

Advanced Seminar: Family Systems and Child & Adolescent Mental Health

- Course Number: V05.0204
- Instructor: Andrew E. Roffman, L.C.S.W., Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- This course carries 4 points.
- Prerequisites: V05.0101 or permission of instructor. Note: Prerequisites may be waived certain semesters.

Course Description:

Until the mid 20th century, the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and mental health were dominated by individually-oriented theories of human experience, development, and psychopathology. Family systems theory emerged as a response to the limitations of that paradigm, offering a radically different way both of thinking about individuals and doing psychotherapy. This emerging model views human experience as *irreducibly relational*. From a systems perspective, an individual is always an individual embedded in networks of significant relationships, the most central of these is the family. This course will present family systems theory as a powerful tool for understanding families and for working with children and adolescents. Special emphasis will be made throughout on multicultural dimensions of theory and practice.

Course Aims:

a. Knowledge

Students will learn key aspects of:

1. Family systems theory, including its history and past and present trends;
2. Family functioning as it pertains to child development and health, including such issues as:
 - a) Culture, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status;
 - b) Current trends in postmodern thought relevant to theory and practice;
 - c) A *strengths* and *resilience* model of psychological development and psychiatric treatment as contrasted with a *deficits* and *pathology* approach;
3. Family therapy models as they relate to prevention and treatment; and
4. The importance of family in both child and adult development and health.

b. Skills

Students will be able to:

1. Conceptualize child and adolescent mental health issues from a family systems framework;
2. Apply a family systems framework to specific cases drawn from the hypothetical and actual case studies; and
3. Critically appraise the strengths and limitations of various proposed models of family therapy and family functioning.

Provisional Syllabus:

FAMILY SYSTEMS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Week 1. From Individual to Family, From Symptom to System

Readings: Nichols, M. & Schwartz, R. - *The Essentials of Family Therapy*, Chap.1, 2
Beels, C. (2002) Notes for a cultural history of family therapy. *Family Process* 41 (1), 67–82.

We will look at the mental health field at the time when ideas about the family and mental health began to change. We will focus on how discontent with dominant paradigms, such as psychoanalysis and behaviorism, led to the first stirrings of the family systems movement.

***Students will sign up for a field visit to the NYU Child Study Center:** Each student will join an ongoing family therapy supervision team at the NYU Child Study Center and observe a live family therapy session from behind the one-way mirror with supervision. This one-time, two hour commitment will take place prior to Week 6 and must be completed on a Wednesday afternoon or Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday evening. The first midterm paper will be based on this observation experience.

Week 2. Family Systems Theory

Readings: Nichols, M. & Schwartz – *The Essentials of Family Therapy*, Chap 4
Minuchin, P. (1985). Families and individual development: Provocations from the field of family therapy. *Child Development*, 56, 289-302.

Family systems theory offers a radical shift in perspective on individuals, families, psychotherapy, and mental health. We will cover basic principles and implications. Video (clinical and popular media) will also be used to illustrate clinical concepts.

Week 3. Understanding Families: The Family Life Cycle.

Readings: Carter & McGoldrick – *The Expanded Family Life Cycle*, Chaps.1, 2

The family life cycle is a basic construct used to understand family functioning. The relationship between individual and family pathology and these life cycle transitions will be explored.

Week 4. Understanding Families: Family Structure

Readings: Nichols & Schwartz, Chap. 7.

Key structural concepts in family therapy theory, such as boundaries, hierarchy, coalitions, and subsystems, will be covered. Case material and video will be used to illustrate these concepts.

Week 5. Understanding Families: Family Patterns and Process

Readings: Nichols & Schwartz, Chap. 6.
Watzlawick, P. & Coyne, J. (1980). Depression following stroke: Brief, problem-focused family treatment. *Family Process* 19, 13-18.
Systems theory offers a way of discerning and describing patterns that maintain problems in families. These patterns are stable sequences that include behavior, emotion, and cognition. We will look at various ways of understanding and intervening in these patterns.

Week 6. Understanding Families: The Intergenerational Perspective

Readings: Nichols & Schwartz, Chap. 5
McGoldrick, M., et al., Genograms Chaps.1, 2
We will focus on the work of Murray Bowen and his followers and will explore in detail the relevance of family of origin influences on a family's life and functioning in the present.

***First Midterm Paper Due**

Week 7. Family Assessment I

Readings: McGoldrick, M. et al., Genograms Chaps. 3, 4
During this session and the next, we will employ the theoretical constructs studied thus far to make sense of an actual family (a "clinical case" that the instructor will present). Students will learn how to construct and utilize the genogram as a way of organizing information.

Week 8. Family Assessment II

Readings: Nichols & Schwartz, Chap. 3
We will complete our review of the family session presented during the prior class and learn how to apply key theoretical concepts in formulating an assessment.

Week 9. Understanding Couples: Basic Concepts

Readings: Carter & McGoldrick, Chap. 14
Gurman, A. & Fraenkel, P. (2002). The history of couple therapy: A millennial review. *Family Process* 41(2), 199-260.
Theories of marriage and relationship have existed both as a part of family systems theory and as a separate but related discourse. During this session, we will review major ideas, themes, theories and questions in this domain.

Week 10. Understanding "Non-Traditional" Couples

Readings: Carter & McGoldrick, Chap 20.
Special concerns, questions, and topics regarding same-sex, cross-cultural, interfaith, and other "non-traditional" relationships will be covered.

***Second Midterm paper due**

Week 11. Couples Assessment

Reading: Scheinkman, M. (2008). A roadmap for couples therapy.

We will discuss how to assess or “diagnose” a couple. A videotape of a couples therapy session will be viewed as a stimulus for discussion and as a starting point for utilizing the information about couples and families covered thus far.

Week 12. Family Systems Theory Today: New Trends and Critiques

Readings: Nichols & Schwartz, Chap 11

We will take a close look at how recent trends and critiques of family systems theory have both challenged and enriched the field of family therapy and child and adolescent mental health.

Week 13. A View From Manywheres

Readings: Nichols & Schwartz Chap. 14

Fraenkel, P. The Therapeutic Palette

What do we do with so many theories? The pro’s and cons of various strategies of theoretical and practical integration will be reviewed.

***Final Paper Due**

Week 14. Student Presentations

Students will give brief presentations of their final papers, emphasizing the genogram and formulation.

Required Reading:

The following texts are required:

Nichols, M. & Schwartz, R. (2005). *The essentials of family therapy*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. See section headings for assigned chapters.

McGoldrick, M., Gerson, R., & Shellenberger, S. (1999). *Genograms: Assessment and intervention (2nd Edition)*. New York: Norton.

Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (Eds.). (1999). *The expanded family life cycle: Individual, family and social perspectives (3rd edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

The following articles and book chapters are required:

Beels, C. (2002) Notes for a Cultural History of Family Therapy. *Family Process* 41 (1), 67–82.

Gurman, A. & Fraenkel, P. (2002). The History of Couple Therapy: A Millennial Review. *Family Process* 41(2), 199-260.

Minuchin, P. (1985). Families and individual development: Provocations from the field of family therapy. *Child Development*, 56, 289-302.

Scheinkman, M. (2008). Couples therapy: A road map.

Watzlawick, P. & Coyne, J. (1980). Depression following stroke: Brief, problem-focused family treatment. *Family Process* 19, 13-18.

Examinations and Grades

First midterm paper: *Due Week 6.* Each student will write about his/her observation experience at the NYU Child Study Center. A format will be provided. 3-5 pages.

Second midterm paper: *Due Week 10.* Using one of the theoretical family therapy models covered in class, each student will write a case formulation based on a clinical case presented by the instructor. A format will be provided. 5-7 pages.

Final paper and presentation: *Due Week 13.* Each student will choose an approved biography of a current or historical figure and write about that person's family from the perspective of the theories covered. 10-12 pages. Each student will make a brief presentation on this family, making extensive use of the genogram as visual representation of the family.

Breakdown of Grading:

Grades will be based upon:

Class participation (20%)

Two midterm papers (1st paper is worth 15% and second paper is worth 25%)

Final paper/presentation (40%)