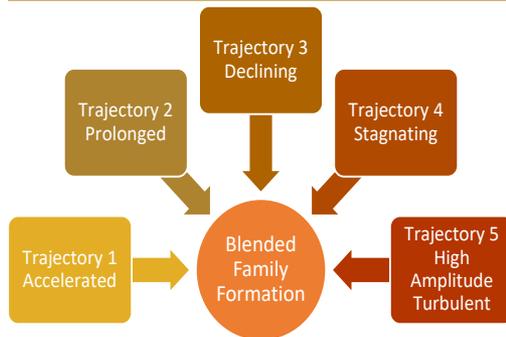


INTRODUCTION

- The purpose is to examine the literature on blended families with consideration given to contrasting a developmental model of blended family formation versus a process model.
- Emphasis is given to a qualitative study (Braithwaite et al, 2001) for its identification of five trajectories which emerged as themes from data collected through interviews with blended families.
- Additional studies are reviewed for their offerings related to the special challenges met by blended families and others for presenting various conditions that facilitate cohesion within blended families.
- A conceptual component of this work is the fusion of Ethnography, a research methodology, with Structural Family Therapy (Minuchin, 1974) to provide clinicians with an innovative treatment approach for working with blended families at the clinical practice level.

5 TRAJECTORIES FOR BLENDED FAMILY FORMATION



The Blended Family

An innovative combined clinical approach for working with blended families

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Ethnographic Interviewing

OBJECTIVE 1

Context is crucial for understanding the lived experiences of individuals

OBJECTIVE 2

To understand the effects of culture on individuals

OBJECTIVE 3

To elicit narratives that take the interviewer into the person's world

OBJECTIVE 4

To expose cultural "imbeddedness" bringing awareness of cultural rules and maps not known otherwise

OBJECTIVE 5

To create a safe space for sharing narratives

OBJECTIVE 6

To use Story, a core feature of ethnography, to bring about healing and change

Structural Family Therapy

TECHNIQUE 1

"Joining" the family to experience first-hand the culture that exists within the family

TECHNIQUE 2

Coaching new means of communication and interaction between family members

TECHNIQUE 3

Confronting assumptions/family myths

TECHNIQUE 4

Identifying subsystems

TECHNIQUE 5

Mapping, creating a visual representation of family relational patterns on a diagram.

TECHNIQUE 6

Enactments: raising the intensity level to cause the family to reorganize

For Clinical Application: Choose an objective on the left and pair with an SFT technique on the right according to color codes

RATIONALE

Data reported by the Stepfamily Foundation (2018)

- Over 50% of US families are remarried or re-coupled
- 1,300 new stepfamilies are formed every day
- The average US marriage lasts only 7 years.
- The result is that 1 of 2 marriages in the United States ends in divorce.
- Of those that divorce, 75% remarry or recouple.
- Of those who remarry or recouple, 2 of 3 break up when children are involved.



WHY ETHNOGRAPHY + SFT ?

Why combine Ethnography with Structural Family Therapy?

- Ethnographic Interviewing is a qualitative research methodology used to collect data to understand a person's lived experience as they interact with culture. (Tubbs and Burton, 2005)
- SFT therapeutic techniques are dependent upon understanding the family culture and Ethnographic Interviewing is a means of discovering the lived experiences of the family members.
- Perhaps the strongest link between Ethnographic Interviewing, the SFT techniques and the implementation of them as a combined therapeutic approach, is that they focus on the cultural component of the family system. Blended families sometimes experience years of discord due to family culture wars. These methods together offer the clinician a synergistic resource that captures the ability of both approaches to facilitate family members' awareness of cultural imbeddedness. This refers to the family cultural norms that exist unknown, and unseen in families of origin until the family blends with another family also having their own forms of cultural imbeddedness.

LIMITATIONS and FUTURE RESEARCH

This is a conceptual piece that was developed during the course of a literature review. This combined approach has been used on a limited scale in a clinical setting with effective results. Though both approaches have been studied extensively and are considered evidence-based therapies, they have not been studied together. A study to evaluate these approaches in a combined fashion is being considered as a future research endeavor.

SPECIAL CHALLENGES FOR BLENDED FAMILIES

- Early role ambiguity and perceptions of inequities in caring for children (Guisinger, et al., 1989)
- Sources of conflict that hampered the early development of relationships included differences in how discipline should occur, favoritism, jealousy, and feelings of guilt. (Hobart, 1989),
- Strong parent-child coalitions that interfered with parental decision-making and negatively affected equitable means of solving family problems (Pasley, et al., 1993).
- Loyalty conflicts, a child feeling trapped between triangulated parents are uniquely difficult (Afifi, 2003)

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

- Normalcy is literally, "talked into being" through the use of language and literary devices such as story and metaphor (Buzzanell, 2010).
- Affinity seeking (relational closeness) is one of the most important tasks of stepfamily life. (Ganong, et al., 2018).
- A positive correlation exists between parental warmth toward the child and the emotional well-being of the child (Fine, et al., 1993).

CONDITIONS CONDUCIVE TO COHESION