



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Chapter 1

David Capuzzi
Mark D. Stauffer
Nicholaus Erber



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Introduction

- Alfred Adler began working with families over 100 years ago, but most emphasis in counseling was focused on individuals.
- Most individual theories were focused on Western ideals and a linear point of view.
- Most of these theories were based on values associated with individualism, autonomy, independence, and free choice and, for the most part, were well received in Western cultures
- Systems theory began to challenge these ideas in the 1950s and 1960s.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Introduction

- One of the greatest challenges, if not transformations, a family therapist must make is to think systemically when observing, assessing, conceptualizing, and intervening within a family system.
- To undergo this transformation is to cultivate a dynamic systemic view rather than a linear cause and effect view that is predominant in Western culture.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Introduction

- When thinking and working systemically, the counselor understands that the client “unit” is not just the individual, but can be a couples dyad, subgroup of a family, an entire family, or even multigenerational families.
- An even more nuanced understanding is that a family counselor works with the family system even when there is only one individual in the therapy room.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Introduction

- Unlike Western cultures, in collectivist cultures, interdependence, family connectedness, hierarchies of relationships, and even ancestral perspectives guide and inform the daily experiences of those living in such cultures.
- Adept counselors and therapists in Western cultures have realized that individuals cannot be viewed in isolation from the people and systems (family, neighborhood, school, work, social-recreational, church, etc.).



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Functional and Dysfunctional Families

According to James Bitter:

- A *functional* family is a family in which family processes are successful in meeting the normal developmental demands as well the abnormal and unexpected stressors experienced by most families.
- He defined a *dysfunctional* family as one in which there has been a breakdown in coping or in which the family continues to engage in patterns that are no longer successful.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Functional and Dysfunctional Families

Other researchers and writers discuss functional families in terms of characteristics:

- Gladding discussed functional dimensions such as:
 - Commitment to the family and its individuals.
 - Appreciation for each other.
 - Willingness to spend time together.
 - Effective communication patterns.
 - A high degree of religious/spiritual orientation.
 - Ability to deal with a crisis in a positive manner.
 - Encouragement of individuals.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Functional and Dysfunctional Families

Becvar and Becvar discussed family functionality in terms of process dimensions, and healthy families are those in which there is:

- A focus of authority.
- A set of rules that is established.
- An ample amount of nurturing.
- Effective and clear child-rearing.
- Couples maintenance expectations.
- A set of goals for the family.
- Flexibility and adaptability for the family to cope with developmental issues as well as unexpected crises.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Functional and Dysfunctional Families

- A solid body of research suggests that family system dysfunction affects individual mental health and psychopathology and vice versa.
- Family system dysfunction leads to internalizing and externalizing of family symptoms.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Variations in Family Systems

- The definition of what constitutes a family and a family system is ever changing and varies from culture to culture (e.g., nuclear, network of kin, anyone who was psychologically connected, and even ancestors).
- The definition of family has also changed over time, and today's definition is much different from that of 60 years ago.
- The authors of this chapter define family as including “those who are connected via birth, psychological, economic, or historical ties.”



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Variations in Family Systems 1950s

- The nuclear family (husband, wife, kids).
- The divorced family
- The step-family



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Variations in Family Systems Today

- The single-parent family.
- The child free family.
- The gay/lesbian family.
- The living-apart-together family.
- The dual-career family.
- The aging family.
- The multigenerational family.
- The military family.
- The transgender family.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

The Family Life Cycle

- Family life cycle theory describes the developmental stages a family usually experiences as time passes.
- One of the dilemmas inherent in describing the life cycle of a family is the fact that most depictions of the life cycle of a family are stage theories and are linear in nature, and those practicing couples, marriage, and family counseling think systemically and interactively.
- Nevertheless, this model can outline the normal developmental stages of the family.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

The Family Life Cycle

- The single, unattached, young adult.
- The new couple.
- Families with very young children.
- Families with school-aged children.
- Families with adolescent children.
- Families with children who are launching.
- Families in retirement and later life.



Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

Additional Factors Affecting the Life Cycle of a Family

- The birth of a child with a disability.
- The onset of a chronic or terminal illness.
- The variations of different cultural groups.