



Systemic Practice: The briefest of briefs



By Grace Adams and Ben Groves



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Introductions

- **City of York's** systemic journey
- **Grace Adams** – CSW/service manager
- **Ben Groves** – CSW/Service manager

Brief history of Systemic family therapy

1950's

- Family therapy origins– communications theory, systems theory, cybernetics.

1970's

- Systemic approach taken forward by the Milan Team
- Role of Gregory Bateson (1972) in translating concepts from physics, engineering and biology and applying them to human interaction (eg feedback)
- Focus of treatment moves from an individual to an interpersonal perspective
- Schools of family therapy – structural, strategic, solution-focussed, narrative

1980's

- Post Milan Team in 1980s. 1st order to 2nd order change, and many other 'schools' of approaches



Overview of Approaches

Systemic Approach	Structural	Strategic	Post-Milan	Solution-focussed	Narrative
View of the problem & theory of change	The way the family functions is connected to the way it organises/structures itself thus change can be created by restructuring the family	Problems seen as being embedded in repetitive interactional patterns. Change is created through breaking these behavioural patterns which maintain the problem	2 nd order approach which views problems as being embedded in the family belief/meaning system. Change created through the practitioner joining and taking a curious stance.	The problem is not the problem but how the problem is seen and responded to. Create change by focussing on building solutions	Problems located within the stories we tell as they shape our beliefs. Change seen as a process of re-storying and re-authoring
Techniques	Joining, Enactment	Reframing	Interventive Interviewing – Circular, reflexive questions	Miracle Question, scaling, exceptions	Externalising the problem, unique outcomes, therapeutic letters
Position or stance	Interventionist and expert 1 st Order position	Interventionist and expert 1 st Order position	Collaborative – explore family with respectful curiosity. Therapist seen as part of the system	Moves between expert and collaborative	Collaborative and social constructionist

A systemic approach: key concepts

Difficulties are located in relationships/pattern of interaction rather than in the individual. 'It is the problem that is the problem', not the person (White 1988/9: 6)

Patterns of family interaction may be replicated **across generations**

Recognises that as soon as **we meet a person** we inevitably **affect, and are affected by them**

Importance of **professional curiosity** - curiosity helps us to continue looking for different descriptions and explanations

Recognises the importance of the **use of self.**

Change through **introducing difference.** Change occurs by considering and supporting the whole family – the professional system needs to be curious and develop a mutual understanding of the issues and introduce differences.

Focus on **second order change** (more permanent, change of the beliefs/rules) rather than **first order change** (temporary behaviour change)



Systems in nature

How wolves change rivers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q>



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Social GRRRAACCEESS

(Burnham 2012)

G Gender
G Gender identity
G Geography
R Race
R Religion
A Age
A Ability
A Appearance
C Class
C Culture
E Ethnicity
E Education
E Employment
S Sexuality
S Sexual orientation
S Spirituality



Social GRRAACCEESS

(Burnham 1992, 1993; Roper-Hall 1998)

- Introduced as a practical tool, not a theoretical position
- Helpful to understand differences or similarities between yourself and families and how these influence your relationship with them.
- **We all have prejudices and assumptions, it's important to notice these and be reflexive about how they impact our practice** (Hedges, 2010)
- Can also be used to support managing the relationships of power inherent in training / supervisory relationships (Burnham et al 2008: 530)
- May vary in the way they are **visible or invisible** (whether it is visually present and obvious) and **voiced or unvoiced** (whether it can be named or discussed)

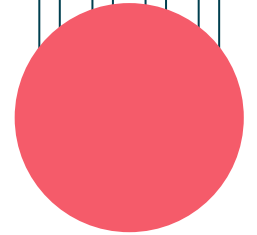
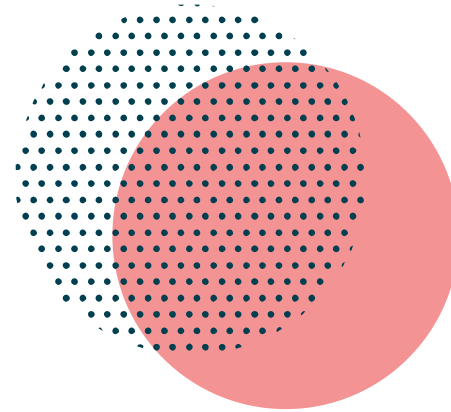
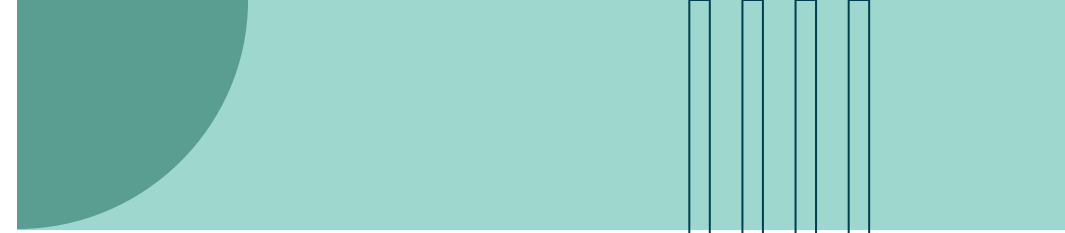
Social Graces in supervision- a discussion

- Managing collusion
- Maintaining curiosity
- Considering triggers
- Developing mentalising
- Understanding students own values
- Spotting and working with bias
- Developing working relationship between student and manager
- Managing power and oppression etc.

Conclusion

Any Questions

Using attached Resources and
References



References

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- Burnham, J. (2011) Developments in Social GRRRAACCEEESSS: visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced. Chap 7, pp 139-160 In *Culture and Reflexivity in Systemic Psychotherapy: Mutual Perspectives*. Inga-Britt Krause (ed). Karnac: London
- Cecchin, G. 1987 'Hypothesizing, Circularity, and Neutrality Revisited: An Invitation to Curiosity' *Fam Proc* 26:405-413
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- Mason, B (1993) Human Systems *The Journal of Systemic Consultation and Management* Vol 4:3&4: 189-200
- Totsuka, Y. (2014) Which aspect of social GRRRAACCEEESSS grab you most? The social GRRRAACCEEESSS exercise for a supervision group to promote therapists' self-reflexivity. *Journal of Family Therapy*, **36 (S1)**: 86-106

Resources

- [A randomized controlled trial of training in Motivational Interviewing for child protection – ScienceDirect](#)
- [From doing to being: the tensions of systemic practice in social work – group reflective supervision in child protection - Journal of Family Therapy](#)
- Chapter 7, Dealing with Difficulties by Liz Munro – Practice Education in Social Work: Achieving Professional Standards, Pam Field Cathie Jasper and Lesley Littler (eds), St. Albans, Critical Publishing, 2014, pp. 197, ISBN 978-1-909330-17-7
- [Social work reframed? The experiences of social workers applying systemic ideas in child protection - Journal of Family Therapy](#)
- [Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Chris Iveson](#)
- [Structural Family Therapy, Arlene Vetere – Child Psychology & Psychiatry Review Volume 6, No. 3, 2001](#)
- Chapter 2, Externalizing of the Problem – Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends, Michael White and David Epston
- Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura
- [Mentalizing, attachment and epistemic trust: how psychotherapy can promote resilience, Peter Fonagy and Chloe Campbell](#)
- [Social Learning Theory Parenting Intervention Promotes Attachment-Based Caregiving in Young Children: Randomized Clinical Trial – Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology](#)
- Chapter 1, What is Mentalization? – Minding the Child: Mentalization-Based Interventions with Children, Young People and their Families by Nick Midgley and Ioanna Vrouva
- [One Minute Guide: Systemic Practice – City of York Council](#)