

Process Paper

Jennifer Hicks

Southern Adventist University

Mental Health Practice in Social Work: Evolving Perspectives and Advance Contemporary

Practice Emphasis I

Professor Kirstee Williams, PhD., LMFT

June 26, 2022

Process Paper

Over the course of a week, a vast amount of information was provided about multiple theories for working with clients and families as a therapist. Reflecting on the material over the week, I find it interesting how different approaches relate to each other. When working with clients and families, the therapist needs to look at the clients and families in a much larger view. The clients will not come into the session with every detail about the past for the therapist to know, but it is the therapist's job to bring the additional information out throughout the sessions. The clients might come in for the one problem, but the therapist might discover that the problem started a while ago but looked like something else than the current problem. When a client is receiving mental health services, it is essential to include the family in the services. Having the family involved can help the client resolve some of the problems the family might be facing or something that has happened in the past because of the client's mental health. Clients with any mental health diagnosis, addiction, or substance abuse disorder can be more effectively treated if we consider their relationships with their families. Providing therapeutic services, including the family in mental health services, benefits the families and client by addressing roles, systems, attachment, and relationships and can include a treatment plan for the family in support of the client.

Ted Talk

While listening to the Good Life Ted Talk at the beginning of the course, I was unsure where it would go because it discussed millennials' most important life goals fame and money. As the Ted Talk continued, listening to how essential connections with other individuals are important to having a "Good Life" or keeping people happy. I found the Harvard Study of Adult Development interesting. The study involved 724 men over 75 years and later included some

women. Learning that Good Relationships keep us happy, Social connections (Family, Friends, Community) is good for individuals and can result in living longer, people that are isolated are less happy, their health declines, and they live shorter lives. When the study reviewed the information for the men around age 50, they realized it wasn't the person's health that predicted how the men would grow old, but how satisfied they were with their relationships.

Systems Theory

The Ted Talk provided an introduction to understanding the importance of relationships, families, and connections in life, which make up the systems surrounding an individual. Systems theory brings out how each person functions with the family. Systems theory can also be used when doing an ecomap to understand how a person is involved in multiple systems, with friends, church, work, and their family, learning if the relationships are reciprocal or not. Additionally, Learning how each part of the individual's systems applies to them and their life, shaping their life. The person's systems can change throughout their life, such as caretakers from an infant's daycare, or people can be added into the system, such as step-parents or siblings, but looking at how each part of the individual's systems helps shape and create the individual's identity. Applying systems to ecomap can be beneficial when working with clients, providing a diagram for them to look at and how each system they are a part of effects each other and themselves.

Attachment

Understanding Attachment within a family unit or with relationships can help understand the systems and vice versa. The attachments within the family are created and also developed over time. When an infant is born, they are attached to their parents or caregivers, which are a part of the infant's system. The infant's relationship and attachment with the caregiver at their daycare are different than their parents' attachment with the same caregiver. It is interesting to

learn how an infant develops attachment or the causes, such as reactive attachment disorder if the infant lacks attachments or their needs are being met. An individual's first year of life and how attachments are formed affect how the individual develops future attachments to another individual throughout their life. Attachments are part of an individual's brain development, especially when they are an infant or toddler. Additionally, different attachments are formed and changed throughout an individual's life. When an individual develops friendships, being a significant relationship shows how a relationship and attachment can expand, creating a system or subsystem within a unit.

Bowen

Bowen's approach is not necessarily fixing problems but opening the conversation to ask self-reflection questions and address the emotions involved. The ability to differentiate between thinking and feeling and show family members or couples how to resolve relationship problems using this principle. Bowen's Theory is about starting where the family is and what they want help with. Bowen's Theory involves the therapist understanding how the family works and how the family system operates is more important than trying to change the family or individual. When a provider starts the session where the family is and what the family wants, the provider then can start going down different avenues of issues within the family that bring the conversation back to the original issue.

An example would be having conflict in the family, starting with the conflict but then going back to the person's childhood and realizing an unresolved emotional attachment is a part of the family's conflict. I think it is important for the family's concerns and what they want from the sessions to be addressed. Still, I also believe it is important for the therapist to look at a larger picture of the issue to understand where it might have originated. This is similar to someone who

does not address something they are angry about and lets it build up inside them until something small is like the "icing on the cake." Then the other party does not realize that the person has been upset for a period of time but thinks the person is just mad about the current event. During the sessions, the therapist has to be aware of any triangulation that has been created. Learning about triangulation can create tension within the session but also can bring up how the "odd man out" feels; the therapist needs to be attentive and not take "sides" within the triangulation. I believe triangulation is similar to having subsystems within the family unit.

Structural

Once again, it is essential for the therapist to have a more extensive understanding of the family's problems and how the family has tried to solve those problems in the past. This can allow the therapist to understand the dynamics of interaction within the family. Structural family therapy includes understanding the interactions and discovering the subsystems within the family unit. One of the techniques used in structural family therapy is an enactment, which involves family members interacting with each other allowing the therapist to observe and assist with their interactions.

Therapeutic Considerations

It is important to establish specific guidelines and a contract before meeting with clients or a family. The guidelines need to include who will be attending the sessions and how frequently the sessions will occur. This can allow the client/family to plan accordingly and the therapist to prepare for each session. If the therapist is working with a family, there might be times when the therapist wants to meet with subsystems within the family, such as the parents or the children, separately. Allowing the clients to beware of that before the first session so that it would not be as much of a surprise if that comes up.

Additionally, allowing the clients to know who will have information about the therapeutic sessions, such as lawyers, court, and other parties that might be involved. The therapist can include in the contract that general information will be provided to certain parties, letting the clients know what will be shared and the confidentiality rules.

Setting up payment before the first session is important. This can allow for the clients to have the payment to be worked out by the attorneys before the sessions begin. Also, if the client is using insurance, it can give time for the therapist to set up the billing with the initial client's insurance company.