COURSE NUMBER: SOWO 852.001

COURSE TITLE: SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH COUPLES, FALL SEMESTER 2015

INSTRUCTOR: Anne Jones, LCSW, PhD
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962-7557 (Fax)
(Email) annejone@email.unc.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays 1:00 – 2:00 pm or by appointment

CLASS WEBSITE: Accessible through - https://sakai.unc.edu/. This will contain the syllabus, assignment descriptions and grading criteria; lecture notes, cases, and external links. Please check it periodically for announcements and make sure that you are listed for the class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is a clinical seminar, which analyzes the operations and character of couple therapy as a human service approach.

OBJECTIVES:
1. To develop an understanding of the dynamics of the couple/marital relationship.

2. To understand the professional social work roles, values, and ethics associated with social work intervention specifically to couples and their families.

3. To become aware of your own values, feelings and attitudes about marriage/couple conflict and dissolution.

4. To develop and deepen skills for diagnosis of and implementation of social intervention strategies for marital or relationship difficulties or dysfunction.

5. To understand marital/relationship therapy from a variety of explanatory and practice theoretical perspectives and to develop practice skills consistent with these perspectives.

6. To understand the implications and importance of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation on practice with couples.

7. To understand the importance and relevance of the ecological environment and community setting on assessment and intervention with couples.
**REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:**


**RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOK:**

(Very inexpensive as it has been in print for some time. Anything from this book will be on Sakai)

The Gurman 4th edition and the Tabbi text are available at the UNC Bookstore. The 5th edition of the Gurman text and others are available at (e.g., www.amazon.com, or www.textbooks.com)

**OTHER TEXTS THAT MAY BE USEFUL:**


OTHER RECOMMENDED BOOKS:


EXPANDED DESCRIPTION:

This class will examine the theory, practice and utilization of effective therapeutic interventions with couple relationships across the developmental life cycle of dyads. A number of theoretical approaches will be presented. The course will involve some lecture, videos of therapy sessions, discussion, role-playing and analyzing cases. The course builds on knowledge and skills gained in foundation classes.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT:

The development of a supportive learning environment, reflecting the values of the social work profession, is essential for the success of this class. A supportive learning environment is fostered by listening to the ideas and views of others, being able to understand and appreciate a point of view which is different from your own, articulating clearly your point of view, and linking experience to readings and assignments. I will appreciate your contributions to making this a safe and respectful class for learning and growth.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Please see the end of the syllabus for all assignment descriptions.

BASIS FOR EVALUATION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals (10% each)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practice Presentation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Model Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GRADING SYSTEM:

- **H** = 94 and above
- **P** = 80 to 93
- **L** = 70 to 79
- **F** = 69 and below

POLICY ON INCOMPLETES AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS

It is expected that assignments will be completed at times noted in the syllabus. If additional time is needed please contact me 24 hours in advance of when the assignment is due. When delays are granted they will not affect the grade. Any unapproved delays or assignments...
completed after an approved delay date will begin to accrue a 2 point reduction every 24 hours that the assignment is late. I prefer not to give a grade of an Incomplete. I will give one only in cases of unusual circumstance such as illness.

**Attendance and Class Participation:**
Attendance and participation is worth 10 points. Attendance and participation is required and the class will rely heavily on discussion. It is expected that students will read the material and apply and discuss readings and field experiences in class. Active listening, respect and tolerance for the views of others and a stance of curiosity will all contribute to a safe and stimulating learning environment.

**Policy on Academic Dishonesty:**
Please refer to the *APA Style Guide*, *The SSW Manual*, and the SSW Writing Guide for information on attribution of quotes, plagiarism and appropriate use of assistance in preparing assignments. All written assignments should contain a signed pledge from you stating that, “I have not given or received unauthorized aid in preparing this written work.”

In keeping with the UNC Honor Code, if reason exists to believe that academic dishonesty has occurred, a referral will be made to the Office of the Student Attorney General for investigation and further action as required.

**Policy on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities which affect their participation in the course may notify the instructor if they wish to have special accommodations in instructional format, examination format, etc., considered. I take these seriously and will do everything I can to support your learning needs.
CLASS SCHEDULE
SOWO 852.01 PRACTICE WITH COUPLES

Class 1: 8/18 Overview of Course and Course Requirements
- Introductions
- Brief historical perspective of marital and couple therapy
- The landscape of couples and families today
- Rationale for working with couples and parents

Class 2: 8/25 The Role of Culture, Beliefs, Values and Gender in Relationship Programs and Practice
- Gender issues in couple relationships and practice
- The changing beliefs and expectations on marriage
- Practitioner held values and impact on practice
  Gender Differences in Depression: A Marital Therapy Approach - Peggy Papp, MSW

Required Readings for Class 2:


Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What is your perspective on the ways in which cultural expectation about marriage have changed? How might these changing paradigms effect relationships?
- Why, according to Amato, has marriage/couple relationships become a public issue?
- In your view, does the high rate of divorce, cohabitation, and non-marital births constitute a social problem that should be of concern to social workers?
- What gendered expectations and beliefs might you bring to the case illustration of Dave and Sonja (in Knudson-Martin article)?
- What are some common therapist mistakes and how can we avoid them?

Class 3: 9/1 Partner Formation, Developmental Transitions, and Factors Associated with Successful Relationships – What the Research Shows
- Factors associated with partner formation across the life span
- Life course changes for couples with children and those without
• Predictors for marital success and risk factors for dissolution in heterosexual and same-sex relationships

Required Readings for Class 3:


Pages 37- top of 56) and (pgs. 87 – 96 top)


Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
➢ What are some of the differences in partnering issues and reasons for cohabitation between younger adults and older adults?
➢ What are some of the most important factors identified in the last three articles associated with marital duration and quality?
➢ What stood out for you? Did anything surprised you?

Optional Readings:


Class 4: 9/8 Assessing the Couple System
- The transition to working systemically
- Guidelines on what to ask and how to ask it
- Standardized assessments
- Practice and reflection

Required Readings for Class 4:
Chapter 2 – The Basics: Clinical Goals and Tasks
Chapter 3 – Presentations, Assessments, and Goals
Chapter 4 – Beginnings in Action

Please note: Aggression will be dealt with in more detail in a later class.

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- How does working with a couple differ from working with an individual?
- What are some of the beginning tasks for a practitioner working with a couple?
- What are some important first questions?
- What are some important steps for wrapping up a first session?

Optional Readings:

Class 5: 9/15 Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy (CBCT)
- Theoretical assumptions
- Perspective on healthy and dysfunctional relationship
- Assessment using a CBCT lens
- Therapeutic goals
- Applications to communication issues

Required Readings for Class 5:

Chapter 13 Cognitive Techniques (pgs. 175 -192).
Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What are some of the basic premises that underlie this approach?
- How do therapists that use CBCT view dysfunctional and functional relationships?
- Using a CBCT lens, what are the primary things to assess for?
- What are the important therapeutic aims of a therapist working from a cognitive-behavioral lens?

Optional Readings:


Class 6: 9/22  Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy (CBCT) Continued
- Common interventions
- Creating homework assignments
- Applications to problems of alcohol dependency and depression
- Strengths and limitations
- Practice and reflection

Required Readings for Class 6:
- Chapter 5, Clearing the Clutter: Improving Communication, (pgs. 77 -95).

- Chapter 11 Communication Techniques (pgs. 136-48)

Optional Readings:

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What are the main interventions used by a CBCT couple therapist?
- What is the role of the therapist?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of CBCT?
- What are the specific mechanisms of CBT that make it so effective in work with couples with problems of alcohol and depression?

Class 7: 9/29  Emotionally Focused Therapy
- Theoretical Assumptions
• Perspective on healthy and dysfunctional relationship
• Assessment through an EFT lens
• Application to trauma and illness

*Emotionally focused therapy with Susan M. Johnson*

**Required Readings for Class 7:**


**Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:**
- What are some of the basic premises that underlie this approach?
- How do therapists that use EFT view dysfunctional and functional relationships?
- What are the important therapeutic aims of a therapist working from an EFT lens?
- How is a history of trauma associated with couple distress?

**Optional Readings:**

**Class 8: 10/6  Emotionally Focused Therapy Continued**
• Stages and associated interventions
• Application to medical problems post-partum depression
• Strengths and limitations

**Required Readings for Class 8:**


  Chapter 6 - Drilling Down: Core Issues (pp. 96-119).
  Chapter 9 – The Early Years (pp. 160-174)
Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:

- What are the three stages of EFT and the interventions associated with each phase?
- In what ways can illness affect a relationship?
- What does Taibbi mean when he talks about “core dynamics” and how might these fit with the EFT approach?
- How are the “early years” relevant to attachment issues and formation of relational patterns?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

Optional Readings:


Class 9: 10/13 Gottman Method Couple Therapy
- Theoretical Assumptions
- Perspective on healthy and dysfunctional relationship
- Assessment from SRH lens
- Therapeutic goals

Live Sessions with Julie Gottman

Required Readings for Class 9

- Chapter 4, The Assessment of Marriage
- Chapter 5, The Disasters and Masters of Marriage

Optional Readings:
www.gottman.com
http://www.psychpage.com/family/library/gottman.html

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:

- What are some of the basic premises that underlie this approach?
- What are the components of the Sound Relationship House?
- How does GMCT view dysfunctional and functional relationships?
- What are the important therapeutic aims of a therapist working from a GMCT lens?
Class 10: 10/20  Gottman Method Couple Therapy (The Sound Relationship House) Cont’d

- Key interventions
- Strengths and limitations
- Applications to male arousal and aggression

Required Readings for Class 10:
  - Chapter 6 – Assumptions and Intervention Overview
  - Chapter 8 – Solving what is Solvable
  - Chapter 10 – Life Dreams and Shared Meaning (Only 3 pages!)

  - Chapter 10 – Re-creating the vision

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What are some Gottman key interventions and which ones might you use in your practice?
- How does Taibbi’s chapter on re-creating the vision reflect Gottman’s focus on life dreams?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

Optional Readings:
  - Chapter 11 – Resistance to change

Class 11: 10/27  Approaches to Partner Aggression and Alcohol Abuse

- Types of aggression
- Risk factors for aggression
- Relationship between aggression and alcohol abuse
- Kinds of interventions

Required Readings for Class 11:


Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- What are the two types of partner physical aggression described in the Epstein article?
- What are the main risk factors for aggression in relationships
How might issues of gender, culture and oppression factor into aggressive behavior?

What are your feelings about treating a couple together when there has been some instances of aggression?

What is the relationship between partner aggression and heavy drinking?

Optional Reading:
(S) Straus, M.A. (2009). Why the overwhelming evidence on couple physical violence by women has not been perceived and is often denied. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, 18, 552-572.

Class 12: 11/3 Working with Couples around Infidelity
- Changing forms and patterns of infidelity
- Practice recommendations
- Therapeutic dilemmas

Required Readings for Class 12:


Reading prompts - Please consider as you reflect on ending this course
- Why do you think working with couples around infidelity is challenging for many therapists?
- How do you think you would be most comfortable handling secrets?
- Do you think that online “only” activity constitutes infidelity?

Class 13: 11/10 Working with Repartnered Couples and Stepfamilies
- Stepfamily life cycle and structural characteristics
- Common stepfamily dilemmas
- Recognizing our transference
- Best Practices

Required Readings:

Chapter 11, Battle and Loss: Managing the Teenage Years (pp. 209-222)
Chapter 12, One Big Happy Family: Working with Stepfamilies.


Optional Readings:

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- How do stepfamilies differ developmentally from the biological nuclear family?
- What are some of the most common challenges that repartnered parents face?
- What are the best practices for therapists?
- What comes to your mind when you think about stepfamilies and stepparents?

Class 14: 11/17  Working with Gay, Lesbian and Inter-cultural Couples
- Common stressors and unique strengths
- Therapeutic interventions
- Reflections on our own culture
- Externalizing issues of culture and race with our clients

Required Readings:


Optional Reading:

Reading prompts - Please consider as you read:
- Both intercultural couples of and same-sex couples experience additional challenges including discrimination. How are these external stressors similar and different?
- Why is it important for therapists to recognize and be able to externalize about these stressors?
- What was the mistake that the therapist made in the Markowitz article?
Optional Readings:

**No Class – 11/24  No Class Happy Thanksgiving!**

**Class 15: 12/1  Ethical Issues & Wrap-up**
- Practice recommendations
- Components of ethical practice
- Reflections and Wrap-up

**Required Readings:**

**Reading prompts - Please consider as you reflect on ending this course**
- What do you see as the most important components of ethical practice with couples?
- Feedback -- What did you like best or least about the course?
Assignment Descriptions

Description and Purpose:
The journal assignment is a 2-3 page reaction paper in which you reflect on some aspect of class lecture, discussion, reading, or class activity. The purpose of the journal is to convey familiarity with class material and to then communicate how it is informing your thinking about either professional or personal experiences. As such, the goal is not just to summarize a reading (for instance) but to react to it or show how it might apply to real life experiences. The journal is an opportunity to think more deeply about some aspect of the class and for me to hear and learn from you about how you are experiencing it. The topics for the journals are optional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria – Journals</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of journal is germane to material presented in class and/or assigned reading and conveys a basic understanding of it.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal discussion is thoughtful and demonstrates the ability to link and integrate with practice or personal experience.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal is well written and clearly organized</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Alternative to One Journal: Standardized Assessment, Due Class 6

Objective: Standardized measurements are often used in work with couples, especially among therapists who use CBT. The purpose of this assignment is to gain experience looking for a standardized measure that would help you evaluate some aspect of a couple’s functioning. Some possibilities include:
- Relationship satisfaction
- Relationship quality
- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Intimate partner violence
- Sexual intimacy and general intimacy
- Trust
- Parenting
- Social Support

To complete this assignment:
1. Choose an issue that interests you and using our library resources, seek out a standardized measurement. Some excellent resources include:
   - HAPI – an online database to identify measurements used in health and psychosocial settings
- Encyclopedia of Psychological Assessment – an extensive online guide to psychological scales and measures
- PsychTESTS - an online database in the UNC library electronic database
- Mental Measurements Yearbook with Tests in Print in the UNC library electronic database

(2) Complete the form (on Sakai under resources)
(3) During the next week I will post the information and share on Sakai so that everyone has access to what you found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria for Journal Alternative – Standardized Assessment for Work with Couples</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the measure and source where it was retrieved.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths of the measurement are accurately and clearly identified.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible limitations (e.g. cultural biases) are accurately and clearly identified.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you learned from this assignment.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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**Assignment Two: Best Practice Presentation**

**Due: To be Scheduled (Last 1/3 of class)**

**Description and Purpose:**
The purpose of this assignment is to explore a couple’s problem or issue that is of interest to you and then to consult the literature on the most effective ways to work with it. Possible topics are listed below. You will be responsible for researching the current clinical and research literature and then: (1) Present information on the issue/problem and key findings on best practices; (2) lead a discussion relevant to the issue and (3) prepare a brief (1-2 pages) hand-out to be shared with your classmates which they can then use in the future.

The hand-out should contain:
1. Background information about the problem or issue and its significance, e.g. why is it important, how many are affected or are a part of this group;
2. A summary of the recommended treatment protocol, methods or interventions and
3. A list of references (including any bibliotherapy or websites you may have found) particularly ones that you think may be most helpful to your classmates when they encounter this kind of issue in their practice.

Your presentation should include the answer to these two questions:
1. What should I do if I get a couple who exhibit this set of characteristics or issue and
2. How might the issues of diversity, difference, class, race, gender etc. affect my practice?

If possible I would like a rough draft of the summary and/or slides a couple days ahead of the presentation. This will allow me to plan other content for the class and to give you the possibility of some feedback ahead of time. **Please keep to the specified time limit.** Evaluation criteria will be handed out later in the class.

-16-
We will take some class time to schedule the presentations. They will take place in the last third of the course. Please do some thinking about what topics may interest you. Also please note that if you choose a topic that is already on the schedule, that you will present on that date. Other presentations will be scheduled to fit most closely with what is already being covered.

**These are examples of topics—They are not meant to restrict your choices**

1. Addiction, e.g. substances, gambling, Internet
2. Medical problem
3. Separation and Divorce
4. Stepfamilies
5. Inter-cultural, inter-racial, or inter-faith marriage
6. Infertility or childless or child-free couples
7. Death, illness of child
8. Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered couples
9. Spouse who is GLBT and “comes out” to family
10. Infidelity including Online
11. Sexual dysfunction (e.g. decreased libido)
12. Marital enrichment/preparation
14. Partner aggression
15. Home-based services-family preservation with emphasis on couple
16. Depression, personality disorder or other mental health problem
17. Anger, conflict management
18. Trauma history
19. In-law or family-of-origin problem
20. Work problem, unemployment, workaholism, retirement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria for Assignment Two – Best Practice Presentation</th>
<th>Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handout is well organized, clearly written, and free of errors.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handout contains well researched and useful information on current best practice(s) for the issue being discussed.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handout provides well selected references (e.g. professional, bibliotherapy, and websites) for future use.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation content informs our knowledge and understanding of the overall significance of the topic (e.g. background information, demographics, etc.).</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation content contains solid information on current evidence-based methods, models, interventions to be used with the specific issue or problems.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity issues (e.g. age, sexual orientation, race, class, religion) are addressed by discussing how one or more areas of diversity may influence practice.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation is clear and flows in a logical manner.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation sparks and contributes to an engaged and meaningful class discussion as a result of some thoughtfully posed questions.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation is interesting, engaging, and adheres to time guidelines</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Assignment Three - Application of a Model to a Case, 
Due 12/8, 5:00 PM

The purpose of this assignment is to become better acquainted with an intervention model that is used with couples. To that end, you are asked to select one theoretical framework that you feel is most consistent with your philosophy about social intervention and human behavior and why and how people change. You can chose from any of the three frameworks covered in this class or some other framework that you are interested in learning more about. If you choose a model that was not covered in class, please clear the topic with me first. (Note: Any of the frameworks from class can be used with this case)

Part 1 – Introduction: In this introduction briefly summarize the framework that you have chosen to apply to the case. Assume that you are writing this section for someone who is unfamiliar with this model. Introduce the reader, to the most distinguishing characteristics of this model. Some things to consider in writing this introduction include the following: What aspects, premises, or characteristics make it unique or different from other models? How does it work? Is it structured, unstructured; are there stages of interventions? What is the role of the therapist? How does this framework view functional or dysfunctional relationships; does it have a theory of change? 
(About ¾ - 1 page)

Part 2 – Case Formulation: In this section, describe and summarize the main issues involved in the case and how you would intervene with this couple if they were your clients. Using the lens and language of the framework, please discuss the following:

a. Assessment -- what factors stand out for you/concern you? What kinds of questions might you ask this couple? The more specific you can be the better. Again, you should be thinking in terms of your framework. For instance, if you were using a Transgenerational Systems lens you would be taking note of things like entrenched triangles (e.g. who do you turn to when you are under stress), lack of differentiation etc.

b. Given your framework, what goals would be appropriate to establish with this couple?

c. What interventions would you likely use with this couple and how would you explain them? Please do not just answer with a list of interventions. Try to be as specific as possible.

d. Given that we very rarely obtain all needed information in a first interview, what kinds of additional information do you want to obtain? What information is missing for you and what additional questions would you ask?

e. What other developmental or diversity issues should be taken into consideration? 
(3-4 pages)
Part 3 – Self-reflection: Explain why you chose the framework and why it is or could be a good match for you. Some things to consider as you write this are: How does the model fit with your:
- Philosophy about therapy
- Values
- Personality/personal history
- Stage of professional development
(About ¾ - 1 page)

Part 4 – Strengths and Weaknesses of Model
- What do you see as the major strengths and weaknesses of this model?
- How well do you think that this framework addresses issues of diversity? Can you see it working for the many or the few? Do you have any concerns about its applicability to any particular groups?
- What if any ethical concerns do you have about this model?
About 1 page)

Other guidelines:
The paper should: (1) reflect an integration of material throughout the course. Therefore, you should pull from more than just the course content relating to the model you have chosen and (2) comply with APA guidelines. Please also (1) number the pages; (2) use clearly labeled section headings. The paper should be submitted within a week of our last class. The due date is 5:00 pm Tuesday, December 8th.

What does an (H) paper look like?
A paper that receives a grade of H (high pass) is thoughtful and well written. The content is only specific and accurate and shows critical thinking. It is informed by and integrates content covered throughout the course. It meets if not exceeds the criteria listed on the evaluation grid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria for Assignment Three – Application of a Model to a Case</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to paper is clearly and accurately laid out. It is well written and provides a solid foundation for the rest of the paper.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The framework is accurately applied to the case. Foci of attention, goals, interventions and other factors affecting the case are consistent with the main tenets of model and are supported by the course readings.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental and diversity issues are convey accuracy and understanding of their role in couple relationships.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of reasons for choosing theory and how it fits with own values, beliefs, personality etc. is clearly written and shows insight and a high level of self-reflection.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and weaknesses of model show solid understanding of it as well as critical thinking.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The paper is well informed by class readings.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The paper is clearly written, lucid, and free of errors. Instructions for the paper have been followed.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA style for in text citations and references is consistently and correctly used.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
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