TAP Seminar—Understanding Families through Literature and Research

Psychology 95-Fall, 2007  
Instructor- Dr. Susan Crockenberg  
Time/Place: T/Th- 9:30-10:45, Lafayette Hall, room L308  
Office Hours: T/Th 11-1, 362 Dewey and by appointment (please make via e-mail)  
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Course Goals: The course is designed to meet two goals. The first is to learn to identify psychological issues in families, to consider alternative explanations of family-related events and behaviors, to understand how communities and cultures affect families, and become familiar with (and critical of) various sources of knowledge about families (personal experience, literature, psychological theory and research). The second goal is to foster skills necessary for academic work and effective functioning in the wider community. These include the abilities: to think critically; write coherently; speak articulately and comfortably in a group; and collaborate with others.

Course Format: The course is organized around discussions of reading and assignments; active student involvement in research; oral presentations; and extensive writing. Always bring the assigned reading and your journal to class.

Grading: Final grades are based on written and oral assignments (70%), and on daily participation in class (30%). Attendance at class is required: one absence is allowed without penalty. Each student makes one “formal” presentation (identified in the syllabus by an *). Assignments must be turned in on the day they are due to receive full credit. Please bring them to class or to my office; I cannot receive them via e-mail.

Reading: Assigned books are or will be available at the UVM bookstore. Other assigned reading is available electronically through the Bailey Howe reserve desk.

Syllabus

Week 1-August 28th and 30th—Family Strengths and Risks

Reading: The Secret Life of Bees, Sue Monk Kidd, Re-read Chapters 1-3

Tuesday- Introduction to class; Guidelines for keeping a journal

Journal assignment for Thursday: 1) Who are the members of Lily’s family? 2) What happened to Lily in her family that we might expect to affect her adversely? 3) To what extent have these experiences had the expected effects on Lily? What are they? 4) Why do you think her father treats her the way he does? 5) What are the sources of strength and support in Lily’s life that have helped her to survive? 6) What “issue or issues” does she need to resolve to continue in her development as an adolescent and young adult?

Thursday-Class discussion of journal assignment
Week 2-September 4th and 6th – Family Support; Resolution of Childhood Issues

Reading: *The Secret Life of Bees*, read chapters 4-9 to top of p. 176, the section that ends with *I was all hung up in limbo*, by Tuesday; finish book by Thursday.

**Journal assignment for Tuesday:** 1) Consider August and her sisters...are they a family? 2) How do the sisters support May (i.e., help her to function in the world)? 3) What are the sources of strength (internal and external) for August and her sisters? What allows them to survive as well as they do in the prejudiced, segregated south of the late 1960s? 4) What experiences does Lily have living with the sisters (to this point in the book) that encourage her development? What evidence do we have that she is changing?

Tuesday- In-class discussion of journal assignment (bring journal to class); receive first paper topic, **due at beginning of class Thursday, September 13th**

**Journal assignment for Thursday:** 1) How does May’s decision affect her sisters, Lily, and Rosaleen, both emotionally and in terms of their lives? 2) How does each “cope” with the event? 3) What is your response to (what do you think and how do you feel about) the way Lily reacts to the information August gives her about her mother? 4) How does Lily make use of the information to resolve the issue that is at the center of her life? What evidence supports your view? 5) Why do you think T Ray accepts Lily’s decision?

Thursday- Discussion of journal assignment

Week 3-September 11th and 13th -

Reading: None

Tuesday-Sue Dinitz-Writing Center- "Writing and revising a Paper"

Thursday- **First Paper Due in class** - Students exchange papers and give feedback; revisions due at the start of class on Tuesday, 9/19

Week 4-September 19th & 21st - Families in Context: Poverty, Race, and Ethnicity as “Risk Factors”

Reading (for Thursday): *Bean Trees*, by Barbara Kingsolver, Chapters 1-4; Kristin Luker - Why Do They Do It? (available on electronic reserve)

Tuesday - How poverty affects psychological functioning in families (Video/Discussion); revised first assignment due at start of class

**Journal assignment for Thursday:** Unlike students in this class, Taylor does not attend college. Why is that? Do you know people like her? Why doesn't she get pregnant, unlike many others in her circumstances? Why then does she accept "Turtle" and become her mother? At this point in the book, what similarities and differences are apparent between
Taylor and Lou Ann? What has contributed to their similarities and differences?

Thursday- In-class discussion of Journal Assignment; receive Families in Poverty Project assignment (this is a group project due Tues, Oct. 23rd).

Week 5- September 25th & 27th - Families in Context: Learning What It’s Like

Reading: Bean Trees, chapters 5-8 for Tuesday

Journal assignment for Tuesday: How do Taylor and Lou Ann support each other psychologically? What does each contribute to the relationship; does one contribute more than the other? Prepare a list of what Lou Ann and Taylor do to survive financially with their two children. Consider how their survival might be more challenging in Burlington, VT rather than Tucson, AZ.

Tuesday - Discussion of assignment; Groups plan “Families in Poverty” Project.

Journal assignment for Thursday: Identify 5 pieces of writing in Bean Trees (each no longer than a paragraph) that you consider well written. Be prepared to read these aloud to the class and explain your judgment.

Thursday - Return and review first papers; read from Bean Trees; group time.

Week 6 - October 2nd & 4th – Immigrant Families: An Issue Facing the Nation

Reading: Bean Trees, by Barbara Kingsolver, chapters 9-17 by Tuesday; article on “illegal aliens” by Thursday (available on electronic reserve)

Journal assignment for Tuesday: Turtle and Lou Ann change during the novel. How would you describe their development and to what do you attribute it? What is Estevan and Esperanza's situation? What is your reaction to them? Do you think helping them avoid capture is morally right given that they are here illegally?

Tuesday-Discuss journal assignment; introduce “illegal alien” issue.

Journal assignment for Thursday: Use the article on illegal aliens to inform your views on the questions below (bring article to class). Do you think we should change current laws on immigration and “illegal aliens”? If so, what changes should we make?

Thursday – Discuss journal assignment

Week 7 - October 9th & 11th - Communication: Intimacy and Conflict in Families

Reading (Tuesday): The mismeasure of woman. The Economist , Aug. 5th, 2006. It, by Donald E. Westlake (both on electronic reserve)

Tuesday- Mini-lecture on Communication in Families; discussion of articles
Thursday - Show videotape and discuss: *He Said, She Said*, by Deborah Tannen

**Week 8 -October 16th & 18th:**

**Reading:** None (or begin reading *House of Sand and Fog*)

Tuesday Final in-class group meeting: Assess where you are; identify what (if any) additional information you need and how to get it; plan your report.

Thursday - No class; work with your group on your project report due Tuesday

**Week 9-October 23rd & 25th: Studying Family Communication**

**Reading:** Start reading *House of Sand and Fog*, by Andre Dubus III,

Tuesday - Psychological research on families: begins with a question; is guided by "theory"; requires methods of data collection and analysis; concludes with inferences drawn from the data. Consider how research-based knowledge is different from knowledge from other sources; self-report measures.

Thursday – Direct Observation as a method of data collection. Analyze Gottman tape, using concepts from *You Just Don't Understand*.

**Week 10-October 30th/November 1st:**

**Reading:** *House of Sand and Fog* Part I, p. 15-135 by Tuesday

**Journal assignment for Tuesday:** What is the central conflict in the book? How does it come about? What role do families play in the conflict? In your view, to what extent is either side "at fault" initially (i.e., before the adversaries have contact with each other?) How does the communication that ensues contribute to the conflict? To what extent do cultural differences and bias associated with those differences contribute to their difficulty resolving the conflict and to its escalation?

Tuesday- In class discussion of journal assignment; receive writing assignment 3 (House of Sand and Fog), due November 8th.

Thursday - Video: House of Sand and Fog

**Week 11-November 6th & 8th: Transitions in Families**

**Reading:** *When Partners Become Parents*, Cowan, Intro (p. 7-12), Ch. 1 & 5

**Journal assignment for Tuesday:** You will receive this in class.
Tuesday- Why family transitions are significant; transition to parenthood and its impact on the couple; other family transitions; receive/discuss final project

Thursday- introduction to electronic searches (Instruction Center, main floor Bailey-Howe Library, through reference section); find original research article from "scholarly journal" on transition to college/empty nest. 3rd paper due.

Week 12 - November 13th & 15th: Using Research on Families; Interviewing

Reading: Your research article by Tuesday (bring article to class)

Tuesday - How to read and summarize a research article; brief report of “relevant points” to class; designing an interview

Assignment for Thursday: Develop a set of questions to ask members of your family about their reactions/adjustment to your transition to college

Thursday - Bring your typed interview questions to class and exchange with your partner for feedback, then revise; observe and critique an interview; role-play interviewing a family member (goal is for to encounter problems likely to occur during the “real” interview and to seek solutions to them with others in the class).

Week 13 - November 27th & 29th: Using Family Experience to Inform Research; Using Research to Inform Divorcing Couples

Reading (for Thursday): Hetherington, Law, & O’Connor – Divorce: Challenges, Changes, and New Chances; Furstenberg & Cherlin – Children’s Adjustment to Divorce (on electronic reserve)

Tuesday: What Research tells us about the Impact of Divorce on Families;

Thursday- What Personal Experience tells us about the Impact of Divorce on Families: Panel of students whose parents divorced (students sign up for this).

Week 14 – December 4th & 6th: Family Differences….and Similarities

Reading (for Tuesday): to be assigned

Tuesday- Families with same-sex parents; video

Thursday- Final project: what worked, what didn't; what you learned about your family, analyzing and organizing the data for the project report

Final Project (serves as final exam): Due Thursday, Dec. 13th by 11 AM, 362 Dewey