

Common Factors in MFT Master Session Videos: A Deductive Qualitative Analysis

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Background

- ▶ Common factors are the general mechanisms or variables associated with therapeutic change that are common across therapy models.
- ▶ Broadly conceived, the common factors perspective can be understood as a **theory** about the fundamental aspects of therapeutic change.
- ▶ Empirical support for common factors is grounded in studies of specific CF and meta-analyses of therapeutic effectiveness (e.g., Asay & Lambert, 1999; Frank & Frank, 1991; Wampold, 2001).



Background



- ▶ Attention to common factors in the MFT field has grown over the past 20 years.
 - ▶ First introduced by Sprenkle, Blow, & Dickey (1999)
 - ▶ Debated in 2004 *JMFT* articles (Sprenkle & Blow vs. Sexton & Ridley)
 - ▶ Compiled into a book by Sprenkle, Davis, & Lebow (2009).
- ▶ MFT CF can be understood as a **theory** about the fundamental aspects of change in MFT.
- ▶ However, this theory has not been empirically studied within the MFT field.

MFT CF Theoretical Framework

- **Relational Conceptualization:** conceptualizing difficulties in relational terms
- **Expanded Direct Treatment System:** Incorporating more than individual clients in treatment and considering all the stakeholders that may be affected by therapy.
- **Expanded Therapeutic Alliance:** Developing a therapeutic alliance with the client system
- **Disrupting Dysfunctional Relational Patterns:** Breaking up dysfunctional or pathological interaction cycles (through behavioral regulation, cognitive mastery, emotional experiencing)
- **Privileging of Clients Experiences:** Incorporating clients' perspectives into therapy.
 - Found only in postmodern approaches (Sprenkle, Blow, & Dickey, 1999).
 - Not found in most recent literature of MFT common factors.



Purpose

- ▶ The goal of this study is to evaluate the theory of common factors within marriage and family therapy using deductive qualitative analysis (QDA).
- ▶ Guiding Research Questions:
 - ▶ What are the common factors of MFT as exemplified in therapy sessions of master therapists using various MFT approaches?
 - ▶ Is there evidence in therapy sessions of MFT master therapists to support the theory of MFT common factors ?



Method: Deductive Qualitative Analysis

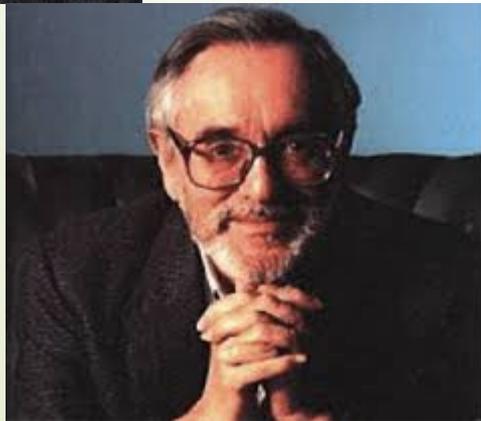
- An approach to qualitative research that begins with theory and facilitates theory development.
- Uses specific cases in order to evaluate an existing theory or hypothesis.
- Utilizes negative case analysis.
 - Purposely seeking evidence refutes or refines the existing theory.
 - Helps researchers avoid finding only what the theory suggests they will find.
- The result is a better theory than the original.

Method: Purposeful Sampling



Sue
Johnson

Salvador
Minuchin



- MFT CF theory asserts that common factors cut across MFT models.
- Therefore, we analyzed therapy sessions conducted by master therapists using seven different MFT models.
- Two different therapists for each model.

Method: Sample

Model	Therapist 1	Video Name	Therapist 2	Video Name
Structural therapy	Harry Aponte	<i>A House Divided</i>	Salvador Minuchin	<i>Unfolding the Laundry</i>
Emotionally-Focused Therapy	Sue Johnson	<i>EFT in Action</i>	Leslie Greenberg	<i>EFT with Couples</i>
Solution-Focused Brief Therapy	Insoo Kim Berg	<i>Irreconcilable Differences</i>	Bill O'Hanlon	<i>Solution-Oriented Family Therapy</i>
Bowenian Family Therapy	Monica McGoldrick	<i>The Legacy of Unresolved Loss</i>	Philip Guerin	<i>Bowenian Family Therapy with Philip Guerin</i>
Narrative Therapy	Michael White	<i>Escape from Bickering</i>	Stephen Madigan	<i>Narrative Family Therapy with Stephen Madigan</i>
Experiential Therapy	Carl Whitaker	<i>Experiential Family Therapy with Carl Whitaker</i>	Virginia Satir	<i>A Step Along the Way</i>
Strategic Therapy	Cloe Madanes	<i>Strategic Therapy with a Couple</i>	James Coyne	<i>Strategic Couples Therapy with James Coyne</i>



Method: Analysis Procedures

- We used open coding, theoretical coding, and analytic memos to analyze therapy videos and session transcripts.
- Each video and session transcript was analyzed by at least two researches.
- Researchers use existing theory as a source of sensitizing concepts (i.e., broad common factors and MFT specific common factors)
- Open coding allowed us to develop new codes when the data warranted it (or modify existing codes from MFT CF theory).



Results: Three Key Overarching Findings

1. Empirical support for existing theory of common factors in marriage and family therapy.
 - ▶ The results demonstrated strong evidence of common factors in highly model-specific therapy sessions.
 2. Empirical support for the moderate common factors perspective.
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Results: Three Key Overarching Findings

3. *A refined and expanded theory of common factors in marriage and family therapy.*
 - ▶ The result of the analysis is a new conceptual framework of MFT common factors that supports, refines, and expands the existing theory.
 - ▶ **Refines** the fundamental tenets of MFT CF
 - ▶ **Expands** the existing theory by moving beyond broad concepts to specific operational tenets of MFT CF.



Results: Refinements

- ▶ **Facilitating Constructive Interactions**
 - ▶ Therapists help clients interact in a more constructive and positive manner, rather than only disrupting dysfunctional patterns.
 - ▶ Embodied by enactments and coaching
- ▶ A refinement of *Disrupting Dysfunctional Relational Patterns*



Results: Refinements

- ▶ **Valuing Clients' Perspective and Experience**
 - ▶ Emphasizes the importance of clients' experience and point of view
 - ▶ Involves seeking clients' input
- ▶ Refinement of *Privileging Clients' Experiences*



Results: Refined MFT CF Theoretical Framework

- Relational Conceptualization
- Expanded Direct Treatment System
- Expanded Therapeutic Alliance
- Facilitating Constructive Interactions
 - ~~➤ Disrupting Dysfunctional Relational Patterns~~
- Valuing Clients' Perspective and Experience
 - ~~➤ Privileging of Clients Experiences~~



Results: Common Factors Operationalized

- ▶ **Gathering Information** about the client system. Includes four sub-factors:
 - ▶ Individuals
 - ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Goals/desired outcomes
 - ▶ Positive aspects of client system
- ▶ **Assessing interpersonal patterns/interactions**
 - ▶ Evaluating information about problems, patterns, and what works



Results: Common Factors Operationalized

- ▶ **Validating:** acknowledging the legitimacy of a client's experience. Includes:
 - ▶ Empathizing: verbally recognizing the emotional experience of clients
 - ▶ Complimenting: pointing out what clients are doing well
- ▶ **Summarizing:** Paraphrasing what clients say



Results: Common Factors Operationalized

- ▶ **Therapist Characteristics:** Aspects of the therapist's personality or style (such as using humor, touch, etc.)
- ▶ **Giving Directives:** providing suggestions for what clients could do to resolve problems
 - ▶ Includes in-session direction or homework
- ▶ **Facilitating Insight:** Using language to invite new understanding
 - ▶ Reframing: therapist rephrasing clients words or experiences to highlight alternative meanings



Results: Common Factors Operationalized

- **Maintaining Structure:** keeping therapy on track
 - Interrupting negative interaction
 - Asserting direction for the session
- **Providing Information about the Process of Therapy:** Telling clients what they can expect from treatment
- **Asking Permission from Clients:** Checking with clients to see if they are okay with the direction of therapy
 - Demonstrates an attitude of respect for clients



Results: Common Factors Operationalized

- ▶ **Challenging Clients:** Pushing back against client's point of view
- ▶ **Facilitating Perspective taking:** Helping client's see another's point of view
 - ▶ Facilitating empathy for another



Discussion and Implications

- ▶ The researchers found that the existing model of common factors was sound, but incomplete.
 - ▶ The results of the study refine and extend the previous theory of MFT common factors.
 - ▶ Further research is needed to examine common factors in MFT to determine how these findings apply to therapy in natural settings.
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Conclusion

- Overall, the refined theory of MFT CF fits well after examining sessions conducted by master therapists using different MFT modalities.
 - Common factors are evident within different MFT models. This lends support to the moderate common factors perspective that they operate within models.
 - The researchers conclude that common factors are an important framework for understanding the therapeutic process in relational therapy.
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