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Marriage and Family Therapy: A Sociocognitive Approach

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being an "introduction," the first part seems detached from the rest. It would have been my preference to let the content articles in the book speak for themselves since collectively they constitute a better claim for the value of clinical sociology than does the introduction. It would seem that, as sociologists, we spend considerable intellectual energy in product differentiation, arguing the superiority of our theories, methods, approaches, and topics, usually with some ghost of the past or some imagined enemy. We would better spend our time improving our product, not just differentiating it. Certainly, there are a number of useful products in the book which contribute to our knowledge. Thus, the book would be useful to those in the sociology of health and could be used as supplemental readings in several different kinds of courses. Collections of articles are notoriously hard to put together in a coherent framework, but the parts still make the book worthwhile.

Marriage and Family Therapy: A Sociocognitive Approach, by Nathan Hurvitz and Roger A. Straus. Binghamton, NY: The Hayworth Press, Inc. 1991. 300 pp., \$29.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.
Beverley Cuthbertson-Johnson

The creative partnership of Nathan Hurvitz and Roger Straus has produced an important work. The sociocognitive approach developed by Hurvitz in his clinical practice and refined and concisely articulated by Straus represents an essential step on the pathway to an integrated framework for applying important sociological concepts in therapeutic settings.

The first two chapters present the theoretical foundations of the sociocognitive approach. Chapter 1 identifies the macrosociological foundations of sociocognitive theory, stressing the importance of the sociocultural context within which family members interact and learn their behaviors, meanings, and feelings. Especially significant is a discussion of how established social structures, such as capitalism and the class system, as well as ethnicity, age/life stage, sex/gender roles, and social change can play a significant role in personal and interpersonal problems. Also particularly relevant is a discussion of the development and consequences of current social values in regard to individualism, personal responsibility, competition, and individual success.

Chapter 2 turns to the microsocial level, focusing on individual social actors as they act and interact. This chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the symbolic interactionism perspective in therapeutic applications. Drawing upon important contributions from the works of George Herbert Mead, W. I. Thomas, Robert Merton, and Erving Goffman, Hurvitz and Straus emphasize the social

act as the organizing concept of the sociocognitive, microsocioal approach. They give two basic strategies for analyzing social acts: (1) establishing a context in which family members can be observed interacting with one another as well as with the therapist, and (2) examining family members' accounts as revealed privately to the therapist or in the presence of other family members. Specific processes are suggested for gaining practical understandings of family members' definitions of the situation. Reflective, analytic, and directed discussion techniques are outlined, as well as specific suggestions for implementing them. Of particular importance is a discussion of the importance of identifying how family members perceive themselves and other family members as well as how they perceive each other's perceptions of them. Detailed case examples illustrate the concepts and processes presented. Enlightening for those who work in clinical practice are practical outlines for handling first appointments and the reluctance to participate in therapy.

Chapter 3 also presents a general outline for practicing sociocognitive intervention. For example, it discusses how to encourage family members to establish new meanings that support individual and joint values and goals. Laudable is Hurvitz and Straus's recognition of the relevance and importance of established interventions, such as the cognitive techniques used by psychologists, and their descriptions of how to interweave those interventions with important sociological concepts.

Hurvitz's concepts of terminal, instrumental, and therapeutic hypotheses are clearly illustrated. The procedures outlined for facilitating therapeutic discussion, including the concepts of terminal and instrumental hypotheses, and procedures for guiding family members' generation of instrumental hypotheses are excellent.

Chapter 3, on working with families as social groups, delineates the process of working with families, including first contact with the therapist and the opening phase of family therapy when information is gathered through a naturalistic assessment process. Using actual cases drawn from Hurvitz's practice, the text differentiates problems, dividing them into personal limitations and interpersonal predicaments; family conflict, including disruptive conflict; and family crisis.

Chapter 4 turns to the process of family therapy. It emphasizes the opening phase of the sociocognitive therapy process, with a specific emphasis on utilizing a Four Questions Technique to make a naturalistic assessment. Therapy goals and limitations are also discussed, as well as the rationale and tactics for both individual and joint meetings.

Chapter 5 focuses on the change-inducing phase of therapy. Crisis management is stressed, and a three-stage process, (1) retrospective reconstruction, (2)

situational reconstruction, and (3) prospective reconstruction, is identified and described.

The change-inducing phase is continued in Chapter 6 with resolving conflicts and interpersonal predicaments as major topics. In addition, three major processes through which spouses or family members determine, establish, and maintain common meanings—decision-making, bargaining, and problem-solving—are presented.

The final stage in the change-inducing phase, overcoming personal limitations, is explored in Chapter 7, using techniques from behavior therapy, rational-emotive therapy and hyposuggestive procedures as well as relaxation and dramaturgical interventions associated with or derived from psychodrama or sociodrama. This chapter illustrates how the insights and techniques of other disciplinary perspectives can be creatively utilized within a sociocognitive approach. Also particularly informative are suggestions for self-management practices, homework, and encouraging each family member to act as a responsible change agent.

Finally, Chapter 8 describes the termination phase of therapy. Sections describe how to decide when to end therapy sessions, identify signs of progress, handle final appointments, and engage in post-therapy activities.

Overall, this book is a commendable contribution to clinical sociology in particular and to the therapeutic community as a whole. In the field of marriage and family therapy, it goes beyond systems theory to a framework that includes both the macro and micro bases and consequences of family problems. The theoretical discussions of the importance of societal factors in individual and family difficulties, as well as the critical significance of a symbolic interactionist standpoint, are exemplary. Paradoxically, case examples do not always demonstrate how societal factors or symbolic interaction concepts were utilized by the therapist in his understanding and intervention strategies. The book's emphasis on the family members as partners in the therapeutic process is also a significant contribution, as is the dual focus on overcoming personal limitations and helping the group reduce interpersonal difficulties. Even more important is the focus on how marital and family problems cannot be considered separately from other problems in society. Again, however, it would have been helpful to have these points demonstrated more clearly in case examples.

A final point is that although the book makes a major contribution from a sociocognitive standpoint, there is a startling lack of emphasis on the feelings and subjective experiences of Hurvitz's clients and the critical role that the extensive literature on the sociology of emotion could play in expanding upon and refining a sociocognitive approach. Unfortunately, while in most cases the work

points out relevant factors from other disciplines or subdisciplines of sociology, it downgrades contemporary emphasis on feelings. The challenge for future researchers, including practitioners, will therefore be to integrate this important “emotional” area into the sociocognitive approach.

Munchhausen’s Pigtail or Psychotherapy and “Reality,” essays and lectures by Paul Watzlawick. New York: W. W. Norton, 1990. 286 pp., \$19.95 cloth-bound.

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When I was a small child, I used to follow my mother about and respond to everything she said by asking, “Why?” Eventually, her patience would wear thin and she would snap at me with “Vy, vy, vy, Enough already with vy!”

These long-forgotten early memories were evoked upon reading Paul Watzlawick’s book, which also emphatically rejects the “why” question, albeit for different reasons. In *Munchhausen’s Pigtail* the author argues that as clinicians seeking to effect change in human interaction, we have been asking the wrong question. By asking “why,” we sought to identify traumatic events in a person’s past which could provide insights into his or her present behavior. The idea was to assist the client to bring long-buried past incidents to consciousness. In this traditional psychodynamic approach we assumed that the resulting insights represented liberating revelations of “truth,” which could lead to transformations in behavior and in interpersonal relationships.

In reality, the author argues, this process often proved to be long, tedious, and unsuccessful. He suggests a radical departure from this traditional approach, based on a reexamination of its underlying premises. Specifically, he challenges three central tenets of the traditional psychodynamic model. He challenges the assumption of linear cause and effect, suggesting instead a cybernetic model. He challenges the treatment of a single individual when the problem is a troubled relationship. (The improvement of troubled relationships is his central focus in this book.) Finally, he challenges the assumption that treatment necessarily entails a search for truth—an answer to the “why” question.

According to the author, the mission of psychotherapy (and indeed of science in general), is much more pragmatic. Indeed, pragmatism is the essence of his approach to the transformation of relationships. Accordingly, he suggests observation and analysis of the patterns of interaction in a relationship for the purpose of uncovering the underlying constructed realities of the participants. He further suggests examination of these constructed realities—definitions of the situation—for the purpose of determining promising changes in the constructs.