

Chapter 15

Family Counseling

Life is interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality; tied in the single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Chapter Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Outline the development of family counseling
- Explain system's focus on family relationships
- Discuss the counseling relationship and goals
- Describe the differences between healthy and unhealthy systems
- Discuss some therapeutic techniques in family counseling
- Outline family counseling approaches to play therapy
- Clarify the effectiveness of family counseling

Defining Historical Event

- In the 1950s a number of researchers who were working independently began to look at schizophrenia as an area where family influences might be connected to the development of psychotic symptoms.
- Those efforts of Bateson's Palo Alto, California, group, Lidz's project at Yale, and Bowen and Wynn at the Institute of Mental Health led to research discoveries of the therapeutic value of seeing family members together

What makes it different?

- Focus on family and its members' interactions and relations
- Involves interventions to alter the entire family system
- Problem diagnosis is circular causality, roles each person plays in maintaining problem

What defines a family?

Webster's Dictionary definitions:

- Group of people who are (1) bound by philosophical, religious, or other convictions, (2) common ancestry, and (3) living under the same roof. And
- Basic biosocial unit in society having as its nucleus two or more adults living together and cooperating in the care and rearing of their own or adopted children

Systems Theory and Families

- System = organized unit made up of interdependent parts
- Whole unit is greater than the sum of its parts
- Change in any part affects all other parts
- Family is system in which each member has a significant influence on all other members

Systems Theory and Families

Families may struggle to find a healthy balance between two extremes:

- Enmeshment = over involvement in each others' lives
- Disengagement = too much detachment from one another

Core Concepts

- Centripetal and Centrifugal.
- Cybernetics.
- Family
- Dyad.
- Marital dyad.
- Nuclear family.

Core Concepts

- Holon
- Family boundaries
- Family homeostasis
- Family projection process
- Family system

Core Concepts

- Family therapist
- Family therapy
- Feedback loop
- Triangulation

Core Concepts

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2008) included some other fundamental concepts:

- **Family rules.** Prescribed rules for the boundaries of permissible behavior. The rules may not be verbalized but are understood by all family members; the rules regulate and help stabilize the family system.
- **Family narratives and assumptions.** Beliefs about the world shared by the family members. Some see the world as a friendly, orderly, predictable place in which they can function competently. Others see the world as threatening, unstable, and unpredictable, therefore, as dangerous. The family story links certain experiences into a sequence that justifies how and why they live as they do.

Core Concepts

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2008) continued:

- **Pseudomutuality and pseudohostility.** The façade of togetherness that masks underlying conflict and the collusion of quarreling that is a superficial tactic for avoiding deeper issues.
- **Mystification.** An effort to obscure the real nature of family conflict by distorting experiences; contradicts one person's perceptions and, after repeated experiences, leads the person to question reality.
- **Scapegoating.** Redirecting conflict by holding one person responsible for whatever goes wrong (pp. 415-417).

Other Fundamental Concepts

- Family rules.
- Family narratives and assumptions.
- Pseudomutuality and pseudohostility. .
- Mystification.
- Scapegoating.

Systems Approach to Family Therapy: Murray Bowen

- Focuses on how family members could maintain a healthy balance between being enmeshed and being disengaged.
- Believes each member should have an individual identity, while maintaining closeness with family.

Murray Bowen

- Spousal Relationship
 - Are they able to differentiate themselves as individuals apart from the couple?
- Differentiation of Self
 - ability to separate thoughts from feelings
 - struggle to develop identity and remain part of the family

Murray Bowen

- Differentiation of Self
 - Highly differentiated = better at handling stress/anxiety
 - Increased differentiation by one family member is likely to lead other members to become more differentiated
- Self-differentiation is principal goal of family therapy

Murray Bowen

- De-triangulation of Self from Family Emotional System
 - Triangulation refers to the practice of two family members bringing a third into their conflict
- Nuclear Family Emotional Process
 1. Emotional distance
 2. Problem transference
 3. Blamers

Murray Bowen

- Family Projection Process
 - how parents pass good and bad things onto their children
- Multigenerational Transmission Process
 - how family passes baggage from one generation to the next

Murray Bowen

- Sibling Position
 - birth order to extreme = dysfunction
 - problems when same birth order marry?
- Emotional Process in Society
 - genogram = generational map of family
 - examples: marriage, birth, death, education, work life, SES, ethnic origins, politics, religion, relationships, etc.

Murray Bowen

- Emotional Systems of the Family
 - Understanding the emotional system and how they work central to the theory
 - Again achieving differentiation primary
- Modeling Differentiation
 - Using “I” statements and taking ownership of his own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors

Structural Family Therapy

- Goal: to alter family structure and empower dysfunctional family to move towards functional family communications
- Functional families characterized by each member's success in finding the healthy balance between belonging to a family and maintaining a separate identity

Structural Family Therapy

- One way to find balance between family and individual identity is to define and clarify the boundaries between the subsystems
- Boundaries range from rigid to diffuse
- Secret is in finding the right boundary balance that is well defined
- Structural family therapy directed toward changing the family organizational structure

Salvador Minuchin

- founder of structural family therapy
- learned from observations of families
- wrote *Families of the Slums* (1967)

Salvador Minuchin

- Transformed Philadelphia Guidance Clinic into a model family therapy center
- With Jay Haley developed the Institute for Family Counseling, designed to train paraprofessionals
- Structural family therapy = a zoom lens that can focus on the entire family or a close-up of any family member

Salvador Minuchin

Boundaries involve

- who participates
- areas of responsibility
- decision making
- privacy

Strategic Family Therapy

- Family members' behavior can only be understood within the family context
- Haley (1973) - therapist initiates what happens in therapy and plan for solving each problem

Strategic Family Therapy

Paradoxical Interventions

- Harness the strong resistance clients have to change and to taking therapist directives
- Therapist uses resistance to bring about change and repair family system

Strategic Family Therapy

- First order changes: symptoms temporarily removed
- Second order changes: symptom and system are repaired

Strategic Family Therapy

- DeShazer and Molnar (1984)
- Team approach of common interventions for solution-focused brief family therapy
 - 40-minute interview with family
 - 10-minute consultation with team
 - 10-minute delivery of intervention
 - closing of session

Strategic Family Therapy

Chasin, Roth, and Bograd (1989)

1. contract to promote safe, voluntary participation
2. participant lists individual strengths and relationship strengths
3. enact three dramatizations
4. states problem(s)
5. therapist recommends next step

Strategic Family Therapy

Haley (1976) describes four stages of a typical first interview:

1. Social Stage: build rapport and assess
2. Problem Stage: get clear statement of concern
3. Interaction Stage; family interacts
4. Goal Setting: define therapy goal in concise, observable, behavioral terms

Communications Approach to Family Therapy

Gottman's Behavioral Interview

- therapist = educator
- accurate communication is key to problem solving
- communicate openly and honestly
- match intent and impact in communication

Gottman's Interview

Stage I - decision to come to therapy.

Stage II - goals for therapy

Stage III - discuss problems

Stage IV - select one issue to discuss

Stage V - analysis of interactions (play-by-play of miscommunications)

Stage VI - negotiate contract

Virginia Satir's Conjoint Family Therapy

- When she was 5, Virginia Satir decided to become a detective to help children figure out parents
- Not sure what was going on, but knew more was happening than met the eye
- After working with thousands of families, she reported she still found a lot of puzzles in families
- She viewed family life as an iceberg (aware of 1/10 of family happenings)
- Thus, 90% hidden

Virginia Satir's Conjoint Family Therapy

- Trained in psychological social work at the University of Chicago
- Worked as teacher, consultant and practitioner in several settings
- One of initial staff at Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, CA
- She synthesized older with newer theories and added original techniques

Nature of People

- Satir had a positive view of human nature
- People are rational and have ability to make choices
- Self-esteem and effective communication are important
- Behavior is directly related to one's family position
- People need a high degree of self-esteem to be a good marriage partner
- Children are third angle of family triangle

Nature of People

- Did not believe in triangulation, only two shifting two-person relationships
- Mature people are fully in charge of feelings
- Mature people are in touch with feelings, communicate clearly and effectively, and accept differences.

Theory of Counseling

Four components in family situation are subject to change and correction:

- The members' feelings of self-worth
- The family's communication abilities
- The system
- The rules of the family

Theory of Counseling

- Rules that govern emotional interchanges
- Freedom to comment
- Freedom to express what one is seeing or hearing
- Freedom to agree or disapprove
- Freedom to ask questions

Theory of Counseling

- Family unit becomes dysfunctional when members do not understand the rules
- Analyzing interactions and communications is important for change
- Emphasis is on development of trust in relationship

Theory of Counseling

Communication = most important factor, the main determinant of the kinds of relationships people have with one another and of how people adjust to their environment, as well as being the tie that binds the family together

Theory of Counseling

- Fear of rejection common source of anxiety
- Because people fear rejection, they resort to one response pattern or a combination of patterns
- These universal roles are described as placater, blamer, computer, distracter and leveler

Theory of Counseling

Communication Styles

- **placater** - peace at any price, try to please others or apologize
- **blamer** – faultfinders, compensate for lonely feelings by bossing others around
- **computer** - calm and correct, with no feelings, pretend no conflict exists

Theory of Counseling

Communication Styles

- **distracter** - make irrelevant statements, evade issues, withdraw from situations
- **leveler** - communicate in a straightforward way, honest thoughts, verbal and nonverbal communication is congruent

Satir's Characteristics of Nurturing Families

- People are listened to and listen to others
- Members feel free to tell one another how they think/feel
- Human life and feeling are most important
- Parents are leader, not bosses
- People look at one another, not through each other

Counseling Method

- Involves entire family and is based on communication, interaction, and general information
- Goal = to establish proper environment to assist members in clarifying what they want or hope for self and family

Counseling Method

- no formula for therapy
- “people making factory”
- respect and love paramount

Keys to Satir's System

1. Increase self-esteem of all family members
2. Help family members better understand each other
3. Use experiential learning techniques

Satir's Technique

1. Describe difficult situation
2. Sit in circle to simulate decision making
3. Family participates in family sculpture

Satir's Technique (Cont.)

4. Each family members takes some rope and ties it to each others waists
5. Role play
6. Videotapes and discussion help family members understand reactions/responses

Satir's Technique (Cont.)

7. Games

- Simulated Family Game
 - family members simulate each other's behavior
- Systems Game
 - open and closed systems
 - learning and insight
 - ex. rescue or coalition game

Satir's Technique (Cont.)

Games

- Communication Game
 - establish communication skills
 - counselor plays important role
 - ex. two members sit back-to-back while they talk

Counselor's Role

- counselor is a facilitator who gives total commitment and attention to process as well as interactions
- careful/sensitive attention

Play Therapy with Families

- Dynamic Family Therapy
 - Engages family members in creative activity by using natural play
- Filial Therapy
 - Goals are to reduce problem behaviors, help parent gain skills and improve parent-child relationship

Play Therapy with Families

- Strategic Family Play Therapy
 - Integrated theory based on information processing and the theory of signs
 - Uses make-believe play
- Theraplay
 - Intensive, short-term approach in which parent are involved as observers and then as co-therapists