TAP Seminar—Understanding Families through Literature and Research

Psychology 95-Fall, 2008
Instructor- Dr. Susan Crockenberg
Time/Place: T/Th- 9:30-10:45, B203 Angell
Office Hours: T/Th 11-1, 362 Dewey and by appointment (please make appts. 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 psychological 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 for functioning in the wider community, including critical thinking; coherent writing; speaking comfortably in a group; and collaborating 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-Family Strengths and Risks

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

Sept. 2-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?

Sept. 4th-Thursday: Class discussion of journal assignment
Week 2– Family Support and Working Models of Relationships
Reading: Tuesday: *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*

**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?

Sept 9th-Tuesday: In-class discussion of journal assignment *(bring journal to class)*; receive first paper topic, **due at beginning of class Thursday, September 18th**

Sept. 11th-Thursday: Sue Dinitz-Writing Center- "Writing and revising a Paper"

Week 3- Resolution of Childhood Issues

Reading: Tuesday: finish *The Secret Life of Bees*

**Journal assignment for Tuesday**: 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?

Sept.16th-Tuesday: Discuss journal assignment

Sept 18th-Thursday: **First Paper Due in class** - Students exchange papers and give feedback; **revisions due at the start of class on Tuesday, 9/23**

Week 4- Psychological Research on Families: Focusing on Family Communication:

Reading: Start *House of Sand and Fog*, by Andre Dubus III *(see week 6)*

Sept 23rd-Tuesday: Show videotape and discuss: *He Said, She Said* by Deborah Tannen; **Revised 1st paper due today at beginning of class**

Sept. 25th-Thursday: Psychological research on families: begins with a question; is guided by theory and previous research; 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; Direct Observation as a method of data collection. Analyze Gottman tape, using concepts from *You Just Don't Understand.*
Week 5 - Psychological Research on Families: Building on Prior Research

Reading: Thursday: original research article that you find (see below)

Sept 30th - Tuesday: introduction to library resources and electronic searches of scholarly material (Instruction Center, main floor Bailey-Howe Library, thru reference section)

Thursday assignment: Find an original research article on marital communication from a scholarly journal (using scholarly search engines) for class on Thursday.

Oct. 4th - Thursday: How to read and summarize a research article; in class workshop Bring research article you locate to class to use in workshop. Return first papers.

Week 6 - Conflict in and between Families

Reading: Tuesday: House of Sand and Fog, by Andre Dubus III, pp. 15-201 (top of page)

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?

Oct 7th - In class discussion of journal assignment; receive writing assignment 2 (House of Sand and Fog), due October 14th.

Oct 9th - Thursday: Violence in Families; How we measure it; What we know about it

Week 7 - Using Research to Inform Experience; Using Experience to Inform Research

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

Oct 14th - Tuesday: What Research tells us about the Impact of Divorce on Families; Paper 2 due at class today.


Week 8 - Families in Context: Family Poverty as a “Risk Factor” in Children’s Development

Reading: Tuesday: Bean Trees, chapters 1-4; Luker-Why Do They Do It? (electronic reserve); Thursday: Bean Trees, chapters 5-8

Journal assignment for Tuesday: 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?

Oct 21st-Tuesday: In-class discussion of Journal Assignment; receive Families in
Poverty Project (assignment 3) a group project, due on Tuesday, November 11th.
Meet briefly with groups to plan what information you need by next Tuesday.

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

Oct. 23rd-Thursday: Discuss assignment; groups plan “Families in Poverty” Project.

Week 9-Families in Context: Race and Ethnicity

Reading: Thursday: Zinn-Family, race, and poverty, Warren & Tyagi-Why Middle-Class
Mothers and Fathers are Going Broke (both on electronic reserve)

Oct. 28th-Tuesday: No formal class; use time to apply for jobs, look for housing, etc

Oct. 30th-Thursday: Discuss Zinn and Warren & Tyagi articles; poverty groups meet:
Assess where you are, what additional information you need, and how to get it. Plan
report and presentation.

Week 10- Developing Adults in Families

Reading: Bean Trees, by Barbara Kingsolver, chapters 9-17 by Tuesday

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?

Nov. 4th-Tuesday: Discuss assignment; final in class group meeting

Nov. 6th-Thursday: Immigration video

Week 11-Immigrant Families: Understanding Our Diversity as a Nation


Nov. 11th-Tuesday: Poverty Assignments due; class presentations

Nov. 13th-Thursday: Immigration power point; brief questionnaire at end of class
Week 12-Illegal Immigrants: An Issue Facing the Nation

**Reading:** Tuesday: Illegal immigration from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (get this online); Thursday: Find on internet, print, and read 2 more articles on illegal immigration

Nov. 15\(^{th}\)-Tuesday- Overview of illegal immigration **Receive 4\(^{th}\) (brief) writing assignment:** due Tuesday, Dec 2\(^{nd}\).

Assignment for Thursday: Use the articles on illegal immigration to inform your views on the following questions (bring articles to class). Do you think we should change current laws on immigration and “illegal aliens”? If so, what changes should we make and why? If not, why not? How will these changes affect immigrant families?

Nov. 20\(^{th}\)-Thursday-Class debate on illegal immigration questions; brief questionnaire

Week 13-When Parents Cannot Care for their Children: An Issue Facing the World

**Reading:** Children in institutions: The beginning of the end. UNICEF Innocenti (electronic reserve)

Dec. 2\(^{nd}\) -Tuesday-video on Africa; **Writing assignment 4 due at beginning of class.**

Dec. 4\(^{th}\) -Thursday-overview of family-based versus institutional care of orphans; receive final writing assignment; due Monday, December 15\(^{th}\) at noon, room 362 Dewey.

Week 14 – Diverse Families

**Reading:** Stacey, J.-Gay and Lesbian Families: Queer Like Us (electronic reserve)

Dec. 9th-Tuesday- Families with same-sex parents; video/discussion

Dec. 11\(^{th}\)-Thursday-to be determined

Monday, December 15\(^{th}\): final writing assignment due by noon, room 362 Dewey.