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PREVIEW

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A secondary school course in family psychology

Sutton, Carolyn Fried, Psy.D.

Pace University, 1992

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**300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106**

PREVIEW

**A SECONDARY SCHOOL
COURSE IN FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY**

by

Carolyn Fried Sutton

**A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology in the
Department of Psychology at Pace University**

NEW YORK

1991



PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT
PSY.D. PROJECT
FINAL APPROVAL FORM

(Please type all information)

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I would like to thank my good friends and family for their caring and consistent encouragement and support, and my daughter, Lia, for her cheerful adaptability during this mid-life endeavor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
I.Teaching of Psychology.....	1
II.Adolescent Readiness for Curriculum.....	15
Nature of Course	
Developmental Readiness	
Importance of Family Relationships in Adolescence	
III. Curriculum.....	27
IV. Implementation and Evaluation.....	87
References.....	95

Abstract

Carolyn Fried Sutton

A SECONDARY SCHOOL COURSE IN FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY

Advisor: Dr. Barbara Mowder

Consultant: Dr. Florence Denmark

The focus of this project is a course in family psychology for high school juniors and seniors. The teaching of psychology in the high school can trace its origins back over a century and has become increasingly widespread over the past several decades. Psychology as a subject is now offered in the majority of high schools. This has been recognized by the APA, which has been expanding its involvement in high school psychology over the past decade. High school psychology has recently been approved for advanced placement, which will most likely lead to improved training and certification of high school psychology teachers and increased status of psychology as a high school subject.

Despite the numerous courses now given, current offerings do not include a course about the study of the family. As high school psychology continues to expand, this proposed course would fill a need for additional psychology courses as well as provide knowledge about the family to adolescents at a time when they are likely to have a heightened interest and need for such information.

Family psychology is defined here as the study of the family as a unit, its functions, structure, organization, development, and interaction. The course is set in a framework of psychology as a scientific field of study and

addresses issues of theory, research, and applications as they apply to the study of families. The goals of the curriculum are:

1. Illustrate the way that families and family functioning can be studied and conceptualized in terms of theory, research, and applications.
2. Teach students about the family, its forms and variations, and its development in terms of structure and functioning across time.
3. Provide students with conceptual frameworks in which to organize thoughts, perceptions, and experiences that relate to themselves and others in the context of families.

This Psy.D. project considers high school psychology and the literature regarding adolescent-family relations in light of adolescent cognitive and developmental readiness for a family psychology course. The project provides the basis for the teaching of the course, presents a family psychology curriculum, and addresses issues of evaluation and implementation.

CHAPTER I TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY

Although the idea of teaching psychology in the high school may seem like a relatively new one, there is evidence that it has been going on for well over a century (Coffield & Engle, 1960; Engle, 1967; Kasschau & Wertheimer, 1974; Louttit, 1956; Roback, 1952). A textbook published in 1831 entitled *Elements of Mental Philosophy* was intended for use in the secondary school (Roback, 1952). The St. Louis, Missouri school system had a course on the books in 1857 entitled "Mental Philosophy" that was basically a psychology course (Coffield & Engle, 1960). The word *psychology* was first used in the title of a high school text in 1889, when a textbook was published entitled *Elementary Psychology, or the First Principles of Mental and Moral Science for High, Normal, and Other Secondary Schools and for Private Reading* (Engle, 1967).

The number of high schools offering psychology courses has continued to grow. A survey by the U.S. Office of Education in 1933-34 indicated that at least 15 states had high schools offering psychology courses. In 1967, it was reported that 20 to 25 per cent of high schools with over 300 students offered a course in psychology (Noland, 1966). In 1975, Dambrot and Popplestone reported over 500,000 students taking psychology courses in high school. Interestingly, the literature concerning high school psychology appears to be sparse during the 1980's and nearly nonexistent during the 1990's thus far. Rolison and Medway (1982) published a review

on the teaching of high school psychology describing courses, teacher characteristics, American Psychological Association (APA) involvement, and research, but did not include data on prevalence. The most recent statistics concerning the national prevalence of high school psychology are from the U.S. Department of Education and have been gleaned from a 1982 study on public high school offerings and enrollments (West, 1984). The study compared high school course offerings from 1973 to those in 1982. The study indicated that in 1973, psychology was offered in 6,782 high schools, or 44.3% of the schools surveyed, and in 1982 was offered in 9,198 schools, or 58.7% of the schools. The teaching of psychology in high school has been steadily on the rise. There do not appear to be any current studies or surveys to determine the nationwide prevalence of high school psychology courses or the nature of courses given. This would seem to be a needed area of future research.

The APA's interest and involvement in high school psychology has increased over the years. The APA began to take notice of high school psychology in the 1930's and formed a committee to survey and study it. The committee reported in 1937 on the continuing growth in popularity of high school psychology (Engle, 1967). The APA became more involved with high school psychology in the early 1970's, creating a Clearinghouse on Precollege Psychology and calling for, as Goldman (1983) describes, "a clear foundation in the discipline of psychology for high school psychology courses, regardless of the particular cognitive or affective mix of their content" (p. 229). They embarked on a Human Behavior Curriculum Project that was completed in 1981 (Goldman, 1983). The Human

Behavior Curriculum Project consists of a series of eight modules, each of which is a learning unit with a teacher handbook and student reader. The modules cover the following content areas: (1) natural behavior in humans and animals, (2) states of consciousness, (3) school life and organizational psychology, (4) social influences on behavior, (5) changing attitudes, (6) conditioning and learning, (7) language and communication, and (8) studying personality (*Human Behavior Curriculum Project*, 1981).

The APA recognized the growth of high school psychology and continued to increase its involvement. In 1981, the APA published *Guidelines for the Specialty Training and Certification of Secondary School Teachers of Psychology*, attempting to lay the groundwork for proper training and subsequent certification of high school psychology teachers by their appropriate Secondary School State Certification Board (American Psychological Association, 1981). The establishment of certification is strongly recommended, and has been implemented in some states. However, for the most part, these still remain guidelines and have not been instituted in any widespread and formal way. In 1986, Ragland did a survey on "The Status of Teachers and Teacher Education in High School Psychology" in conjunction with the APA. She found that most teachers of high school psychology did most of their teaching in other subjects and had limited credit hours in psychology, areas of specialty being most frequently in the social studies, underlining the need for better preparation in psychology proper (Ragland, 1987). The goal of the APA is that "all secondary school teachers of psychology should have a thorough

and broad preparation in both the content and methods of psychology" (American Psychological Association, 1981, p. 4).

In 1983, the APA published *Ethical Guidelines for the Teaching of Psychology in the Secondary School*, addressing both issues of student projects with animal and human research and ethical issues for the high school psychology teacher (American Psychological Association, 1983). In 1986, the APA published *Statement on the Curriculum for the High School Psychology Course*, with recommendations as to content and structure (American Psychological Association, 1986). APA has a High School Teacher Affiliate with a regular newsletter entitled High School Psychology Teacher, published through the Education Programs Office. The newsletter has recently been combined with the undergraduate psychology teachers newsletter. As of September, 1991, there is a new newsletter entitled The Psychology Teacher Network, which illustrates a trend to encourage linkages among teachers of psychology ("APA National Conference," 1991). According to the APA marketing department, the high school teacher affiliate currently has one thousand members and the newsletter mailing list numbers five thousand. The APA has also published three Activities Handbooks, each with ideas for lessons in various content areas (Benjamin & Lowman, 1981; Makosky, Sileo, Whittemore, Landry, & Skutley, 1990; Makosky, Whittemore, & Rogers 1987).

The APA is currently conducting a survey on the use of psychology textbooks in the teaching of high school psychology ("Undergraduate and Precollege Panel," 1991). The APA Undergraduate and Precollege Panel of the APA Board of Educational Affairs is responsible for recommending

policies and programs in precollege psychology. The panel is currently reviewing the history of APA involvement in high school psychology ("Undergraduate and Precollege Panel," 1991).

High school psychology courses have recently been given further legitimacy and impetus by the instituting of an Advanced Placement exam in psychology, which will be given starting in the Spring of 1992 ("New AP Exam," 1989). This new development will also give a boost to improved teacher training and qualifications for the teaching of psychology.

At the present time, teachers from various departments teach psychology, including Social Studies, Science, English, Home Economics, and Health Education, with Social Studies being the most frequent according to a 1986 APA survey (Ragland, 1987). Most courses are electives. The survey found that the topics most emphasized were personality, development, learning, and mental health. There are textbooks that can go with the courses, with several in common use, including *Understanding Psychology* (4th ed.), published by Random House, *Invitation to Psychology* by Ragland and Saxon, published by Scott, Foresman, and *Psychology: Its Principles and Applications* by Engle and Snellgrove and published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (Griggs, Jackson, & Meyer, 1989). With the advent of Advanced Placement in Psychology, courses that are prototypes of introductory college psychology will most likely become more prevalent and formalized.

In terms of the teaching of psychology, courses have tended to take one of three directions: cognitive, affective, and a combination of affective

and cognitive (Griggs, Jackson, & Meyer, 1989; White, Marcuella, & Oresick, 1979). Courses with an affective emphasis tend to focus on personal adjustment concerns of students and attempt to provide psychological knowledge as it relates to the understanding of self and others. Courses with a cognitive emphasis tend to focus on the scientific aspects of psychology, teaching it as a scientific discipline with emphasis on empirical knowledge and research. Courses that combine the two teach psychological concepts as well as applications of some of those concepts to students' lives. Course content is most often determined by the teacher's choice (Ragland, 1987).

Because of this, the emphasis in high school psychology has largely been a product of the background and training of the particular teachers giving the course and their beliefs regarding what should be taught. White, Marcuella, and Oresick (1979), who surveyed the teaching of psychology in Massachusetts high schools, found that teachers who had a background in psychology as a field of scientific knowledge were more science-oriented in their teaching and goals, whereas teachers without a psychology background were concerned with addressing personal problems as their priority. Both White et al. (1979) and Griggs et al. (1989), who more recently surveyed Florida schools, found that areas such as personality development were given priority and emphasis, whereas research and the scientific empirical side of psychology were frequently not well covered, due to the teachers' lack of orientation and training in academic psychology. Ragland (1987) found that most high school psychology teachers had not majored in psychology, the majority having majored in

areas of social studies. She also found that the goals of the course ranked most important by teachers were: self-knowledge and understanding, knowledge of major concepts and theories, critical thinking skills, and social and interpersonal skills.

There has not been much written on aspects of the teaching of psychology in high school. Mosher (1974) and Mosher and Sprinthall (1970, 1971) published articles in the 1970's regarding an affectively-oriented curriculum that they developed for adolescents which sought to teach principles of psychological growth and to develop personal and social competence. They incorporated a research and development component, with ongoing evaluation, finding that adolescent ego development and level of ethical judgment could be increased by special curricula and that adolescents could learn psychology as an academic discipline and apply it to the understanding of themselves and others (Mosher, 1974). Those interested in affective education in the schools have seen psychology as providing a relevant vehicle (Pickover, 1982; Sprinthall, 1971; Zeeman, 1982), with adolescence as an ideal time to encourage students to focus on aspects of themselves in light of their cognitive and developmental readiness (Cognetta, 1977). Kohlberg (1970) looked at the need for psychological education from a cognitive-developmental standpoint and said, "the cognitive reorganization of experience through successively higher levels (including emotional experience), is the basic aim of education" (p. 75).

Kasschau and Wertheimer (1974) discuss at length the differences between the approach to psychology as personal development and the

approach to psychology as a discipline. They propose a synthesis, stating that "the goal is enhancing both knowledge of the discipline and an understanding of the self" (p. 33). They point out that empirically arrived at knowledge concerning human behavior can be applied in a variety of ways. Kasschau (1979) states that although teachers realize that students are motivated to learn when content relates to the self, and "we start with topics that will catch the attention of those students by couching the information we wish to put across in terms of the problems those students are currently facing,...research must precede applications [and] what we teach our students must be couchd in terms of our science" (p. 13). Goldman (1983) noted that trends at the time seemed to favor synthesis of cognition and affect so that the curriculum could address both domains. He also pointed out that cultural swings in the philosophy of education lead to changes in emphasis on goals.

The *APA Statement on the Curriculum for the High School Psychology Course* (American Psychological Association, 1986) states as its philosophy a synthesis of cognitive and affective approaches:

There are many different approaches to teaching psychology. Some teachers emphasize the rigorous scientific content of psychology, whereas others see psychology primarily as a vehicle for educating students about themselves. Each goal is imporant and one need not exclude the other. With thoughtful planning, both can be accomplished. The course should give students an opportunity to explore subjects studied by behavioral scientists, to learn how psychology is applied to solving human problems, to experiment, and

to learn and evaluate methods of research. Students should be challenged to relate psychological concepts to their own lives. Course content need not be watered down to achieve this goal. (pp. 2-3)

The Statement on the Curriculum also recommends a core curriculum with the following content areas: scientific methods of psychology, growth and development, learning, personality, mental health and behavioral disorders, and social psychology. As for teaching methods, it suggests that "the chosen methods should involve students actively in the learning process, promoting their psychological as well as intellectual development" (p. 5). This recommendation clearly promotes attention to both cognitive and affective domains.

The *Advanced Placement Course Description* for Psychology has recently been published in anticipation of the upcoming Advanced Placement Examination in March, 1992 (*Advanced Placement*, 1991). It covers thirteen major content areas: (1) methods, approaches, and history of psychology, (2) biological bases of behavior, (3) sensation and perception, (4) states of consciousness, (5) learning, (6) cognition, (7) motivation and emotion, (8) developmental psychology, (9) personality, (10) testing and individual differences, (11) abnormal psychology, (12) treatment of psychological disorders, and (13) social psychology. The course is supposed to provide a learning experience equivalent to an college level introductory psychology course. As the content areas show, such courses are survey courses which cover a broad range of topics and address the cognitive domain.

It is likely that having an Advanced Placement Psychology course will attract college bound students and provide increased status for teachers who are prepared to teach an equivalent college level course. It will reinforce the need for well-trained teachers and the likelihood of more formalized certification. The need also remains for psychology courses that are not Advanced Placement. These can be courses that address content domains in a depth that a survey course can not provide and also address the affective component as recommended in the APA curriculum guidelines so that students can "relate psychological concepts to their own lives" (p. 3). It appears that high school psychology is coming of age and will be taking its place as a subject area in most secondary schools.

This project presents a psychology course that would focus on family psychology. The term family psychology here refers to the study of the family as a unit, its development over the life course, and the interactional effects the family and its members have on one another. L'Abate (1985), who has headed a doctoral program in family psychology at Georgia State University, emphasizes the importance in family psychology of theory testing, evaluation, and prevention. Kaslow (1987) broadly describes family psychology as the scientific study of the family from a multifaceted perspective which "encompasses the totality of all that concerns the art and science of the study and treatment of the variegated entity known as 'the family' "(p. 88). The family has been a focus of study in other disciplines for several decades, in fields such as anthropology, sociology, human development, and family life education.

The psychological viewpoint having family as its object has burgeoned in the past twenty years and has entered the mainstream of psychological thought, theory, and practice, with increasing numbers of clinical practitioners who treat couples and families. The APA Division 43, the Division of Family Psychology, was established in 1984 (L'Abate, 1985; Kaslow, 1987). The Division publishes a quarterly journal, the *Journal of Family Psychology*, which in 1992 will become a primary APA publication (Liddle, 1991). Further evidence of the growth of a family perspective is seen in proliferating numbers of professional books, now needing separate sections relating to books on the family in professional book catalogs such as *Psychotherapy Book News* and catalogs for publishing houses such as The Guilford Press (The Guilford Press, 1990). Professional journals are also proliferating, and there are established training programs with a focus on the family at the masters degree as well as doctoral levels, including psychology doctoral programs offering family psychology (L'Abate, 1985; Kaslow, 1987; American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 1991), as well as increasing numbers of training institutes for clinicians. The APA's Division of Family Psychology (Division 43) currently has 1,790 members (A. Calhoun, personal communication, August 8, 1991). The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy currently has over 13,000 clinical members (R. Waller, personal communication, August 22, 1991). Marital and family therapy have become widespread modes of treatment, increasingly being offered at mental health settings. The field of family therapy has largely been based on theory and clinical practice without strong empirical underpinnings, but empirical research is

increasing rapidly. A family perspective has been increasingly of interest to psychotherapists, particularly child psychologists who are treating clients that live in a family context.

The teaching of psychology is a unique opportunity to acquaint students with the ways in which the field of psychology goes about studying people in the context of families, and to provide students with the opportunity to add a psychological perspective to what they are learning and experiencing. Adolescents are at a crossroads in terms of their relationships with their families and are cognitively ripe for a course about the family. A course of this nature can help adolescents develop cognitive frameworks for increased awareness and understanding of the psychology of relationship systems. Adolescents' cognitive readiness of adolescents and aspects of adolescent-family relations make a course in family psychology both timely and relevant.

The material proposed is currently not being covered in any significant way in the high school. The APA Curriculum guidelines (*Statement on the Curriculum*, 1986) only mention the family parenthetically under the topic Growth and Development next to the subtopic "significant others (peers, family, etc.)"(p. 7). In the Advanced Placement Course Description (Advanced Placement, 1991), there is no specific mention of the family, theories relating to the family such as systems theory, or family therapy as a treatment approach, although other approaches and modes of treatment are mentioned. In the three volumes of the Activities Handbooks for the Teaching of Psychology (Benjamin & Lowman, 1981; Makosky et al., 1987; Makosky et al., 1990) there are 264 activities listed, only one of

which relates to family psychology (Arnold, 1990). A list of course descriptions from the New York State Education Department shows that topics relating to family relationships are rarely covered.

As described by Robert Carruthers (personal communication, July 7, 1991), the person in charge of psychology course approval for the New York State Education Department in Albany, a proposed high school psychology course is sent to the department for approval, and this is currently done through the office concerned with Social Studies. The course descriptions from a list of abstracts of approved high school psychology courses illustrate that there is a wide latitude in the nature of courses given. Courses typically cover some combination of topics in psychology such as personality, learning, motivation, and research. Other courses, such as Psychology in Literature, are also offered. A course is approved for three years, at which time an application is made for renewal and the course is reviewed. Thus far, in New York State, all courses have been electives. Most are for high school juniors and seniors. According to Ellen Zebrowski, at the Information Center on Education (personal communication, July 9, 1991), almost 400 public high schools in New York State currently offer psychology courses.

The course proposed in this project could be used in whole or part by current teachers of high school psychology and is aimed at high school juniors or seniors. The applicability of the material to adolescents is particularly salient in light of their developmental stage in relation to the family, and teachers may welcome the availability of such material. This course follows the APA Statement on the Curriculum's philosophy of