## Treatment Roadblocks

Many people's most intense emotions are associated with the initiation, maintenance and disruption of marital bonds (Bowlby, 1973). Given this, how partners identify and communicate emotions, cope with their own and their partner's emotions, and generally enact their emotions in

relation to intimate partners should constitute an important domain of couple health and well-being. One's particular enactment of emotions may, in fact, be the primary mechanism for relational adjustment. Conflicts, mistakes, and personality or stylistic differences are unavoidable in relationships, yet are often experienced by intimate partners as aversive. This suggests that approaches like those offered by Integrative Couples Therapy (ICT) (e.g., Christensen, Jacobson, & Babcock, 1995; Cordova & Jacobson, 1993) are needed which do not emphasize making these areas of difference or conflict *go away*, but rather work to change their emotional meaning and impact—in the case of ICT, through encouraging and modeling acceptance. For example, if the presence of conflict is no longer experienced as highly aversive, it becomes more feasible to respond proactively and positively rather than to simply *react* and in so doing avoid the full experience of an emotion in all its painful glory. The cultivation of mindfulness may offer a way to intervene in a partner's stance toward emotions and in the process address important areas of impasse.

For instance, couples in conflict often find themselves caught in habitual back-and-forth, such as a "demand-withdraw" pattern described by Christensen & Heavey (1993), from which they feel they cannot escape. Behavioral change techniques may be particularly difficult to introduce into such a system that has evolved its own, maladaptive, self-reinforcing patterns—a condition commonly described by partners as having his or her "buttons pushed." Secondly, although problem-solving and communication skills are widely acknowledged to be critical in maintaining couple stability over time, building (or having) these skill sets alone may not be sufficient. Intimate relationship partners will regularly be thrust into interactions that evoke emotional responses, sometimes strong ones. Formulations of the construct in fact suggest that intimacy is built through repeated and mutual exposure to vulnerability and emotionally challenging interactions (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004; Cordova & Scott, 2001; Reis, 1990). This ongoing vulnerability ensures that even healthy couples will experience rejection and hurt, however at lower levels than distressed couples. Having challenging emotions on board is likely to tax whatever cognitive resources for problem-solving an individual may bring to the table. Next, while some may manage challenging emotions themselves and/or with the help of a

skillful and sensitive partner, very often powerful emotional experience can overwhelm, or flood, emotional resources (Gottman, 1993). Experiential avoidance strategies to keep these threatening emotions at bay undermine the underlying processes of intimacy formation and maintenance. A coping style that predominantly employs avoidance strategies can thus pose a challenge to many efforts designed to develop and deepen intimacy. Finally, partners in distress often imagine that the source of their upset will disappear as soon as their partner changes. They become insistent upon the need for change and come to buy fully into the notion that the only possible solution is to fundamentally alter the situation, or even better, the person. Approaches to intervention which incorporate a focus on mindfulness may serve to influence partners' stance toward their emotional experience, and allow new possibilities for dealing with relationship roadblocks.

#### Mindfulness and Relevant Findings

Most research in mindfulness is based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, whose Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center has been seminal in bringing Buddhist notions of mindfulness to Western behavioral medicine. According to Kabat-Zinn (1994), mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (p. 36). In other words, mindfulness is a state of awareness characterized by ongoing and consistent attention directed to the present moment, in order that one is in full contact with one's experience as it is happening. Mindful awareness is characterized by openness and acceptance.

The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program is an eight-week intervention initially conceived as a meditation-based behavioral treatment for traditionally medically-treated problems such as heart disease and chronic pain. The meditation is, in effect, a training regimen for the mind, with the broader goal to become fully present and awake to one's own life. Beginning mindfulness meditation as it is explored in Buddhist teachings assumes that the mind is weak and undisciplined, and that it will immediately wander despite brief attempts to hold attention. In Buddhism this inclination is referred to as "monkey mind," wherein the mind moves—or even jumps—from speculation about the future to rumination about the past, completely removed from appreciation of the present moment most of the time. A first step of meditation is to use the breath as a reference point, in order to teach one to sustain attention on the ongoing flow of the present moment. However the objective is not a mind fixated on one thing (since the present moment is not itself fixed), but a mind that notices things *without* becoming distracted by or fixated on them. As such, the corollary to attending to the breath during meditation is to notice one's thoughts as they are arising

and fading away. Thoughts are not to be squelched or suppressed, but neither are they necessarily subject for further examination. One simply notices that one is *having* a thought, and then redirects attention back to the breath.

Current research in mindfulness interventions and psychological correlates has largely adopted the MBSR-style intervention as a template. A central finding has been that mindfulness training tends to promote psychological resiliency and sense of well-being in both clinical and non-clinical populations. Many of the observed changes have been on dimensions that the couples and marriage research have implicated in the cultivation and maintenance of intimate relationship health. For example, several studies have observed reductions in stress and improved coping skills. An intervention for new medical students indicated decreased stress at follow-up relative to a control group (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998). Individuals being treated for substance abuse evidenced similar declines in post-mindfulness intervention stress (Marcus, Fine, Moeller, Khan, & Pitts, et. al., 2002). In one study involving breast and cancer patients, patterns of secretion of cortisol were found to have shifted to a healthier profile following MBSR intervention. Numerous studies have also reported mood improvements, particularly in anxiety and depression. In their work to develop a preventative approach to depression relapse, Segal, Teasdale, and Williams (2002) found that incorporation of mindfulness training significantly improved outcomes for those who had already experienced a depressive episode. Shapiro's 1998 study reported decreased depression and lowered anxiety levels in medical students. Another study involving medical students revealed post-treatment improvements on a number of mood dimensions including tension/anxiety, fatigue, and mental confusion (Rosenzweig, Reibel, Greeson, Brainard, & Hojat, 2003). Miller, Fletcher, and Kabat-Zinn (1995) found that anxiety and depression amongst individuals meeting criteria for generalized anxiety and panic disorders was significantly reduced. A 2003 study (Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkranz, Muller, et. al.) further found decreased anxiety and negative affect in a non-clinical population. One study of women with fibromyalgia revealed increases in sense of coherence (Weissbecker, Salmon, Studts, Floyd, & Dedert, et. al., 2002).

Promising results of these studies have been bolstered by other, non-intervention studies designed to measure the mindfulness construct. One such study (Brown & Ryan, 2003) identified a number of psychological correlates of mindfulness using self-report measures as compared to scores on the Mindful Awareness Attention Scale (MAAS). Results suggested that mindfulness was moderately related to lower levels of neuroticism, self-consciousness, depression, negative affectivity,

impulsivity, and angry hostility. Mindfulness scores were positively related to other indicators of well-being, including positive affectivity, life satisfaction, self-esteem, autonomy, competence, and relatedness fulfillment. Almost all of these variables have been demonstrated to influence relationship satisfaction and stability (e.g., Gattis, Berns, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Weinstock, 2004).

#### Mindful Relating Theory

The theory of mindful relating and some existing research suggest that paying attention to the present moment in a notably non-judgmental way should be especially beneficial to intimate relationships, particularly given their often emotionally challenging nature. For example, attribution research (Fincham, Harold & Gano-Phillips, 2000; Davey, Fincham, Beach, & Brody, 2001) and forgiveness research (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Fincham, Paleari & Regalia, 2002) both recognize the benefits of a generally more nonjudgmental stance. In addition, research on rumination and the suffering caused by unrealistic relationship ideals suggest the benefits of present moment orientation over attention to either the past or the idealized future (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2005; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). Thus, generally, the theory of mindful relating suggests that cultivating greater mindfulness should benefit intimate relationships by (1) facilitating identification of emotions; (2) increasing empathy; (3) fostering feelings of interdependence and relatedness; (4) decreasing intolerance of negative emotions and impulsivity; and (5) encouraging a non-blaming and non-judgmental attitude toward self and others. According to Buddhist scripture:

“Knowing that the other person is angry,  
one who remains mindful and calm  
acts for his own best interest  
and for the other's interest, too.”

*-Buddhist Scripture*

We believe this verse captures the heightened and broadened emotional awareness, and the sequelae of awareness, that we theorize follows from paying mindful attention. It emphasizes self-knowledge, knowledge of the intimate other's feeling states and needs, an acknowledgment of mutuality of needs, and acceptance of both one's own and one's partner's emotional experience.

#### *Identification of Emotions*

Alexithymia, or the inability to recognize feeling states, has been negatively associated with a number of measures of psychological well-being (e.g., Zimmerman, Rossier, Meyer deStadelhofen, 2004). Recent empirical studies have made the explicit connection between the ability to identify emotions and satisfaction in close relationships (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005). Presumably, impairment in recognizing and understanding one's internal emotional states would present a significant obstacle to maintaining a marital relationship, wherein emotional exchange is critical to

building and retaining intimacy. Moreover, according to Ekman and Davidson (1994), what we commonly experience and label as categorical emotions are not in fact discrete emotions, but emotion blends. We often leap to categorize our feelings, when in fact most affective experience is much more complex. Especially in challenging conflicted situations, feelings most likely consist of blends of a whole range of emotions, experienced at different intensities. Blended responses may even comprise seemingly inconsistent or even mutually opposing feelings. We suggest that those unskilled at recognizing their emotions will be particularly susceptible to missing out on a whole host of relatively subtle emotions which may be useful in negotiating emotionally challenging exchanges. Anger, for example, is a powerful emotion that tends to overwhelm or drown out an array of softer emotions—feelings such as hurt, sadness, and jealousy that may all be equally relevant aspects of the emotional experience.

Mindful relating theory asserts that close attention to one's experience at each moment presents one with better access to the full range of an emotional experience. The act of paying attention may be quite difficult, particularly under psychologically demanding conditions. Elevated stress may in many cases result in decrements to cognitive resources, including the capacity to process information and hold relevant detail in mind (Hopko, Crittendon, Grant, & Wilson, 2005). The emotionally challenging nature of couple conflict therefore suggests that lack of close attention could lead to missing critical subtleties in one's own emotional experiencing. We suggest that in being mindful, partners are in a position to take notice of feelings as they are arising, in “realtime.” A study presented by Wachs and Cordova (2004) at the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy Convention examined the satisfaction and overall adjustment of married couples, in conjunction with both a measure of mindful awareness (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2004) and a range of emotion regulation skill variables. This work specifically examined whether greater mindfulness was associated with an increased ability to recognize and name one's emotions. Findings revealed that more mindful partners were indeed superior at identifying their own emotions, and that they were relatively more inclined and able to see emotional complexity. Moreover, more mindful couples also had more satisfied and stable relationships. Because they are able to track emotions as they occur, it may be that such couples are less likely to be taken by surprise by the strong emotions that may follow from a whole sequence of less intense feelings, and in turn are better managers of the sort of conflict that degrades relationship bonds. Greater identification of emotions and appreciation of emotion blends in self and other should allow for greater empathy and compassion, and more skillful responding

within the ongoing intimate interaction, which in turn should facilitate intimacy and acceptance.

#### *Empathy and Awareness of Others*

Empathic ability has been found to be one of the factors most useful in maintaining the quality of romantic relationships (e.g., Davis & Oathout, 1987). The construct of empathy captures the ability of an individual to be sensitive to another person's emotional state and to be able to reflect that emotion back to the person, indicating that they vicariously feel the same emotion (Johnson, Cheek & Smither, 1983). In a conceptualization proposed by Davis (1983) a primary dimension of empathy is perspective taking, or the ability to place oneself in another person's shoes and comprehend his or her point of view. Empathic concern, the second dimension, refers to caring about the welfare of others and becoming upset over their misfortunes. Personal distress, the third dimension, is defined as one's own negative affect connected with the suffering of others.

We posit that mindfulness promotes more skilled empathic responding, through 1) increasing the threshold at which one becomes overwhelmed by emotional experiencing, 2) expanding the capacity for concern for others, and 3) increasing perspective-taking ability. Mindful relating theory suggests that the tendency to be overwhelmed by emotions may be attenuated by the process described above, in which individuals better regulate intense emotions by noticing and identifying feelings as they come online. We would also expect that noticing the feeling states of others on a more regular basis would tend to enhance concern. Finally, growth in the ability to take the perspective of others may occur as paying sustained attention to ongoing experience puts the individual in close proximity to his or her own thoughts and feelings. Through repeated observation of thoughts coming and going through the mind, individuals may gain insight into their own conscious processes, particularly the transitory nature of thoughts and feelings. This type of meta-level awareness of the contents of consciousness has been referred to as "meta-cognitive awareness" (Teasdale, Moore, & Hayhurst, 2002). Development of a mindfulness-based depression prevention program, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT; Segal, Teasdale, & Williams, 2002) led its authors to further speculate that in meta-cognitive awareness, one is capable of observing thoughts and feelings as separate from the self, resulting in an increased ability to allow them to pass through the mind without seizing onto and becoming attached to them. We suggest that seeing the independence of cognitions from any notion of the self helps to promote flexibility in recognizing that a broad range of thoughts may be possible in response to a given circumstance. More specifically, it should become easier to entertain the possibility that one's partner can have completely different thoughts and feelings from one's own, and that they may be equally valid.

Block Lerner, Rhatigan, Plumb, and Orsillo (38<sup>th</sup> Annual AABT Convention, 2004) examined the potential connection between mindfulness and empathy by having a community sample of women complete a measure of mindfulness, the Cognitive Affective Mindfulness Scales (CAMS; Feldman, Kumar, Galyardt, & Hayes, 2002), as well as a measure of various facets of empathy. Mindfulness was indeed found to be strongly positively correlated with the perspective-taking and empathic concern dimensions of empathy, as well as negatively correlated with personal distress (the tendency to become overwhelmed in the presence of someone else's pain or sadness). This provides support for the role of mindfulness in increased perspective-taking, and suggests that it may operate on an individual's sense of compassion for others as well as decrease the tendency to become distressed and overwhelmed by others' emotions. It also makes sense that attending more fully to the other, greater tolerance for unpleasant affect and less experiential avoidance, which will be discussed more extensively below, would result in greater empathic concern and less personal distress. Ultimately, higher levels of empathy contribute to better conditions for developing intimacy, and should also help to build acceptance.

#### *Interconnectedness and Relatedness*

Intimate relationship satisfaction and overall stability may in part be attributable to the feeling of connection between partners, as well as a shared sense that partners are contributing to a whole greater than the sum of its parts. "We-ness," which is evocative of this highly mutual, team-like stance toward a relationship, has been empirically associated with relationship health (Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992).

Mindful relating theory suggests that feelings of interdependence and connectedness that likely contribute to this sense of "we-ness" may in fact be cultivated through mindful awareness. Being mindful should increase the probability that one will be available to attend to the meta- or dyadic system-level significance of any given exchange for the relationship. One is in a better position to observe ramifications for the entity of the relationship, not just the individual or his or her partner as individual entities, and to recognize that the relationship is a project over time on which each interaction has some bearing. This new level of relationship-mindedness coupled with increases in empathy and concern may well contribute to greater, more positive feelings of relatedness with others.

Work by Brown and Barnes (2004), also presented at the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual AABT Convention, lends support to this hypothesis. In their research, a pool of community adults were initially measured on trait-level mindfulness, and were then enrolled in a 3-week long study in which they received pager signals asking them to record the degree of relatedness they felt toward whomever they

were with at the time. Those higher in mindfulness reported greater feelings of closeness to those they interacted with on a day-to-day basis. In a subsequent study, couples in steady romantic relationships engaged in relationship conflict discussions in the lab. More mindful individuals showed more positive interaction quality with their partners on a variety of measures of communication patterns, relatedness, and stress response. Increases in positive feelings toward others such as perceptions of closeness and relatedness, particularly in a conflict situation, are additionally encouraging in that they imply mindfulness may also operate on an individual's sense of compassion and acceptance.

Findings from this work are further bolstered by results of a mindfulness-based couples intervention study conducted by Carson, Carson, Gil, and Baucom (2004). Carson's program was designed for the purpose of relationship enhancement in non-distressed couples. It was an 8-week program with weekly meetings and a single all-day retreat, consisting generally of meditation practice, group discussion, individual and partnered yoga, and dyadic exercises to enhance communication and connectedness, and homework. Immediately following, the intervention was found to have had favorable impacts on a number of dimensions, including basic relationship satisfaction, and notably on feelings of relatedness and closeness to one another. Having a heightened awareness of being connected to one's partner should further promote acceptance, and potentially improve resolve to break from negative and over-learned relationship patterns.

#### *Tolerance of Negative Emotion*

Research into negative affect in marriage has done a great deal to describe those behaviors appearing to weaken intimate relationships, including "stonewalling" or shutting down during arguments, overt hostility, and impulsive displays of aggression (Gottman, 1994). Buddhism similarly recognizes the importance of "remaining calm." We suggest that "remaining calm" is essentially a byproduct of an ability to manage the impulse to react, which may often have destructive consequences.

According to mindful relating theory, decreased impulsivity may be a function of taking a different, more tolerant stance toward negative emotions. One may not feel compelled to react in order to avoid the unpleasant experience of internalized negative emotions, precisely because these emotions are no longer perceived as so aversive. Paying sustained attention to ongoing experience puts the individual in close proximity to his or her own thoughts and feelings that allows for meta-cognitive awareness, or recognizing cognitive content as temporary and distinct from the self. Even challenging or psychologically painful internal states can be observed to dissipate when one chooses not to elaborate on the thoughts or feelings, but simply notice them. We

speculate that through this process it should be possible to develop an understanding that negative feelings can be lived through and tolerated, thus reducing reactivity and impulsivity in emotionally challenging situations.

In our own work with married couples (Wachs & Cordova, 38<sup>th</sup> Annual AABT Convention, 2004), we have tested and found evidence supporting a model in which partners' skillfulness at emotional display and expression mediates the association between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Mindful couples demonstrated a greater awareness of the potential impact of emotional expression on others, exercised better control over aggressive impulses, and keeping aggressive behaviors, especially hostility, to a minimum. We believe these findings are particularly hopeful in regards to their implications for impulsivity. Couples who were mindful appeared to have a better grasp of the potential emotional impact of their destructive behavior, moreover they appear to be better managers of their destructive impulses even in situations that might pull for anger or hostility. Such couples may have a greater likelihood of breaking entrenched, negative, reciprocal patterns of behavior—that is, to resist the inclination to react when their "buttons" are pushed. Furthermore couples who experience emotions as less aversive may be better able to handle the pragmatics of problem-solving even under emotionally challenging circumstances.

#### *Non-Judgment of Self and Other*

Many couples find refraining from identifying imperfections and shortcomings in their partners, and from judging them as such, to be particularly challenging. As human beings it seems we are bound by nature to be evaluative, at least according to theories of evolutionary psychology (e.g., Chiappe & MacDonald, 2005). In discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; e.g., Hayes & Wilson, 1994) the authors describe the particular implications of language and the role it takes in promoting inherently judgmental thoughts. According to this particular construction, thoughts are affectively laden without our conscious awareness, and carry automatic evaluations that such thoughts are "good" or "bad." Moreover, the *holder* of those thoughts tends to take on the properties of those evaluations, becoming a good or bad (or "serious" or "funny," or "anxious") person for being the bearer of these thoughts. Thus subjective distress occurs in response to the vagaries of the ongoing thought stream.

Mindfulness essentially pulls the plug on evaluative thought, as it involves simply noticing experience without engaging in any further examination of it. We also believe that meta-cognitive awareness, theorized to increase tolerance for previously aversive emotional experience, should tend to reduce judgments labeling that experience – the emotion is no longer quite so bad because one has observed that one can live through it. Mindful relating theory suggests that there should be an additional benefit

of increasing tolerance for one's partner in that negative expressions previously seen as expressions of an immutable self may now also be seen as isolated behaviors, or passing phenomena. Partners may come to see provocative behavior by the other as less subjectively distressing as they become more tolerant of their own emotional experiencing. Finally, mindful relating theory also suggests that increased perspective-taking should allow one to identify partner characteristics and behaviors as having multiple facets and motivations, which in turn should promote tolerance and acceptance. As described earlier, findings from studies on mindful relating by Brown and Barnes (2004) and Carson et. al. (2004) both provide support for increased feelings of acceptance of intimate others in association with greater mindfulness.

#### Conclusion

In sum, mindful relating theory and preliminary study suggest that non-judgmental awareness of the present moment may better equip couples to negotiate the ubiquitous and ongoing challenges of intimacy. One way to conceptualize empirical findings is that mindfulness helps to move couples to a more adaptive stance toward their own and their partner's emotions. By attending to ongoing experience with an attitude of open curiosity partners may learn to sit with their own emotional experience and that of their partner, thus creating opportunities to read their own and other's emotions, observe that they can be tolerated, respond to them more thoughtfully and with greater compassion, and to feel emotionally connected. We posit that increased capacity on these dimensions creates a more comfortable emotional climate in which individuals can work together to deal with common couple challenges. Such obstacles include disengaging from over-learned destructive relationship patterns, utilizing communication and problem-solving skills even under emotionally stressful circumstances, building and maintaining intimacy, and accepting unchangeable relationship circumstances or characteristics in their partner.

Of course, much work remains to be done in order to more fully understand the relational sequelae of mindfulness. We speculate that there are other mechanisms in play in mindful relating, however further hypothesis-testing work needs to be done in order to disentangle them. For instance, it remains to be examined how mindfulness may or may not increase accurate responding to one's partner. We suspect that being present-centered, one should be able to track the contingencies of current provocative interactions with one's partner, rather than be pulled off course by the strong feelings evoked and which may be associated with previous attachment relationships. Preliminary work also needs to be done to understand how mindfulness training might best be incorporated into couples therapies. There are indications, for example, that mindfulness may not operate in the same way across gender, and may confer

different types of relationship benefits. It also is unknown how mindfulness in a single partner contributes to a relationship, when the other is non- or less mindful. Furthermore, although we understand that present-centeredness can enhance couple satisfaction, how can the cultivation of mindfulness improve already-distressed relationships? These are just some of the questions that remain to be addressed.

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### **Ideas for the Couples SIG cocktail party?**

We're looking for suggestions for skits, games, etc. to do during our get-together at the ABCT conference this year. Send your suggestions to Sara Steinberg at [sara.j.steinberg@sunysb.edu](mailto:sara.j.steinberg@sunysb.edu)!

# HOT OFF THE PRESS

## *In Press and Recently Published Literature*

*In addition to the works cited here, be sure to check out the March 2005 (10,1) issue of the Journal of Family Psychology. This issue is devoted to methodological issues in couple and family research and covers a variety of techniques for data collection and analysis and includes several articles from SIG members.*

Allen, E. B., Atkins, D. C., Baucom, D. H., Snyder, D. K., Gordon, K. C., Glass, S. (in press). Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors in engaging in and responding to infidelity. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*.

Extramarital involvement (EMI) occurs with high prevalence among couples in clinical and community settings, frequently resulting in considerable distress both to participants and their spouses. A great deal has been published on EMI, but the field currently lacks a synthesized review of this literature. Without such a synthesis, it has been difficult for researchers and clinicians to have an understanding of what is and is not known about EMI. This article reviews the large and scattered EMI literature using a framework that encompasses multiple source domains across the temporal process of engaging in and responding to EMI. In addition, this review delineates both conceptual and methodological limitations to previous work in this area and articulates directions for further research.

Atkins, D. C., Yi, J., Baucom, D. H., & Christensen, A. (in press). Infidelity in couples seeking marital therapy. *Journal of Family Psychology*.

The revelation of an affair is often an emotionally explosive event for a couple, yet little is known about specific individual and relationship factors that accompany infidelity. The present study examined the qualities of individuals and couples that differentiate couples with ( $n = 19$ ) and without ( $n = 115$ ) infidelity using couples from a randomized clinical trial of marital therapy. Findings indicated that couples with infidelity showed greater marital instability, dishonesty, arguments about trust, narcissism, and time spent apart. Gender also proved to be a significant moderator of several effects. Men who had participated in affairs showed increased substance use, were older, and were more sexually dissatisfied. Results offer initial clues to concomitants of affairs for couple therapists.

Busby, D. M., Gardner, B. C., & Taniguchi, N. (2005). The family of origin parachute model: Landing

safely in adult romantic relationships. *Family Relations*, 54, 254-264.

This study investigates the utility of the family of origin parachute model in predicting longitudinal outcomes for couples in romantic relationships. This conceptual model contains common family variables that are theoretically and empirically related to later adult functioning and are believed to influence attitudes that adult children develop regarding romantic relationships as well as self-esteem. Data from two samples were used to analyze this model. The results support the model and demonstrate its ability to predict membership in relationship satisfaction groups. Suggestions are presented for integrating the family of origin in applied work.

Capaldi, D. M., Kim, H. K., and Shortt, J. W. (in press). Observed initiation and reciprocity of physical aggression in young, at-risk couples. *Journal of Family Violence*.

The present study examined sex differences in initiation of physical aggression as observed during discussion tasks and in the likelihood of a similar response from the partner. In addition, patterns for men and women in the prevalence of aggression initiation and partner reciprocation across 4 time points spanning approximately 9 years from late adolescence through the mid-20s are examined, as well as overall associations with reported aggression and injuries. Findings indicated that the young women were more likely than the men to initiate physical aggression at late adolescence, but by the mid-20s in early adulthood there were no significant sex differences in initiation rates. The average rates of reciprocation across the 4 time points appeared to be similar for men and women. Women and men appeared more likely to report injuries if the couples observed physical aggression involved mutual aggression in their interactions.

Cordova, J. V., Gee, C. G., & Warren, L. Z. (2005). Emotional skillfulness in marriage: Intimacy as a mediator of the relationship between emotional skillfulness and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 218-235.

We tested the theory that emotional skillfulness, specifically the ability to identify and communicate emotions, plays a role in the maintenance of marital adjustment through its effects on the intimacy process. Ninety-two married couples completed measures of emotional skillfulness, marital adjustment, and intimate safety. As predicted, we found that the ability to identify

and the ability to communicate emotions were associated with self and partner marital adjustment. Further, the association between these emotion skills and marital adjustment was mediated by intimate safety for both husbands and wives. Gender differences were found in the ability to communicate emotions and in the association between the communication of emotions and partners' marital adjustment.

Cordova, J. V., Scott, R. L., Dorian, M., Mirgain, S., Yaeger, D., & Groot, A. (in press). The marriage checkup: A motivational interviewing approach to the promotion of marital health with couples at-risk for relationship deterioration. *Behavior Therapy*.

Prior to dissolution, it is likely that couples that become severely distressed first pass through an at-risk stage in which they experience early symptoms of marital deterioration but have not yet suffered irreversible damage to their marriage. It is during this "at-risk" stage when couples might benefit most from early intervention. In response to this need we have developed an indicated intervention program called the Marriage Checkup (MC) based on the principles of motivational interviewing. The current randomized study provides preliminary evidence for the attractiveness, tolerability, efficacy and mechanisms of change of the MC.

Doss, B. D., Thum, Y. M., Sevier, M., Atkins, D. C., & Christensen, A. (in press). Improving relationships: Mechanisms of change in couple therapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

In a sample of 134 married couples randomly assigned to Traditional or Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (TBCT vs. IBCT), a multivariate hierarchical growth curve analysis using latent variable regression revealed that measures of communication, behavior frequency, and emotional acceptance acted as mechanisms of change. TBCT lead to greater changes in frequency of targeted behavior early in therapy while IBCT lead to greater changes in acceptance of targeted behavior both early and late in therapy. Additionally, change in behavioral frequency was strongly related to improvements in satisfaction early in therapy; however, in the second half of therapy, emotional acceptance was more strongly related to changes in satisfaction. Research and clinical implications are discussed.

Ehrensaft, M. K., Cohen, P., & Johnson, J. G. (in press). Development of Personality Disorder Symptoms and the Risk for Partner Violence. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.

A community sample ( $N = 543$ ) was followed over 20 years to study the associations among childhood exposure to family violence, personality disorder (PD) symptoms, and perpetrating partner violence in adulthood. We investigated whether PD symptoms in early adulthood

mediate the association of violence in the family of origin with subsequent partner violence perpetration. PD symptoms (DSM-III-R Clusters A, B, and C) partially mediated the effect of earlier childhood risks on the odds of perpetrating violence to a partner. We then tested whether the stability of PD symptoms from adolescence to the early 20s differs for individuals who later perpetrated partner violence. Cluster A ('Odd/Eccentric') symptoms declined less with age among partner violent men and women, compared to non-partner violent individuals. Cluster B ('Dramatic/Erratic') symptoms were more stable through late adolescence in partner violent men, compared with nonviolent men and violent women, who experienced declines in Cluster B symptoms, though these differences were partially explained by Cluster A and C symptoms. Cluster C ('Anxious') symptoms followed an inverse curvilinear trend; these were most stable among partner violent men, compared to nonviolent men and women.

Fals-Stewart, W., Leonard, K. E., & Birchler, G. R. (2005). The day-to-day relationship between episodes of male partner violence and alcohol use: The moderating effects of antisocial personality disorder." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73, 239-248.

In this study, the moderating effects of antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) on the day-to-day relationship between male partner alcohol consumption and male-to-female intimate partner violence (IPV) for men entering a domestic violence treatment program ( $n = 170$ ) or an alcoholism treatment program ( $n = 169$ ) were examined. For both samples, alcohol consumption was associated with an increased likelihood of nonsevere IPV among men without a diagnosis of ASPD but not among men with ASPD (who tended to engage in nonsevere IPV whether they did or did not drink). Drinking was more strongly associated with a likelihood of severe IPV among men with ASPD compared with those without ASPD who also drank. These results provide partial support for a multiple threshold model of intoxication and aggression.

Hoyt, W. T., Fincham, F., McCullough, M. E., Maio, G. & Davila, J. (in press). Responses to interpersonal transgressions in families: Forgiveness, forgivability, and relationship-specific effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Social relations analyses examined the relative importance of forgiveness (disposition to forgive others), forgivability (tendency to obtain forgiveness from others), and relationship effects in determining family members' transgression-related interpersonal motivations (TRIMs), and their perceptions of others' TRIMs toward them (PTRIMs). In two studies, the individual and dyadic predictors of these components and their relative importance differed by family role (father, mother, or early adolescent child). Dispositional tendencies

accounted for the most variance in father and child forgiveness, whereas mothers' TRIMs and PTRIMs were more strongly determined by relationship and partner effects. Personality correlates of forgiveness and forgivability were moderated by family role. The findings point to the need to embed the study of forgiveness in more complex psychosocial contexts. The theoretical, methodological, and applied implications of this conclusion are discussed.

Kelly, S., & Floyd, F. J. (in press). Impact of racial perspectives and contextual variables on marital trust and adjustment for African American couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*.

This study examined the associations of racial perspectives that represent pro-Black, anti-Black, or a mixture of these beliefs with marital trust and adjustment for African American couples (N = 93). Religious well-being and socioeconomic status (SES) were examined as contextual moderators. For husbands only, the anti-Black perspective was inversely associated with couple functioning, the mixed perspective was inversely associated with marital trust, and the pro-Black perspective predicted marital trust only for husbands having relatively low religious well-being and relatively high SES. The limited effects of pro-Black attitudes suggest the need to evaluate a wider range of these attitudes in future research. Also, findings corroborate suggestions for therapists to routinely assess and address both cultural pride and shame issues relevant to Black couple relationships.

Laurenceau, J-P., Troy, A. B., & Carver, C. S. (in press). Two distinct emotional experiences in romantic relationships: Effects of perceptions regarding approach of intimacy and avoidance of conflict. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

This study examined how perceived position and velocity regarding approach and avoidance in romantic relationships relate to affective experiences. The authors hypothesized that perceived progress toward intimacy would predict positive affect and that perceived movement toward conflict would predict anxious affect. Ninety-two romantic couples recorded perceived levels of, and perceived changes in, both intimacy and conflict twice daily throughout 10 consecutive days using electronic palm-top devices. Multilevel modeling demonstrated that perceived increase in intimacy related to positive affect above and beyond perceptions of intimacy, conflict, and changes in conflict, for both male and female partners. Perceived increase in conflict related to anxious affect above and beyond perceptions of conflict, intimacy, and changes in intimacy, but only among male partners. Findings support a dual-process view of these feelings in romantic relationships and suggest that increases in positive feelings in close

relationships depend on enhancing intimacy rather than on decreasing conflict.

Lorber, M. F., & O'Leary, K. D. (2004). Predictors of the persistence of male aggression in early marriage. *Journal of Family Violence, 19*, 329-338.

The prediction of husband-to-wife physical aggression was examined in a sample of 94 community couples in which the husband had engaged in at least one act of physical aggression toward his partner during the engagement period. Predictors were measured approximately one month prior to marriage, and physical aggression was assessed again at 6, 18, and 30 months postmarriage. Over seventy-six percent of the men who were physically aggressive during the engagement period were physically aggressive at one or more of the next three assessments across the initial 30 months of marriage. Nearly 62% were severely aggressive at one or more assessments. Results were generally supportive of the hypothesis that risk factors for persistent antisocial behavior would predict the persistence of aggression. More frequent physical partner aggression, aggressive personality styles, general aggression, and witnessing interparental aggression in the family of origin were associated with continued aggression. Only general aggression, and premarital physical aggression predicted the persistence of severe aggression.

Mansfield, A. K., & Cordova, J. V. (in press). A contemporary behavioral perspective on adult intimacy disorders. Invited chapter in D. Woods & J. Kanter (Eds.), *Understanding behavior disorders: A contemporary behavioral perspective*. Reno, NV: Context Press.

This chapter reviews pioneering work on attachment theory and then argues that a behavioral perspective can provide a generative theoretical foundation for understanding attachment. Implications of adult attachment theory are explored for distressed couples, and a specific style of therapy, Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT) is presented as a means of helping couples to recover from damaging attachment-related relationship patterns.

Paleari, G., Regalia, C., & Fincham, F.D. (2005). Marital quality, forgiveness, empathy, and rumination: A longitudinal analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*, 368-378.

McCullough et al.'s (1998) social-psychological framework of forgiveness informed a longitudinal study that examined the extent to which marital forgiveness is determined by social-cognitive (the offended spouse's rumination and emotional empathy) and relationship variables (the quality of the relationship in which the offence took place). One hundred and nineteen husbands and 124 wives from long- and medium-term marriages in north Italy provided data at 2 time points separated by 6 a

month interval. Structural equation models showed that rumination and empathy independently predicted concurrent marital forgiveness. Forgiveness, in turn, predicted concurrent marital quality. Finally, reciprocal directions of effect emerged between forgiveness and marital quality over time. These results are discussed in terms of their implications for promoting forgiveness and future research directions are outlined.

Rhatigan, D.L., Moore, T.M., Stuart, G.L. (in press). An Investment Model analysis of relationship stability among women court-mandated to violence interventions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

This investigation examined relationship stability among 60 women court-mandated to violence interventions by applying a general model (i.e., Rusbult's 1980 Investment Model) to predict intentions to leave current relationships. As in past research, results showed that Investment Model predictions were supported such that court-mandated women who reported lesser relationship satisfaction, greater alternatives and fewer investments in current relationships endorsed lower levels of commitment and greater intentions to leave those relationships. Secondary analyses showed that court-mandated women's violence perpetration and victimization experiences were minimally related to model factors or women's intentions to leave. Taken together, results of this study provide additional evidence that general models should be used to predict relationship termination decisions among women involved in violent relationships, and violence experiences alone do not affect that decision.

Stanley, S. M. (2005). *The power of commitment: A guide to active, lifelong love*. New York: Wiley and Sons.

In his new book, Scott Stanley, best-selling marriage expert, reveals that the secret ingredient for finding lasting love is understanding commitment. Too often, men and women find themselves in half-committed, Maybe I Do, relationships that lead to frustration, sadness, and, in many cases, divorce. But it doesn't have to be this way. Scott Stanley offers a five-step plan—based on his groundbreaking marital research and uniquely spiritual approach—for understanding commitment, including learning to handle the pressures of everyday life, moving through the pain of unfulfilled dreams and hopes, overcoming attraction to others that might endanger a marriage, transforming your thinking from "me versus you" to "we" and "us," and capturing the beauty and mystery of lifelong devotion, loyalty, teamwork, and building a lasting vision for the future.

Troy, A. B. & Lewis-Smith, J. (in press). Preliminary findings on a brief self-disclosure

intervention with young adult dating couples. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*.

Self-disclosure has been viewed as an integral part of intimacy formation and relationship satisfaction. Despite the availability of techniques to increase self-disclosure (e.g., Gottman, 1999), studies exploring the efficacy of these interventions have not been reported in the literature. In this pilot study, 26 college-aged dating couples were recruited to investigate the impact of a self-disclosure intervention described by Gottman (1999) on relationship satisfaction in dating couples over a five-month period. The intervention did not significantly influence relationship satisfaction compared with a control group at any one of three time periods tested; however, males' knowledge of their partners' life predicted females' satisfaction over a five month time period. These findings suggest that further research is needed for understanding the application of self-disclosure to couples interventions.

Troy, A. B. (in press). Romantic passion as output from a self-regulating, intimacy-seeking system: A model for understanding passionate love. *Psychological Reports*.

This article presents a model of why individuals experience the feeling of passionate love in intimate relationships. Previous models have been limited because they do not describe the purpose and function of passionate love, do not incorporate basic emotion and personality theory, or are not applicable to help couples in distress. The present model reinterprets and integrates previous findings. New predictions are made about the functioning of passionate love in relationships by hypothesizing a self-regulating, intimacy-seeking system that produces passionate love as its outcome. A self-regulation model proposed by Carver and Scheier (1998) is the template on which this model is based.

Troy, A. B., Lewis-Smith, J., & Laurenceau, J.P. (in press). Interracial and intraracial romantic relationships: The search for differences in satisfaction, conflict, and attachment style. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

Interracial relationships constitute a rising proportion of dating and married couples. Despite this fact, they continue to be an understudied population. The present paper presents two studies that compared the functioning of interracial and intraracial intimate relationships. Because interracial relationships face additional challenges and societal disapproval, we hypothesized that interracial relationships would report lower relationship quality, more intense conflict patterns, and increased frequency of coping strategies. Additionally, based on prior research, we also hypothesized that individuals in interracial relationships would report similar attachment styles to individuals in intraracial relationships. In Study One, 32 interracial and 86 intraracial couples were

recruited and completed measures of relationship satisfaction, conflict patterns, and attachment style. Mixed model ANOVAs revealed a significantly higher level of relationship satisfaction for partners in interracial relationships compared to those in intraracial relationships. No differences were found for reported conflict or attachment style between male and female partners in interracial relationships and their respective intraracial counterparts. To replicate and extend these

findings, 34 interracial and 75 intraracial couples completed a measure of relationship quality, conflict patterns, relationship efficacy, coping style, and attachment style in Study Two. No significant differences were found for male or female partners in either interracial or intraracial relationships. This investigation casts doubt on the commonly held belief that interracial relationships are burdened with more problems than intraracial relationships.