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Practitioner Profile: An Interview with Dr. Jerry Gale, LMFT

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Researcher Profile

An Interview with
Dr. Jerry Gale, LMFT

Dr. Jerry Gale is an Associate Professor and the Clinical Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Doctoral Program at the University of Georgia. He is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and an approved supervisor of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists. He earned a B.A. from the University of Michigan, a MEd from the University of Arizona, and a Ph.D. from Texas Tech University. Over the course of his career, Dr. Gale has authored three books and over 60 articles and book chapters. He is a co-developer of a relational financial therapy approach that combines financial counseling with family therapy and has extensive training in clinical hypnosis, couples therapy, and family therapy, as well as mindfulness meditation. He is the recipient of the American Family Therapy Academy 2006 Outstanding Research Award. In addition to his work at the University of Georgia, Dr. Gale conducts therapy at Athens Associates for Counseling & Psychotherapy.

Keywords: Gale; marriage and family therapy; financial therapy

Q. Tell us a bit about yourself.

A. I was born in Detroit in the early 1950's. I received a B.A. from the University of Michigan, a MEd from the University of Arizona, and my Ph.D. from Texas Tech University. I met my wife on a blind date in 1980 in Albuquerque and we were married in 1981 (three ceremonies over the course of the year including civil, Jewish, and Buddhist). We adopted our daughter in 2001 from China (we had to wait 20 years for her to be born). I have been at the University of Georgia since 1989 in the department of Child and Family Development, which includes an accredited doctoral program in couple and family therapy. I have written/edited 3 books and over 60 articles and chapters, and have presented both throughout the US and Canada, as well as Mexico, Great Britain, and South Korea. As a faculty supervising clinicians in our

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family therapy program, I occasionally invite faculty from Housing and Consumer Economics to consult on a session. However, when our university offered funding for poverty initiatives, the idea of combining therapy *with* financial advice came together. In 2006, I and three other faculty (including Dr. Joe Goetz), submitted a proposal titled "Creating a Conjoint Financial Counseling and Couple Counseling Treatment model for Couples on the Threshold of Poverty." We received a grant from the Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, Poverty, and the Economy Faculty Research Grants Program for a one year project. This project led to my on-going collaboration with Joe and his students and my involvement with Financial Therapy Association.

Q. Define what you do professionally.

A. I am an associate professor in the Department of Child and Family Development. I am also Clinical Director of the Family Therapy Doctoral Program (and former Director of the MFT Doctoral Program). I am a licensed marriage and family therapist, trained mediator, and approved MFT supervisor. I am also adjunct faculty at the University of Calgary in the Department of Psychiatry and a Taos Institute Fellow. In 2006, I received the American Family Therapy Academy (AFTA) Outstanding Research Award. Courses that I teach include qualitative research methods, family therapy courses, medical family therapy, professional issues and ethics, clinical practicum (in which I supervise the service providers in our clinic as they see clients), an undergraduate course on diversity across the lifespan, and an undergraduate course on meditation. My research interests include discourse analysis of clinical talk, relational financial therapy, and meditation. In the near future, I plan on collecting dyadic data including biometric measures and self-report.

Q. What activities encompass your professional responsibilities?

A. My responsibilities include teaching and research. I am actively involved in the ASPIRE Clinic (www.aspireclinic.org) which provides family therapy, financial counseling, nutritional counseling, home design consultation, and free legal services. These services are offered both separately and are systemically integrated. I teach a supervision class that includes students from all of these disciplines (except law students) and we discuss clients' presenting problems from an eco-systemic perspective. Service providers will work individually, in pairs, or/and as consultants to one another. We have a one-way mirror in which the team can observe the cases, and at times we do reflecting teams where we trade places with the clients and service provider. Some clients use three or more of our professional services.

I also have a part-time private practice as a family therapist and hypnotherapist where I see individuals, couples, and families. Experiences in FTA and research on financial therapy have also informed my private practice. My research projects have included the study of family mediation, clinical discourse, HIV-AIDS and the Black church, meditation as a relational activity, and relational financial therapy. I am a founding member of the Athens

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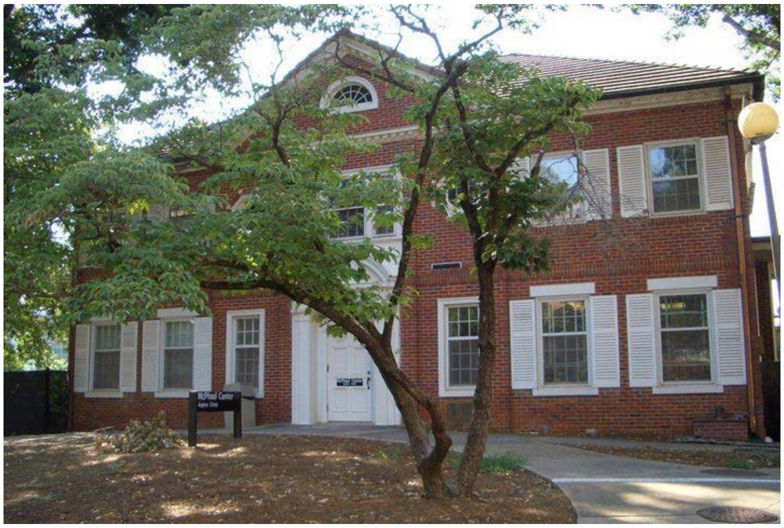
Crisis Response Team and have been involved in crisis response work with evacuees of Hurricane Katrina and survivors of a triple homicide at a local community theater.



The ASPIRE Clinic at the University of Georgia

Q. How long have you been engaged in your professional activity?

A. I was hired in 1989 when I graduated from Texas Tech. Prior to my doctoral program (1986-1989), I was a family therapist in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Tucson, Arizona from 1979-1986.

Q. What led you to your professional calling?

A. In part, I have to say that a speech impediment as a child was a contributing factor. From about the ages 4-9, it was very difficult for family members and others to understand me. I went to speech classes for a number of years. I see this contributing to my interests in qualitative research (how people make meaning), discourse analysis (my dissertation, and again, how meaning is achieved), and a desire to work with people to help them understand one another. I worked in group homes when I was a young adult and, at age 22, I was a foster parent to four teenage boys. In the early 1980's, I received extensive training in Ericksonian hypnosis. When I was working in a group home and for the juvenile courts in Albuquerque in the mid-80's, I received supervision from Braulio Montalvo (a person very involved in the development of structural and strategic therapy), who suggested I seek a doctorate degree from Texas Tech University. While I had planned to return to a full-time clinical practice after receiving a doctorate, I found that I enjoyed teaching and conducting research (my dissertation was published as a book). This led me to apply for a faculty position at the University of Georgia.

Q. How are you paid?

A. I have a 12 month contract with UGA and the State of Georgia and am paid a salary. I also work part-time as a family therapist (paid hourly) and have consulted and presented at various events both nationally and internationally.

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Q. Do you work alone or do you have a team? Please explain.

A. I see clients privately in my clinical practice. I work with Joe Goetz, assistant professor in Personal Financial Planning at UGA. Together we created a model for relational financial therapy and co-chaired the 2011 FTA Conference. I also work with other colleagues and students at the University conducting research, writing papers, and presenting at professional conferences and meetings, as well as at community events.

Q. What theoretical framework guides your work when dealing with clients and/or conducting research (e.g., some practitioners use a solution-focused theoretical framework while others are more eclectic)?

A. While I do not advocate an eclectic framework, I am influenced by many different theories and perspectives. My own professional and personal development has been shaped by mentors from whom I have learned therapy models of psychodrama, structural and strategic family therapies, Ericksonian interventions, collaborative language systems, solution focused therapy, and narrative therapy. I have also maintained a personal meditation practice for over 35 years, which has influenced my thinking of change, relationships, compassion, and neuroplasticity. I have also been involved with medical family therapy and influenced by the biopsychosocialspiritual framework. All of these frameworks and experiences have shaped who I am today. Describing my work today, I would say that my overarching framework is social constructionism (meaning is socially and discursively constructed), with attention to a systemic perspective (how parts relationally and mutually interact), attention to bio-chemical-neurological aspects, and attention to a critical cultural aspect (how cultural discourses influence social norms and values).

Q. What needs to happen so that 10 years from now we can say that financial therapy is a respected field of study?

A. I think in ten years we need: (a) research demonstrating that financial therapy achieves positive outcomes; (b) a clear articulation of different goals that can be achieved from financial therapy (both process and outcomes objectives); (c) a clear trans-theoretical framework and model outlining the process of financial therapy, including approaches that involve both individual practitioners and collaborative practitioners; (d) the development of mid-level theories to explain and predict how different aspects of financial therapy works; (e) a method for credentialing or certifying a level of competence and professional standards of members of FTA; (f) universities offering courses about financial therapy; (g) a voice in shaping policy at the state and national level ; (h) goals for FTA to address social issues and disparities; and (i) goals for FTA to address international and cross-cultural issues.

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Q. What benefits can the Financial Therapy Association provide to others doing work that is similar to your professional activities?

A. A limitation of most therapy approaches is that not all contextual aspects of clients' home and cultural environment are addressed. FTA provides a model for therapists to learn skills and knowledge to address (in a limited way) financial issues and concerns in therapy, and to develop professional relationships with financial planners for collaboration and referral. Likewise, financial planners may encounter individual and relational issues that limit their effectiveness with their clients. FTA provides a model for financial planners to learn skills to address (in a limited way) emotional reactivity, non-useful patterns of behaviors, communication skills and relationship issues, and to develop professional relationships with therapists for collaboration and referral.

Q. If others are interested in finding out more about you personally and professionally, where can they obtain this information?

A. My email is jgale@fcs.uga.edu and my address is Department of Child and Family Development, Dawson Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602. The link to the ASPIRE Clinic is www.aspireclinic.org.

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