

# Family Therapy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

CPY 550  
Dynamics of Marriage, Relationship  
and Family Systems

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## Family Therapy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

During the formative years of family therapy there emerged well-defined “schools” of family therapy each with its own leaders and way of doing therapy. (We have spent the last 6-8 weeks reviewing these theories.)

Today all of that has changed – the field is no longer neatly separated into separate schools and practitioners rarely identify themselves as subscribing to one theory of family therapy.

## Family Therapy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Powerful forces converged to reshape family therapy

Feminist Critique

Postmodernism

Constructivism & Social Constructionism

## Family Therapy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Feminist Critique

Historically, marriage and family life subjugated women

Systemic idea of equal responsibility (complementarity) is troublesome because it colludes with patriarchal rules by suggesting that men and women have contributed equally to and share equal responsibility for changing these rules

Challenged the view of the dysfunctional family (i.e., the enmeshed, incompetent mother who needs a competent, rational father to come the children's rescue.

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### Postmodernism

Contemporary antipositivism, viewing knowledge as relative and context-dependent; questions assumptions of objectivity that characterize modern science.

In family therapy, challenging the idea of scientific certainty, and linked to the method of deconstruction.

Deconstruction: a postmodern approach to exploring meaning by taking apart and examining taken-for-granted categories and assumptions, making possible newer and sounder constructions of meaning.

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### Constructivism Social Constructionism

Constructivism: a relativistic point of view that emphasizes the subjective construction of reality. It implies that what we (as human beings) see in the world may be based as much on our preconceptions as on what's actually going on.

Social Constructionism: Like constructivism, challenges the notion of an objective basis for knowledge. Knowledge and meaning are shaped by culturally shared assumptions. Constructivism asserts that reality doesn't exist as a world-out-there, but instead, as a mental creation of the observer.

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### Constructivism

As therapists, Constructivism requires us to adopt greater tentativeness about the "truth" of our observations and a closer examination of the assumptions we each bring to encounters with our clients. The "not knowing" attitude...

Changes in the field of family therapy as a result of constructivism include:

- Elevation of meaning to a position of primary importance over behavioral interaction patterns
- Increased humility about our theoretical models,
- Increased attention to the values behind our assumptions about families and family functioning,
- Less urgency to manipulate or control people, and
- Increased trust in client's resources.

## Family Therapy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- Family Violence
- Multiculturalism
- Race
- Poverty & Social Class
- GLBT
- Spirituality
- Tailoring Treatment to Populations and Problems
- Home Based Services
- Psychoeducation (for family members)
- Medical Family Therapy
- Relationship Enrichment Programs
- ...and more and more and more