

Valdosta State University
Department of Marriage & Family Therapy
MFTH 6900 Foundations of Family Therapy

Course Description

Introduction to postmodern theory & social constructionism. There will be a focus on understanding human interaction, meaning making, and problem resolution through both relational and narrative lenses. Students will explore the relationship between meaning, language, stories, and cultural discourses.

Department of Marriage & Family Therapy Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

1. Practice from a culturally sensitive lens.
2. Practice from a systemic lens.
3. Be prepared to obtain entry-level employment in mental health agencies.
4. Claim the professional identity of Marriage and Family

Syllabi Specific Learning Objectives linked to SLOs

Upon successful completion of this course students will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of postmodern theory. (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 4)
2. Demonstrate understanding that the social construction of reality can be used to make sense of human interaction, meaning making, problem construction, and problem resolution. (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 2)
3. Demonstrate sensitivity to the ways individual and cultural narratives shape each other, especially in relation to issues of diversity. (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 2)
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between language, stories, the social construction of knowledge, and cultural narratives - especially in relation to the life experiences of marginalized populations, embracing otherness, and examining one's own socio-cultural position. (Student Learning Outcomes: 1, 2, 4)

Assignments for this course linked to SLOs

Public Conversations Project Facilitation & Participation	SLO 1: Practice from a culturally sensitive lens SLO 2: Practice from a systemic lens SLO 4: Claim the professional identity of Marriage and Family Therapy
Public Conversations Project Paper	SLO 1: Practice from a culturally sensitive lens SLO 2: Practice from a systemic lens SLO 4: Claim the professional identity of Marriage and Family Therapy
Postmodernism Research Paper	SLO 1: Practice from a culturally sensitive lens

	SLO 2: Practice from a systemic lens
Final Exam	SLO 1: Practice from a culturally sensitive lens SLO 2: Practice from a systemic lens SLO 4: Claim the professional identity of Marriage and Family Therapy
6 Word Memoir	SLO 1: Practice from a culturally sensitive lens SLO 2: Practice from a systemic lens

Use of Grading Rubrics:

A grading rubric will be used for all major assignments. When a rubric is not included in your syllabus or on the web-based learning portal for this class, the *MFT Program Academic Assignment Evaluation Tool* will be used for papers, posters, or presentations. For written exams, the MFT Exam Evaluation Tool will be used. Both rubrics can be found and downloaded on the Resources for Students page of the MFT website.

Access Office for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who are experiencing barriers in this course may contact the Access Office for assistance in determining and implementing reasonable accommodations. The Access Office is located in Farber Hall – South, 1500 N. Patterson Street, Valdosta, GA 31698-0280. The phone numbers are: 229-245-2498 (Voice), 229-375-5871 (VP), 229-219-1348 (TTY), 229-245-3788 (Fax). For more information, please visit <http://www.valdosta.edu/access> or email: access@valdosta.edu.

The Student Success Center (SSC)

The SSC at Valdosta State University is located in Langdale Residence Hall and is available to all students. They provide free professional academic advising, peer tutoring in core curriculum courses, and campus job information in one location. You can reach them at 229-333-7570 or email them at ssc@valdosta.edu.

Required Readings

1. Anderson, H. (1997). *Conversation, language, and possibilities: A postmodern approach to therapy*. New York: BasicBooks.
2. Freedman, J., & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: W.W. Norton.
3. Gergen, K. (2009). *An invitation to social construction (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
4. Madsen, W.C. (2009). Collaborative helping: A practice framework for family-centered services. *Family Process*, 48(1), 103-116.
5. Monk, G., & Gehart, D.R. (2003). Sociopolitical activist or conversational partner? Distinguishing the position of the therapist in narrative and collaborative therapies. *Family Process*, 42(1), 19-30.
6. Sutherland, O. (2007). Therapist positioning and power in discursive therapies: A comparative analysis. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 29, 193-209.

Recommended Readings

1. Besley, A.C. (2002). Foucault and the turn to narrative therapy. *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling*, 30(2), 125-143.
2. Cheon, H.S., & Murphy, M.J. (2007). The self-of-the-therapist awakened: Postmodern approaches to the use of self in marriage and family therapy. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 19(1), 1-16.
3. Gergen, K. (2001). Relational processes for ethical outcomes. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 20(4), 1-2.
4. Hoffman, L. (1990). Constructing realities: An art of lenses. *Family Process*, 29(1), 1-12.
5. Hoffman, L. (1998). Setting aside the model in family therapy lenses. *Family Process*, 24(2), 145-156.
6. Madsen, W. C. (1999). *Collaborative therapy with multi-stressed families: From old problems to new futures*. New York: Guilford.
7. McGoldrick, M. (1998). *Re-Visioning family therapy (2nd ed.): Race, culture, and gender in clinical practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
8. Mills, S., & Sprenkle, D. (1995). Family therapy in a postmodern era. *Helping Contemporary Families*, 44(4), 368-376.
9. Semmler, P.L., & Williams, C.B. (2000). Narrative therapy: A storied context for multicultural counseling. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 28(1), 51-62.
10. White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. Adelaide, South Australia: W.W. Norton.

Assignments

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
1. Six Word Memoir	5	Aug. 22
2. Postmodern Research Paper	40	Oct. 3
3. PCP Participation & Facilitation	10	Weekly Self-Evals
4. PCP Reflection Paper	20	Nov. 7
5. Final Exam	25	Nov. 21
Total Possible Points	100	
*Bonus Points for SOI		5 TBA

Grading Scale

A = 90-100%

- Excellent – Meets all or most categorical expectations with high frequency and quality

B = 80-89%

- Good – Consistently meets expectations of most categories with quality

C = 70-79%

- Adequate – Meets some categorical expectations with quality but insufficiently meets other categorical expectations

D = 60-69%

- Inadequate – Insufficiently and frequently fails to meet most categorical expectations

F = 50-59%

- Fail – Insufficiently and frequently fails to meet all categorical expectations

Evaluation of Written Work

- 1. Graduate level writing:** To what extent is the paper clear, concise, coherent/organized, & comprehensive? Unless otherwise specified, all written work should adhere to APA conventions and include a cover sheet and reference list. However, you can omit the abstract. Poor writing, organization, and clarity will significantly reduce your grade.
- 2. Critical Thinking/Analysis:** How well were you able to comprehend and engage with concepts from Postmodern theory and Social constructionism? How well were you able to think about the course material from a contextually informed and systemic perspective? How clearly did you demonstrate the ability to apply a postmodern and social constructionist framework to understanding social phenomena presented in texts, research, and movies? How well were you able to relate Postmodern thinking and Social constructionist ideas to consider the intersections of: race, class, gender, sexual orientation, migration status, religious beliefs/spirituality, and disability status?
- 3. Self-Reflection:** How engaged were you with the course content? How well were you able to draw from your personal experiences and relate it to the course content? How well did you self-reflect upon your own taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions, and allow yourself to shift/not shift? How well did you receive feedback from your instructor and peers?
- 4. Research Integration:** How well did you integrate and synthesize relevant research? How well did you use research to support your ideas?
- 5. Clinical Application and/or Practice:** How well were you able to integrate content from the readings & discussions into your clinical framework and relate it to family therapy? How well were you able to apply constructionist ideas to your thinking around problem formation?

Late Assignment Policy

All assignments are expected to be turned in on time, no later than 15 minutes after class begins on the day the assignment is due. Staple the pages together in the upper left-hand corner. **Papers that are turned-in late will be subject to a 10% point deduction per day that it is late.**

Please do not ask me to make exceptions to grading policies. In fairness to those students who meet the requirements and time parameters as defined in the syllabus, I am unlikely to make

exceptions on an individual basis.

A Note on Academic Integrity

I expect that all students are aware of VSU's policies regarding academic dishonesty and plagiarism. All students are expected to do their own work and to uphold a high standard of academic ethics. If you are found to have plagiarized material, this will result in a meeting and possible report to the university.

List of Assignments

1. Attendance & In-class Participation – 0 points

Do not ask me for permission to miss class. The decision is always yours. However, when you know that you will miss class, I always appreciate the professional courtesy of advance notice. In addition, missing classes or consistently arriving late for class or leaving early can negatively impact your final grade. **Missing more than 2 classes (excluding emergency situations) may result in a full letter grade deduction. As per VSU University Attendance Policy, any student who misses more than 20% of the scheduled classes may be subject to receive a failing grade in the course.**

You are encouraged to actively participate. Passive participation is not sufficient for you to fully benefit from this class. Please decide to take an active part in creating a community of engaged scholarship. The voice and involvement of each person is important. Ask questions, make observations and comments, and display respectful curiosity about how your colleagues are making sense of the material we are exploring.

Electronic devices: Please put your cell phones and other electronic devices on silent mode or vibrate mode to reduce the distraction to your classmates and instructor. Do not view text messages during class. If you need to view a text message or a missed call, please step out of the classroom to handle your personal business. If you are on an emergency call, please talk to me before class about how to monitor your communication device. You will be allowed to use computers in this class, however to facilitate a climate of learning and to reduce the distractions for yourself and others, please refrain from engagement in social media or other personal business.

2. Six Word Memoir – 5 points

Family Therapy is all about the stories people have to tell us about their lives, and all about personal narrative. The essential tools therapists have at their disposal are their theories and their words. Given that words and talk are elemental to the therapeutic endeavor, it is amazing that so little attention has been given to the way we use words in therapy.

Postmodernism and its attendant theories have long been rooted in attention to words, narrative, and exploring the meaning making processes. Stories, meaning, and metaphor are central to the current development of Family Therapy theory.

6 Word Memoirs are very short stories that depend mightily on metaphor. While Six Word

Memoirs often use metaphors, just as often, they *are* metaphors. 6 Word Memoirs are working to capture a life story, in something very small—just 6 words.

Your assignment is to play with language, and metaphor—and write your own 6 Word Memoir.

For example: The novelist, Ernest Hemingway, Once asked to write a full story in six words, responded: "For Sale: baby shoes, never worn." (From [Talk of the Nation](#), February 7, 2008: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18768430>)

*For additional examples, please refer to the Six Word Memoirs found at the end of this syllabus.

3. Public Conversations Project (PCP) Facilitation & Participation – 10 points

The Public Conversations Project helps people with fundamental disagreements over divisive issues develop the mutual understanding and trust essential for collaborative relationships and positive community action. In part, this occurs by helping people establish conversations that are intended to deepen the understanding of “the other” rather than for the purpose of convincing others to change.

Throughout this class you will learn about the Public Conversations Project. Part of what you will be challenged to do is “lean forward” and learn to listen to the perspectives, views, attitudes, and lived experiences of others that may dramatically differ from you.

You will lead a Public Conversations Project discussion and participate in a series of weekly conversations as a discussion member. I strongly encourage you to visit the website of the Public Conversations Project at: <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/index.asp>. It is filled with materials and information that you will be expected to apply as a PCP participant and facilitator.

- **Facilitators:** After your discussion, you will ask your colleagues for feedback about your facilitation. Ask them questions that do more than ask, “How did I do?” For instance: What were my strengths? What do I need to work on? Did I surprise you in any way? You may also add your own questions to this list. Take notes regarding your experience as well as the feedback you received. You will be required to reflect back on your experiences as a facilitator and a participant, as you write your PCP reflection paper.
- **Participants:** After PCP groups each week, you will complete a brief “self-evaluation” as it relates to your interaction with the PCP process. You will submit this through a weekly dropbox on Blazeview. Your self-evaluation should be submitted as a ‘Word’ document and include/address each of the following:
 1. Write your name and identify whether you were a participant or facilitator
 2. What I struggled with this week
 3. What I did well or made improvements on this week

4. What I will continue to self-reflect upon
5. What I might try differently next week

*Length should be 1-2 double space pages. Submission deadlines will be time-sensitive. Be sure to submit your self-evals before the following class period.

***Grading Rubric

Self-Reflection	5
Active engagement in process. Ability to apply PCP constructs.	5
Total Points	10

4. Public Conversations Project (PCP) Reflection Paper – 20 points

Drawing on your experience as a facilitator and a participant in PCP, **write a 6-8 page essay that reflects your understanding of the concepts that underpin PCP and describes each of the following:**

- What I learned
 - Describe what you learned through your participation
 - How did your actual experience vary from your expectations about the process?
 - For instance, what was the most challenging aspect or moment for you?
 - What surprised you?
 - What was the most difficult or delightful aspect of your experience?
- Approaching Otherness
 - Describe your approach to otherness before you participated in PCP and compare it to the way you now think about approaching otherness & difference
 - Be sure to articulate your current goals and mindset with respect to encountering difference
- My Other: I'm Your Other
 - Describe your other
 - What differences challenge you?
 - How might you present a challenge to someone?
 - This question is asking you to explore how encountering you might pose a challenge to those who may see you as their "other"
- Implications for My Clinical Practice

*I strongly suggest that your paper use the main headings outlined above.

***Grading Rubric

Graduate Level Writing	5
Self-Reflection & Integration of PCP concepts	10
Critical Analysis & Clinical Application	5
Total Points	20

5. Postmodern Research Paper – 40 points

This assignment requires you to write a paper that explores a movie of your choice through the lens of postmodernism and social constructionism and draw implications for family therapy. In essence, you are expected to: (1) Employ a social constructionist framework to make sense of human interaction, meaning making, problem construction, and problem resolution, and (2) Relate the topic to family therapy.

- First, select a movie that interests you.
- Afterwards, email the title of your movie and a brief synopsis to me for approval before you begin writing your paper (i.e., It would suffice to send me an imdb link to your proposed movie of choice).
- Your paper should: (1) Provide a brief synopsis of the movie you selected, (2) Reflect sensitivity to the ways cultural and societal discourses shape each other, and (3) Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between language, stories, the social construction of knowledge, and cultural narratives. Look for ways to apply one or more course concepts (i.e. narrative, language, social discourses, epistemology, taken-for-granted-realities, systems, essentializing, reification, institutionalization, social construction, etc.) to your topic.
- Include 10 academic references to support your ideas. These must come from peer-reviewed journals or academic texts. Non-primary resources and web pages should only be used when the information you need to cite is not available in refereed journals or professional books.
- Length of paper: 8-10 pages, including title page and reference list.

As you write your paper, keep in mind the following ideas. Postmodernism posits that reality is multiple and varied. Postmodernism suggests that knowledge and knower are interdependent. Social constructionism highlights the relational nature of knowledge and the generative nature of language. As such, the following concepts are fundamental to postmodernism and social constructionist thought:

1. Knowledge is relational in nature
2. Knowledge is communal
3. Knowledge is shaped by culture and context, both are always changing
4. Individual and cultural narratives shape each other

6. Language and experience go hand in hand
7. Language is active
8. Language shapes social reality and social realities shape language
9. We give meaning to experience through language, symbols, and symbolic systems
10. There is a dynamic, fluid relationship between language, symbols, stories, individual narratives, cultural narratives, and the social construction of knowledge
11. Individuals shape culture and culture shapes individuals
12. The observer is part of the observed
13. Reification supports social constructions; social constructions often become reified.

*** Grading Rubric: (See above for detailed overview)

Graduate Level Writing	10
Critical Thinking/Analysis (Ability to apply Postmodern Theory & Social Constructionism to deconstruct themes in the selected movie)	15
Research Integration	10
Clinical Application (ability to relate PM/SC ideas from movie to family therapy)	5
Total Points	40

6. Final Exam – 25 points

The final exam will be given on the last day of class. It will include a variety of multiple choice, matching, & short answer questions based on postmodern MFT theories: Narrative therapy & Collaborative Language Systems (CLS). We will discuss this further after the midterm point of the course.

A Note about Student Course Evaluations (SOIs):

At the end of the term, all students will be expected to complete an online Student Opinion of Instruction survey (SOI) that will be available on BANNER. Students will receive an email notification through their VSU email address when the SOI is available (generally at least one week before the end of the term). SOI responses are anonymous to instructors/administrators. Instructors will be able to view only a summary of all responses two weeks after they have submitted final grades. While instructors will not be able to view individual responses or to access any of the data until after final grade submission, they will be able to see which students have or have not completed their SOIs, and student compliance may be considered in the determination of the final course grade. These compliance and non-compliance reports will not be available once instructors are able to access the results. Complete information about the SOIs, including how to access the survey and a timetable for this term is available at: <http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/OnlineSOIPilotProject.shtml>.

Weekly Topics and Reading Schedule	Date
<p>Week 1 - Introduction to Postmodern Theory</p> <p>Readings: Gergen – Ch. 7 & 1</p> <p>Topics: Brief Introductions Review of Syllabus Introduction to Postmodern Theory</p>	August 15, 2013
<p>Week 2 - Theory: Overview of Social Constructionism</p> <p>Readings: Gergen – Ch. 2 Freedman & Combs – Ch. 2</p> <p>Topics: Introduction to Social Constructionism Generative nature of language Foucault: Institutionalized Power Public Conversations (PCP) Survey</p> <p>Assignment Due: Six-Word Memoir</p>	August 22, 2013
<p>Week 3 – Theory: Social Constructionism</p> <p>Readings Gergen – Ch. 4 Philosophical perspectives: Basic issues of man, Chapter 3 (PDF)</p> <p>Topics: The relational self Social constructionism (continued)</p>	August 29, 2013
<p>Week 4 - Transformative Dialogue: Public Conversations Project</p> <p>Readings: Gergen – Ch. 5 Public Conversations Project articles (Blazeview)</p> <p>Topics: Introduction to Public Conversations (Guest Lecture: Dr. Kate Warner) PCP – Fishbowl demo (Faculty led)</p>	September 5, 2013
<p>Week 5 - Transformative Dialogue: Public Conversations Project</p> <p>Readings: none</p> <p>Topics: PCP – Demo 2 (Faculty-led)</p>	September 12, 2013
<p>Week 6 – Transformative Dialogue: Public Conversations Project</p> <p>Readings: none</p> <p>Topics: PCP 1 – Peer facilitation (Group debriefing to follow)</p>	September 19, 2013

<p>Week 7 – Postmodern therapy approaches: Narrative Therapy</p> <p>Readings: Freedman & Combs – Ch. 1 & 3</p> <p>Topics: The narrative metaphor PCP 2 – Peer facilitation (Group debriefing to follow)</p>	<p>September 26, 2013</p>
<p>Week 8 – Postmodern therapy approaches: Narrative Therapy</p> <p>Readings: Freedman & Combs – Ch. 4</p> <p>Topics: Problem-saturated narratives & “sparkling moments” PCP 3 – Peer facilitation (Group debriefing to follow)</p> <p>Assignment Due: Postmodern Research Paper</p>	<p>October 3, 2013 (Midterm - last day to drop)</p>
<p>Week 9 – Postmodern therapy approaches: Narrative Therapy</p> <p>Readings: Freedman & Combs – Ch. 5</p> <p>Topics: Beyond gathering information – Questions that generate experience PCP 4 – Peer facilitation (Group debriefing to follow)</p>	<p>October 10, 2013</p>
<p>Week 10 – Postmodern therapy approaches: Narrative Therapy</p> <p>Readings: Freedman & Combs – Ch. 6</p> <p>Topics: Generating experience and expanding life narratives PCP 5 – Peer facilitation (Group debriefing to follow)</p>	<p>October 17, 2013</p>
<p>Week 11 – Postmodern approaches: Narrative Therapy</p> <p>Readings: Freedman & Combs – Ch. 7 & 8</p> <p>Topics: Co-authoring & thickening the plot PCP 6 – Peer facilitation (Group debriefing to follow)</p>	<p>October 24, 2013</p>
<p>Week 12 – Postmodern approaches: Collaborative Language Systems</p> <p>Readings: Anderson – Ch. 3 & 4 (Blazeview)</p> <p>Topics: Therapy as language and meaning generating systems</p>	<p>October 31, 2013</p>
<p>Week 13 – Postmodern approaches: Collaborative Language Systems</p> <p>Readings: Anderson – Ch. 5 (Blazeview)</p> <p>Topics: Therapist position & responsibility</p> <p>Assignment Due: PCP Reflection Paper</p>	<p>November 7, 2013</p>

Week 14 – Postmodern approaches: Collaborative Language Systems <u>Readings:</u> Anderson – Ch. 6 (Blazeview) <u>Topics:</u> Therapy as dialogical conversation	November 14, 2013
Week 15 – Postmodern approaches: Collaborative Language Systems <u>Readings:</u> Anderson – Ch. 9 & 10 <u>Topics:</u> Wrap up Final Exam?	November 21, 2013
No Class, Thanksgiving Break.	November 28, 2013

*Syllabus may be subject to change. Please check Blazeview regularly for updates.

6 Word Memoirs

In this spirit of simple yet profound brevity, the online magazine [Smith](#) asked readers to write the story of their own lives in a single sentence. The result is *Not Quite What I Was Planning*, a collection of six-word memoirs by famous and not-so-famous writers, artists and musicians. Their stories are sometimes sad, often funny — and always concise.

You can listen to an interview with Larry Smith, founding editor of *Smith* magazine, and Rachel Fershleiser, *Smith*'s memoir editor, talk about 6 Word Memoirs at:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18768430>

To learn more, visit the online magazine, Smith, at <http://www.smithmag.net/>

Samples of 6 Word Memoirs:

Two toddlers. Too tired to type.
Puppies would have been much easier.
Three years, three kids, I'm tired!
Thousands of acquaintances. Very few friends.
Married for love. Living without it.
I read. I wrote. I survived.
I'm damaged, but there's a discount.
Existing never ceases to amaze me
I don't know where I'm going...
My kids still need me. Phew.
Will work for: my father's approval.
I'm better now, than you then
I suck at everything. What, now?
I think I should be happy

"Honey, nice girls don't do that."
My six words haven't happened yet.
We cut ties but strings linger
70 years, few tears, hairy ears.
Watching quietly from every door frame.
Catholic school backfired. Sin is in!
Savior complex makes for many disappointments.
Nobody cared, then they did. Why?
She said she was negative. Damn.
Born in the desert, still thirsty.
A sake mom, not soccer mom.
I asked. They answered. I wrote.
No future, no past. Not lost.
Extremely responsible, secretly longed for spontaneity.
Joined Army. Came out. Got booted.
Almost a victim of my family
The psychic said I'd be richer.
Grumpy old soundman needs love, too.
Mom died, Dad screwed us over.
Painful nerd kid, happy nerd adult.
Write about sex, learn about love.

Excerpted from *Not Quite What I Was Planning* from *Smith* magazine, edited by Rachel Fershleiser and Larry Smith. Copyright 2008

