CHAPTER 12

Intergenerational Family Therapy: Bowen

Basic Ideas

- Examining client's early relationships and client's role in family patterns
- Tracing transgenerational and extended family dynamics, particularly responses to stress
- Promoting insight into extended family dynamics
- Identifying and altering destructive beliefs and patterns of behavior

Bowen Intergenerational Therapy

- More about the nature of being human than it is about families or family therapy
- Requires work from a broader perspective of what ‘pattern’ means
- This perspective relies primarily on therapists' calm self (differentiated) to effect change
Chapter 12
Mastering Competencies in Family Therapy

Significant Contributions to the Field

- **Differentiation**
  - Useful concept for understanding interpersonal relationships
  - A person's ability to separate intrapersonal (thinking and emotions) and interpersonal distress
  - Balancing two counterbalancing life forces
    - The need for togetherness
    - The need for autonomy

- **Genogram**
  - Commonly used family assessment instrument
  - At its most basic level, a genogram maps key multigenerational processes that illuminate emotional and relational dynamics
  - Simultaneously, genogram is an assessment instrument, intervention

Contributors

- **Murray Bowen**
  - Psychoanalytically trained psychiatrist
  - Studied emotional processes in families
- Michael Kerr, Philip Guerin, Thomas Fogarty, Monica McGoldrick, and Betty Carter
- David Schnarch
  - *The Sexual Crucible Model*: Integrates sex and couples therapy

Overview of Therapy Process

- Process-oriented therapy, relies heavily on the self of the therapist, most specifically the therapist's level of differentiation
- Emphasis is not on techniques and interventions
- Uses genograms and assessment to promote insight
Chapter 12  
Mastering Competencies in Family Therapy

The Therapeutic Relationship

- Differentiation and the Emotional Being of the Therapist
  - Encourages all parties to further their own differentiation processes
- Non-anxious Presence
  - An emotionally engaged stance that is non-reactive

Case Conceptualization/Assessment

- "Viewing" is the primary "intervention" in Bowen therapy:
  - Emotional systems
  - Chronic anxiety
  - Multigenerational transmission process
  - Multigenerational patterns
  - Levels of differentiation

- "Viewing" also includes:
  - Emotional triangles
  - Family projection process
  - Emotional cut-off
  - Sibling position
  - Societal regression

Goal Setting

- Increase each person’s level of differentiation (in specific contexts)
  - Define with each client specifically in which context (intra or inter) differentiation is increasing
- Decrease emotional reactivity to chronic anxiety in the system
  - As differentiation increases, anxiety decreases
  - As anxiety decreases, differentiation increases
- Internal and relational differentiation reciprocally affect each other
Chapter 12
Mastering Competencies in Family Therapy

Interventions
- Theory vs. technique
- Process questions
- Encouraging differentiation of self
- Genogram
- Detriangulate
- Relational experiments
- Going home again - coaching

Chapter 12
Mastering Competencies in Family Therapy

The Evidence Base
- Majority of research has been on the validity of theoretical constructs that inform the theory rather than therapeutic outcomes
- Focus of research on Bowen and psychoanalytic therapies has not been on outcome which is required to be labeled and empirically validated study

Chapter 12
Mastering Competencies in Family Therapy

Working with Diverse Populations
- Therapy with diverse populations has not been widely explored or studied
- Approaches should be thoughtfully adapted for attitudes towards introspection, rationality, and psychological analysis
- May be useful with clients whose cultural norms dictate the primacy of extended family over nuclear family