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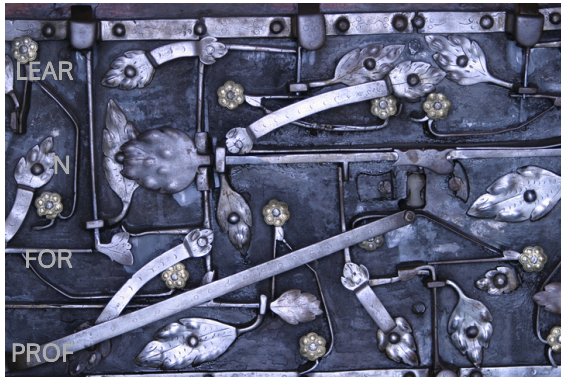
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## Systems Theory / Therapy

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**Systems theory**, also called systems science, is the multidisciplinary study of systems to investigate phenomena from a [holistic](#) approach. Systems, which can be natural or man-made and living or nonliving, are found in many aspects of human life.

People who adhere to systems thinking, or the systemic perspective, believe it is impossible to truly understand a phenomenon by breaking it up into its basic components. They believe, rather, that a global

perspective is necessary for comprehending the entire phenomenon.

### DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS THEORY

Systems theory finds some of its roots within the biological sciences, as some of the founders of its core concepts, including Ludwig Bertalanffy and Humberto Maturana, were biologists. One of the main perspectives of systems theory is viewing an individual or group as its own ecosystem with many moving parts that affect each other. Principles of systems theory have been applied to the field of [psychology](#) to explore and explain behavioral patterns. This approach was spearheaded by several individuals, including [Gregory Bateson](#), [Murray Bowen](#), Anatol Rapoport, W. Ross Ashby, and [Margaret Mead](#).

### CONCEPTS OF SYSTEMS THEORY

A system is characterized by a group of parts that interact to form a coherent whole. Systems have distinct boundary separating them from external elements and distinguishing between inputs, or factors that impact the system, and outputs, or effects and products of the system. Systems may also have feedback loops, which occur when outputs of a system return as inputs, forming a circuit. Changes in one component of a system will affect other components as well as the overall entity. This dynamic makes it possible to predict what might happen when a system experiences a known change.

Systems theory has been applied in the field of psychology, where it is called systems psychology.

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In the late 1900s, Dr. Murray Bowen applied systems thinking to the [family](#) unit and developed family systems theory. This theory views the family as an [emotional](#) unit and assumes individuals cannot be fully understood in isolation. Instead, Bowen theorized, individuals must be viewed as part of their [family of origin](#). Bowen's concept later developed into an effective and widely popular form of treatment, called [family systems therapy](#).

In family systems therapy, familial relationships, patterns, communication, and behaviors are examined within and beyond the therapy session, allowing the therapist and other family members to observe how certain behaviors could be impacting the family. Once these behaviors are recognized and understood, family members can learn new behaviors that have benefits for themselves and the rest of their family.

## SYSTEMS THEORY AND SYSTEMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

The efficacy of family systems therapy has motivated researchers and mental health experts to apply its primary principles to other groups of people. This new approach, called systemic psychotherapy or systemic therapy, helps [groups](#) gain insight into how each member's [role](#) within a group may affect its functionality. It can be applied to organizations, communities, or businesses. Systemic psychotherapy has expanded into a nondirective, multifaceted treatment method currently applied in a variety of circumstances. Systemic psychotherapy has been found effective in addressing issues including:

- [Anxiety](#)
- [Body image issues](#)
- [Eating issues](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Substance abuse](#)
- [Relationship issues](#)

A notable dynamic of systemic psychotherapy is its emphasis that a family or community plays a vital role in its own recovery and psychological health. As a result, families, [couples](#), or members of an organization are directly involved in their own [therapy](#) to resolve an issue, and individual participants can begin transforming their own behaviors to be more [adaptive](#) and productive.

Systemic psychotherapy helps members of a group attain positive relationships, secure

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issues. In some cases, looking at an individual's history with a mental health concern may be crucial to reaching a solution.

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