

**Module:**  
**Mental Health in the Community**

Week 4:  
Psychosocial approaches to care in the community



Dr Angie Cucchi

**Topic 2**  
**Psychological approaches II:**  
**Beyond the individual to couple,**  
**family, and group work**

Part 1 of 2

Topic list



This week, we will be looking at the following topics:

- Topic 1: Psychological approaches I: Individual therapies
- ***Topic 2: Psychological approaches II: Beyond the individual to couple, family, and group work***
- Topic 3: Community care in practice

Click **Next** to continue

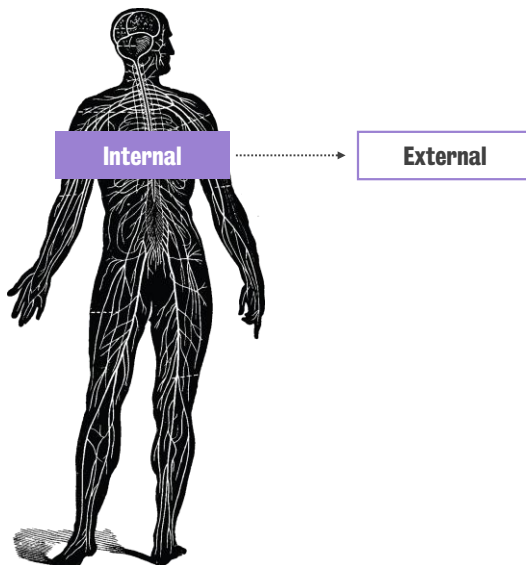
# Part 1

Week 4 Psychosocial approaches to care in the community

Topic 2: Psychological approaches II: Beyond the individual to couple, family and group work

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## History of systemic therapy



Shift from earlier internal approach to an external (interpersonal) one...

...Both agreed treatment was best away from family, focusing on individual

Satisfaction with individual therapies, prompted development of systemic therapy

Systemic approaches (systemic family therapy) developed from system theory + cybernetics in the 1950s



**Argument:** problems and “pathology” fundamentally interpersonal as opposed to individual

Dallos and Draper (2010)

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## The Palo Alto Mental Research Institute

### Pioneers of systemic therapy



Bateson



Jackson



Weakland



Haley

Collaborated at the Palo Alto Mental Research Institute (MRI) in California

Applied anthropological observation + social system theory to families of individuals with schizophrenia

Dallos and Draper (2010); Mental Research Institute (n.d.)

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## Early systemic approaches (1)

### The Palo Alto Group

Symptoms of schizophrenia function to maintain homeostatic balance in families

All behaviour is communication

Communication happens at **content (surface) level** and the **intent (meta-communication) level**

### Example:



Contradictions between communication levels lead to confusion ("double-bind" communication)

Dallos and Draper (2010)

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## Early systemic approaches (2)

*Double-bind theory (1965)*

Paradoxical communication in which contradictory and logically-inconsistent messages are communicated

Used to describe how schizophrenia can be explained in context of families

Trying to make sense of contradictory messages leads to schizophrenic symptoms

*Theodore Lidz (1910-2001)*

Studies from 1949 to 1957

Large number of individuals with schizophrenia reported unhealthy relationships with their families

Led to attention shifting to the role of the familial nucleus in the development and maintenance of psychological distress

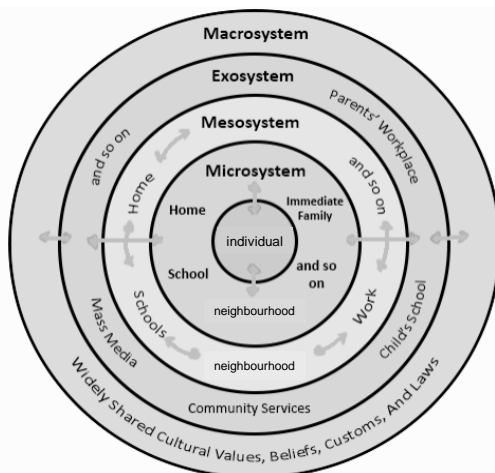
Dallos and Draper (2010)

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## Tenets of systemic therapy



Individuals do not exist in a "vacuum" - they exist in relation to significant people in their lives + social networks

**Systemic Therapists argue that:**

- difficulties need to be explored in context of individual's social environment
- psychotherapy should not be seen as the cure to mental illness, but as a way to help people strengthen their relationships – making disturbing symptoms less necessary or problematic

Bronfenbrenner (1994); Dallos and Draper (2010)

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## Cultural background to systemic therapy (1)

Systemic therapy developed in an environment of social constructionist and postmodernist beliefs:

Reality “per se” does not exist - it is socially constructed by individuals in dialectical interactions

Meanings and connotations individuals attach to objects/concepts are the result of socially-agreed conventions

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## Cultural background to systemic therapy (2)

*Can you define normality?*



When does sadness become depression?



Blue for boys and pink for girls?



Why are some girls labelled “tom boys”?



Why is self harm a sign of belief in one instance and mental illness in another?

Dallos and Draper (2010)

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## Cultural background to systemic therapy (3)

Why was slavery acceptable 200 years ago?

Why is child labour considered abuse in some countries, but not in others?

Why is marrying children allowed in some cultures, but not in others?

### How does subjectivity impact diagnosis?



In the former Soviet Union, diagnoses were used to attack political dissenters

It was called “psychopathological mechanisms of dissent”



Homosexuality was classified as a mental illness in the DSM until 1973

Dallos and Draper (2010)

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## Cultural background to systemic therapy (4)



Subjectivity can be investigated by studying language and communication

Through communication, both verbal and non-verbal, rules, regulations and interactions are negotiated and changed

In systemic social theory, family is the “maker of meanings”:

- communication/storytelling within families organises experiences and shapes lives
- families can be dependent on these collective recollections as they are passed down from generations, limiting perceived options
- these stories are not objective accounts of reality, but beliefs and ideas created through language and interactions



Dallos and Draper (2010)

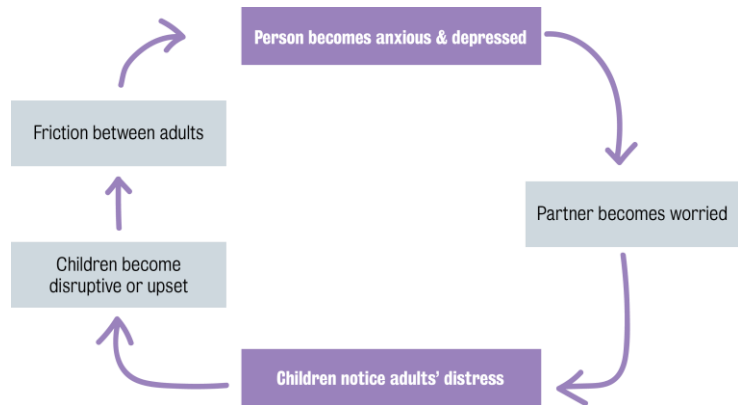
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## Structural family therapy: Origins

- difficult to identify specific origin, but can be traced back to mid-1950's system and cybernetic theories on communication in complex systems.
- these ideas were used to explain family relations and allowed the Palo Alto School to devise the model
- cybernetics argued causation was best understood as a circular continuous process that relied on feedback mechanisms



Dallos and Draper (2010)

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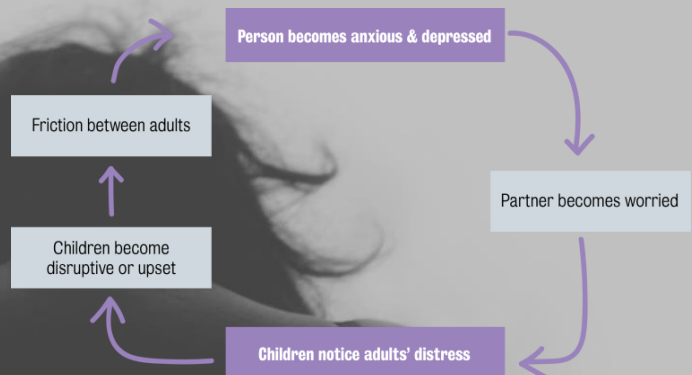
## Structural family therapy: Argument



- How do you know the cycle started with the person feeling low?
- What if the partner thought the person was feeling low and anxious?
- What if the children picked up on something and became unsettled, and that this had an impact on the individual's mood?

It doesn't matter where/what started it, what matters is all units of the system are interconnected

They reject linear cause-and-effect as potentially carrying blame, and replace it with efforts to identify reciprocal influences/interconnectedness



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## Structural family therapy: Goal

Researchers moved away from relationships in pairs to concentrate on larger family units

The family is viewed as a system or an interacting unit, with its own characteristics and rules

**BUT** such influences have repercussions on the entire family system

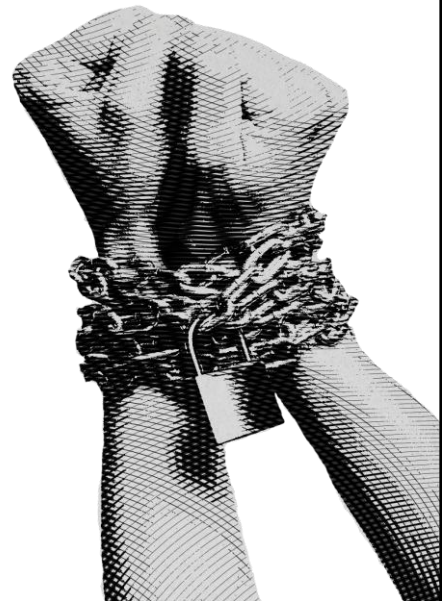
→ Family therapy developed as a psychotherapeutic endeavour explicitly focused on **altering interactions between family members**, and sought to improve the functioning of the family as a **unit**

The locus of the problem is **between people** rather than within the individual

## Structural family therapy: Overview (1)

This approach was revolutionary and it's in direct contrast to the psychotherapy approaches, which focus on the individual and assume an intrapsychic model of mental distress

It was argued that addressing symptoms and the interpersonal helped to liberate individuals from oppressive and pathologising cultures





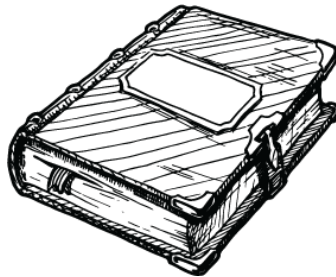
## Structural family therapy: Overview (2)

Many exponents have contributed to SFT, and many different approaches apply:

- Behavioural Family therapy
- Bowen theory
- Bateson theory
- Structural Family Therapy
- Contextual Therapy
- Focal Family Therapy
- Conjoint Family Therapy
- Milan Systemic Therapy
- Strategic Family Therapy
- Brief Therapy: MRI
- Narrative Therapy

Only some of the major theorists will be covered in this lecture

For a comprehensive look at family therapy, the student is referred to Dallos and Draper



*"An introduction to family therapy"*  
Dallos and Draper

Dallos and Draper (2010)

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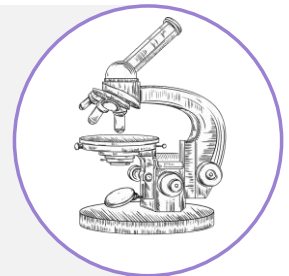
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## Evolution of systemic therapy (1)

### First Order SFT:

- mid 1950s to the mid 1970s
- Modernist: attempted to take empirical approach to psychology based on rigorous observation
- examples: structural and strategic family therapies
- attempt to classify families according to number of variables



### Second Order SFT:

- it became evident that such "objective" descriptions were inaccurate as different observers viewed the families' problems in different ways
- this led to a shift in SFT, and more broadly in psychology and the social sciences, to a postmodern view
- example: the Milan School



Dallos and Draper (2010)

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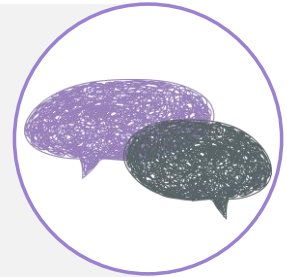
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## Evolution of systemic therapy (2)

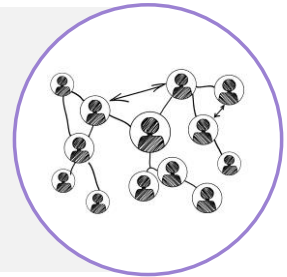
### Third Order SFT:

- emerged from social constructivist theory
- emphasised the role of language in shaping meaning



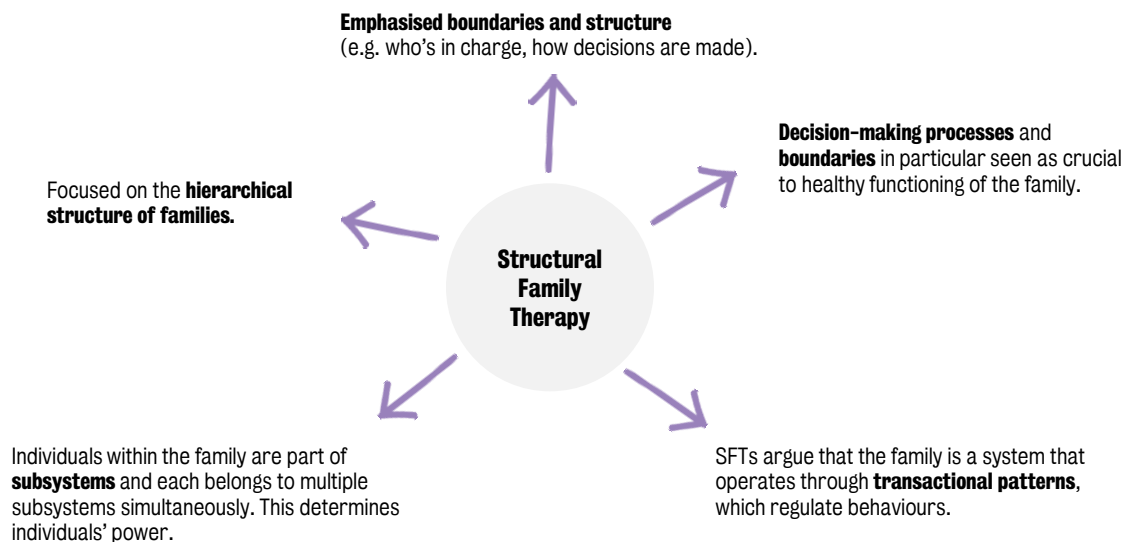
### Fourth Order SFT:

- proposed by Dallos and Draper
- concerned with the integration of SFT and with the integration of the intrapsychic and the interpersonal



Dallos and Draper (2010)

## First order: Structural family therapy (SFT)



Dallos and Draper (2010)

## SFT: Boundaries

**Boundaries:**

- Are used to protect the differentiation of the systems
- Should be clear yet permeable to allow balance between autonomy and interdependencies
- Patterns of enmeshment or detachment were deemed incapacitating for the family structure
- Problems result from developmental and environmental challenges that may lead to conflict avoidance through either disengagement or enmeshment



Boundaries become too porous, too enmeshed or too rigid



How close are family members? How flexible are the rules?

Therapists will also look at subsystem negotiation, and, for example, dynamics between family clusters - who aligns with who? Who gets left out?

Dallos and Draper (2010)

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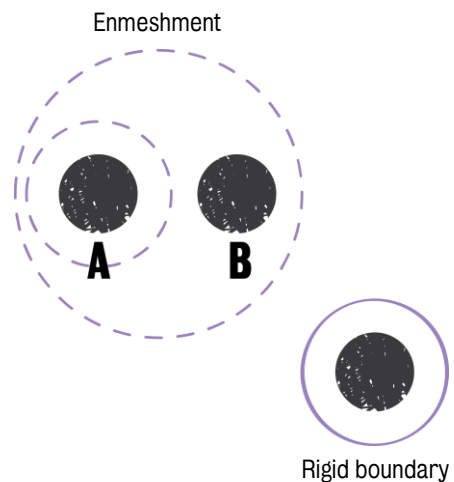
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## SFT: Summary

**Summary of SFT:**

- it sees difficulties as originating either from boundaries being too rigid/enmeshed, a system's failure to realign and power imbalances
- it involves a process of assessment, mapping and altering the family structure through escalating stress, creating crisis, and also enacting and balancing



Dallos and Draper (2010)

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# End of part 1