

President's Address:

Marianne Celano, Ph.D., ABPP



What Can Jazz teach Us About Family Psychology?

“Jazz is the type of music that can absorb so many things and still be jazz.”

—Sonny Rollins

“The problem with jazz is that it is hidden in plain sight.”

—Peter Gordon,
Thirsty Ear Records

These quotes about jazz together capture both the bright promise and the primary limitation of the field of Family Psychology (FP) today. Jazz, a musical form characterized by improvisation, has been used as a metaphor to describe the role of the family therapist (Sexton & van Dam, 2010) and the tension between research and practice in FP (Lebow, 2009). Here I compare the history of jazz as a strong musical tradition with our evolving professional specialty. Both jazz and FP are

innovative (some say revolutionary) paradigms that evolved from a mix of cultural traditions in the U.S., gained wide acceptance and popularity, yet face an uncertain future.

Evolution of Jazz and FP

Both jazz and FP are easier to recognize than describe; as Louis Armstrong once said, “if you gotta ask, you’ll never know!” Although the etymology of the word “jazz” is in dispute, most scholars agree it was first used to describe music in Chicago around

1915. Currently, jazz refers to the musical genre originating in the U.S. at the beginning of the 20th century from a confluence of European and West African musical traditions (Stearns, 1975). Characterized by rhythmic complexity, blue tonality, improvisation, and a unique performance practice (the “swung note”), jazz is considered by many to be the greatest, most original American export to the world.

FP also developed from a confluence of disparate traditions in the U.S. The primary precursor was the systemic view, exemplified by the pioneering efforts of Bateson and colleagues. Another strong influence was behaviorism, which emphasized observable human

behavior rather than intrapsychic dynamics. The behavioral view fanned the flame of systemic thinking as it applied to family interaction patterns (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2009). Over time the melding of a focus on behavior and systemic patterns evolved into the epistemology we know today as FP: a broad and general orientation to psychology that uses a systemic paradigm as an alternative to the individual focus of many psychological orientations (Nutt & Stanton, 2008). It is the paramount perspective on individuals in context.

Complexity

Jazz is characterized by its complexity. The musical components are complicated, particularly as compared to other popular genres, like blues and rock. As Lou Reed once quipped, "If it has more than three chords, it's jazz." But what really sets jazz apart from other musical forms is the power and freedom given to the performer in interpreting the musical composition. A skilled jazz musician interprets a tune in very individual ways, altering the harmonies or time signature depending on his or her mood, interactions with fellow musicians, or even members of the audience. In fact, the appeal of live jazz is the discovery of unique improvisations arising out of the musical interplay among a group of musicians.

Complexity is one of the key concepts defining the systemic paradigm of FP. To understand human behavior within the interacting contexts of individual, interpersonal and macrosystemic factors is to embrace complexity. Family psychologists recognize complexity in their conceptualizations and strive to become comfortable with the

ambiguity and unpredictability that exist in real-life systems rather than seek simplistic or reductionistic solutions (Stanton, 2009).

The complexity inherent in jazz and FP provide fertile ground for innovation. Jazz has spawned a number of new musical styles as musicians absorb other influences and seek new ways to express themselves; witness the dissonant harmonies introduced by Thelonious Monk, or the development of Latin jazz. FP also has seen considerable innovation in theory, research methodology, and clinical practice over the last several decades.

The challenge posed by complexity is that it is difficult to master. For many modern musicians, jazz is a genre attempted only after learning another musical form, such as classical music or blues. Indeed, the general level of musicianship in jazz is higher now than ever (Giddins, 1998). Similarly, family psychologists are required to be competent in a number of areas, including conceptual and scientific foundations, interpersonal interactions, individual and cultural diversity, and consultation (Stanton & Welsh, 2011). Many of the essential skills comprising these competencies are more advanced than what is typically taught in a professional psychology graduate program. For example, graduate students learn that it is important to be empathic and validate client concerns in developing a therapeutic alliance. For a family psychologist, a systemic therapeutic alliance requires these same skills plus simultaneous consideration of how interactions between the therapist and any one family member affect interactions between the therapist and other members, and/or those between family members.

Uncertain Future

Both jazz and FP sparked excitement, enjoyed meteoric rises in popularity, and now look back on their heydays. Jazz began as "race music," moved quickly to become the popular music in America, only to become an avant-garde, marginalized music once again, sustained by a small but dedicated following. In short, jazz has become a victim of its own success. Its influence on American culture is undeniable; once just a noun, "jazz" is now also a verb and an adjective ("jazzy"). Despite the tremendous influence of jazz on music and culture, successful venues for live jazz performances diminished as other popular musical forms became dominant. According to an old saying, a rock guitarist plays three chords to a thousand people, while a jazz guitarist plays a thousand chords to three people. Jazz critic Gary Giddins (1998) put it best: jazz faced "a perilous future of respectability and disinterested acceptance."

FP, too, has been a victim of its own success. As Bill Watson observed, the family systems viewpoint is now "part of the therapeutic mainstream rather than the maverick vanguard" (Watson, 2007). Once a revolutionary movement (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2009), consideration of individuals in context has become part of the status quo in professional psychology. Graduate programs claim a "biopsychosocial" framework or a "multi-level conceptualization" of psychopathology, and many include courses that present systems theory. According to the APPIC online directory, 90% of APA accredited internships have at least a minor rotation in couple or family therapy, and 33% have

a major rotation. While FP should be defined more by epistemology than population (Thoburn, 2010), couple/family therapy still constitutes the core treatment modality associated with the field. The tenets of FP are everywhere, hidden in plain sight.

Although the influence of FP on professional psychology is indisputable, the future of its distinctive voice is threatened. For example, internship and postdoctoral training programs offering training in family *psychology* (as opposed to family therapy) are rare, and there are comparatively few psychologists with board certification in Couple and Family Psychology, as compared to those boarded in clinical or counseling psychology. In addition, the clinical practice of FP continues to face challenges posed by the lack of reimbursement for couple and family therapy in traditional health insurance plans.

Follow the Lead of Jazz

What is to become of jazz and FP? Will their success in influencing the broader culture – artistic or professional – cost them their integrity and distinctiveness? A number of steps have been taken to ensure that jazz remains vibrant, innovative, and relevant to each new generation. FP would do well to follow this lead. We must take the initiative to expand our audience (consumer base), identify and nurture young talent, and seek formal recognition of our specialty.

Expand the consumer base. Jazz has expanded its audience via radio programming and free concerts. We can expand our consumer base in FP by informing others about our services and unique contributions. We can educate administrators,

funding agencies, referring physicians, trainees and potential clients about how services offered by a family psychologist differ from those offered by a clinical or counseling psychologist. These efforts can be done via APA publications; our Division 43 website; state psychological association activities; and our personal interactions with students, researchers, policy-makers, and clients.

To expand its audience, the Columbia/Legacy label set out to deliver a comprehensive review of jazz artists with their “This is Jazz” series in the 1990s. I propose a “This is Family Psychology” series for the general public, consisting of brief (500 words) case examples or anecdotal descriptions that capture the distinctiveness of a FP approach to a specific situation, question, or problem. These could be available on our website for anyone to read. The advantage of this approach is that the case examples are easily accessible and digestible, and available to those outside the Society.

Identify and nurture young talent. Jazz promotes young musicians via middle school and high school bands, community youth ensembles, “all state” competitions, summer camps, and local jazz jams open to musicians of all ages. By the time they attend college, most jazz musicians have already played gigs in a variety of venues. FP may be introduced to undergraduate psychology majors, but is typically not part of the curriculum until graduate school. Opportunities for supervised practice in FP often don’t emerge until internship and postdoctoral training; by this time, many trainees have identified themselves with a specialty or theoretical perspective that they perceive

to be incompatible with FP. Relatively few young psychologists join the Society for Family Psychology; less than 10% of our membership is under age 40, and only 15% are early career psychologists (ECPs).

To nurture interest and talent in FP, we should introduce FP into psychology courses at the high school and undergraduate level. There should be graduate programs, or tracks within programs, dedicated to training students in the core competencies of family psychology (Stanton & Welsh, 2011). Internships and postdoctoral fellowships should offer intensive and comprehensive FP training in a clinical or applied setting in preparation for board certification. ECPs should receive mentoring from senior family psychologists in providing clinical supervision, conducting clinical programs and research projects, and writing and reviewing manuscripts.

There are many paths to FP. Some psychologists discover the value of a systemic paradigm well after graduate school, as their clinical practices or capacities for complexity grow. The Division 43 leadership should try to identify these FP “late bloomers,” nurture their interests in systemic thinking, and encourage them to contribute to the field. In addition, psychologists who choose a professional identity based on their practice setting should be invited to join the Society and consider specialization in FP. Who says you can’t be both a pediatric psychologist and a family psychologist?

Perhaps most important, we should examine the structures, relationships, and procedures of the Society itself, as Sexton (2009) recommended, to discover and implement activities that engage ECPs who practice family psychology. In short, we need

to think systemically about how to increase the voice of the Division's future leaders.

Formal recognition. In 1987, Congress passed House Congressional Resolution 57, which designated jazz as "a rare and valuable national American treasure to which we should devote our attention, support and resources to make certain it is preserved, understood and promulgated." Jazz education and performance programs are eligible to receive federal grants, and students can major in jazz studies at universities.

Although FP was recognized as a specialty by the Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP) in 2002, it is not yet considered a Developed Practice Area (like clinical psychology or counseling psychology) by the Commission on Accreditation of the APA. Nor is there an international standard for FP (Bray & Stanton, 2009). If FP is to progress in its growth and influence, yet retain its integrity as a unique orientation to psychology, it must follow the example of jazz in achieving formal recognition of its specialty status.

As Miller wrote in the forward to Janus' (2010) book on jazz, "The one thing that's kept jazz from disappearing is its ability to embrace new elements and influences and still, somehow, keep its essence." Jazz remains alive because it is inventive, absorbing other musical influences and reflecting life as we live it. FP has followed a similar path, incorporating new considerations of context and spawning evidence-based treatment models. The future of FP will depend on our success in remaining vibrant and innovative, allowing each generation to bring its own "lived experience" to the field.

References

- Bray, J.H., & Stanton, M. (2009). Conclusion: The future of family psychology. In J.H. Bray & M. Stanton, M. (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of family psychology* (pp. 755-760). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Giddins, G. (1998). *Visions of Jazz: The first century*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Goldenberg, H., & Goldenberg, I. (2009). The revolution and evolution of family therapy and family psychology. In J.H. Bray & M. Stanton (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of family psychology* (pp. 21-36). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Janus, C. (2010). *The new face of jazz: An intimate look at today's living legends and the artists of tomorrow*. New York: Billboard Books.
- Nutt, R. L., & Stanton, M. (2008). Family psychology specialty practice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39, 519-528. doi: 10.1037/0735-7028.39.5.519
- Sexton, T.L., & van Dam, A.E. (2010). Creativity within the structure: Clinical expertise and evidence-based treatments. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 40 (3), 175-180. doi: 10.1007/s10879-010-9144-2
- Sexton, T. (2009). From the President: The evolving identity of family psychology – Celebrating our past and charting our future. *The Family Psychologist*, 25 (1).
- Stanton, M. & Welsh, R. (2011). *Specialty competencies in couple and family psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stanton, M. (2009). The systemic epistemology of the specialty of family psychology. In J.H. Bray & M. Stanton, M. (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of family psychology* (pp. 5-20). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stearns, M.W. (1975). *The story of jazz*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Thoburn, J. (2010). Family psychology in action. *The Family Psychologist*, 26 (1).
- Watson, W.H. (2007). From the President: In praise of magic. *The Family Psychologist*, 23 (4).