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## Editorial: Couple Therapy and Family Therapy

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Couple therapy has always had a complex relationship with family therapy. Practiced long before the family therapy movement (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002), couple therapy for many years was peripheral in considerations of systemic therapy. Although it has been the focus of a few early (Framo, 1976; Papp, 1982; Sager et al., 1971) and more recent memorable articles in *Family Process* (Fishbane, 2011; Goldner, 1998; Gurman, 2011; Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002; Knudson-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010; Scheinkman & Werneck, 2010), couple therapy never has quite fully been integrated into the family therapy field. As an example, in the last decade, only 28 of 370 articles in *Family Process* have centered on couple therapy.

Couple therapists, in turn, sometimes regard work with couples as a wholly distinct territory, subject to other very different forces than work with families. Sometimes, they even speak of a separate field of couple therapy with its own knowledge base, literature, and principles. Of course, there are unique aspects of couple therapy involving such subjects as romantic love, sex, infidelity, and the hovering possibility of divorce as an outcome. However, couples are systems, subject to essentially the same systemic forces and factors as are families. Most couples are also subsystems within families.

Therefore, couple therapy clearly has a vital importance in the context of a journal devoted to families and family therapy, such as *Family Process*. To make up for some of the relative neglect of couple therapy in this journal, this issue is devoted to couple therapy. While we mostly have not been looking, a great deal has happened in the practice of couple therapy and these trends are reflected in the articles included.

This issue is made up with contributions from outstanding scholar-clinicians across several of the most widely practiced methods of couple therapy today. The diversity in approach is apparent in these articles. Vantage points range from emotion-focused (Goldman & Greenberg, 2013; Greenman & Johnson, 2013) to cognitive behavioral (Doss, Benson, Georgia, & Christensen, 2013; Gurman, 2013) to poststructural (Dickerson, 2013; Weingarten, 2013). Couple therapy today includes diverse approaches. However, I am also

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struck by how much common ground these articles share. Several threads that transcend approach emerge typical of couple therapy over the last decade.

First, all couples are couples. Once couple therapy was marital therapy; that is, couple therapy was only for marriages. Coupling is now much more diverse and it is rare to limit this realm to marriage. In a related vein, couples may be heterosexual or LGBTQ. They may also be from many cultures or mixes of cultures. Although there are special factors that apply in different sexual orientation, cultural, or socioeconomic contexts (Boyd-Franklin, Kelly, & Durham, 2008; Green & Mitchell, 2008; Parra Cardona et al., 2012), all couple relationships are equally the focus of today's couple therapy.

Second, couple therapy in heterosexual couples inevitably must deal today with the politics of gender. Although there remain "pop" therapies with stereotypic gender slants, all of the prominent family therapies today work from an egalitarian view of couples. In part, this is because egalitarian couples are happier couples. Two of the articles in this issue are specifically focused on power and gender in couples (Dickerson, 2013; Knudson-Martin, 2013).

Third, couple therapy has emerged as having two related but different uses. Primarily, couple therapy is considered the treatment for couple distress or improving couple relationship satisfaction. It is the only treatment established to be effective in this way. There have long been indications, both in research and in clinical experience, that individual therapies are highly risky ways to try to ameliorate such distress, often promoting relationship breakup (Gurman & Kniskern, 1986). However, there is also a growing body of work that indicates that the couple treatment context has distinct advantages for helping with a range of other problems, including those that are typically thought of as residing within individuals. This second use of couple therapy has relevance whether or not couples are distressed in their marriages; in fact, the greatest benefits from such couple therapy may emerge in the best marriages. Don Baucom has referred to such treatments as "partner-assisted" or "disorder-focused" treatments, where the couple format is the platform for a therapy focused on a problem faced by the couple (Baucom, Whisman, & Papprocki, 2012). Typically, such treatments are most frequently associated with directive evidence-based methods for ameliorating disorders. However, it is striking how from a very different perspective in this issue Kaethe Weingarten (Weingarten, 2013) speaks to the unique advantages of utilizing the couple format to enable a different goal than relationship change: witnessing and coping with sorrow in the context of illness.

Fourth, today's couple therapy is also largely integrative. Even though there are differences in perspective across the methods described in this issue, most of these methods draw upon generic overlapping elements to serve the common task of helping couples more fully experience in their relationships and alter the patterns that erode connection (Lebow, in press). We share a common base of ways of understanding couple processes and working with couples that provide the foundation for practice (Lebow, in press). For example, Wile (2013) in this issue calls our attention to the frequently encountered dynamic of pursuer-distancer (also called demand-withdraw) and its many variations. Recognition and attention to such patterns is part of the shared understandings of most couple therapists. This shared base of common ground also extends to techniques of intervention. In terms of intervention, it is particularly wonderful to have Peggy Papp, Michele Scheinkman, and Jean Malpas (Papp, Scheinkman, and Malpas, 2013) remind us in this issue of the value of sculpting. Sculpting is a powerful technique, which at one time was among the principal procedures taught in family therapy programs. Somewhere along the way, its practice declined in frequency, even though clients typically reported sculpting to be very meaningful and promote understanding and change. Sometimes even the best of methods need proponents to keep useful ideas in focus, especially over the generations of therapists, and Papp and colleagues have done a major service in this way.

Fifth, couple therapy has become a much more scientific endeavor. A relationship science has emerged over the time of the history of couple and family therapy (Berscheid, 2010). That science provides considerable guidance for practice and helps separate this activity today from the well-meaning ideas of opinionated uncles or cable relationship experts. We see evidence of this science in almost every article in this issue. This includes drawing from basic research about couple relationships from the relationship science developed by John Gottman (Gottman, 1998) and others, drawing from relevant findings from neuroscience (Fishbane, 2007, 2011), and drawing on the research on couple therapy itself (Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012). Part of that science has made three couple therapies represented here—emotion focused, cognitive-behavioral, and integrative behavioral couple therapy—among the best supported evidence-based therapies.

Finally, couple therapy is about evolving formats. Couple therapy today often mixes individual and couple session formats. In this issue, Doss and colleagues (Doss et al. 2013) provide a look into future with their online version of Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy. This method is not intended to replace couple therapy, but neither is it simply relationship education. It uses new media and technology to create a version of this treatment that can be available to many more than those who might present in therapists' offices.

This issue of *Family Process* points to the remarkable progress in couple therapy in recent years. Yet, I do not think that we will have another issue about couple therapy. Instead, my hope is that couple therapy becomes fully integrated into the being of *Family Process* and we hear about its development in these pages from those who are advancing its progress more regularly.

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