

## TAP Seminar-Understanding Families through Literature and Research

### Partial Syllabus (through week 10)

Psychology 095A-Fall, 2009

Instructor- Dr. Susan Crockenberg

Time/Place: T/Th 8:30- 9:45; LaFayette Hall L400

Office Hours: T/Th 10-12, **362 Dewey** and by appointment (please make appts. via e-mail)

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**Course Goals:** The course is designed to meet three 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 to consider the social policy implications of this knowledge. The second is to become familiar with (and critical of) various sources of knowledge about families (personal experience, literature, psychological theory and research). A third is to develop skills necessary for academic work: critical thinking; coherent writing; speaking 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, your journal, and the course syllabus to class.**

**Grading:** Final grades are based on written and oral assignments (60%), and daily participation in class (40%). Attendance at class is required *unless you are ill*. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to obtain any information you may have missed *from your class partner or from Blackboard*. I will post all new assignments or changes there. **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 unless you are ill and need to avoid contact with others.**

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

**Journal assignments:** These assignments are intended to stimulate your thinking about families and human behavior, but they should not limit you. There is much to consider in the books we read and you should feel free to bring your own questions and perspectives to our discussions. Keep in mind that you need to present “evidence” in support of your explanations (i.e., examples from the text that support them).

### Syllabus

#### Week 1-Family Strengths and Risks; Working Models of Relationships

**Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>** -Tuesday: Introduction; what is a family? Who is your family “genogram”?

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

**Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup>**-Thursday: Class discussion of journal assignment; mini-lecture working models

**Week 2– Family Systems, Family Support, and Resolution of Childhood Issues**

**Reading: Tuesday: *The Secret Life of Bees*, read chapters 4-9**

**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 for August and her sisters? What allows them to survive in the prejudiced, segregated south of the late 1960s? 4) What experiences does Lily have living with them (to this point in the book) that encourage her development? What *evidence* is there that she is changing?

**Sept 8<sup>th</sup>**-Tuesday: discuss journal assignment; lecture/class activity on family systems

**Reading: Thursday: Finish *The Secret Life of Bees***

**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?

**Sept. 10<sup>th</sup>**-Thursday: In-class discussion of journal assignment (**bring journal to class**); receive first paper topic, **due at beginning of class Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 3- Writing About Families**

**Reading: None assigned this week.**

**Sept 15<sup>th</sup>**- Sue Dinitz-Writing Center- "Writing and Revising a Paper"

**Sept 17<sup>th</sup>**-Thursday: **First Paper Due in class** - Students exchange papers and give feedback; **revisions due at the start of class on Tuesday, 9/22**

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

**Sept 22<sup>nd</sup>** -Tuesday: Show videotape and discuss: *He Said, She Said* by Deborah Tannen; **revised 1<sup>st</sup> paper due today at the beginning of class**

**Reading Thursday:** Skolnick, A. Ground for Marriage: How relationships succeed or fail.

**Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>** -Thursday: Psychological research on families: How research-based knowledge is different from knowledge from other sources; using questionnaires and observations to collect data on marital communication/relationship

### **Week 5-Psychological Research on Families: Building on Prior Research**

**Reading: Begin *Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver (see reading assignment for week 7)**

**Sept 29<sup>th</sup>**- Tuesday: Observational research on marital communication-observing and coding videotaped couples; **receive research article assignment, due Oct 6<sup>th</sup>.**

**Oct.1<sup>st</sup>** – Thursday: introduction to electronic searches of scholarly material (Instruction Center, main floor Bailey-Howe Library, thru reference section)

Assignment: **Find and read an *original research* article on marital communication from a *scholarly journal* (using scholarly search engines); complete assignment.**

### **Week 6 – Families with Children**

**Reading Tuesday: Cowan, P. and Cowan, C. *New Families: Modern Couples as New Pioneers* (on electronic reserve)**

**Oct 6<sup>th</sup>**- Tuesday: Group review of **assignment 2 due in class today**; class discussion-having children; develop questions for parent visit

**Reading Thursday: Continue reading *Bean Trees***

**Oct 8<sup>th</sup>** –Thursday: New Parents visit to class

### **Week 7 - How Contexts Affect Families...the Culture of Poverty**

**Reading Tuesday: Edin and Kefalas-*Unmarried with Children*; Lareau-*Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (on electronic reserve)**

**Assignment: Take home quiz on assigned articles, due in class, Tuesday, Oct. 13th**

**Oct 13<sup>th</sup>**- Tuesday: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Development; video clips; discuss effects of poverty on children's development

**Reading Thursday: *Bean Trees*, chapters 1-8**

**Journal assignment for Thursday:** Unlike you, 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? *Initially*, what

similarities and differences are apparent between Taylor and Lou Ann, and what has contributed to them? How do Taylor and Lou Ann support each other psychologically and contribute to each other's growth? How do they survive financially? Do you think the author's description of how families survive in poverty is realistic? Are Taylor, Turtle, Lou Ann, and Dwayne Ray a family? How do you understand Mrs. Parsons' comments at dinner; how do Taylor and Estevan respond?

**Oct 15<sup>th</sup>**- Thursday: In class discussion of journal assignment; receive *Families in Poverty Project* (assignment 3), a group project; **draft reports due Tuesday, Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>. presentations on Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>**. Groups meet briefly to plan work meetings for Tuesday.

### **Week 8- The Family in Poverty: A Virtual Experience**

**Reading: Continue reading *Bean Trees*** (see reading assignment for week 9)

**Oct 20<sup>th</sup>**-Tuesday: Groups plan "Families in Poverty (FIP)" Project.

**Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>**-Thursday: **NO CLASS; Groups collect information for FIP project**

**\*\*Extra credit assignment: Attend a session of the 2009 Fall Institute on Racism, Heterosexism, Bias, and Oppression; then summarize and reflect on what you learned\*\***

### **Weeks 9 and 10-Families in Context: Poverty, Race, and Social Policy**

**Reading Tuesday: *Bean Trees*, chapters 9-17**

**Journal assignment for Tuesday:** At first, Taylor was furious with Esperanza for attempting to kill herself. What was your initial reaction? Did it change as you learned more about her past; if so, how? What did Taylor learn (about herself, life) from talking with Estevan about Esperanza? What do we learn about Taylor's feelings about being a mother? How does Lou Ann change during the narrative, and to what do you attribute her development? Why doesn't she leave when Angel asks her to? What is your reaction to Immigration law as it impacts Estevan and Esperanza? Why does Taylor respond as she does after Turtle is frightened in the park? Were you surprised at her reaction? How does Taylor get beyond that experience?

**Oct. 27<sup>th</sup>**-Tuesday: discuss journal assignment; poverty groups meet to assess where you are, what additional information needed, how to get it; plan your report and presentation.

**Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>**-Thursday: *Legacy* (documentary on a poor African-American family)

**Reading: Begin reading *The Namesake*** (see week 12 reading assignment).

**Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>**-**Reflections on Legacy; draft poverty reports due (every member of the group needs a copy); group meetings to review reports and prepare for presentations**

**Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>**-Thursday: **Group Presentations of Virtual Poverty Projects**

