Individual and Family Therapy

THE FAMILY THERAPY LITERATURE

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From *Individual and Family Therapy* Fred Sander M.D.

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The teaching of family therapy in most training programs is most often, and appropriately so, by the direct observation and live supervision of actual clinical interviews. The field is still so young that the systematic reading of relevant literature is usually not done. Further, since most training programs teach a particular school of family therapy, trainees will most probably be especially familiar, with the Bowen theory, Minuchin's structural theory, the communications approach, or the more psychoanalytically oriented point of view. To encourage the reading of the literature of family therapy and to counter the parochial tendencies of many training programs, my colleague C.C. Beels and I designed a course, originally taught at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, that is described in the present chapter.

The course description was first published in *Family Process*, in 1970, and revised by me for *The Primer of Family Therapy* (Block 1973). To date, it is still the only published description of an eclectic course in family therapy, and it is reprinted here with minor changes. Since its publication, innumerable new books on family therapy have appeared. I shall mention a few of them here to bring the course syllabus more up to date. In 1974, Glick and Kessler published their textbook on marital and family therapy, which, at this time, is the only satisfactory overview of the field. Bowen's writings have, after many years, been brought together in one volume (1978) and Minuchin's recent book *Families and Family Therapy* (1974) represents the latest version of his structural theory. A most interesting and unique introduction to family therapy that is also an excellent teaching vehicle is Napier's and Whitaker's *The Family Crucible* (1978). Written in the form of a novel, it portrays the treatment of one family in such vivid detail that the somewhat controversial therapeutic interventions lend themselves to lively discussions of the varying family therapy theories and techniques. How these family therapy pioneers, as well as the "communications school" (Watzlawick et al. 1967, Haley 1973), conceptualize the individual within a family systems framework shall be taken up in Chapter 8.

CONTEXT OF FAMILY THERAPY

Where family and nation once stood, or Church and Party, there will be hospital and theatre too.

— Philip Rieff

At historical moments of cultural change such as ours, it is with considerable anxiety that we witness our most stable institutions and deeply held convictions being called into question. Our parents are increasingly unable to transmit their culturally acquired wisdom to us; we as parents, in turn, sense our emerging obsolescence to our children. These doubts reflect more than the ubiquitous and perennial waves of generational conflict. There is, rather, a tide of cultural upheaval that defies our control and full understanding. We are too profoundly enmeshed in the swirl of events to view them clearly or dispassionately, and yet certain trends are becoming evident.

As Weston LaBarre (1970) has so convincingly documented in *The Ghost Dance*, it is at times of cultural crises that charismatic cult leaders emerge, satisfying regressive needs, and that pseudoreligious movements begin. Henry Ellenberger (1970) has shown how this pehonomenon is also true of the emergence of schools of pscyhotherapy, beginning, for example, with Mesmer in prerevolutionary France. Where traditional religions have lost their sense of legitimacy, therapeutic institutions and varied "healers" have assumed a larger role in integrating man in his social order. Philip Rieff (1966) has called our age, and aptly has titled his recent book, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. As another "professional mourner at the wake of Christian culture," Rieff views with some apprehension the emergence of psychologic man, who has gained a "self" while lacking some compelling self-integrating communal purpose. He expects that "modern society will mount psychodramas far more frequently than its ancestors mounted miracle plays, with the patient-analysts acting out their inner lives" (p. 26).

No institution has been more altered by the rapidity of social change than that transmitter of culture and that crucible of personality formation, the family. This was discussed in chapter 2 as a primary factor in the emergence of the family therapy movement. This movement has both the characteristics of a revivalistic "Ghost Dance" and those of a new paradigm within the behavioral sciences. As the lens of the psychotherapeutic looking glass is changed, new structures are being seen and described. As mental illnesses are viewed increasingly as symptoms of family dysfuncton, new patterns of family interaction are being described. It is in this sense that Szasz's *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961) can be seen better in historical perspective. He was one of the first to recognize the need for a paradigmatic change in the medical model of mental illness. By insisting that mental illnesses were more correctly viewed as "problems in living," he highlighted the limitations of that model. Inasmuch as these "problems in living" are partly interactional difficulties, the family and other immediate reference groups of an "identified

patient" come into focus. By insisting, however, on the absolute separation of brain disease from "problems in living," Szasz's writings have, among other things, further polarized the nature- nurture controversy in psychology (Sander 1969).

This new attention to interpersonal patterns in natural groups is producing a vastly expanding literature. In this literature are reflected the multiple and varied approaches, philosophies, prejudices, and orientations of the many disciplines that have turned to the family as the unit of study. In 1971 Glick and Haley published a bibliography of writings in the field. Since the original publication of the didactic course described in this chapter, several anthologies related to family therapy have been published (Ackerman 1970, Erickson, G. and Hogan, T. 1976, Ferber et al. 1972, Guerin 1976, Haley 1971, Howells 1971, Paolino, T. Jr. and McGrady, B. 1978, Sager 1972, Skolnick and Skolnick 1972).

I shall outline the overview of our literature course for family therapy trainees, rather than attempt the presently impossible task of a comprehensive review of the literature. The last three sections of this chapter are drawn from the earlier description of our course.

The goals that we attempted to achieve with this course were: (1) some historical perspective on the family as an institution; (2) awareness of the multiple theoretical approaches to the understanding of family process; (3) an appreciation of the difficulties in the scientific study of family forces in the complex etiology of psychopathology; and (4) a comparison of writings of various family therapists with videotapes or films of their work.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AS SEEN IN FICTION

During the course of a yearlong, weekly, ninety-minute seminar, we spent three to four sessions on works of fiction that reflected changes in the structure and function of the family and its sociocultural contexts from biblical times to the present. The following capsule analyses illustrate our approach to the use of such materials. It was the use of such fictional material that were the seeds of this book.

The Book of Genesis (Abraham and Sarah)

Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it. [Genesis 1:28]

To survive in the desert, nomads required a cohesive and authoritarian family. The survival of the family clan of 50-200 tent-dwelling shepherds demanded obedience to the father. Individual survival was linked directly to immediate and proximate membership in the family. To be out of this family group was tantamount to death. The constant dangers of hostile tribes, animals and disease made regular claims on their numbers and gave birth to a moral demand system whose first commandment was to be "fruitful and multiply."

This cultural demand system led barren Sarah to entrust Hagar, her handmaiden, to Abraham for the purpose of bearing his child. The inevitable jealousies between Hagar and Sarah after the birth of Ishmael were followed by the arbitrary banishment of Hagar and Ishmael. This banishment and the later test of Abraham's faith in the sacrificing of Isaac illustrate the unquestioned acceptance of the requirements of obedience to the father (and God the Father) in this evolving patriarchal culture.

The role of arranged marriages is illustrated in the marriage of cousins Isaac and Rebecca. The incest taboo, endogamy requirements, and reduction of intertribal hostilities all were served by such arrangements.

Isaac, the younger of Abraham's sons, inherited the family line following the exile of Ishmael. This began a pattern, repeated in subsequent generations, of the preference of the younger son over the older. In reviewing this literature, our seminar speculated about the possible mechanisms for the generational transmission of such family patterns, while noting also how this theme of the "chosen son" resonated with the Jews' cultural self-representation as the "chosen people." Psychology, sociology, and culture were seen here as interwoven threads in the tapestry of Jewish history.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (Elizabeth and Darcy)

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. [Pride and Prejudice]

Marital arrangements among the eighteenth-century English aristocracy served to sustain and support a complex structure of property in the form of entitlements. The prophetic opening sentence above of Austen's novel reflects the demand system of that particular culture in the same sense that "to be fruitful and multiply" was part of the cultural demand system of the ancient Hebrews.

From the beginning Elizabeth and Darcy capture our interest because they represent some transcendence over the rigidified and mannered demands of their culture. The commands of the covenant in the Old Testament are replaced here by the pressures of social forms, but there is some room for autonomy. Jane Austen weaves their strivings for greater independence of their backgrounds with their ultimate reconciliation with it. Their marriage, based on love rather than on propertied arrangements, ultimately supports and sustains the social order at the same time that it satisfies their quest for individual autonomy. Family requirements and individual strivings here are balanced at this threshold of the industrial revolution. Elizabeth is also clearly a *forme fruste* of the "emancipated modern woman."

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? **(George and Martha)**

Where the Old Testament's first commandment to be fruitful and multiply served to facilitate the survival of a people, we are for the first time in the history of our civilization aware that our future hinges on our ability to contradict that precept. Both of these contemporary plays are of interest in this regard because they portray childless marriages. *The Cocktail Party* dramatizes a modern couple devoid of extended kinship. Living in an urban apartment, they find that their relationship is stabilized by infidelities and ultimately by the ministrations of the first family therapist in literature. This play, written in 1949, interestingly preceded the emergence of the family therapy movement in the 1950s and illustrates the socioreligious role of the psychiatrist in secular society (see chapter 2).

In Albee's play, George and Martha battle endlessly as they desperately attempt to form a new family of friends and colleagues in a small college community. They do not sustain and support any viable culture, nor does any culture sustain and support them. They act out a "family romance" fantasy in which life is made bearable through the creation of an imaginary child (Blum 1969, also see chapter 3).

The historical perspective afforded by these readings in fiction highlights the emergence of the modern nuclear family as a unique structure, which still contains certain universal attributes dictated by the biologic trimorphism of mother, father, and developing child. These ideas can be studied further in the reading of various other disciplines in which theories regarding the institution of the family are offered.

THEORIES OF THE FAMILY

As psychiatry has little to offer in the way of a comprehensive theory of families, a brief survey of the theories and descriptions of other disciplines affords the student some beginning orientation to the family.

In our readings we considered the family as a social entity, its history and structure, rather than the individual family member, his biology and psychology. Beginning with Aries's *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) the student can view the historical development of the idea of "the family" and the rather recent appearance of such values as intimacy, privacy, and the specialness of children. One can contrast the cultural anthropology of Levi-Strauss (1956) and Margaret Mead (1950) with the primatological writings of Jane van Lawick Goodall (1971) for two different views of the family's universality. One can then examine the extent to which some of its institutions, such as sex role differences, childbearing, and incest taboo, are biologically 01 socially obligatory. Readings in Parsons (1955) show how one sociologic theory attempted to integrate biology, psychoanalytic psychology, sociology, and anthropology. This ambitious and little-appreciated effort is clearly a neglected precursor of what is referred to today as general systems theory. Communication and system theorists such as Haley (1963, 1967, 1971), Jackson (1961, 1964, 1965, 1967), and Minuchin (1974) construct family theories that dispense with almost all the values, assumptions, and motivational forces the others have required. Such a quick tour of the field enables the reader to begin a second look at the theoretical assumptions on which clinical work is based. In our seminar we then reread such psychiatric theorists of family therapy as Boszormenyi-Nagy (1965), Laing (1967), and Dicks (1967) with the recognition that their task of building a bridge between the theories of individual and social function has only begun.

SCIENTIFIC BASIS

We thought we ought to ask a somewhat naive question: How much scientific evidence was there that family factors, in fact, could be viewed as etiologic agents in the production of mental illness? We chose what we felt were the better studies representing the clinical, epidemiologic, field, and laboratory approaches to this knotty problem.

One of the most interesting clinical descriptions of a family is to be found in Freud's case of Dora

(1905). The correlation between family circumstances and Dora's symptoms is elegantly demonstrated. Historically the significance of this case is, of course, the discovery of the importance of infantile sexuality, the function of dreams, and intrapsychic factors in general. In fact, Freud's elucidation of Dora's complicity in the family system due to her oedipal and unconscious homosexual wishes reflects the present- day family systems view of the necessary collusion of all the members of any system to keep it going. The case lent itself beautifully to the age-old question perhaps best formulated by Shakespeare: whether it is in ourselves or in our stars that we are underlings. The relative significance of constitution, infantile experiences, and current social forces in the etiology of mental illness (hysteria in this case) were again considered.

Other psychoanalytic writers such as Main (1966) and Johnson and Szurek (1952) afforded a view of what additional theory is required by the shift to working concurrently (though not conjointly) with the relatives of the identified patient.

With the work of Thomas, Chess, and Birch (1963) we returned to the interplay, over time, of temperament and environment in a more systematic, although still primarily clinical, study. Problems of sampling, clinical biases, and interpretation of results were explored in greater detail. This book, by reemphasizing temperament, helps to shift the balance in the nature-nurture controversy away from the preponderant environmentalist bias of American culture and social science. It is a kind of scientific pacifier for a guilt-ridden parental generation tired of being blamed for all their children's ills.

We turned from these clinical impressions to read some material describing attempts at objective specification of the experience aspect of the temperament-experience interaction. We considered hard data such as family structure (Ferber et al. 1967), paternal absence (Anderson 1968), or maternal death (Barry and Lindemann 1968) and soft data such as Cheek's characterization of the mothers and fathers of schizophrenics (1964, 1965). Most of the studies could be seriously faulted for their methodology. Even the best, such as Wynne's and Singer's studies (1963, 1965) of the parental contribution to thought disorder in schizophrenia, were unsatisfying in the sense that they all seemed to represent such a small piece of the clinical picture. Wender's paper, "On Necessary and Sufficient Conditions in Psychiatric Explanation" (1967) summed up this problem quite well: The examination of single variables as partial causes of an event that occurs rarely and has many causes will yield a very low predictive grasp on the

event even though it has a high level of statistical significance. Wender's own review of the genetic studies of schizophrenia, the most convincing paper we could find on the temperament aspect of the formula, suffers from the same difficulty (1969).

At this point we abandoned the medical model of first diagnosing a sick or deviant patient and then seeking the etiologic cause in his family. We assembled several papers that could be read as descriptions of the activity of the family as a disordered or malfunctioning group: Ravich (1969), Bauman and Roman (1966), and Reiss (1967). We then looked upon the Wynne and Singer, Reiss, and Cheek papers and viewed them in the same light. From this standpoint the family can be seen as setting out to accomplish a task (provided either by life or by the experimenter) and doing it well or badly. The trouble they are having with it appears to be strikingly the same in each study: They are spending time managing their relations with each other rather than thinking about the task. Once that point of view had been reached, we were ready to appreciate work such as Scheflen's on the ethology of the family as an interactive group (1968).

THERAPY

Having surveyed available theories of the family and the question of "scientific evidence," one can better read the writings of the major family therapists and compare them with films or videotapes of their work (Ackerman, Bowen, Haley, Jackson, Minuchin, Paul, Satir, Wynne, Whitaker, and Zuk).

We tried to appreciate what each of the therapists was trying to accomplish and to identify the special techniques used to get that result. In this way we concentrated on the unique characteristics of each one, their philosophy, personality, and tactics, rather than on what they all have in common. It is difficult to abstract a useful general theory or description of family therapy from the literature (see Beels and Ferber [1969], "Family Therapy: A View," for one such attempt). The most important benefit that can be gained from reading the literature of family therapy is to secure a collection of models and scenarios from which the student chooses the most appropriate for himself and the family he is treating.

CONCLUSION

This chapter describing an eclectic course on the literature of family therapy has made little

mention of techniques. This is due partly to the fact that the technical aspects of all therapies tend to be less written about than more theoretical considerations. The newness of the field also contributes to this problem, but of much greater significance is the substantial increase in the role of direct observation of therapy by the use of videotape, one-way screens, films, audiotapes, and live supervision. The impact of these nonliterary methods are substantial and will in many ways guide future theoretical advances. The role, for example, of varying types of feedback in social systems and the very profound, heretofore neglected, role of nonverbal communications are already shaping theoretic advances. These technologic advances have already played and will continue to play a role in the teaching and practice of family therapy. The hard work of sorting out the wheat from the chaff in this technologic explosion remains ahead of us.

Meanwhile, the reading of both technical and literary works remains a time-tested medium for deepening our appreciation of the complexities before us. Hopefully, as "cool media," they will restrain our overzealous attempts to change and modify human behavior before we understand more fully either ourselves or the multiple forces impinging upon us.

In the concluding part we move from the burgeoning literature to the job ahead of integrating the individual and family approaches. In chapter 8 we shall review the predominant schools of family systems therapy to see how they do or do not deal with the individual in the family system. Chapter 9 examines some of the dramas encountered in the clinician's office before turning, in the final chapter, to Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. I attempt an integration of psychoanalytic and family systems concepts in a play that brings us full circle back to chapter 1, for Salome is a princess whose family structure is strikingly similar to Hamlet's. She must cope, as Hamlet did, with the murder of a father/king by a usurping uncle who marries the mother/queen.

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