

RP 2: Structural Family Therapy

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Assessment & Diagnosis Historical Application (Ages 12-14)

“Structural Family Therapy is defined as a type of psychotherapy that focuses on family relationships and interactions. The goal of this therapy is to help families identify and change negative patterns of behavior. It is also known as SFT, which is an acronym for Structural Family Therapy” (Himani, 2022). In this paper I will illustrate how structural family therapy is used using my real life experiences as an example. My name is Alfeny Reyes. I am 24 years old. I got married in November 2017 and have three beautiful children under 5. I will be going back to a time of my life where I was going through many obstacles in life. Some of these obstacles affect who I am today. The specific age I will be diving into is from 12 to 14 years old.

Between the ages of 12 and 14 years of age my life changed drastically. It was new years eve, and my mom and I went to spend some time with my dad and my grandmother. My grandmother was working as usual; she never took the day off. She would always allow men to drink at her Deli store because she made more money that way. While in the store, my grandmother went to a back room, my dad was in the bathroom and my mom was getting some things from the store to take home. That is when it happened that I got molested by a drunk man in my grandmother's Deli store.

After that happened I thought to myself I should have never worn those leggings because maybe he would have not touched me. I felt dirty and confused about what had just happened. I was angry and disappointed in myself for not doing anything back to him. I should have slapped him or called the cops on him. Although my mother slapped him I think she should have done more. I remember holding my tears and anger back so that my father could not find out what that man did to me. My mom was also abused she was raped so I thought she would understand and should have known to do more than what she did. I was young and I didn't know what to do. I just knew I could not tell my father. I regret not telling him because six months later he died over a drug overdose.

After my father passed away I grew angrier about what happened to me. I was broken and blamed myself for his death because I thought if I would have told him about that night he would have been arrested and would not have died. After his death, I became anxious and severely depressed. To cope with all of the pain I began to smoke marijuana and drink excessive amounts of alcohol. It was very hard for me to be vulnerable in front of others. My family and I did not really talk about our feelings so I just kept everything to myself. My dad was the only one who asked me how I was doing and really knew me for who I was. At this point of my life I was suicidal. I kept replaying the last conversation I had with my father. We argued because I had gotten a lip piercing without permission and he slapped me on the face.

When my father slapped my face I became angry because he never hit me before. Unlike my mom who used to hit me often. It even went as far as both of us getting into a physical fight so I knew I could not count on her for anything. I was a daddy's girl so him slapping me made me feel betrayed and alone like I had no one on my side. I held on to that for two years. My suicidal thoughts began to get stronger. I began to look for attention in guys at school and whenever I got rejected I questioned my worth. I also became afraid that my mom would die and leave me all alone.

I used to go to Riverbank State Park and looked down to the river thinking to myself when I would be strong enough to jump. It started every Friday to almost everyday until I found myself going everyday to the park trying to jump. I would text my best friends long paragraphs stating that I loved them and that I would miss them. I even went as far as writing letters to leave behinds for my mom, grandma, and siblings. When I thought about my father being dead and my mom not giving me the attention I wanted, but she gave it to her boyfriend instead, I became anxious. I would message my cousins and friends to get drinks with them and smoke with them. I would smoke in the mornings so I was always late for school, I would also smoke during lunch time since we were able to go outside for lunch and I would smoke after school. By the time I got home I ate a big meal and fell asleep. I also did no homework and I did not want to give myself any chance to think.

I began to think about drinking pills and would start taking a couple of extra medications pills like iron or any pills my mom would leave on the counter just hoping it would kill me. I thought to myself no one would care or notice if I was gone. Thank God I had a best friend who was there for me and made me feel loved. I also thank God that my mom ended up giving her life to Christ and led me to him. I was suicidal, I depended on alcohol and marijuana, and I had anger management issues. I will be focusing on treating all of these symptoms using structural family therapy.

Treatment 1

I diagnosed myself at 13 years old with major depressive disorder. Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. This affects the way you think, feel, and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. Some of the symptoms of major depressive disorder include feelings of sadness, hopelessness, emptiness, or a high level of irritability, increased or decreased need for sleep, increased or decreased appetite with or without weight changes, decreased energy, less interest in activities and interests, feeling or appearing sped up or slowed down, poor concentration and decision-making skills, feeling worthless and guilty with low self-esteem, thinking about death, dying, and suicide (*Depression (major depressive disorder)* 2018). Structural Family Therapy can be helpful in treating depression by changing the way family members interact with each other in order to promote healthy functioning within the family unit. For example, I can teach Alfeny, her mom, and siblings to “identify negative patterns of interaction, and find more constructive ways to communicate and interact with each other” (Himani, 2022).

In this treatment plan I will focus on reframing which involves changing the way you see a problem or situation. It is important to try to change the way Alfeny views herself and what happened to her as well as her relationship with her mom. “Role playing will also be used in this treatment plan. Role playing is defined as a technique used to help clients explore different ways of behaving in a particular situation. It can be used to help clients practice new skills such as assertiveness or problem-solving. It is also believed that this type of therapy can help to increase empathy and understanding” (Himani, 2022). The goal in using this technique is to get each family member to understand how they all feel and are affected by the family’s dysfunction. I would have Alfeny role play about what she would say to her dad if he was still alive. This can be done by using an empty chair as well and having her say things to her dad as if he was sitting there.

Treatment 2

Overall my goal is for Alfeny to learn that what happened to her is not her fault and her fathers death was not her fault. My goal is also to get Alfeny to understand her feelings and learn to express those feelings by communicating effectively with her family. Alfeny has been avoiding most of her negative feelings so letting them out will help start her healing process. Her mom and siblings will be provided with some tools to better communicate. In my second treatment plan I will focus on Transgenerational Transmission which involves looking at how patterns of behavior are passed down from one generation to the next. This will be helpful because it will show how every family member has dealt with their issues in the past and how they might still be dealing with them in the present.

Clients will see repeated patterns and behaviors passed down from generations to generations. Alfeny's mom will see similarities from her mother's behavior. Alfeny and her siblings will see how they have similar patterns and behaviors as their mom and father. For example there is a family pattern of self blame, guilt, and depression. Alfeny and her mom both were abused and blamed themselves for what happened to them. I wonder if Alfeny's grandmother or grandfather were abused or if something happened to them that caused them to blame themselves. I would ask if depression runs in the family.

Assessment & Diagnosis Current Application (24 Years Old)

In my present life I am no longer depressed. However, I still battle with some moderate anxiety and binge eating. I will be explaining the treatment plans that I will use to treat anxiety and binge eating. Anxiety is defined as an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure *Anxiety* (2022). Binge Eating disorder is defined as the consumption of large quantities of food in a short period of time, typically as part of an eating disorder. The more anxious I get, the more I want to binge on food. I tried to distract myself from the anxiety, but now I have been working on facing it and not avoiding it. I will demonstrate how I as the therapist will use structural therapy to treat anxiety and binge eating disorder.

Although this is a current present day disorder, it began when Alfeny was a child. I will use structural therapy to treat Anxiety and binge eating disorder by re-assigning household roles and tasks. Alfeny is married and currently has three kids under 5; a 4 year old, 1 year old, and 4 month old. She is also a full time grad student and she is going to start an internship soon. Alfeny's husband works full

time and is currently taking a two day cyber security course. They have help two days a week from Alfeny's mom but the rest of the week have to figure it out on their own.

Treatment 1

Stress can lead to anxiety which can also lead to bingeing. One way I can help treat this is by getting Alfeny and her husband to talk about their roles in the house and what can be changed or accommodated in order to ease some stress for the both of them. For example, maybe Alfeny can watch the kids the day she is home so that her husband can study and attend class. Her husband could switch the days of the week he works so that he can watch the kids while Alfeny is off. This will also help the kids enough time to spend with each parent individually and together.

Another way that assigning new roles to each family member can help treat anxiety and binge eating is because having a clear plan and schedule of the roles will help Alfeny plan out her meals. If both her and her husband are meal prepping there would be food ready for when the anxiety arises. That will limit the binge eating because it would help her eat a more balanced meal. They will both look at the schedule and be able to see who's turn it is to watch the kids, and do some house chores. For example the weekends Alfeny will be the only one to watch the kids while her husband might watch them some of the days of the week and they might alternate the timing.

Treatment 2

Structural therapy can help you understand and manage anxiety in a healthy way. The second treatment will include learning new coping skills to handle anxiety. I would do this by changing the places Alfeny and her husband are sitting at. This way both couples can be closer together. The goal of that is to get couples to prioritize each other so that they can get better at communicating. I give them homework which would include going on a date once or twice a month so that they can get away from some of the daily stress. By doing this it will ease the families anxiety which will benefit not only the couples, but the kids.

This will also be a good foundation for their kids to follow when they are older in their own families. The less anxious Alfeny and her husband are the more calm they will be with their kids and they will be able to make wiser decisions. I can also make a comment that states It seems to me that both of you have been very busy and do not prioritize one another. You choose each other for a reason. I suggest you both go on a date without the kids and see if you can remember that reason. The more time they make for one another not only will it ease the family's anxiety, but it will help with Alfeny's binge eating because she won't be as stressed and anxious.

In conclusion, Structural Family Therapy is a very good approach to help ameliorate the families structure. That approach has various techniques that can help a family who have individuals dealing with things like anxiety and binge eating disorder. Alfeny and her family will benefit from this because they will learn new coping skills that will ease their anxiety and the less anxious she is the less likely she will binge eat.

References

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