

EDPY 442: Introduction to Counselling

December 4, 2007
Marriage & Family
Counselling

The many facets of “Marriage” and “Family” Counselling

- What constitutes and defines “marriage” and “family” is defined by
 - individual perspectives and experience
 - one’s culture, faith, ideals, and expectations
 - society and cultural background
 - past and present social definitions (e.g., homosexual unions, common law, bi-racial unions etc.)

The Evolution of Family Therapy

- Family therapy has a short history but a long past. For many years therapists resisted the idea of seeing a patient’s relatives in order to safeguard the patient-therapist relationship. Freudians excluded the family to uncover the unconscious. Rogerians kept relatives away to provide unconditional positive regard. Hospital psychiatrists kept families away because they were seen as potentially disruptive to the patient and hospital

Evolution of Family Therapy Cont'd

- Several developments led to the rise of family therapy:
 - 1) WWII and high increase in divorce rates
 - 2) Changing role of women (more women sought out employment outside of the home, women's movement in the 60s etc)
 - 3) Expanded life span – people living longer and transitioning through different stages in life
 - 4) Hospital psychiatrists noticed that often when patients improved, someone else in the family got worse (change in one person changes the system)

Pioneers of Family Counselling

- Gregory Bateson
- Murray Bowen - *Systems Family Therapy*
- Salvador Minuchin- *Structural Family Therapy*
- Jay Haley – *Strategic Family Therapy*

Gregory Bateson and Team in Palo Alto California

- A very important breakthrough in family therapy happened in the 1950's Bateson and his team of scientists/practitioners Jay Haley, Don Jackson, and John Weakland, studying meta-communication patterns. For example, every message has a stated content, as, "Wash your hands it is time for dinner"; but in addition, it also carries how it is to be taken. In this case the second message is that the speaker is in charge.
- The group's interest turned to developing a communication theory that might explain the origin and nature of schizophrenic behavior- they assumed that psychotic behavior might make sense in the context of *pathologic family communication* (i.e., double binds)

Strategic Family Therapy- Jay Haley

- Strategic therapy grew out of the communications theory
- Strategic Family Therapy- focuses on changing behavior rather than insight
- Mainly concerned with power struggles and often "prescribed the symptom". In addition, there is a focus on rules that follow a hierarchy

Systems Family Therapy- Murray Bowen

- To Bowen, all families lie on a continuum, optimal development occurs when the members are differentiated, anxiety is low, and parents are in good emotional contact with their families of origin.
- Family of origin approach, he conceptualized our understanding of human function and dysfunction within the context of the family across generations, which had a big impact on how we view pathology and health

Systems Family Therapy- Basic Theoretical Tenets

- Families develop unwritten codes, rules and patterns that shape the system's worldviews.
- Worldviews are woven into each relationship and thus passed on across generations
- Purpose is to help clients deconstruct and become aware of their unwritten codes, rules, and patterns. Also, to guide family members to become their "true selves" rather than influenced by the emotional patterns of the family
- **Differentiation**- is the ability to separate feeling and thinking. Undifferentiated people can not do this. Their intellects are flooded with feelings, they can't think rationally, and they can't separate their own from other people's feelings
- **Triangulation**- enters the family dynamic when two family members experience an uncomfortable, chronic, but unsustainable level of anxiety and involve a third person to decrease the anxiety by spreading it through three relationships and diluting the initial level of anxiety

Goals of Systemic Family Therapy

- To 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 individual symptoms and family pathology
- To increase individual member's level of differentiation to one that is balanced

Structural Family Therapy

- Focuses on structure, subsystems (spousal, parental, sibling), and boundaries
- Every family has a structure
- A person's problems is best understood as being rooted in family transaction patterns
 - In structural family therapy- roles, rules and power are also looked at

Process of Change:

- Emphasize action over insight
- Overall structure is altered and reorganized
- Dated and outgrown rules are replaced with those more to family's current realities

Things to be Mindful of in Family Therapy

- There are a number of individuals in the room to attend to... and some more demanding of your attention than others
- There are subsystems in play during the session
- Alliances may be formed within the family
- Joining- Who to join? What will be most beneficial?
- Establishing clear boundaries may be difficult
- Ages of children and when or when they should not be present?

Marriage/Couples Counselling

After 20 years of researching marriages, John Gottman found 6 predictors of divorce:

- 1) Harsh Start-ups: you find yourself beginning a discussion with your spouse using criticism, sarcasm, or harsh words
- 2) The Four Horsemen: Criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling (withdrawal) invade communication
- 3) Flooding: Your spouse's negativity is so overwhelming that it leaves you shell-shocked. You disengage emotionally from the relationship

Six Predictors of Divorce Cont'd

- 4) Body Language: Your heart rate increases, your blood pressure mounts, and your ability to process information is reduced. This makes it harder to pay attention to what your partner is saying
- 5) Failed Repair Attempts: Efforts made by either partner to de-escalate the tensions during a touching discussion fail to work
- 6) Bad Memories: Couples who are "stuck" in a negative view of their spouse and marriage often rewrite their past- for the worse and cannot think of the good times in their marriage

Couples Therapy- Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT)

- Founders/Developers – Les Greenberg and Sue Johnson
- Main Concepts:
 - Based on emotional uncoverings and integration as intimate attachment theory
 - EFT therapists work to validate the partners' emotions and attachment needs and to try to stir the two partners' own ability to heal themselves and their relationship
 - Help partners engage in their emotions in the moment

Goals in EFT Therapy

- 1) To expand and re-organize key emotional responses—the music of the attachment dance
- 2) To create a shift in partner's interactional positions and initiate new cycles of interaction.
- 3) To foster the creation of a secure bond between partners
