


# WHY AND HOW SHOULD FAMILY THERAPISTS TAKE PART IN FAMILY THERAPY RESEARCH?

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# Family therapy works!

- Several of these approaches are on APA lists of empirically-supported and evidence-based treatments (Laurie Hetherington (2014)).

# Still; systemic thinking and practice do have a rather weak position in the health services

- Psychological problems are individualized
- The focus on diagnosis and screening leads therapists into a medical way of thinking
- Diagnostic labels are used for other purposes than communication:
  - Releases economic support, admission to sick-leave and free medicine, access to certain treatment facilities, and so on.
  - Can also serve to free the individual and the relatives for guilt and responsibility attached to the problems
  - Used to control the “production” of psychological health

# Comments about the systemic research on outcome and client

- Challenges attached to the interventions:
  - Often described in very general ways
  - Unclear how well the practice corresponds to the theory
  - Difficult to separate the ideas of the treatment from the general alliance factors
  
- Challenges attached to the measurement of change:
  - How do we ask and what do we ask for?
  - Do we get valid and reliable answers?
  - *When – at what time* – do we ask for feedback?
  - Simple measurements or descriptions?
  - When therapeutic feedback instruments becomes instruments of control

# More initiatives to design longitudinal studies of systemic interventions

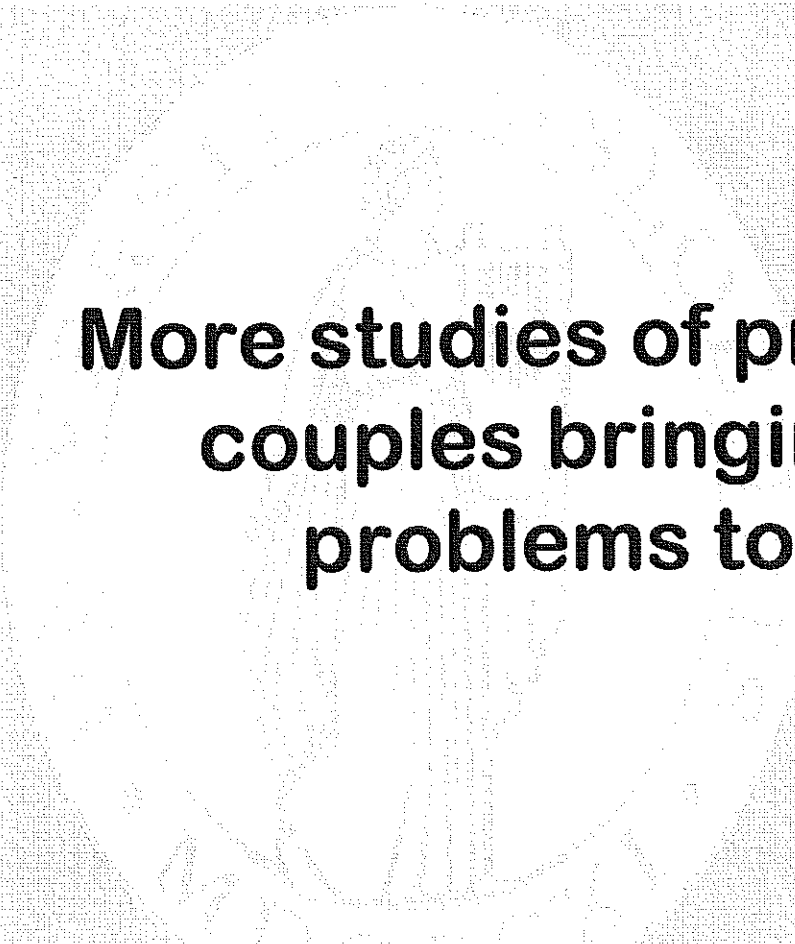
- The importance to compare the long term consequences of individualized/medical interventions with systemic interventions

# **Strengthen the efforts to describe systemic processes with specific client populations**

➤ Using labels like:

Working with families/couples with substance abuse problems, with depression problems, with eating disturbances, with self-harming behavior problems, psychotic behavior, with suspicions of sexual abuse, and so on

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## **More studies of processes with couples bringing specific problems to therapy**

- For instance collaboration around infidelity, loss of a child, sexual problems, violence, and so on, and to collect empirical feedback from the work

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# More observational studies of systemic practice

- Huge gaps between theoretical concepts of systemic therapy the observed practice
- Observational studies can close them, and learn us more about helpful practice.



## Summing up - we need:

- more longitudinal studies comparing systemic oriented work with other approaches directed towards specific groups of clients
- clear descriptions of the systemic paths to follow with specific problems, and more evaluations of this work
- more observational studies of therapies with couples/families, preferably combined with a use of interviews and feed-back devices
- ..in order to bring attention to the importance of always seeing psychological problems in the context of “the important others” and the dominating cultural expectancies.

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