



Systemic Family Therapy and the Therapist's Use of Self

EFTA congress PARIS 2010
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Systemic Therapy

The focus of investigation is on the interaction within and among individuals and systems



Systemic Concepts



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- We *mutually influence (and change)* each other via:

Patterns of Interaction

- Interactive partners' characteristic ways of behaving

Patterns of Communication

- Patterns of interaction are expressed both verbally and non-verbally

Internal Working Models

“The representation of how things happen”
D. Stern



- Beliefs and expectations about ourselves and others
- Views of the SELF
- Views of OTHERS
- Views of RELATIONSHIPS
- Views of the WORLD

Internal Working Models



- These models or beliefs continue to guide our actions, thoughts and feelings through life
- We will keep ourselves SAFE :
by staying close to and being loved by others, or by being distant from and protecting ourselves from others

Early Interactions

Video Interactions



- E & D
- L & N
- K & K
- M & N

Attachment



- Attachment refers to the infant's choice of a preferred relationship and his/her use of that relationship to regulate his/her emotional state and his/her exploration of the world

Bowlby (1988)

Miscuing



- A “miscuing behavior” happens when defensive maneuvers on the part of one of the interactive partner may result in a behavior (communication) that expresses the contrary of the felt need
- That creates a loop of interactions that encourage distance when comfort is needed or closeness when exploration is needed

Marvin, R., Cooper, G., Hoffman, K., Powell, B. (2002). The Circle of Security project: Attachment-based intervention with caregiver-pre-school child dyads.

What you may see in the therapy room



- Affect regulation : can safely express a range of emotions.
- Less reactivity : partner's communication does not cause mobilization of defences, attack or withdrawal
- Support seeking : can ask for what is needed
- Flexible stance : curiosity, can tolerate ambiguity
- Communication is collaborative, can assert own needs and be empathic towards partner
- The sense of self is not threatened by the other

Or...

- Affect regulation : range of emotions is constricted or expression of emotion is distorted
- High reactivity : partner's communication causes mobilization of defences, attack or withdrawal
- Support seeking : unable to ask for what is needed
- Rigid stance : cannot tolerate ambiguity, only one interpretation allowed
- Communication is antagonistic, there is only space for my needs or your needs
- The sense of self is constantly threatened by the other



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Application to Systems

- These stances of Felt Safety or Felt Insecurity can be observed :



- Among individuals
- Between individuals and systems
- Among Systems

Role of the Therapist: Providing a Bridge



- Where is the gap, where is the disconnection?
- What is the most effective way of providing a bridge?
- Therapy as scaffolding
Vetere, White
- What will be the consequences of my intervention for all parties?

Role of the Therapist: Acting as a Conduit



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- Acting as a translator
- People's behaviors and interactions have meanings
- Consider how each party will respond to the intervention
- Opening the space to allow for different experiences

Alicia Lieberman

Clinical Examples

- John
- Christopher
- Francis, Elsie and Samantha
- Amy



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Role of the Therapist: other considerations



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- “the work of psychotherapists is to become full human beings and to inspire full human-beingness in people who feel starved about their lives.”
Johanson and Kurtz (1994)
- As therapists, we are responsible for the consequences of what we do, say, and think
Michael White (2007)
- We take full accountability for the work, and give full credit for the change
Jon Connelly

What gets in the way

- Not being present
- Feeling rushed
- Reaching conclusions
- Espousing our theories
- Any new idea, once it becomes a theory, becomes oppressive Michael White



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