

FAMILY THERAPY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

CPSY 504

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Catalogue Description:

Content: Overview of the fundamental assumptions and ideas of general systems theory and the basic premises of theoretical orientations within family therapy. Participants explore the application of course material to their work setting or training track.

Prerequisites: For students in the Professional Mental Health Community Counseling or Professional Mental Health Counseling-Addictions programs, [CPSY 503](#), [CPSY 506](#), [CPSY 509](#), [CPSY 513](#), [CPSY 550](#), [CPSY 530](#) or [CPSY 535](#). For students in other programs, none.

Credits: 3 semester hours.

Purpose:

It has been said that all therapy is family therapy. Even when working with individuals we are dealing with the internalized community of others that shaped them and continue to influence their every thought and feeling. This will be a survey course designed around the concept of family as a system that powerfully influences, and is influenced by, the behavior of individuals within that system. The fundamental concepts of general systems theory will be applied to the interactional patterns within families and the major theories of family therapy will be explored. Selected topics, controversies, themes, and trends in the field of family therapy will be discussed.

Because each student in this class is also a member of a family that has shaped his or her assumptions about reality and relationships, as well as career choices, it is essential that the student recognize and understand the ongoing influence of family of origin on his or her thoughts, feelings and behavior. Therefore students will be required to examine their own experiences in their family of origin and their taken-for-granted assumptions about family as an essential prerequisite to being able to understand, and intervene in, the systemic interactions of other families.

The course will be a combination of theoretical and clinical material. This course is an introduction and is not designed to prepare the student to do family therapy. The hope is that students will be excited enough by the powerful possibilities of family therapy that they will pursue further training and coursework in the field.

The purpose of this class will be best accomplished within a classroom milieu that encourages critical thinking and discussion, open debate, experiential learning, and fun.

Course Objectives:

Students in this course will:

1. Learn the history of marital, couple, and family therapy; the primary professional state, national, and international associations; and the core competencies (as defined by AAMFT) required to practice family therapy.
2. Understand principles of theory construction and model building and how these influence the extent to which theories and models developed within particular cultural contexts are applicable for clients from contrasting cultural contexts.
3. Consider the dynamics of power and social location relative to developing, researching, and applying field knowledge and theory, with attention to how family therapy has the potential to contribute to social inequities and social control. Recognize issues of power and privilege relative to own and clients' social locations and how these influence therapy, problems and solving problems.
4. Understand systems, world systems, and ecosystems concepts, theories and techniques that are foundational to the practice of marriage, couple, and family therapy, as well as trends in the field. These include: first and second order cybernetics; patterns of interaction; Bowen's core systems concepts; Minuchin's structural approach; MRI problem formation/principles of brief therapy; feminist critique of general systems theory; social constructionist/post modern paradigm; and critical theory and family therapy.
5. Develop a beginning knowledge of marital, couple, and family life cycle dynamics, healthy family functioning, family structures and development in a multicultural society and world, with particular attention to how systems of power and privilege influence family life.
6. Learn and practice several methods (e.g., sculpting, genograms, structural maps, historical time lines) for assessing family dynamics, family of origin/intergenerational influences, history, and cultural heritage to identify patterns, understand belief systems, and identify strengths/resilience.
7. Gain an understanding of couple and family healthy functioning and life cycle development across cultural contexts, life worlds, and family forms. And apply principles of family and couple life cycle development from culturally and contextually situated perspectives.
8. Practice skills in conceptualizing problems systemically, developing therapeutic alliance with multiple members of a system, and interviewing from a relational perspective (e.g., using circular questions, co-constructing therapeutic goals, identifying verbal and nonverbal relational patterns in and out of session, enacting communication between systems members).

Related Authorizations:

Successful completion of this course is necessary for fulfillment of degree requirements for any of the specialty areas in the Counseling Psychology Department. This course is also necessary for gaining access to licensure as a professional counselor, school psychologist, or marriage and family therapist.

Instructional Methods:

The class will combine didactic and experiential methods. Class periods will include discussion of the readings, lecture, role plays, demonstrations, video, experiential exercises and debates.

Attendance Policy:

Class attendance is expected and required. Any missed class time will be made up by completing extra assignments designed by the instructor. Missing more than ten percent of class time may result in failure to complete the class. This would be 4.5 hours of a 45 hour class (3 credits), 3.0 hours for a 30 hour class (2 credits) or 1.5 hours for a 15 hour class (1 credit.) In case of extreme hardship and also at the discretion of the instructor, a grade of incomplete may be given for an assignment or the entire course. In such cases, the work to be submitted in order to remove the incomplete must be documented appropriately and stated deadlines met. Students are expected to be on time to class and tardiness may be seen as an absence that requires make-up work.

Required Texts:

Nichols, M.P. (2010). *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods*, 9th ed. New York: Allyn and Bacon.

Additional readings will be available on Moodle.

Course Requirements:

1. Active engagement in class through asking questions and participation in discussions, role plays, and exercises.
2. Completion of all assigned readings. Readings will be discussed in class and your comments and questions should reflect a thoughtful consideration of the material.
3. Family of Origin Project (see below).
4. Group Project (see below).

Evaluation:

Grades will be assigned based on points earned as follows:

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|--------------------------|-----|
| Class Participation | 25 |
| Family of Origin Project | 100 |
| Group Project | 75 |
| Total Possible Points | 200 |

Grading scale: 185-200 = A
180-184 = A-
175-179 = B+
170-174 = B
165-169 = B-

Class Schedule:

May 7:

Introduction to class.
Group assignments.
Introduction to systems.

May 14:

Nichols, Introduction and Chapter 1
McGodrick & Gerson, Chapter 1, *Why genograms?*
Chapter 2, *Constructing genograms*

May 21:

Nichols, Chapter 2
Chabon, *William and I*

May 28: No Class

June 4:

Part One of Group Project Due

Nichols, Chapter 3
Treadway, *The ties that bind*

June 11:

Nichols, Chapters 4 and 11
Alvarez, *Applying family systems therapy in schools.*

June 18:

Johnson, *Emotionally focused family therapy*

Levy & Orland, *Creating and repairing attachments in biological, foster and adoptive families.*

June 25:

Nichols, Chapter 5 and 9

Kerr, *Theoretical base for differentiation of self in one's family of origin.*

Group One Presents

July 2:

Nichols, Chapter 6

Prevatt, *Milan Systemic Therapy*

Group Two Presents

July 9:

Nichols, Chapter 7

Kemenoff, Jachimczyk, & Fussner, *Structural Family Therapy*

Group Three Presents

July 16:

Nichols, Chapter 8

Lawrence, *The humanistic approach of Virginia Satir*

Group Four Presents

July 23:

Family of Origin Project Due

Nichols, Chapters 12 and 13

Akinyela, *Testimony of hope: African centered praxis for therapeutic ends.*

White, *The externalizing of the problem and the re-authoring of lives and relationships.*

July 30:

Nichols, Chapter 14 and 15

Philpot and Brooks, *Intergender communication and gender-sensitive family therapy.*

August 6:

Nichols, Chapter 16

Family of Origin Project

General instructions: This assignment requires you to apply the concept and theories we will study to your family of origin. In order to complete this assignment you will need to conduct at least two interviews of family members. You may interview parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, or cousins. You will cite these interviews in your bibliography. Please discuss confidentiality with your interviewees, get permission to use the interview material, and offer to change names if they so desire. You may include pieces of transcript in your paper only with expressed permission of your interviewee.

Instructions for paper:

Section one: (One page) Produce a detailed genogram of your family of origin covering at least three generations (going back to your grandparents). The genogram may be hand drawn but I prefer that you use a genogram software program. Go to www.genopro.com and you will have free access to the genopro software program for 90 days.

Section two: (4-6 pages) In narrative form, write a systemic analysis of your family of origin, referring back to the genogram. Issues you should cover include boundaries (within the family as well as between the family and the world), hierarchies, subsystems, alliances, rules (spoken and unspoken), feedback loops, adaptability, cohesion, power, attachment styles, cutoffs, family myths, significant losses, communication style and patterns, triangles, homeostatic regulation, inclusion and intimacy. You must give specific behavioral examples to back up your analysis. Don't just say, for example, that there were strong intergenerational boundaries, discuss the specific behaviors that demonstrated that those boundaries existed.

Section three: (6-8 pages) Select a theme of your choice to research and apply to your family of origin. You may create your own theme or select from the following list:

1. The effects of alcoholism or addiction on the family.
2. Gay and lesbian families.
3. Blended family issues.
4. Single-parent family.
5. The effects of violence or abuse.
6. Poverty and the family.
7. Family secrets.
8. Legacies of loss.
9. The role of ritual in the family.
10. Birth order.
11. Cultural themes.
12. The effects of mental or physical illness on the family.
13. Gender roles within the family.
14. Family stories and the construction of meaning.
15. Models of marriage.

16. Enmeshment and disengagement.
17. Emotional milieu within the family.

In completing this section you will need to cite at least three scholarly articles and/or books that address the theme you are discussing. You will also need to give specific behavioral examples to illustrate your theme as it plays out in your family of origin.

Section four: (One page) Attach a bibliography citing all references using APA reference style. List all interviews, including person interviewed, date of interview, length of interview and mode of interview (phone, in person, email).

This paper is due July 23. Papers may be handed in before that date but no late papers will be accepted. Paper must be double-spaced, using 12 point font.

Grading:

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| Writing conventions (spelling, grammar, organization) | 5 points |
| Genogram (completeness, neatness, clarity) | 15 points |
| Systemic analysis (completeness, depth, grasp of concepts) | 30 points |
| Selected theme (depth, originality, insight, quality analysis) | 45 points |
| Bibliography (APA style, documented interviews) | 5 points |
| Total possible | 100 points |

Extra Credit: Up to four students may volunteer to present their Family of Origin Projects in class. Students who do this will receive 10 points of extra credit on this assignment.

It is understood that this assignment can be emotionally difficult for some students in that it might require focus on issues they are not prepared to address, or they may feel uncomfortable in exposing personal information to the instructor. If you feel you cannot complete this assignment please make an appointment to talk with the instructor and an alternative assignment will be arranged.

Group Project

During one of the first class periods you will be assigned to “families”. These families will remain together throughout the term and will be the subjects of the role plays we will do in class. In addition, your “family” will be your workgroup for the completion of this assignment. Your “family” will be randomly assigned an “issue” that brings you to therapy and will also be randomly assigned a theory from which to approach this issue. Some time in class will be allocated to work on your projects but you will need to do considerable work and communication outside of class in order to complete this assignment.

Part one: Meet as a group. Assign roles, deciding who will be the parents, the children, etc. Decide on the age and gender of the children. Who is the identified patient? Describe the relationships between family members. Develop an identity and history for each family member. Decide how the identified problem will play out in the family. Keep notes of your decisions. On **June 4** you will turn in a brief, 3-4 page paper describing your family, the individuals, the history of the problem, and a genogram. Only one paper is expected from each group.

Part two: In addition to a family “issue” you will be assigned a particular theory. You will need to research how your assigned issue would be addressed within this theory. For example if your issue is “alcoholism within the family” and your assigned theory was “solution-focused” you would need to research how a solution-focused family therapist would address alcoholism in the family. Your group will then do a demonstration of this approach to this problem by role-playing a family session for the class. This presentation should be no more than 30 minutes. For purposes of this demonstration, one of your group members will need to step out of his or her usual family role in order to be “the therapist”. As part of the presentation, your group will do a brief (30 minute maximum) didactic presentation on your theory which addresses the techniques that were demonstrated and the theoretical constructs involved. Be prepared to answer questions. Dates for these presentations will coincide with the schedule of readings on each theory. You will need to hand in a bibliography citing your sources.

Grading:

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|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Part one (Family Description) | 15 points |
| Part two (Demonstration/presentation) | 60 points |
| Total possible | 75 points |