

Family Systems Therapy

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PSY 202

Family Systems Therapy

THEORY

- First developed by Alfred Adler in Vienna in the 1920's
- Took root in America in the 40's – 60's
- Many approaches to therapy (adlerian, multigenerational, structural, experiential)
- States that individuals are best understood within the context of relationships and through assessing the various interactions within an entire family

Family Systems Therapy

- Symptoms are viewed as an expression of a dysfunction within a family and are often passed across generations
- Therefore, the clients problematic behavior may serve a function or purpose for the family
- May be a function of the family's inability to operate productively

Family Systems Therapy

- Can be a symptom of dysfunctional patterns handed down across generations
- Change by the client reverberates throughout the other parts of the family
- Because a family is an interactional unit, it is best to treat the whole family
- Best to assess an individual by observing the interactions with and mutual influences of other family members

Family Systems Therapy

- Therapists believe that to focus on the internal dynamics of an individual without adequately considering interpersonal dynamics as well yields an incomplete picture
- The family provides a primary context for understanding how individuals function in relationship to others outside the family

Family Systems Therapy

- Parents and children become locked in repetitive and negative interactions
- Thought the problems of one family are common to all others in the community

Family Systems Therapy

KEY CONCEPTS:

FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

- Defined as the climate of relationships that exist between people
- Each member exerts an influence on every other member
- A 'climate' or 'atmosphere' develops that is said to characterize how the family relates to one another

Family Systems Therapy

FAMILY CONSTELLATION

- Constellation consists of parents, children, and extended family
- Birth order
- Constellation can give therapist a written description of how a person finds a place within the system
- Therapists can ask parents to describe each child
- Genogram (3 generational family map)

Family Systems Therapy

MISTAKEN GOALS

- Goals of children's misbehavior
- Attention getting, power struggle, revenge
- Therapist looks at parents actions and reactions to these behaviors

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GOALS OF THERAPY

- Establish and support parents as effective leaders of the family
- Replace automatic, often unconscious, negative interactions with a conscious understanding of the family process
- Encourage functional family interaction

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THERAPISTS ROLE AND FUNCTION

- Therapists are collaborators who work to join the family from a position of mutual respect
- Therapists investigate the family constellation, the motivations behind problematic interactions, the family process throughout the typical day

Family Systems Therapy

- Develop interventions and recommendations
- Correct faulty goals; look at the motivation behind the goals
- Provide parents with parenting skills

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TECHNIQUES

- Problem description and goal identification
- Typical day: ask the family describe a typical day; this assesses family atmosphere and interaction
- Parent interviews: yield tentative hypotheses regarding children's misbehavior
- Child interviews: find out what goals of misbehavior are
- Encouragement: used with both parents and children

Family Systems Therapy

STRENGTHS

- Comprehensive process in assisting families
- Looks at many aspects of the family (i.e., atmosphere, constellation, goals)
- Respect is given to both children and adults
- Interventions are suggested to children and adults

Family Systems Therapy

WEAKNESSES

- How much insight can children provide
- Parents feigning or embellishing
- Provides much insight into behavior, interactions, and motivation, but not many explicit interventions