Course Description:
This is the second semester (elective) of a year-long course in family therapy. Please refer to pages 1-2 of the syllabus for Family Systems Theory, Treatment, and Research I for a detailed description of the course’s overarching goals, integrative perspective, and pedagogic approach. As stated there, the course draws upon family systems theories and social psychology to conceptualize the relationship between individuals and their intimate and larger social and environmental contexts. Conceptualizing psychological development as a function of this evolving, reciprocal relationship between the individual and her/his multiple levels of context is important whether one conducts therapy with individuals, therapy with couples and families, or interventions that involve larger systems such as communities, schools, hospitals, and the legal system. However, as this course is primarily a course in how to do couple and family therapy, the emphasis will be on how systems and social psychological theories and research support the practice of systemic therapies with couples and families.

In this semester, we will examine the relationship between families and what family systems theory calls “larger systems” -- or in the language of Brofenbrenner’s ecological model of development, the “mesosystemic, exosystemic, and macrosystemic” levels of the individual person’s and individual family’s context. Individuals’ and families’ daily lives include occasional or ongoing relationships with one or more larger societal institutions and systems such as schools; hospitals and health clinics; the world of employment and work; the world of material goods and advertising; the legal system (including the police, courts, and immigration); social services; city, state, federal government; the international political and economic situation; the man-made and natural environment; and spiritual/religious communities. The experienced quality and real effects of these relationships is determined by the type, frequency, purpose, and outcomes of interactions, which in turn are influenced by the family’s social location and associated level of privilege/influence in terms of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, English fluency, ability/disability, citizenship status, and other dimensions of difference, along with their unique sources of resilience and resourcefulness.

Course Organization and Format
The course is organized to reflect the multiple levels of meaningful relationships between persons and their complex ecologies. It combines lectures, discussions, readings, role-play exercises, student presentations, and viewing of videotapes as learning modalities. You are also encouraged to bring to class discussions specific clinical experiences with families that illustrate important theoretical and treatment issues.
Please note that the schedule of topics listed in the syllabus is subject to change, depending on group interest in a topic, and opportunities for special presentations. Changes in dates on which topics will be discussed will be decided by the whole group and announced during class with as much advance notice as possible.

**Course Objectives:**

Students will emerge from this course with an expanded foundation in the practice of couple and family therapy; a sound grasp of how family systems research and social psychology inform systemically-based clinical interventions; an experience in critically applying clinical data to refine general theories of human social behavior and experience; and an enhanced sensitivity to aspects of social location such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, immigration history/citizenship status, culture, and other dimensions of diversity that afford individuals and families experiences of privilege or oppression, and that affect family functioning. Whereas in the first semester of the course, the focus was on the intimate systems of couples and families, this course’s focus is on understanding and intervening with the various larger systems that affect individual, couple, and family functioning.

Specifically, by the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate their knowledge of key theories and techniques of couple and family therapy, and the research supporting systemic theories and interventions, with an emphasis on larger systems. This knowledge will be demonstrated by students’ responses to in-class questions posed by the instructor and in-class discussions; reading reflection papers; performance on a group presentation; performance on a term paper; and performance on an exam.

2. Demonstrate a capacity to critically evaluate family systems theories and applied practices utilizing three perspectives:
   a. examining the adequacy of the empirical research supporting these theories and techniques;
   b. understanding how power relationships within the academic and larger social/historical context supports the ascendance of particular theories and therapeutic techniques over alternative theories and techniques
   c. evaluating the degree of generalizability/suitability/applicability of theories and practices from the perspective of intersectionality – the multiple interacting social locations of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other dimensions of difference

   This knowledge will be demonstrated by students’ responses to in-class questions posed by the instructor and in-class discussions; reading reflection papers; performance on a group presentation; performance on a term paper; and performance on an exam.

3. Demonstrate the capacity to apply general family and couple clinical theory and techniques to particular case material, thereby demonstrating the ability to identify a problem and employ appropriate problem-solving processes to develop viable
solutions. Acquisition of the capacity apply general theory and techniques to particular case material will be demonstrated by students’ responses to in-class questions by the instructor and in-class discussions; reading reflection papers; performance on a group presentation; performance on a term paper; and performance on an exam.

4. Demonstrate understanding of guidelines for ethical practice as a family and couple counselor. Acquisition of an understanding of ethical practice will be demonstrated by students’ responses to in-class questions posed by the instructor and in-class discussions; reading reflection papers; performance on a group presentation; performance on a term paper; and performance on an exam.

5. Demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills through weekly in-class discussions, a formal in-class group presentation, and a term paper.

Requirements and Grading:
Second Semester Term Paper
The paper assignment for the second semester is designed to provide you with an opportunity to apply the concepts learned in the course to the act of understanding an actual or fictional family. You may elect to study and write about your own family (the one you grew up in or the one you have created with your spouse/partner and/or children); a “television family” such as the Cosbys, the family portrayed on Married with Children, one of the soap operas -- even the Simpsons!; or a “film family” -- a family portrayed in a movie/video. If you choose to use a TV family for this assignment, you will need to watch at least 4 episodes of the show; likewise, you will need to watch the entire movie/video if using a film family. It is highly advised that you tape the TV show (for TV families) and use a film already on video (for film families) so that you can watch the material repeatedly. You must specify which show and episodes you are drawing from in writing your paper; likewise, you must specify the movie/video title if using a film family.

The paper should be between 12 and 15 pages in length – NO LONGER THAN 15 PAGES. It must describe the family in terms of the following key concepts and issues, and must be organized with the following headings, and in the following order:

Family Organization
- Who is in the family? What are their roles (mother, father, spouse, sister, great-aunt, etc.) and approximate ages?
- How clear are the roles and responsibilities of family members? Do some members play roles inappropriate to their age, development, and position in the family?
- What are the subsystems of the family? Who is in which subsystems? How permeable are boundaries between subsystems? What changes the permeability, if anything?
- What is the nature of the family’s relationships and boundaries with larger systems -- schools, workplaces, religious institutions, state agencies such as child welfare, the courts and legal system, medical systems, etc? You need only describe those with which the family has had contact. What events in the life of the family have changed the permeability of their boundaries and level of involvement with larger systems, if any?
- Who has the most power in this family and in what contexts/activities? (Remember that different family members may have more or less power than others in different contexts and for different tasks/activities).
- What is the nature of the hierarchy among members? How is this hierarchy maintained?
- Who is closest to whom, and in what contexts/activities? Who is more distant to whom, in what contexts/activities? How has degree of closeness between particular members changed over time, and why? How do members feel about the degree of their closeness to other members or persons outside the family. (Note: You may include non-family members whom are involved with family members in this part of the description.)
- Describe at least one triangle in this family.
- How well differentiated are the adult members from their families of origin?

**Family Culture**
- What are the family members’ ethnic backgrounds, races, social classes, genders, sexual orientations, and geographic region (in US) and countries of origin?
- If members of the family are first generation in this country (immigrated to this country), what impact has the immigration had on them and on the family as a whole?
- How do these aspects of identity shape interactions in the family? For instance, if there are differences between members on these aspects of identity (skin color, social class, sexual orientation), how are these handled? What impact do these differences have for the degree of closeness/distance and power relationships among family members?
- How do these aspects of identity affect the types of experiences the family has had in the world, including experiences of privilege and experiences of oppression?
- Describe at least one family ritual and its meaning to the family.
- How does the family’s culture affect the nature of their relationship and boundaries with their community, and with persons of cultures different from their own?

**Family Development**
- Where is this family as a whole on its relevant version of the “family life cycle”? In other words, what are the goals this family holds for itself and where are they along the pathway to achieving these? Also, where are they along the life cycle in terms of events that may not be goals per se but are common or inevitable aspects of life (ex: death of a family member)?
- How satisfied are members with their place on this lifecycle?
- Where are individual members in terms of their respective developmental timelines and goals/paths?
- How satisfied are the members with their place on their respective developmental timelines?
- What have been the greatest challenges for this family in terms of their development along a life cycle? What have been the blocks or impediments to achieving family and individual goals? How have members handled/adapted to these blocks?

**Family Affect and Communication**
- How clear is the communication among family members?
- What is the general quality of family communication (lighthearted, aggressive, empathic) and how does this vary across subsystems and family tasks?
- What style(s) of problem discussion and problem solving do members use, particularly the adult members?
- How effective is the family in solving problems?
- How emotionally expressive are family members?
- Are there particular emotions that seem to characterize the family “climate” much of the time
(happy, excitable, depressed, annoyed, cynical)? How do different members relate to this overall family emotional climate? What events or interactions change the emotional climate, how, and in what ways? How does the family regulate its emotional climate?

**Family Problems**

- Describe one problem the family has struggled with. The problem could be in any of the aspects of family life you have already described (in terms of organization, development, culture, communication, affect), or could be something else.
- Provide a detailed “video description” of the problem (the sequence of events and interactions that surround the problem).
- What has the family done so far to try to solve the problem? What has worked and what hasn’t?

**Family Strengths**

List at least three positive qualities of the family as a whole. Give examples of each strength.

**Social Psychological Theory and Research Pertinent Understanding this Family**

Drawing upon a minimum of 5 sources (articles or chapters) from the course’s social psychology readings, describe how some aspect this particular family’s functioning and situation can be understood as exemplifying social psychological theory and/or research findings.

**Second Semester In-Class Presentations**

The in-class presentation will be an outgrowth of our semester-long focus on collaborative practices with economically marginalized, multi-stressed families. As discussed throughout the semester, such families are frequently involved with welfare, child protection, hospitals and health clinics, the legal system, foster care, shelters, underfunded schools, and other larger systems and agencies. They can feel overwhelmed, pathologized, and demoralized rather than assisted by these relationships. Therapists can also feel overwhelmed and unskilled in working with these families and these institutions. Working from a narrative, social constructionist perspective, Bill Madsen has developed compassionate, respectful, and effective ways of working with multi-stressed families and the institutions that serve and observe them. And from the theoretical starting points of structural, strategic, behavioral, and ecosystemic therapies, several teams of research-based clinicians have developed effective, manualized, empirically-validated treatments for working with conduct-disordered and substance-abusing teens and their families. In teams of two students, you will do a 35-minute presentation either on two of the chapters in the Madsen book or one chapter in the Lebow book (which describes the EVTs). If possible, use as illustrations of the ideas and practices a case you are working with or have worked with in a previous clinical position, rather than the examples in the book. It can be an individual case, child, adolescent, or adult, or a couple or family. The presentation should also draw upon at least two social psychological theories or research findings that support the clinical approach described.

**Reading Reflection Papers**

Across the semester, you are required to submit three reading reflection papers – a half page to one page in length, single-spaced 12 point font maximum, in which you address the following questions about one of the core readings:
1. Novelty/Interest: What idea or finding intrigued you most about this article/chapter, and why?

2. Constructive Critique: What was missing or seemed problematic about the position/conclusions advanced in this article/chapter?

3. Application: How might this idea/finding (or the article/chapter as a whole) affect your work in individual psychotherapy?

Readings will be randomly assigned to students at the beginning of the semester. You are welcome to trade articles/chapters for which you will take responsibility for the paper; but let me know. You must email this paper to me and the entire class by the evening (not later than 10 p.m.) before the class for which the article/chapter is assigned. Failure to submit the paper will result in no credit.

Course Grading

Classroom Participation (asking relevant questions, offering thoughts, accurately answering questions about readings posed by instructor): 10%

Reading Reflection Papers: 15% (5% each of three papers)

In-Class Presentation: 25%

Final Paper: 25%

Exam: 25%

NOTE ON LATE PAPERS:

Please note that, in order to be fair to your classmates, final papers are due on the date set in class, with no exceptions! Papers will lose a half grade per day late.

Readings

As in Semester One, required readings for the course are arranged in an electronic course pack in the order in which they appear in the syllabus. The readings are emailed as .pdf documents. Books are either available in bookstore. Required readings are bolded and are listed in this syllabus immediately under the class dates/topics for which they are particularly relevant. We will select one or more of these readings each week for “close reading.” Other (not bolded) readings are recommended but we will not necessarily go over them in great detail. Note that in class, I will select sections of some of the longer core readings for close scrutiny and discussion, but you are responsible for reading the entire article/chapter.

For each week, readings drawn from the family systems literature are listed under the heading Family Systems Readings. Readings drawn from the social psychology literature are listed under the heading Social Psychology Readings.

Over the years I have greatly reduced the required reading list so that we can thoroughly encounter and absorb a few representative texts. But keep in mind that these readings barely
scratch the surface of the couple and family therapy literature (never mind the enormous body of relevant work in social psychology), and so, I encourage you to read much more, and I have many articles, chapters, and books readily available.

In addition, we will draw from eight books that have required readings, but six of them were used in the first semester of the course. One copy of each book will be on reserve in the CCNY library, and several (the less expensive ones) will also be available in the bookstore.

**Required Texts:**


**Recommended Texts:**


Along with the readings, you will receive a packet of handouts that provide additional, practical guidelines on a variety of topics and treatment issues.
Weekly Reading Assignments and Class Topics:

**Week 1**  
**ASSESSING THE FAMILIES’ RELATIONSHIP TO LARGER SYSTEMS AND THEIR ECOLOGY OF SOCIAL LOCATION**

In this class, we will draw upon family systems theories and social psychological theories (especially Bronfenbrenner’s classic conceptualization of the social-developmental ecology) to refine an approach to assessing the family’s “ecosystem” — the family’s relationships with societal institutions such as schools, health care providers, legal (including immigration) agencies, the workplace (including welfare), and others. In subsequent weeks, we will apply this broad conceptual-assessment framework to more detailed examination of the family’s relationships with each of these particular aspects of their broader social ecology.

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


**SOCIAL (AND DEVELOPMENTAL) PSYCHOLOGY READINGS**


**Weeks 2&3**  
**REFINING THE COLLABORATIVE STANCE IN WORK WITH MULTI-STRESSED FAMILIES**

In these two weeks, we will examine the impact of the fundamental stance taken by clinicians and family-based programs working with families struggling with multiple psychological and social problems. What is the impact of taking a more hierarchical/directive approach that emphasizes families’ deficits, versus a more collaborative/resilience-based approach that emphasizes families’ strengths? What does social psychology tell us about the variables that affect persuasion and attitude change, and how can this knowledge assist us in the clinical encounter?

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


**SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY READINGS**


**Week 4**

**THE FAMILY AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM: BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS**

In this class, we will examine the interface between the family and the school context, and learn effective methods for creating collaborative family-school partnerships that enhance children’s learning.

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


**Week 5**

**FAMILY-SCHOOL THERAPY: CHILDREN WITH ADHD AND LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

In this class, we will continue discussing families and children in the school context, learning about the particular challenges facing children, families, and schools in working with children with brain-based learning difficulties.

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


  Chapter 4: A brain primer
  Chapter 5: Zooming out: Focusing on the family and school
  Chapter 6: Zooming in: Focusing on the child and individual factors
  Chapter 8: A group intervention with learning disabilities and their families


**SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY READINGS**

**Week 6  FAMILIES AND THE MEDICAL SYSTEM: CHRONIC ILLNESS & HEALTH BEHAVIORS**

In this class, we will examine the complexities of families’ involvement with medical systems. We will also examine the social psychology research on health behavior and discuss how this research can be introduced in psychoeducational interventions with families.

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


**SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY READINGS**


**Week 7  POVERTY, JOBLESSNESS, COMMUNITY VIOLENCE, AND HOMELESSNESS**

In this class, we will examine the family systems and social psychological literatures on families struggling with poverty, and the frequently-associated problems of racism and increased exposure to community violence. We will learn an approach to strengthening family resilience in these challenging contexts.

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


**Week 8** WORKING WITH THE IMPACT OF RACISM AND ETHNICISM ON FAMILIES

In this class, we will continue to examine the impact of racism and prejudice on family experience and functioning from a family systems and social psychological perspective, and discuss how to address these issues in family therapy.

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


**SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY READINGS**


**Week 9** WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

In this class, we will examine the challenges faced by immigrant families, and interventions that support their adjustment to the new society while helping them preserve their sense of cultural integrity.

**FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS**


**SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY READINGS**

Week 10 FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH SOCIAL SERVICES: EXAMPLES FROM FOSTER CARE AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In this class, we will examine the complex challenges of working with families in which there has been abuse or neglect, resulting in involvement of child protective services and sometimes, involvement of the foster care system. We will discuss collaborative methods for working with these multi-stressed families that empower parents to take charge and become fully responsible and protective of their children.

FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS


Chapter 2: The framework: A systems orientation and a family-centered approach.

Chapter 6: Foster care: Children, families, and the system.


Chapter 4: The treatment in sequence

Week 11 WORK AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

FAMILIES IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

FAMILIES AND NATURE

In this class, we will examine the impact of our materialist culture on family identity, stress, and functioning. We will also examine the family’s relationship to the natural world. We will learn interventions that help families decrease stress and conflict due to societal-marketing pressure that leads families to focus inordinate amounts of energy and money on acquisition of often-unnecessary material goods and resources. We will also examine the emerging area of ecological psychology and family-based interventions that can help them access this important resource for well-being.

FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS


SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY READINGS


Chapter 8: City pox and the patriarchal ego.

Chapter 9: The neon telephone: The moral equivalent of wretched excess.

Chapter 11: Toward an ecological ego

Week 12 FAMILY, RELIGION, AND SPIRITUALITY

In this class, we will examine the impact of religious and spiritual beliefs and religious/spiritual communities on family wellness and coping with stress. We’ll also examine the conflict that can arise when family members hold different religious/spiritual beliefs, and wish for different degrees of identification with these beliefs and their associated ritual practices.

FAMILY SYSTEMS READINGS


SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL READINGS


Week 13 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: NARRATIVE APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH MULTI-STRESSED FAMILIES

Chapters:

Team 1:

4. Developing a Proactive Vision to Guide Clinical Work: Collaborative Therapy Contracts

5. Collaborative Inquiry: An Anthropological Approach to "Intervening" with Families

Team 2:

6. Examining the Relationship between Clients and the Problems in Their Lives

7. Helping Clients Shift Their Relationship to Problems and Develop Preferred Lives

Team 3:

8. Developing Communities to Support New Lives

9. Solidifying New Lives through Therapeutic Documents

Group Discussion:

10. Sustaining a Collaborative Practice in the "Real" World

Week 14: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: EMPIRICALLY-VALIDATED FAMILY THERAPY FOR WORKING WITH SUBSTANCE-ABUSING AND CONDUCT-DISORDERED YOUTH

Team 4:


Team 5:


Team 6:


**Week 15:** EXAM

COURSE SUMMARY AND PREPARATION FOR SEEING FAMILIES AND COUPLES IN THE CLINIC

**Week 16:** FINAL PAPER DUE