

**Family Systems Theory applied to Conrad in Ordinary People**

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## **Family Systems Therapy Overview**

A family systems perspective holds that individuals are best understood through assessing the interactions between and among family members. The development and behavior of one family member is inextricably interconnected with others in the family. Symptoms are often viewed as an expression of a set of habits and patterns within a family. It is revolutionary to conclude that the identified client's problem might be a symptom of how the system functions, not just a symptom of the individual's maladjustment, history, and psychosocial development. This perspective is grounded on the assumptions that a client's problematic behavior may (1) serve a function or purpose for the family; (2) be unintentionally maintained by family processes; (3) be a function of the family's inability to operate productively, especially during developmental transitions; or (4) be a symptom of dysfunctional patterns handed down across generations.

Therefore, a treatment approach that comprehensively addresses the family as well as the "identified" client is required. Because a family is an interactional unit, it has its own set of unique traits. It is not possible to accurately assess an individual's concern without observing the interaction of the other family members, as well as the broader contexts in which the person and the family live.

Her depression may signal both her own pain and the unexpressed pain of the family.

One way in which family therapy differs from many individual therapies is its emphasis on how current family relationships contribute to the development and maintenance of symptoms.

## **Application**

MURRAY BOWEN (1913–1990) believed families could best be understood when analyzed from a three-generation perspective because patterns of interpersonal relationships connect family members across generations. Two of his objectives in therapy were to help family members develop a rational, nonreactive approach to living (called a differentiation of self) and to de-tangle family interactions that involved two people pulling a third person into the couple's problems and arguments (or triangulation).

Bowen's observations led to his interest in patterns across multiple generations. He contended that problems manifested in one's current family will not significantly change until relationship patterns in one's family of origin are understood and directly challenged.

they work to promote understanding through curiosity and interest rather than through formal assessments. Adopting a decentered position allows them to be part of the system without taking it over.

## **Techniques**

Understanding family process is almost always facilitated by how questions.

more formal assessment procedures, such as genograms (McGoldrick et al., 2008), enable the family structure and stories to be presented in a clearer, more orderly manner. In some cases, form

## **Benefits**

One of the strengths of the systemic perspective in working from a multi-cultural framework is that many ethnic and cultural groups place great value on the extended family.

It may have started out as a symptom of other problems, but now the alcohol is a problem in itself.

A new place for Stan in the family, a better way of relating, and an ability to access “lost” parts of his internal system are all critical to winning his battle with alcohol.

An advantage to this viewpoint is that an individual is not scapegoated as the “bad person” in the family. Rather than blaming either the “identified patient” or a family, the entire family has an opportunity (a) to examine the multiple perspectives and interactional patterns that characterize the unit and (b) to participate in finding solutions.

## **References**

Redford, R. (1980), Ordinary People. Wildwood Enterprises Inc.

Corey G., (2017). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, (10th ed.). Cengage  
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