

A Reflective Look at Family Therapy as Part of The Life Sustaining Habitat on the Moon

James E. Anacker MA, NCC, LMHC State of Washington

October, 31, 2021

A Reflective Look at Family Therapy as Part of The Life Sustaining Habitat on the Moon

The moon village is an outstandingly ambitious and important aspiration. To bring a permanent habitation to the lunar surface has deep impacts on what it means to be human and of what humans are capable of. The habitat must support human life. There are certain things central to being human including eating, drinking, breathing, being a part of families, and exploring. This list is not extensive, but the moon village must be a sustainable environment for things required by humans. A successful settlement on the moon literally is about being human on the moon. This involves eating food, drinking water, breathing air, and exploring—which is part of the human experience. However, what about families? Are families as important as eating, drinking, and breathing?

My Experience as a Family Therapist

I started researching telehealth options for family counseling as part of my early dissertation process as a PhD student in Counselor Education and Supervision. Previously, I started working with families in 2018 in their homes. The state of Washington, where I am licensed, is a wonderful state in regards to providing families with evidence-based approaches when they are in need. Separation of children from parents is not the first choice for struggling families by agents of the state, but rather, as much as possible, families with children are given free family counseling in the home paid for by the state. It is sad that many families do not have access to high quality family therapy, even in the state of Washington. A family must demonstrate that it is more or less in crisis prior to receiving services. It is my understanding that most states in the United States do not have as robust of options. For inhabitants of the moon

village do we want to wait for them to reach the point of crisis prior to providing family services? What if we only provided food when moon village inhabitants are starving, water when they are dehydrated, or air when they were suffocating? Obviously, these are not options for successful placement of humans on the moon. I would argue that for an optimal human experience on the moon, one in which inhabitants are empowered to thrive, that wrap around family services should be considered.

I have already described how inhabitants of earth often are limited in the family therapy options available. After all, many health insurances are staunch on their family therapy options if they have them at all. Which on first glance may seem like a wise business decision, cutting costs for health payment systems. However, there is ample evidence that all individuals of a family can benefit from family therapy services. Which means an entire family is getting mental health therapy in one sitting. Our family systems are central to our psychological individual health. So, if there are three people in a family, that is three people receiving treatment for the price of one. Family therapy can be an effective approach at treating an entire group of people through bolstering what is a natural human phenomenon, that is strong human ties in systems we call families.

Evolutionary Leap from Hunter Gathers to Moon Inhabitants

As we are looking at expanding the habitation of humans on to another body in the solar system, one can appreciate the evolutionary leap that such an inhabitation would represent. To look forward, it is often good idea to look backward. The role of family is to provide protection to children. Most mammals take care of their babies, but not the extent that humans have evolved a family.

If we are to look at the evolutionary history of families, it does not take long to appreciate that families serve all people of all ages. They are almost at the center of every story of human experience. Many accounts in religious texts pay specific attention to family dynamics and heritage of the subjects of stories. Homer's *Odyssey* is about an individual that wishes to return and acclimate into their family. Most television shows surround a family and their collective passage in time with the dynamics of these interpersonal groups that intimately surround them, be they humorous or serious. For the purpose of this reflective paper, I would put forth the definition that the family is the unit of people that depend fundamentally upon one another on a regular basis.

Continuing to look backwards at our role as a family driven mammalian species, we need to appreciate the anthropological reality that human offspring are incapable of getting enough calories without their parents help until about teenage years. (Anyone who has ever lived with teenagers, realize at that age often they are consuming almost every calorie they can get their hands on). However, in the wild the 1.4 million years of homo-sapien existence, families that stuck together survived. Children received enough calories, which often required the work of at least two parents working more or less in harmony. Parents that stuck together with their offspring in communities that worked together also greatly impacted the odds that the children might just might themselves grow up to reproduce. There were no antibiotics, modern amenities, and insights that has made the child mortality rate drop greatly as society has progressed. Many children died during the history of our species. However, evolution favored families that stuck together and had positive relationships with other families in small communities.

While the vast majority of human evolution is a mystery, it is likely that human families from about 1.4 million years ago until about 12,000 years ago was an existence as hunter gatherers. Families stuck together with other families, because individual parents could not always be successful with kills of wild life. When an adult human did succeed at hunting, they often had more food than what they knew what to do with it before it would spoil. Food would not go to waste if the family had other families to share their successes with. Again, it is likely the sharing of calories promoted community systems which benefited family systems which benefited individual systems, which allowed biological systems to pass on genetic systems. Healthy communities depended upon cooperative families which depended on the welfare of individuals. Will the community of the moon village be any different? I would argue that promotion of the welfare of moon village inhabitants and community can be greatly impacted by family systems consideration.

The Family of the Moon Village

Ideally, everyone in the family takes care of everyone. Everyone in the family deeply impacts one another. The people who live long term at the moon village will themselves be like a family, at least temporarily. Even the parent who abandons their children, leaves an impact on the child's psyche that persists. So, when we talk about the passage and residence of individuals at the moon village, we are wise to consider the familial needs and role and influence they pose on those they left on earth. We should strive to understand the family needs of those who must be away for periods of time. We should aspire for the ideal in family relationships. Inhabitants on at the moon village will be in much better shape with peace of mind that their family is receiving

the best possible support while they are gone. There is evidence that even the basic biological systems are healthier when the family system is healthier.

The moon village is going to require complex systems to provide life sustaining nutrients, air, hydration, waste management, and etc. to keep the humans healthy. The planning of the moon village should include the dynamic of caring for the individual's family systems. Adults who are likely to have children are in the prime age where they will be needed in the moon village. Most people aged 25 to 50 will likely inhabit the moon village. Middle aged adults often are sandwiched between taking care of their older parents and their younger children.

Geographical distances make adulting, this process of taking care of family members in need, difficult. When an essential family member is needed on the moon, we are not necessary talking about geographical distance- we are talking about stellar distance. Regardless of how far away an individual travels, their role as supporting both younger and older people their families remain. Providing support so individuals are not sitting on the moon stressing about their families is essential. So, one option is that the moon village only accept inhabitants that can demonstrate that they are not needed by their families. There will be very few inhabitants under these conditions, so this is not likely. Another option is that families must accept that their family member is not going to be able to serve any function.

A Rough Draft of What Family Therapy for Moon Villagers Could Accomplish

Or, the moon village, could adopt a robust system, based on the science of mental health research for helping people on the moon participate in their families even at a great distance. This last option seems more likely. What exactly does a robust family counseling system look like for the moon village?

The process of preparing to go the moon village would include voluntarily participation in family counseling prior to actual travel. Therapists in a case manager role would help the busy professional to seek out what their role is in their family. What arrangements need to be made to allow the professional to have their ducks in a row before blast off would be professionally brainstormed and considered. Family businesses, retiree care, childcare, and partnership considerations would be some of the issues addressed in this process. The family has several components and individuals play multiple roles in their family. Being removed from the family should start with a case manager understanding the needs of the family unit prior to the journey to the moon.

Making sure that every professional's home life is in order prior to taking off for the moon would be preventative. Following through after a careful analysis of what a professional's role is in their family would involve providing support and resources for those left behind. Maybe children will need play therapy to cope with a parent being gone. Perhaps, elder parents will need a caregiver arrangement. Spouses may need assistance with house chores. The absence of household member leaves much needed slack that must be incorporated into people's plans. Also, something that must be planned is the continuation of family therapy.

Therapy sessions can be partaken at an interval that is appropriate for every family. Some families may decline, and that is their right. Therapy should be synchronous telehealth service involving key members of the family. This can help the family to feel connected and be guided to healthy interactions. The family is going to inherently be under stress from the separation inherent to the moon village inhabitation. Ideally the therapy will help both the moon village

worker and the family. The guided therapy should help the separated family find individual health for one another.

The last proposed schema for therapy would be helping the moon village inhabitant to reintegrate into their family. Return to earth procedures to prepare for the return on family members to earthly family existence. This can include scaffolding provided by families that have already been through this process. There need not be an abrupt return of individuals to home, but instead expectations and discussions can help the family bond and discuss issues involving the return of the individual from the moon.

So, in essence, I argue and conclude with the thought that inhabitation of the moon should include at least some regular family considerations. From preparing to go, to guided family discussions while there, and finally with at least a basic integration process, our future moon village inhabitants are going to feel supported. How much do things such as food, airlocks, water purification and acquisition, and other life supporting systems cost? A family therapy program would not be inexpensive, but it would also not be overall nearly as expensive as several other life sustaining systems at the moon village. I would challenge planners of the moon village to consider the costs of developing such a program. I would also encourage future moon villagers to be given consideration that their family health matters and should, can, and will be planned for.