

Integrative Thinking for Family Therapy

A review of the video



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Integrative Family Therapy

with Jay Lebow

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007. American

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Reviewed by

[David S. Hargrove](#)

[Elizabeth M. Malone](#)

Integrative family therapy brings together various theoretical perspectives and procedural techniques to bear on specific family problems and dynamics that are relevant to a given family. Each family situation demands a different configuration of theory and procedure to be emphasized. Thus, integrative family therapy is atheoretical and requires a clinician to be knowledgeable about a wide variety of theories and principles. It is the responsibility of the therapist to determine whether a particular technique is relevant for a particular family

in the clinical situation. Systematic assessment and relevant research are significant determining factors for the therapeutic approach.

This video, produced by the American Psychological Association, features Jay Lebow explaining and demonstrating integrative family therapy in an interview series with Jon Carlson. Carlson identifies key factors of the family interview, asking Lebow for additional comment and explanation. This format enables both to feature integrative family therapy as a unique and flexible therapeutic procedure. Lebow's integrative approach is based on his own empirical work, which seeks to bring together selected systems approaches to psychotherapy as well as to combine systems thinking with individual therapeutic approaches. The case on the video exemplifies a combined systems and individual therapy approach.

Combining systems and individual approaches to psychotherapy is an eclectic method. This raises the age-old question of the effectiveness of a single theoretical perspective versus an eclectic approach. Empirical support of eclectic psychotherapy can be difficult to determine because the same techniques are not used consistently across clients. Practical support, however, may easily be demonstrated in the consulting room by designing a combination of techniques for specific cases and needs.

A review of this video could easily be done from a particular theoretical perspective, to find fault with many of the procedures used, if not with the therapist. On the other hand, the integrative perspective comes alive as Lebow applies it in the work with a specific family. He clearly assimilates procedures from several theoretical perspectives in an initial interview with the family.

Several concepts from systems psychotherapy are present in Lebow's interview of the family. He directly relates with each member of the group, which is consistent with Bowen family systems theory (Bowen, 1978, p. 248). Establishing the connection between the therapist and each person in the family assists in creating a calm environment. He also

determines or assists in the development of a role for each member. Calling attention to the parentification of the older daughter is consistent with the systems thinking of Borszormenyi-Nagy (Borszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991).

It is important to distinguish between systems thinking and individual thinking. Systems thinking emphasizes the organic unit of a set of relationships that contains functional reciprocity between the individuals and the system. Assigning a cause for specific behavior to one individual in the system is not appropriate. The system is viewed as a whole, with its own integrity. Individual thinking, on the other hand, defines the individual organism as the focus of attention. It is more likely that a linear relationship exists between cause and effect in individual thinking.

The eclectic procedure of combining systems thinking and a focus on the place of the individual is evident when Lebow marshals the energy of the family to focus on the single person who manifests the problem. In this particular case, a young boy has been recently diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD). A behavior modification program is in place. Lebow enables the family to coalesce in the attention to the boy to assist in the alleviation of problem behaviors. Further, each family member is encouraged to take an important role in relationship to the boy and modification of his symptoms.

The presented case consists only of an initial interview. Lebow defines that interview as, in part, an assessment and a means of establishing a working alliance with the family. He clearly succeeds in getting in touch with each family member and demonstrates in his later discussion how his thinking would lead to a treatment plan.

Lebow also demonstrates theoretical and practical flexibility in both the interview and subsequent discussion. He identifies specific procedures that could be taken to ameliorate conditions that develop in the interview. For example, the older daughter is nine years older than her siblings, who are seven-year-old triplets, one of whom is the boy recently

diagnosed with ADD. Due to the family composition, she is frequently placed in a parental role. The anticipation of this becoming a problem is considered and made a part of the treatment plan.

Strengths of the video include Carlson's questions of Lebow following the interview. The use of brief clips of the interview enables Carlson and Lebow to discuss specific therapeutic strategies as they occur in the process. One has to appreciate the ease with which Lebow manages a live family being recorded for later consideration. A small confusion is Carlson's apparently erroneous statement in the beginning that the family has five children. Only four are with the family, and there is no mention of a person not in the room. This is distracting but not a major flaw in the presentation of the procedure.

The video is a valuable teaching tool in and of itself. Its power is amplified by the use of two important publications from the American Psychological Association: *Integrating Family Therapy: Handbook of Family Psychology and Systems Theory* (Mikesell, Lusterman, & McDaniel, 1995) and *Casebook for Integrating Family Therapy: An Ecosystemic Approach* (McDaniel, Lusterman, & Philpot, 2001). These volumes provide thorough theoretical explanations and practical examples of a broad range of family systems methods. Lebow's work synthesizes some of the important contributions of these volumes. It is particularly important to point out his multimodal assessment and intervention strategies, which include a variety of other systems. This sets the stage for useful collaboration among professional caregivers and agencies.

References

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