Family Assessment
Integrating Multiple Clinical Perspectives
Family Assessment: Integrating Multiple Perspectives
Family Assessment

Integrating Multiple Perspectives

Edited by

Manfred Cierpka
Volker Thomas
Douglas H. Sprenkle
CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................. vii

Introduction
1 Introduction to Family Assessment ................................. 3
   Manfred Cierpka
2 The Three-Level Model of Family Assessment .................. 15
   Manfred Cierpka

Part I: The Initial Interview
3 First Contact and Preconditions for the Initial Interview:
   Conducting the First Interview ................................. 35
   Joseph L. Wetchler and Gina Gutenkunst
4 “A Problem Well Stated Is a Problem Half Solved.” .............. 53
   A. Peter MacLean
5 Initial Interview with a Family .................................... 81
   Volker Thomas

Part II: Clinical Perspectives
6 The Context of Family Assessment .................................. 95
   Dieter Benninghoven, Sabine Krebeck, & Uta Bohlen
7 The Family’s Social World .......................................... 111
   Silvia Echevarria-Doan, Martha Marquez, & Diane Estrada
8 The Multigenerational Perspective of Family Assessment ...... 129
   Günter Reich, Manfred Cierpka, & Almuth Massing
9 The Family Life Cycle and the Genogram ......................... 159
   Tina Timm and Adrian Blow
10 Assessment of Parenting Styles and Behavior ................... 193
    C. Everett Bailey
11 Systemic Assessment ............................................. 211
    Douglas H. Sprenkle
12 Psychodynamic Assessment ....................................... 231
    Günter Reich & Manfred Cierpka
13 Family Sculpture Procedures ..................................... 257
    Gary H. Bischof and Karen B. Helmeke

List of Contributors .................................................. 283
Subject Index .......................................................... 285
Preface

This book presents several unique perspectives of family diagnostics and assessment. First, it integrates the views of family therapists from Germany and the United States by offering a glimpse of systemic thinking from two cultures, two languages, and two historical contexts. Second, the book offers multiple theoretical perspectives integrated into one comprehensive approach that has the overarching goal to match the assessment process with the family’s needs. These perspectives include psychodynamic and systemic theories that require different assessment procedures. The interaction effects between the two approaches and their integration contribute to the unique contribution of this work in providing new assessment procedures.

The book is conceptualized to view families through different lenses, similar to looking through a window into the inside of a house. Each chapter offers a special perspective into the family’s house as illustrated in Figure 1. The personal theories of the diagnostician, his or her scientific theories of how a family works, and the social context in which the assessment of the family takes place, all influence the definitions, the observations, and the formation of a clinical assessment. In Figure 1 these influencing factors are shown in the outer ring that surrounds the diagnostic window and the concrete implementation of the first interview. Chapter 1 presents definitions of family and family assessment. Advantages and disadvantages of the assessment procedures are discussed. “The Three-Level Model of Family Assessment” in Chapter 2 is an attempt to integrate the various perspectives like psychodynamic and systemic thinking by looking at the level of the individual, dyadic and triadic relationships, and the family as a whole. These two introduction chapters constitute the theoretical framework of our understanding of family assessment.

The diagnostic/assessment process as outlined in the center box of Figure 1 illustrates the stages for carrying out the assessment interviews. Three chapters describe, step-by-step, and as practice-oriented as possible, the assessment process from the first contact (usually a telephone conversation) with the family to the problem definition and the formulation of the therapy goals. Chapter 3 “First Contacts and Preconditions for the Initial Interview” describes the establishment of contacts between the systems of the family and that of the therapists. During the initial interviews family members formulate their perceptions of the problems and express the changes they desire. Problem definition and treatment goals are central issues in this stage of the process. Chapter 4 called “A Problem Well Stated is a Problem Half Solved” explores more formal assessment procedures. Chapter 5 presents the case example of assessment interviews with a family. This chapter “Conducting the First Interview with the Family” contains guidelines for first interviews. In the course of the first sessions, the therapist explains, in concrete terms, how the assessment process will proceed. In addition, the commentary to the interview discusses theoretical considerations regarding the clinical material from various, individual and systemic diagnostic points of view.

The outer layer of Figure 1 represents the different elements of the diagnostic/assessment window through which the information of the assessment interviews is gathered, connections are found and, finally, results are interpreted. The elements themselves are located on different levels of abstraction. Chapter 6 “Family Assessment in Context” describes the framework in which first family interviews take place and the variables that
influence the presentation of the family problems. The social environment of the family or partnership has an effect on the diagnostic/assessment and therapeutic process. Chapter 7 “The Family’s Social World” discusses the assessment of the social realities of families. Families have histories extending back for many generations and cultural contexts in which they have been embedded. Chapter 8 entitled “The Multigenerational Perspective of Family Assessment” focuses on diagnosing/assessing the psychodynamics of families over several generations as a contributing factor in the present, ongoing relationships of a family. Family dynamics are a result of the growth processes of the individuals and the adaptation of the family life cycle in response to them. Families proceed through life-
cycle stages that greatly influence the environment and the tasks that characterize their communal lives. Chapter 9 “The Family Life Cycle and the Genogram” synthesises the family’s context and environment into the visual diagnostic/assessment tool of the genogram. Behavior management with regard to education and parenting plays an important role in many family problems. Chapter 10 “Assessment of Parenting Styles and Behavior” provides the family therapist with another angle into a diagnostic window of family assessment.

In family assessment, the connections between the presenting problems and the family dynamics can be viewed as a reciprocal interaction between systemic-structural and psychodynamic factors. From our point of view, comprehensive family assessment integrates psychodynamic and systemic-structural findings into a summary of its clinical diagnosis.

The systemic dimension constitutes the first theoretical element that highlights the structure of the family – the transactional patterns that manifestly regulate desires and fears at the relational and behavioral levels. The family therapist can form a picture of the systemic-structural components by, for example, observing and assessing the structure of role assignments and the appropriateness of these roles with regard to generational and gender alliances and limitations. The therapist must observe the reciprocal relationships between the subsystems and the family as a whole with other systems and place these in relationship to the current development status of the individual family members and the current life-cycle stage of the family. Chapter 11 “The Systemic Assessment” summarizes assessment information from the longitudinal life-history perspective and from the ongoing, present-related systemic perspective, respectively. The psychodynamic window adds an assessment element of the desires and fears of the individual family members as they influence (mostly unconsciously) the relationship dynamics. The therapist must also discover the unconscious dynamics of the “whole family.” The object relationships of individual family members produce a network of conscious and unconscious desires and anxieties that emerge in the framework of these object relationships and constitute both the family dynamics of the whole family as well as the inner images of the family for each individual. Chapter 12 “Psychodynamic Assessment” gives an overview of the guidelines for assessing psychodynamic constructs in family life. The family therapist assesses the tension between the constructive and destructive components between the individual, inner world of the family members and the family relationship patterns. The flexibility of the family, that is, the extent of possible change, will depend mostly on these parameters. Finally, Chapter 13 applies both theoretical perspectives illustrating some “Family Sculpture Procedures” that are particularly helpful in the assessment process.

We would like to thank the 7 German and 13 US authors for taking on the challenging task of writing a book that attempts to bridge two cultural and two theoretical worlds. Their enthusiasm, respect for each other, and patience made this book a pleasure to conceptualize, put together, and look through to its completion. Thanks to Hogrefe’s Lisa Bennett who kept us on track when the transatlantic communication among the editors appeared interrupted. We hope that the reader will enjoy this book as much as we did working on it.

Manfred Cierpka, Volker Thomas, and Douglas Sprenkle
Introduction