To prevent future disappointment, I always go on a first date looking like I would after we've lived together for several years.
Towards a Systemic Hypothesis

COU 625 Family Therapy Assessment and Intervention
Prof. Gonzalo Bacigalupe

"Next, an example of the very same procedure when done correctly."
Key Concepts: Family Systems

- Greater than the sum of its parts
- Performs functions
- Boundaries and subsystem boundaries
- Evolving: Change and Stability
- Circular causality is a better explanatory device than lineal causality
“You can be anything you want to be—no limits.”
What do I need to create a systemic hypothesis?

What are the family and community resources?

What are the family-environment interactions?

What is the impact of environmental factors on the family and its members?
('The Cosmology of Timmy' Genealogy of God and all the major mythical figures of childhood. Santa, the Tooth Fairy, The Bogey Man, etc.)
Theory-Based Treatment  
(Gehart & Tuttle, 2003, p. 18)

• Theory-based goal + “to reduce” + specific symptoms  
  – (+ “to be evidenced by” + measurable goal)

• Theory-based goal + “to increase” + preferred behaviors  
  – (+ “to be evidenced by” + measurable goal)
“I’ll do whatever it takes to save this marriage. Even if that means having to work weekends.”
Model of Therapeutic Change

Cybernetics

- Redundant patterns / beliefs

Narratives

- Meaning through Language

Understand patterns / beliefs / stories

Develop different patterns / beliefs / stories

Amplify change
"I'm not trying to change you—I'm trying to enhance you."
A Family Assessment Includes

• Specific problems, issues, etc.
• Family structure and Developmental Stage
• Larger Context (Cultural, institutional)
• Family Functioning
  – Roles, communication patterns, problem solving, beliefs, alliances, concrete supports, emotional supports, instrumental supports
• Strengths and Problems
• Summary or Hypothesis
Systemic Hypothesis is informed by

- Your theoretical assumptions
  - What is normal/healthy?
  - What is a symptom or a dysfunction?
  - What are the goals of therapy?
- Questions you ask and general stance
- Family and referral source expectations
- Institutional context in which you practice
“Your problems make my fee seem insignificant.”
The Systemic Hypothesis

• Identifies the core of the problem-determined system
  – What are the core aspects that if removed would not allow you to identify a particular relational or systemic configuration (i.e., a family in therapy)?

• Guides your work with the family
• Orients engagement with the family
• Informs your intervention
• Defines what may be achieved and when the therapy may end
“I still say it’s only a theory.”
An exercise

Putting some of these ideas together
WHAT "BEFORE AND AFTER" LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE.
Preparing for the First Sessions
(Pote, et al., No Date)

Team and/or co-therapists meet for 15 minutes before the session begins and address the following issues:

Construct a genogram from referral information or previous sessions
What are main themes emerging in the referral or initial interview?
What are recent life events of the family?
What are potential difficulties which may arise around engagement and how could you address them?
What are the broader system issues and who is in the network?
Brainstorm themes/hypotheses/formulations which may be relevant to the family
As you take notes:
A Systemic SOAPs

– Subjective
– Objective
– Assessment
– Prognosis
– Self of the Therapist