



# Behavioral and Cognitive- Behavioral Theories: Approaches and Applications

## Chapter 11

Marvarene Oliver

Yvonne Castillo



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Introduction

- Arising initially from behaviorism and later adding information from cognitive psychology and systems thinking, specific frameworks within the broad domain of cognitive-behavioral couple and family therapy (CBC/FT) vary, sometimes significantly.
- Cognitive-behavioral theorists, scholars and clinicians give greater or lesser emphasis to variables addressed in theory and practice, depending in part on where they fall on a continuum between a more behavioral and a more cognitive orientation.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Introduction

- While most behavioral and cognitive-behavioral approaches are not strictly considered systemic approaches to working with families, they do share with systems theory an emphasis on rules and communication processes as well as attention to the reciprocal impact of each family member's behaviors and attitudes on others.
- However, all cognitive-behavioral approaches share an emphasis on research and clearly outlined goals, ongoing assessment, and treatment interventions.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Introduction

- There have been more studies demonstrating the efficacy of CBC/FT approaches than any other model.
- It is among the most used approaches to couple and family therapy.
- Behavioral and cognitive-behavioral approaches have their origins in science; that is, the scientific method was critical in the development of the behavioral approach to working with problems, and remains so today.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## First Wave Approaches

- During the early days of behavioral couple and family therapy (BC/FT), which were closely linked to traditional stimulus-response learning theory, there was no consideration of internal events such as thoughts or emotions, as those could not be readily observed, nor was there much attention given to interpersonal processes.
- A major premise underlying this approach is that all behavior is learned and that people, including families, act according to how they have been reinforced or conditioned.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## First-Wave Approaches

- Behavior in the family or couple is maintained by consequences, also called contingencies.
- Unless new behaviors result in consequences that are more desired, they will not be maintained.
- In addition, the focus is on maladaptive current behaviors as the target of change. From a traditional behavioral perspective, it is not necessary to look for underlying causes; behavior that is not desirable can be extinguished and replaced by more desirable behavior.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## First-Wave Approaches

- Finally, many behavioral family therapists believe not everyone in the family has to be treated for change to occur.
- Today, BC/FT relies on the same theoretical foundation as individual behavior therapy in that it utilizes principles of classical and operant conditioning.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## First-Wave Approaches

Noted First-Wave Practitioners or Researchers

- Richard Stuart
- Robert Liberman
- Gerald Patterson
- John Gottman
- Neil Jacobson



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Traditional Behavioral Couple Therapy

Traditional behavioral couple therapy (TBCT) was built on two major precepts:

- (1) That marital dissatisfaction arises when the ratio of rewards to costs is too low, which means there are inadequate behavior-maintaining contingencies, and
- (2) That partners have deficits in interpersonal skills.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Traditional Behavioral Couple Therapy

- Therapy from this perspective follows a predictable format, with problem behaviors operationally defined and targeted.
- Behavioral interventions such as contingency management and behavioral exchange are used to decrease negative behaviors and increase positive ones, and skill training in communication and problem solving is provided.
- Overall, the tone is didactic, as the therapeutic process involves much teaching and training.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Traditional Behavioral Couple Therapy

### Critiques of TBCT

- As early as the late 1970s, critics noted that BCT of that era did not take into account context.
- Research indicated, for example, that longer-term gains achieved during treatment were not sustained by a large portion of couples.
- Traditional behavioral couple therapy did not include a mechanism for dealing with perpetual problems, which may account for nearly 70% of what couples regularly argue about.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Second-Wave Approaches

- The emphasis on mediational cognitive variables constituted the second wave in behavioral therapy.
- Some behaviorists began to argue that the stimulus-response cycle as conceived in traditional behavioral psychology was not automatic, but rather was mediated by cognitions.
- Changing the way family members act as well as their dysfunctional attitudes or beliefs is central to second-wave approaches.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Second-Wave Approaches

While goals will vary according to presenting problems and the counselor's particular frame of reference, there are a number of facets that characterize second-wave approaches.

1. Facilitating the family's ability to see patterns of behavior and understand the interaction among cognitions, emotions, and behavior.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Second Wave Approaches

2. Diminishing problem behaviors or interactions and increasing positive ones.
3. Improving each couple's or family member's functioning in a way that improves the overall relationship.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy

- Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT) has its roots in behavioral couple therapy (BCT), cognitive therapy, and basic research in cognitive psychology.
- CBCT arose from concerns that TBCT was clinically limited because of its lack of attention to internal processes.
- Cognitive theory was developing as early as the 1960s, and its usefulness in clinical settings was becoming evident in the 1980s.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy

- During the 1980s, couple therapists began to attend to cognitive processes such as “attributions, expectancies, assumptions, standards, and schemas with most attention paid to the ways in which such information processing was focally important to intimate relationships.”
- Cognitive-behavioral couple therapy builds on skills-based interventions of BCT that target couple communication and behavior exchange by directing partners’ attention to explanations they construct for each other’s behavior and to expectations and standards they hold for their own relationship and for relationships in general.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy

### Cognitive Restructuring

- Cognitive restructuring involves core cognitive therapy methods such as identification and modification of partners' automatic thoughts and the use of Socratic questioning to determine evidence for partner attributions about each other and about relationships.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy

### Couple and Family Schemas

- Therapists working with couples and families who focus on schemas pay attention to fundamental central belief structures (schemas), particularly as they relate to beliefs about areas such as intimate relationships, parenting, children, and self-worth.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Enhanced Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy

- Enhanced cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (ECBCT) is the third and most fully developed emphasis in CBCT.
- Epstein and Baucom expanded their initial cognitive-behavioral approach to include attention to broader patterns and core themes as well as attention to discrete behaviors.
- They noted the importance of individual characteristics and the ways in which individual characteristics impact couple relationships.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Enhanced Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy

- These authors also recognize the role environmental stressors play in couple relationships.
- Finally, they give more emphasis to the role of emotion in couple relationships, including the reciprocal impact of emotion on wants, needs, and motives.
- This approach includes substantial emphasis on increasing positive experiences and emotions rather than focusing primarily on decreasing negatives, and includes consideration of positive experiences beyond the couple relationship itself.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Third-Wave Approaches

- In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on the use of acceptance and mindfulness-based approaches within CBCT. Gurman (2013) categorized these as the third wave of behavioral therapy.
- Among those included by Gurman are acceptance and commitment therapy, behavioral activation therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, functional analytic therapy, and integrative behavioral couple therapy.
- Each of these approaches addresses criticisms that previous behavioral approaches are reductionistic and mechanistic.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy

- Integrative behavioral couple therapy (IBCT) is both contextually based and behavioral and is arguably the most visible BCT approach.
- IBCT differs significantly from CBCT's continued emphasis on changing maladaptive behaviors, particularly thoughts, and focuses more attention on functional analysis of behavior.
- There are techniques used in IBCT that are used in other approaches as well; however, the rationale for their use may be different.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

- ACT has been suggested for couples to address the reality that there are couples for whom change-oriented approaches do not work, in part because partners are not motivated or willing to enter into the therapeutic process.
- ACT targets avoidance and efforts to control aversive experiences, excessive response to cognitive content, and the inability to make and keep commitments to change.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

- A goal is for partners to become more able and willing to approach situations that have been avoided in the past and act in ways that improve relationship satisfaction and intimacy.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Functioning Family Therapy (FFT)

- FFT was developed specifically for the purpose of working with families dealing with severe adolescent behavioral problems, and with the intent of providing a clinically useful model grounded in research.
- Beginning to establish change in subjective perceptions about other family members, as well as building alliance, are essential tasks of the first phase of treatment (engagement/motivation phase) and continue until completion of therapy.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Functioning Family Therapy (FFT)

- The second stage of treatment is the behavior change phase. The primary goal of this phase is changing specific behavioral skills of family members, though from a therapeutic rather than teaching perspective and within a relational context. Immediate concerns are addressed initially, followed by bigger issues involving risk and protective factors.
- The third and final phase of treatment is designed to generalize, maintain, and support family change. It includes strategies for generalizing skills, maintaining change, and incorporating community and family resources into treatment.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Major Constructs

- Contingency Contracting
- Cognitive Distortions
- Reinforcement and Punishment
- Experiential Avoidance
- Automatic Thoughts
- Underlying Assumptions
- Schemas



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Techniques

- Education about the model
- Socratic questioning
- Communications training
- Problem solving training
- Behavioral exchange agreements
- Behavioral reversal
- Modification of cognitions
- Identification of core beliefs and schemas



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Limitations

- One limitation is that most cognitive-behavioral approaches to couple and family therapy can be conducted from a reductionistic or mechanistic stance, particularly by those who are inexperienced in working with couples and families.
- With notable exceptions, such as in the case of functional family therapy, there is limited research about outcomes of BC/FT and CBC/FT approaches with couples and families that specifically address cultural, ethnic, or other diversity concerns.



# Variations in Family Systems and Family Life Cycles

## Limitations

- The emphasis on skills training by some CBC/FT practitioners, whether or not there is evidence that the skill exists and is just not being used, can ignore more salient issues that underlie whatever communication problems may exist.
- Focusing on skill deficits, expectations, or attributions explicitly may cause some couples to become more aware of characteristics that were previously unknown or overlooked.
- Counselors who focus on behavior change not only may fail to be helpful but may be harmful.