

This volume is a collection of my most important papers from 1957 to 1977. The papers represent the evolution of Family Systems Theory from the earliest descriptive papers in 1957, to the first orderly presentation of the theory in 1966, to the refinements in therapy and the extensions of theory over the past ten years. The development of this theory has paralleled most evolutionary processes. It began slowly when several key ideas began to coalesce into a different way of understanding the human phenomenon. The ideas quickly led into so many new areas it became a busy balancing act to follow all at the same time; it would have been conceptually inaccurate to try to stay on one without conceptual violence to the whole. The rapid evolution of the theory is largely responsible for the fact I have gone twenty years and have not yet written a book.

Family Systems Theory contains no ideas that have not been a part of human experience through the centuries. The task of the theorist is to find the minimal number of congruent pieces from the total bank of human knowledge that fit together to tell a simple story about the nature of man, or whatever other phenomenon he attempts to describe. The theorist needs a formula or blueprint as a guide in selecting the pieces. Without it he is vulnerable to the use of attractive but discrepant pieces of knowledge that can defeat his long-range goal. In my papers I have described the disciplined effort to select consistent theoretical concepts that might someday conceptualize emotional illness as a product of that part of man he shares with the lower forms of life. After 1957 there was a consistent effort