

Specialty Competencies in Couple and Family Psychology

MARK STANTON
ROBERT WELSH

Specialty Competencies in Couple and Family Psychology

Series in Specialty Competencies in Professional Psychology

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ABOUT THE SERIES IN SPECIALTY COMPETENCIES IN PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

This series is intended to describe state-of-the-art functional and foundational competencies in professional psychology across extant and emerging specialty areas. Each book in this series provides a guide to best practices across both core and specialty competencies as defined by a given professional psychology specialty.

The impetus for this series was created by various growing movements in professional psychology during the past 15 years. First, as an applied discipline, psychology is increasingly recognizing the unique and distinct nature among a variety of orientations, modalities, and approaches with regard to professional practice. These specialty areas represent distinct ways of practicing one's profession across various domains of activities that are based on distinct bodies of literature and often addressing differing populations or problems. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1995 established the Commission on the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP) in order to define criteria by which a given specialty could be recognized. The Council of Credentialing Organizations in Professional Psychology (CCOPP), an interorganizational entity, was formed in reaction to the need to establish criteria and principles regarding the types of training programs related to the education, training, and professional development of individuals seeking such specialization. In addition, the Council on Specialties in Professional Psychology (COS) was formed in 1997, independent of the APA, to foster communication among the established specialties, in order to offer a unified position to the public regarding specialty education and training, credentialing, and practice standards across specialty areas.

Simultaneously, efforts to actually define professional competence regarding psychological practice have also been growing significantly. For example, the APA-sponsored Task Force on Assessment of Competence in Professional Psychology put forth a series of guiding principles for the assessment of competence within professional psychology, based, in part,

on a review of competency assessment models developed both within (e.g., Assessment of Competence Workgroup from Competencies Conference [Roberts, Borden, Christiansen, & Lopez, 2005]) and outside (e.g., Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education and American Board of Medical Specialties, 2000) the profession of psychology (N. J. Kaslow et al., 2007).

Moreover, additional professional organizations in psychology have provided valuable input into this discussion, including various associations primarily interested in the credentialing of professional psychologists, such as the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP), the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPBB), and the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology. This widespread interest and importance of the issue of competency in professional psychology can be especially appreciated given the attention and collaboration afforded to this effort by international groups, including the Canadian Psychological Association and the International Congress on Licensure, Certification, and Credentialing in Professional Psychology.

Each volume in the series is devoted to a specific specialty and provides a definition, description, and development timeline of that specialty, including its essential and characteristic pattern of activities, as well as its distinctive and unique features. Each set of authors, long-term experts and veterans of a given specialty, were asked to describe that specialty along the lines of both functional and foundational competencies. *Functional competencies* are those common practice activities provided at the specialty level of practice that include, for example, the application of its science base, assessment, intervention, consultation, and, where relevant, supervision, management, and teaching. *Foundational competencies* represent core knowledge areas that are integrated and cut across all functional competencies to varying degrees, and dependent upon the specialty, in various ways. These include ethical and legal issues, individual and cultural diversity considerations, interpersonal interactions, and professional identification.

Whereas we realize that each specialty is likely to undergo changes in the future, we wanted to establish a baseline of basic knowledge and principles that comprise a specialty highlighting both its commonalities with other areas of professional psychology and its distinctiveness. We look forward to seeing the dynamics of such changes, as well as the emergence of new specialties in the future.

Couple and family psychology is a broad and general specialty in professional psychology that is founded on an understanding of the human experience in a systems context. For the public, the terms *couples* and *family*

provide a user-friendly translation but underestimate the multifaceted perspectives required of the specialty. Specialists in couple and family psychology have developed unique assessment and treatment methods that impact behavioral and dynamic factors across individuals, couples, families, and larger social systems. In this volume, Drs. Mark Stanton and Robert Welsh provide a comprehensive explanation of the competencies involved in the specialty and illustrate how complexity, reciprocity, interdependence, adaptation, and self-organization are important aspects of the epistemology of a couples and family approach. As the authors underscore for the reader, the specialty of couple and family psychology is not confined to marital or family therapy but encompasses a broad orientation to human behavior that occurs in the context of relationships as well as larger macrosystemic dynamics. The conceptualization and application of systemic concepts to human behavior include a body of knowledge and evidence-based interventions that require specialty training and competence.

The historical background and careful attention the authors provide regarding illustration of defined practice areas, as well as the breadth of formal models of treatment with specific techniques, provide the definitive text for the way in which specialists begin with a strong systemic framework, even when influenced by additional theoretic frameworks.

Arthur M. Nezu
Christine Maguth Nezu

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