EXAMPLE 3 A BVP Can Have Many, One, or No Solutions

In Example 7 of Section 1.1 we saw that the two-parameter family of solutions of the differential equation $x'' + 16x = 0$ is

$$x = c_1 \cos 4t + c_2 \sin 4t. \tag{2}$$

(a) Suppose we now wish to determine the solution of the equation that further satisfies the boundary conditions $x(0) = 0$, $x(\pi/2) = 0$. Observe that the first condition $0 = c_1 \cos 0 + c_2 \sin 0$ implies that $c_1 = 0$, so $x = c_2 \sin 4t$. But when $t = \pi/2$, $0 = c_2 \sin 2\pi$ is satisfied for any choice of c_2, since $\sin 2\pi = 0$. Hence the boundary-value problem

$$x'' + 16x = 0, \quad x(0) = 0, \quad x\left(\frac{\pi}{2}\right) = 0 \tag{3}$$

has infinitely many solutions. Figure 4.1.2 shows the graphs of some of the members of the one-parameter family $x = c_2 \sin 4t$ that pass through the two points $(0, 0)$ and $(\pi/2, 0)$.

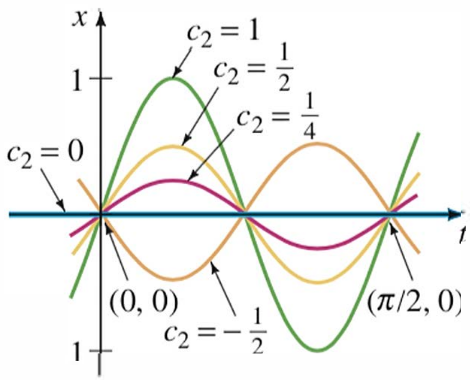

FIGURE 4.1.2 Solution curves for BVP in part (a) of Example 3

(b) If the boundary-value problem in (3) is changed to

$$x'' + 16x = 0, \quad x(0) = 0, \quad x\left(\frac{\pi}{8}\right) = 0, \tag{4}$$

then $x(0) = 0$ still requires $c_1 = 0$ in the solution (2). But applying $x(\pi/8) = 0$ to $x = c_2 \sin 4t$ demands that $0 = c_2 \sin(\pi/2) = c_2 \cdot 1$. Hence $x = 0$ is a solution of this new boundary-value problem. Indeed, it can be proved that $x = 0$ is the *only* solution of (4).

(c) Finally, if we change the problem to

$$x'' + 16x = 0, \quad x(0) = 0, \quad x\left(\frac{\pi}{2}\right) = 1, \tag{5}$$

we find again from $x(0) = 0$ that $c_1 = 0$, but applying $x(\pi/2) = 1$ to $x = c_2 \sin 4t$ leads to the contradiction $1 = c_2 \sin 2\pi = c_2 \cdot 0 = 0$. Hence the boundary-value problem (5) has no solution.