Family Systems Theories Applied
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Traditional (psychoanalytic / psychodynamic) family therapy and theory are grounded what we have consciously and unconsciously inherited from our parents and their parents before them.

Object Relations Psychoanalytic Theory

- Roots in psychoanalytic theory, British Middle School (Late 1940’s)
- Produced attachment theory
- Basic conceptualization of relationships are how each adult learned from their caregiver about the world and how to interact with others.
- Issues / conflict lay outside of awareness

Object Relations Psychoanalytic Theory

- Interventions
  - Holding
  - Interpreting
  - Eliciting unconscious material
  - Fostering integration of painful memories
  - Working Through in the present
- How to determine if system has the ability to tolerate and is resourced?

Object Relations Psychoanalytic Theory & Amy Winehouse

- Determine what the introjects (relationship lessons) are for Amy (or Janis and Mitchell) through creating holding, encountering defenses, and interpreting.
  - For Amy, imagine, what needs of hers were met as a small child who father is having an affair, who might be disinterested in her as a toddler, and who’s mother is protecting herself emotionally from her husband’s affair?
  - Did Amy become a “negative object” and make her mother an idealized object to tolerate her not getting her needs met?
  - “I treated myself like I knew I would”

Transgenerational Family System Theory

- Roots in psychoanalytic theory, Bowen, Whitaker, Boszormenyi-Nagy (1950’s)
- Fundamental - Genogram
- Creating a Transgenerational frame
- Issues / conflict are passed on generationally
Transgenerational Family System Theory

- Interventions
  - Looking for patterns on the genogram
  - Identify patterns of fusion and distancing, distancing and cutoff

- How to determine if system has the ability to tolerate and is resourced?

Transitioning from mid-century influences

- Modern era of family therapy
- Postmodern, social constructionist approaches rule these ways of thinking and intervening.

Modern approaches to family therapy and theory are grounded in the ways couples, families, communities, and societies construct reality.

What is social constructionism?

Narrative therapy

- Developed by Michael White (1948-2008).
- Narrative therapy: interested in the stories individuals and families tell about problems.
- “The problem is the problem.”
- “How long has addiction been a part of your life?”
Narrative Therapy Interventions

- Externalize the problem
  - Build coalitions to decrease the presence and power of the problem in individual and family life.
- Undermine the conclusions that the problem has previously forced into family life.
- Free space for hope that is independent of problems.

- Re-story the problem
  - "When did this problem come into your life?"
  - What are unique exceptions to this problem: "When have been times that you've been able to fight against alcohol?" "Are there ever times when marijuana doesn't control you?"

- Consider use of witnesses
  - Outsider witnesses provide feedback to the patient and system about changes being made.
  - Group treatment modalities have a great deal of strengths with this intervention.

Narrative Therapy & Amy Winehouse

- Potential externalizing questions
  - "It seems like being mad and being musical are married for you. What is that like?"
  - "Tell me about how alcohol fits with your relationships? How does alcohol fight with your relationships?"

- Restorying interventions
  - "What would be the worst thing if alcohol left your life? What would be the biggest change if it left?"
  - "What would there be space for if alcohol left your life?"

- Potential witnesses: Nick, Juliette, Lauren (three long-term friends prior to addiction and stardom)

- Likely poor witnesses: Mitch (her father, came back into her life after she began making money; initially told her that he did not think that she needed to go to rehab “right now”), Blake (due to apparent codependency)

Family Resilience

- Family resilience is about: connectedness, beliefs about suffering, boundaries, flexibility in roles, and hopefulness.

- How do families stay together and stay healthy in the face of incredible suffering?

Family Resilience in Action: Landau’s Arise Intervention

- Judith Landau, MD, LMFT, Arise interventionist approach-designed for increasing treatment engagement and compliance among people affected by addiction.

- 86% of people affected by addiction enter treatment within three weeks
- 96% enter treatment within six months
- At the end of the first year after treatment:
  - 61% are sober
  - 10% are using less

Family Resilience in Action: Landau on Relating Strengths and Challenges in Relating to Crisis

- Dr. Landau describing ways that one family responded to crisis of immigration and secondary adversities, and how family recovered from addiction.

  - “Family Secrets, Shame, and Survival” Landau TEDx Talk:

Amy Winehouse and Family Resilience

- In what ways was this family resilient?
  - Janis, her mother, first woman in family with a professional job (pharmacist)
  - Working their way into the middle class
  - Amy building family of choice in early adulthood (Juliette, Nick, Lauren)
  - “Every bad situation is a blues song waiting to happen.” Potentially very functional and adaptive meaning for suffering

- In what ways can this family build resilience?
  - Increase cohesion
  - Family patterns suggest a great deal of disengaged patterns, followed by enmeshment patterns (e.g. Amy & Mitch)
  - Increasing cohesion would decrease the need for both disengagement and enmeshment.
  - Increasing cohesion would likely also increase family “alarm system” about severity of Amy’s chemical use, and make them more able to prioritize each other’s health.

  - Firm up boundaries
  - Enmeshed relationship between Amy and her work-building space would serve the family system and Amy’s health.
  - Build media-free times into family life.
Questions

References


References Cont.