

Psychology 460 Counseling & Interviewing

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Family Systems Therapy

Chapter 14

The Family Systems Perspective

- Individuals – are best understood through assessing the interactions within an entire family
- Symptoms – are viewed as an expression of a dysfunction within a family
- Problematic behaviors –
 - Serve a purpose for the family
 - Are a function of the family's inability to operate productively
 - Are symptomatic patterns handed down across generations (i.e., symptom of dysfunctional familial patterns)
- A family – is an interactional unit and a change in one member effects all members

Adlerian Family Therapy

- Adlerians use an educational model to counsel families
- Emphasis is on family atmosphere and family constellation
- Therapists function as collaborators who seek to join the family
- Parent interviews yield hunches about the purposes underlying children's misbehavior

Adlerian Family Therapy Therapy Goals

- Unlock mistaken goals and interactional patterns
- Engage parents in a learning experience and a collaborative assessment
- Emphasis is on the family's motivational patterns
- Main aim is to initiate a reorientation of the family

Multigenerational Family Therapy

- Murray Bowen
 - One of original developers of mainstream family therapy
- Bowenian family systems theory (a theoretical & clinical model that evolved from psychoanalytic principles & practices) is sometimes called multigenerational family therapy
- The application of rational thinking to emotionally saturated systems
 - A well-articulated theory is considered to be essential
- Operates on premise that a predictable pattern of interpersonal relationships connects the functioning of family members across generations
- With the proper knowledge the individual can change
 - Change occurs only with other family members

Multigenerational Family Therapy Therapy Goals

- Change the individuals within the context of the system
 - To end generation-to-generation transmission of problems by resolving emotional attachments
 - To lessen anxiety and relieve symptoms
 - To increase the individual member's level of differentiation

Multigenerational Family Therapy

- **Bowenian Key Concepts**
 - Differentiation of the self
 - Involves both the Psychological Separation of intellect & emotion &
 - Independence of the Self from others
 - Undifferentiated people have difficulty separating themselves from others, fuse with dominant emotional patterns of family
 - A healthy person has a sense of belonging to one's family & a sense of separateness & individuality
 - Differentiated individuals can choose between being guided by their feelings or by their thoughts

Multigenerational Family Therapy

- **Bowenian Key Concepts**
 - Triangulation
 - A process in which triads result in a *two-against-one* experience
 - When under stressful situation, two people recruit a third person into relationship to reduce anxiety & stabilize a couple's relationship
 - Bowen assumed that
 - triangulation could easily happen between family members & the therapist
 - (why he put such emphasis on trainees becoming aware of their own family-of-origin issues)

Multigenerational Family Therapy

- **Techniques**
 - Believe that understanding how a family operates is far more important than using a particular technique
 - Genogram work
 - Asking questions
 - Designed to get clients to think about the role they play in relating with members of their family
 - Questions that emphasize personal choice are very important

Human Validation Process Model

- **Stresses:**
 - Enhancement and validation of self-esteem
 - Family rules
 - Congruence and openness (vs. defensive patterns) in communications
 - Sculpting
 - Nurturing triads
 - Family mapping
 - Family life-fact chronologies

Human Validation Process Model

- **Techniques:**
 - Family sculpting
 - To increase family members' awareness of how they function & how they're viewed by others in family
 - Family Reconstruction
 - Enables clients to explore significant events in three generations of family life
 - Build family reconstructions around person's family maps, family life-fact chronology, wheel of influence
 - Reenact & observe significant life events
 - Can identify roots of old learning
 - Formulate a more realistic picture of parents
 - Interrupt old entrenched patterns in favor of more useful process
 - Parts parties
 - Each person is a system of positive & negative parts to help individuals acknowledge & integrate multiple aspects of self

Human Validation Process Model Therapy Goals

- **Open communications**
 - Individuals are allowed to honestly report their perceptions (being congruent)
- **Enhancement of self-esteem**
 - Family decisions are based on individual needs
- **Encouragement of growth**
 - Differences are acknowledged and seen as opportunities for growth
- **Transform extreme rules into useful and functional rules**
 - Families have many spoken and unspoken rules

Human Validation Process Model Therapy Goals

- **Key Concepts**
 - Families are loaded with rules
 - Most important rules are ones that govern communication
 - When rules are presented without choice, as absolutes, they pose problems
 - In healthy families, rules are few, consistently applied, humanly possible, relevant, and flexible

Human Validation Process Model Therapy Goals

- **Functional communication in families**
 - Each family member has a separate life & a shared one with their family
 - Different relationships allowed & nurtured
 - Change is expected & invited
 - Disagreements seen as opportunity for growth
 - There is freedom, flexibility, open communication & each person can speak for themselves

Human Validation Process Model Therapy Goals

- **Dysfunctional communication in families**
 - Closed communication
 - Poor self-esteem of one or both parents
 - Rigid patterns
 - This type of family:
 - Resists awareness
 - Blunts responsiveness
 - Little support for individuality
 - Strained relationships
 - Incapable of autonomy or genuine intimacy
 - Rules serve the function of masking fears over differences
 - Rules are rigid, many, frequent, & members in family are expected to think, feel, & act in the same way
 - Parents control family by using fear of punishment, guilt, dominance

Human Validation Process Model Therapy Goals

- **Defensive Stances in Coping with Stress**
 - Family members who use placating behaviors
 - Sacrificing themselves in order to please others
 - **People who blame**
 - Sacrifice others to maintain view of themselves
 - **People who become super-reasonable**
 - Strive for complete control over themselves, others, & environment
 - **Irrelevant behavior**
 - Pattern of distractions in the mistaken hope that hurt/pain/stress will diminish

Human Validation Process Model Therapy Goals

- **Family Roles and Family Triads**
 - Roles of each family member influence family interactions
 - Triads may be dysfunctional,
 - But also possible to have parents forming a nurturing triad with each of the children
- **Therapist's Role & Function**
 - To guide family members through change process
 - Therapist is facilitator in therapeutic process, not responsible for making change happen
 - It's essential for therapist to have faith in ability of family members to move toward growth
 - As an official observer, the therapist is able to report on what the family cannot see

Experiential Family Therapy

- A freewheeling, intuitive, sometimes outrageous approach aiming to:
 - Unmask pretense, create new meaning, and liberate family members to be themselves
- Techniques are secondary to the therapeutic relationship
- Pragmatic and atheoretical
- Interventions create turmoil and intensify what is going on here and now in the family

Experiential Family Therapy

- Experiential approach stresses choice, freedom, self-determination, growth
- Family with a therapist who is willing to be real
- Focus on the here & now interaction between family & therapist
- Change must be experienced rather than understood or designed
- Focus on the subjective needs of the individuals in the family
- Techniques are secondary to the therapeutic relationship
- Pragmatic & atheoretical, even anti-theoretical
- A highly intuitive form of therapy

Experiential Family Therapy

- **Therapy Goals**
 - Promote the feeling dimension
 - Facilitate individual autonomy and a sense of belonging in the family
 - Help individuals achieve more intimacy by increasing their awareness and their experiencing
 - Encourage members to be themselves by freely expressing what they are thinking and feeling
 - Support spontaneity, creativity, the ability to play, and the willingness to be “crazy”

Experiential Family Therapy

- **Therapist’s Role & Function**
 - Therapists interested in interaction between themselves & family
 - Their role requires immediacy, a willingness to be oneself, vitality, a degree of transparency, & willingness to use personal reactions during sessions
 - They intensify what is going on in here & now session
 - Focus on impulses & symbols of family
 - Family therapy in three phases:
 - Engagement (therapist assumes all powerful position)
 - Involvement
 - Disentanglement (therapist will gradually become more personal & less involved)
 - Therapy for the therapist is viewed as essential

Experiential Family Therapy

- **Techniques**
 - Therapist is main therapeutic factor
 - Emphasis on being with a family
 - Recommend use of Co-Therapist

Structural Family Therapy

- Focus is on family interactions to understand the structure, or organization of the family
- Symptoms are a by-product of structural failings
- Structural changes must occur in a family before an individual’s symptoms can be reduced
- Techniques are active, directive, and well thought-out; aimed at re-structuring family

Structural Family Therapy Therapy Goals

- Reduce symptoms of dysfunction
- Bring about structural change by:
 - Modifying the family's transactional rules
 - Developing more appropriate boundaries
 - Creation of an effective hierarchical structure

Structural Family Therapy

• KEY CONCEPTS

- Family Structure
 - Invisible set of functional demands or rules that organize the way family members relate to one another
 - To understand family structure, observe family in action especially observe appropriateness of hierarchical structure of family
- Family Systems
 - Spousal, parental, sibling, extended family defined by rules & boundaries
 - Important to note that each family member plays roles in different subgroups

Structural Family Therapy

• KEY CONCEPTS

- It is assumed that faulty family structures have:
 - Boundaries
 - Emotional barriers that protect & enhance the integrity of individuals, subsystems, & families
 - Boundaries that are rigid
 - » Disengagement or
 - Diffuse
 - » Enmeshment
 - Subsystems that have inappropriate tasks and functions

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Structural Family Therapy

• Therapist's Role & Function

- Three (3) Interactive Functions of Therapist:
 - Joining the family in a position of leadership
 - Mapping its underlying structure
 - Intervening in ways designed to transform an ineffective structure

Structural Family Therapy

• Techniques

- Structural family therapy
 - provides a context for viewing a family,
 - offering a clear description of how a healthy family operates,
 - therapy of action, not insight
- Therapist join family to modify its function
 - Joining is a process of building & maintaining a therapeutic alliance

Structural Family Therapy

- **Techniques**
 - **Family Mapping**
 - Mapping structure of family identify boundaries & transactional styles
 - **Enactments**
 - Therapist asks family members to act out some conflict situation that would happen at home
 - Change as a result of enacting & dealing with problems
 - **Reframing**
 - Therapist casts a new light & provides a different interpretation to a problem situation in family

Strategic Family Therapy

- Focus on solving problems in the present
- Presenting problems are accepted as “real” and not a symptom of system dysfunction
- Therapy is brief, process-focused, and solution-oriented
- The therapist designs strategies for change
- Change results when the family follows the therapist’s directions & change transactions

Strategic Family Therapy Therapy Goals

- Resolve presenting problems by focusing on behavioral sequences
- Get people to behave differently
 - Behavior change is main goal
- Prevent repetition of maladaptive sequences & introduce greater number of alternatives
 - Shift the family organization so that the presenting problem is no longer functional
- Move the family toward the appropriate stage of family development
 - Problems often arise during the transition from one developmental stage to the next

Strategic Family Therapy Therapy Goals

- Therapy characterized by a number of stages:
 - **Social stage**
 - Goal to make family feel comfortable
 - **Problem stage**
 - Goal to find out why the family is seeking help
 - **Family-Interaction stage**
 - Therapists allows the family to communicate with one another while noting the patterns of behavior, power struggles, hierarchies, etc.
 - **Goal-setting stage**
 - Specific goals set, both therapist & family members participate in process & contract is established

Strategic Family Therapy Therapy Goals

- Assume that people often develop problems during transition from one developmental stage to the next
- Therapy moves family forward to appropriate stage of life:
 - The courtyard period
 - The early years of marriage
 - Childbirth & rearing of children
 - The middle years of marriage
 - Weaning parents of children
 - Retirement & old age

Strategic Family Therapy

- **Therapist’s Role & Function**
 - A consultant, an expert, a stage director
 - **Directive & authoritarian**
 - But no direct educating; don’t explain themselves
 - **Responsibility for initiating**
 - Change rests with therapist
 - **Therapist’s task is to design interventions aimed at client’s social situation**
 - Key techniques are: paradoxical interventions, joining, reframing, amplifying, pretending, asking about attempted solutions, & enactments
 - **Paradoxical interventions**
 - Place clients in a double bind so that therapeutic change occurs regardless of directive
 - Clients may be asked to exaggerate & even perfect a problematic behavior