

Ch 14 Family Systems Therapy

1. From a Biblical and Christian point of view, the aspects of Family Systems perspective I see reflected are many, and they begin with Genesis and God's Creation of the first family of origin of humanity, Adam and Eve and their sons, Cain and Abel. In the Heavenly realm, God is our Father and through His Holy Bible we are provided an opportunity to increase our knowledge, wisdom and understanding about ourselves, others and the purpose and meaning of life.

Christians are unified as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ as the Head of His one Body of His brothers and sisters in the family of the Church. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians can grow in self-awareness and awareness of the need of others, through the study of the Lord's Truth and the meditation of the heart and the Holy Bible to love and know and rely on God and to love one another.

God's design for humanity parallels earthly life as men and women are born, grow to marry as husbands and wives, and may be blessed by sons and daughters, creating a family of origin that family systems theorists study to determine patterns, interactions, habits and behaviors. A record of the difficulties of the human condition are immediately known in the Garden of Eden and the transgressions that take place between Adam and Eve, and later in family life between their sons Cain and Abel. Throughout the Old Testament, countless stories of our human condition and sinful natures show us how generational sin plays out in families. And, thankfully, God sends his Son Jesus Christ to show us the Way to love God by loving one another. We wrestle with our human nature that shows up in our thoughts, words, actions and behaviors and most often our families of origin, our spouse and our children receive more of our sinful nature. Through His Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are given further understanding about how to be in relationships, particularly useful for harmony in marriage and family life.

The elements of Family Systems perspective I see conflicting with my Christian worldview is the free will God grants us to determine the choices and decisions we make each moment. It is possible to be born in a family of origin where the patterns, interactions and habits are unlike the recorded teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and the Apostle Paul's Epistles of the New Testament. A parent or sibling may have a sinful nature, for example a proclivity for wrath, anger, malice, slander or obscene language, but free will and the degree of psychosocial development and spiritual development allows other members of the family of origin to choose or decide to think, behave or speak and live differently.

I also believe evil and temptation are real spiritual dark forces that prey on us, especially when we are without reliance or awareness of God, His Truth, His Son Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. With a lack of faith in Christianity, we will be overcome by darkness. For this reason, I believe in the possibility that not every member of a family system may suffer problems created by its dysfunctional patterns, problems, habits and family processes. Is every child of a neglectful and abusive parent(s), destined to become the same kind of parent?

I hold the hope that through the choice of free will we can choose to be different, but I also wonder if the parent that chooses to be different than their family of origin may also be a person who is a Christian who gratefully receives the help of the Holy Trinity to end the dysfunctional patterns, habits, family process and problems that plague the earlier marriages and families of origin. Alternatively, family systems theory cannot ignore members of marriages and families of origin that suffer from severe mental and psychiatric illnesses and the dysfunction it creates in the family system. As I've begun learning about psychology, I find myself curious about the power of evil, genetics and generational sin on marriages and families. As an aspiring marriage and family therapist, I do believe in the power of family systems theories, and my sense is when severe psychological problems are present, referral to a psychiatrist, and working with the

marriage and/or family in tandem with a medical team to assure ethical and professional treatment and care is the protocol. Understanding the dynamics of the marriage and family of origin, does help understand the patient and their presenting problem in new multidimensional ways and context.

4. The basic therapy goals of each of these approaches to family therapy include:

- Multigenerational family therapy - Murray Bowen believed families of 3 generations carry patterns of connection and interpersonal interactions. Two objectives are to help family members develop a rational, nonreactive approach to living allowing differentiation of self within the family system and to de-tangle family interactions of coalitions and triangulations. To understand the problems manifested in the patient or the family, it has to be studied, understood and challenged as people's interpersonal patterns are predicted by the patterns across the members of the family and generations, and the patient's emotional unit of the family such as unresolved emotional reactivity which needs to be addressed to achieve a mature and unique personality, such as unresolved emotional attachments which are done with the family in the room. The goal is to differentiate the self within a system and to understand one's family of origin.
- Human validation process model- Virginia Satir developed conjoint family therapy, known as the human validation model that emphasizes communication and emotional experiencing, using an intergenerational model by bringing the family pattern to life in the present through sculpting and family reconstructions. Claiming techniques were secondary to relationship, she focused on the relationship of the therapist and the family to achieve change; a power of congruence to help the family members communicate with emotional honesty is at the center of this model. She would encourage the family members to each get in touch with what was significant within, to become more fully human and to share one another more deeply, at their best. She called this making contact and believed it led to inner peace, and this peace was experienced by one

another and eventually the whole family and family connection, through a nurturing triad of the family. She considered herself a detective who sought out and listened to reflections of self-esteem through speech and communication of her clients, focused on the goal of truly understanding meta-communication in family interactions and the role of therapeutic validation in the process of change. Her work led to family therapy's inclusion of the model of empathic listening, therapeutic presence and nurturance.

- Structural-strategic family therapy - Salvador Minuchin's work with delinquent boys from poor families at a school in New York and his model is based on the central idea that an individual's symptoms are best viewed and discovered from interactional patterns, sequences, within a family. The goals of this therapy include reducing the symptoms of dysfunction in the family system and bringing about structural change within the system by modifying the family's transactional rules and establishing more appropriate boundaries. What is the spousal system? The parental system? The sibling system? Therapists work to discover and understand the rules and boundaries of the family system and these subsystems. Therapists look at what happens when boundaries are crossed, who has the power in the family, how it is exercised and where the power is aligned and how and what is used to achieve that alignment? And, what helps or hinders or needs to change to improve functioning.

7. Some of the major techniques and intervention strategies used by each of the following family systems models are elaborated on in the above paragraph. They all enjoy the goal of no one person or the family being blamed for dysfunction. Being able to change directions, and be flexible are assets to family therapists. Other commonalities across family systems include: therapist-client conjoining, collaborative planning and discussion about making change happen called interventions and techniques with the family's full participation in enactments and/or tasks

and the therapist works to engage the family to operate together in a balanced rather than a polarized way and being able to think rather than be emotionally reactivity, being able to feel rather than not feel, good contact with others is more rewarding than isolation or self-absorption and taking reasonable risks in the service of growth and development is better than fear and being stuck. Helping the members and family gain awareness of behaviors, feelings and interactions and choices about their use is one technique. Challenging patterns and the enactment of new possibilities are important therapist's skills.

(1) Multigenerational family therapy - genograms, questions about observations and seeking to share ideas and insights and questions about what the therapist sees and asking for permission to share a question of appreciative inquiry.. Could it be that? Would you be willing to hear an idea..... (2) Human validation process - empathic listening, emotional self-awareness, therapist conjoining, client-therapist relationship (3) Structural-strategic - circular or relational questioning to get at the systemic issues presented in family story descriptions shared by the family members, assessments of hypothesizing and understanding sharing meaning and degree of faith the therapist and family have in the ideas they generate and how much influence the therapist is willing to be in the lives of the members and the family.

9. Feminism, multiculturalism, and postmodern social constructionism are all recent innovations in the family therapy field. What makes family systems and these innovations unique is how the members and the family are all directly involved and empowered to identify and collaboratively explore their lives, as they are the experts. Therapists engage them in therapeutic conversations to get to know the family with interest and curiosity, and the therapist is socially active and engaged with the family and takes a stand with the family to the dominant culture that may be oppressing the family. The interventions include reflecting teams and definitional ceremonies to bring out multiple perspectives. The therapists in these areas are aware of the power they have as they enter the family system and choose a de-centered position to allow

them to be part of the system rather than the authority with power to overtake it. Postmodern like narrative therapy, work to reduce or eliminate power and impact of the family system.

21. I'd address the theme of patriarchy working with a family whose culture places the father in the key role of making decisions for the entire family with respect, curiosity and interest and from a lens of not-knowing lens which I believe is the desired approach regardless of the family's culture or dynamic. As a therapist, I see my role as helping the family address its reasons for seeking therapy, and hear from the family what is working, not working, and what they want to achieve through the therapeutic process. My context, beliefs and worldview about power has no place in working with the family to understand its issues and goals and then helping them through the therapeutic process, techniques and interventions get to the change they said they wanted to achieve with the help of therapy. No, it is not my job to challenge cultural values or pass judgment on whether the family's patriarchal family system leads to oppression of women. If working with a family reveals signs or reports of domestic violence, abuse, rape, assault and battery, that is a different situation which would require a duty to act in seeking clinical supervision and legal and ethical guidance.