

The interactive context of the individual within the family: between normality and disorder

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Abstract:

Healthy family interaction contributes to the psychological well-being of family members, allowing them to behave in a balanced manner and acquire qualities and skills that help them cope with life outside the family, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and social skills that help them build and maintain relationships with others in their social circle. On the other hand, there are many factors that may threaten and destabilize this family entity, creating a kind of dysfunctional and turbulent relationship between individuals. This causes their interaction to take a negative turn and may become unhealthy and abnormal, affecting individuals and the relationships between the various sub-groups that make up the family, threatening the mental and physical health of individuals. Its members exhibit abnormal behaviors, and some may develop psychological and even mental disorders that may lead them to adopt deviant and criminal behaviors that are indicative of and express the family's own dysfunction. The family structure becomes a pathological and deviant one, rather than a healthy one that fulfills its educational role and ensures the proper upbringing of its members. Thus, the individual within his family may be either within a healthy and normal educational system, or in a system, that generates disorder and deviance because of poor interactions and a corrupt family environment as a whole.

Keywords: individual; interactive context; family; normality; disorder.

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Introduction:

The family is a unique and special unit. It is the first environment in which an individual grows up and has the greatest influence on him or she compared to other contexts that affect him or her and play a role in shaping his or her personality. This uniqueness and special nature of the family—mainly reflected in the experiences individuals gain and the skills they learn within it—governs their behavior and attitudes. Therefore, the family is considered a source of satisfaction for the biological, psychological, social, and economic needs of the individual, providing him with the appropriate environment for healthy growth and ensuring him a dignified and stable life. It also instills cultural and social values in the individual and contributes to building and shaping his or her attitudes and refining his or her personality. Family members, whether parents or siblings, are considered the ideal role models and primary examples for children, especially parents, as children learn from them everything that helps them face life, considering them the first and most important models in their social lives. As the basic social unit in building society, the family is also considered a center for the exchange of experiences among its members, so that they influence each other, their attitudes converge, and they bond as an expression of the emotional and affective participation of any of its members. Any imbalance in the structure of this family will affect the rest of its members.

Given the changes in family structures brought about by social change and rapid technological development, including roles, duties, and values that have helped create new patterns of interaction, families may not know how to deal with them, leading to conflict that plunges the family into a vortex of conflict that makes it unstable. This has a negative impact on the type of relationships between individuals and their health on various levels.

A healthy, sound, and balanced family environment that seeks to maintain cohesion and harmony among family members, in addition to the ability of this environment to face and confront the problems and pressures that the family may encounter during its life cycle, and the use of effective strategies to address various events that may disrupt the family system and upset the roles of its members, contribute to the family members enjoying balanced mental health and acquiring qualities and skills that help them cope with life outside the family, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and social skills that help them build and maintain relationships with others within their social circle.

Therefore, families that experience conflicts and discordant behaviors need counseling and therapeutic services provided to families in this regard, with the aim of maintaining harmony and balance in the family structure, strengthening relationships between individuals, and improving interactive strategies.

1. Family systems and forms of family interaction:

There are many family systems based on family interaction within the family, including:

1.1. The autocratic or authoritarian system:

One person who decides almost everything in the family, usually the father, represents this system. This system attempts to impose its will on family members through domination, punishment, or threats. This system is hierarchical, with some members at the top of the pyramid, some in the middle, and some at the bottom. This system is rigid and does not allow family members to give and take or express their thoughts and feelings, which leads to problems within the family and its environment (Malki and Bangip, 2013, p. 9).

The permissive or lenient system:

This system is the opposite of the authoritarian or dictatorial system. It gives individuals within the family the freedom to do as they please, whether they wake up early or not, complete their education or not, go to school or not, etc. etc .

Therefore, if the autocratic system is bad, this system is much worse, because the individual in the family will be undisciplined and will not know the standards of right and wrong. He will do whatever he wants without taking the consequences of his behavior into

consideration, thereby harming himself and others, and social relationships will be non-existent. (Al-Aziz, 2015, p. 106)

1.2. Democratic system:

This is a middle ground between autocratic and permissive systems, where freedom is within limits and a spirit of cooperation and teamwork unites individuals. Each family member respects the views of the others; all family members have equal rights and duties. This system allows its members to accept attempts at success and failure so that they can learn from their personal experiences. All family members respect this system because they have accepted it and participated in establishing its rules. Individuals within this system can make amendments to it. As for interactions within this system, they are logical and acceptable to all individuals, as it provides the individual with the means for physical, mental, psychological, and social growth. (Malki and Bangip, 2013, p. 9)

2 .Some aspects of family interaction:

2.1 Family cohesion:

This psychological and social process strengthens the psychological and social structure of the family and the bonds between its members through blood ties, marriage, harmony, cooperation, and complementary roles. All of this is based on commitment, a sense of shared responsibility, and sacrifice in order to preserve marital bonds and parental and filial ties. This provides the family structure with strength, stability, and growth.

The family is a living system with boundaries that provide it with a degree of relative independence from larger social systems. These boundaries should be flexible and open to larger social systems, from which it draws sustenance and to which it contributes. Given the differences in boundaries and openness from one family to another, we find varying levels of cohesion, ranging from the most rigid cohesion, which reaches the point of isolation from the surrounding environment, to the most open, which is characterized by lax, fluid, and even non-existent boundaries. This leads to the disintegration observed in cases of family breakdown (Hajazi, 2015, p. 43).

Minuchin (1974) clearly defined the necessary balance between the principles of general patterns in adaptive dynamic equilibrium, noting that the continued existence of the family as a system depends on a sufficient range of patterns through interactivity and flexibility in moving them if necessary. The family must be able to transform itself in ways that suit new circumstances without losing the continuity that provides a frame of reference for its members (Kafafi, 2008, p. 339).

2.2 Family harmony:

Family harmony is the ability of family members to get along and be in tune with each other and with the demands of family life. We can see this in how they act and behave, how they do their family duties, how they achieve their family goals, how they meet their needs, and how they express their emotions and feelings toward each other. It can also be inferred from the efforts of family members, collectively or individually, in dealing with normal or emergency events that occur in the family. (Morsi, 2008, p. 99).

Family harmony depends on the extent to which its members are psychologically compatible with themselves, as well as their compatibility with each other. An individual who grows up in a harmonious and cohesive family environment is a well-adjusted person who develops healthily, enjoys a degree of self-confidence, enjoys mental health, and strives to be a good and active member of their family and society. On the other hand, individuals who grow up in an environment of family discord, conflict, and disintegration experience psychological instability and impaired psychological development. In addition, has a negative image of themselves, which disrupts their relationship with themselves and, in turn, contributes to the disruption of their relationships with family members and those around them, leading to the emergence of behavioral, emotional, and psychological disorders.

The arrangement of roles within the family is also extremely important, and this is called a healthy hierarchy. A healthy hierarchy must be flexible, as roles and functions change according to changing situations. The absence of the authority figure (the leader) requires that another individual of lower rank take his place, someone who has the ability to ensure the proper functioning of the family system, solve its problems, and make major decisions to ensure the continued cohesion of the family structure. Therefore, flexibility of roles allows the family hierarchy to be formed according to the situation, enabling individuals to respond to various changes, circumstances, or situations that may lead to an imbalance of roles and tasks. If roles are rigid, the absence of a leader will make it difficult to compensate for this within the family, which may destabilize the family structure because of the inflexibility of its members' roles .

This can be illustrated by the following example: if the father is, absent for some reason, the mother must take his place and become the authority figure, followed by the eldest brother, and so on.

2.3 Family problems:

A family problem refers to the emergence of an obstacle between family members that prevents them from satisfying basic needs, achieving necessary goals, or obtaining legitimate rights, causing them to feel deprived and frustrated, and making them feel threatened and insecure in their family. This leads to anxiety or anger in their family interactions and poor harmony with other family members. However, it is rare for family and married life to be perfect throughout their life cycle, because many of the events that families experience lead to crises and problems. Families that encounter problems are often those that do not have the appropriate resources to deal with events. (Abu Asaad and Al-Khatatna, 2014, p. 49)

The emergence of obstacles in family life is called a stressful event, while the resulting feelings, tension, anxiety, pressure, threat, and deprivation are called problem awareness and emotional response.

Problems vary in their level, extent, and nature:

- In terms of severity: The problem may be severe, moderate, or mild.
- In terms of duration: The problem may be chronic or acute.
- In terms of nature: The problem may be expected or unexpected.

The occurrence of compatibility with family crises depends on how effectively family members perform their roles and on the community's response and provision of assistance and support to the family in facing its crises. Since the family is a small community characterized by close ties and direct incentives for forming mutual relationships among its members, poor compatibility and discord in mutual relationships are considered among the most important problems facing the family. These problems can be viewed from the perspective of spousal relationships or in relation to their impact on children's development. (Abu Asaad and Al-Khatatna, 2015, p. 52)

Al-Jawhari divides family problems or crises into:

- The family that constitutes what is called an empty structure: here we find spouses living together but communicating only to a very limited extent, and it is difficult for each of them to give the other emotional support.
 - Family crises that result in the voluntary separation of one of the spouses, which may take the form of separation, divorce, or abandonment.
 - Family crises resulting from external events, such as the involuntary permanent absence of one of the spouses.
 - Internal disasters that lead to unintentional failure to perform roles, such as mental or physical illness (Al-Kandari, 1982, p. 203).

3. The interactive family context that generates conflict and disorder:

Academics have differed in their approach to family conflict, each according to their own point of view. Constructivist theory views family conflict as a rupture in social patterns that

threatens the family and its balance. Others believe that society is subject to constant change and that social change in both major and minor social patterns is inevitable. In this regard, Dr. Cooper points out in her book *The Death of the Family* that the problems and conflicts faced by the family are a result of the alienation felt by individuals within families, as the nuclear family is unable to achieve intimacy, affection, and self-actualization, unlike the extended family. (Al-Azza, 2015, p. 133).

Unhealthy or dysfunctional patterns of interaction within the family play a major role in the emergence of illness in one of its members. This illness is nothing more than an expression or indicator of family dysfunction, and an unhealthy family environment is fertile ground for the emergence of psychological and even mental disorders among individuals. The manifestations of an unhealthy environment are as follows

a) Dehumanization :

This refers to stripping an individual of their human qualities and treating them as if they were an object or a tool for achieving goals rather than an end in themselves, which causes the individual to lose many of their rights. The criterion of dehumanization is not specific or precise, but it is used to describe normal behavior, a normal personality, and a normal family, where the relationship is humane when each party perceives the other as they are, and conversely, the relationship is inhumane if the other party is treated as a means to an end. (Kafafi, 2009, pp. 234, 232)

If this distortion of relationships between family members exceeds a certain degree, it may be closely linked to the creation of a pathological climate in the family characterized by distorted relationships. An example of this is a man who beats his wife even though she has done nothing to deserve punishment from her husband. During treatment, it became clear that when this husband drank alcohol, he began to see his current wife in the image of his previous wife, who was psychotic and with whom he had suffered greatly.

b) Artificial love for the child:

Usually, the couple forms an illicit relationship. Due to their unfulfilled psychological needs, they use the child as a means to achieve that fulfillment. The child discovers that his parents' love is artificial, and there is no doubt that a child who does not find true love will live in suffering, thus living with duality in his feelings and emotions. (Kafafi, 2009, p. 235)

c) The integrated (fused) family:

Integration or fusion is the adoption of a possessive attitude between two or three individuals or more, and may include the whole family. When fusion occurs between one of the parents and the child, they form a sub-system of father or mother + child. This system seeks to maintain the status quo by the stronger parent, who is either the father or mother, and the child remains a child even as a young adult. The entire family may become fused, and punishment is imposed on any individual who attempts to separate or become independent. Here, the family is silent, and the structure is almost suffocating, not allowing them to breathe freely. (Malki and Bangip, 2013, p. 12)

d) Rigidity of roles within the family:

Here, the role of the actor (father, mother) continues to perform the behavior of that role, and the behavior of the recipient (children) remains unchanged. The children are never allowed to be active agents, as the roles are fixed and rigid. The role of the children is to satisfy the inner desires and psychological needs of the other person, and the recipient of the role must be willing to do anything to satisfy the other party. In light of this rigidity, family members are not allowed to grow and cannot satisfy their own needs. They live with a sense of guilt because of their shortcomings or failure to do something that was asked of them and did not achieve what the actor wanted. (Kafafi, 2009, pp. 239–240)

e) Open and closed systems :

Closed systems are rigid systems that do not allow information to be input or output. They are isolated from their surroundings or environment. Closed systems are characterized by force,

obedience, deprivation, submission, and guilt, and do not allow for any change. Open systems, on the other hand, are systems that constantly exchange energy and information with their external environment. They are living systems that evolve and go through the stages that make up the life cycle. In other words, they are systems characterized by constant change in energy and information with the environment. The open system accepts all changes in feelings, including hope, love, anger, frustration, sadness, pleasure, and tenderness. Individuals in this system have high self-esteem, and open families seek to resort to various adaptive methods and adapt to change. (Ait Mouloud and Abi Mouloud, 2016, 183).

f) System limits:

Every system has limits within which it is confined, and these limits include all the relationships and events contained within the system, which differ from those relationships and events that exist outside its limits or are contained within the limits of another system. The limit can also act as a filter in that it allows energy to enter or leave the system. There are also boundaries between subsystems, and these boundaries can be described as highly permeable or impermeable, depending on the degree of separation between the parts. Therefore, boundaries may be rigid and thick, or they may be fluid and thin, so that the components of the parts or subsystems appear to be mixed and fused together. (Kafafi, 2007, p. 90)

3.1 The healthy and disordered family interaction context according to Salvador Minuchin's theory:

This theory is based on the premise that most symptoms result from structural failures within the family system. According to him, individual symptoms can only be properly understood by looking at patterns of interaction within the family. Structural changes must occur within the family before individual symptoms can be improved or reduced. Thus, structural theory views the individual with the symptom (problem) as an indicator of a dysfunctional family structure. In order to bring about change in the individual, change must occur within the family structure and its subsystems. (Al-Shalabi, 2012, p. 28)

The family is considered a social-psychological system embedded within broader social systems, which is employed through procedural patterns .

Family tasks are carried out or implemented within specific subsystems.

Subsystems are organized hierarchically and managed within and between subsystems. In hierarchical organization, clear boundaries and optimal performance of subsystems are taken into account. The social system and life itself are hierarchically organized, providing children with the desire to learn, negotiate, and adapt to the hierarchical organization of the family.

Cohesion and adaptation are key characteristics of the family group, creating a balance between emotional bonds and growing independence, and observing changes in family members through the emotional life cycle. (Mustafa and Al-Sharbini, 2015, p. 273).

Minuchin classified families in terms of cohesion into four levels:

- Interdependent family: Actions and communications from one member are met with actions and responses from others, and any pain felt by one member will be met with great empathy from the rest of the family.
- Connected family: The individual is harmonious and in tune with the rest of the family, but is not controlled by the feelings and actions of others. Despite their empathy and solidarity with them, they do not depend on them in their emotional life, because the individuals here represent cohesion more than entanglement and interdependence more than dependence.
- The separated family: In this pattern, communication between family members is limited, but their behavior is that of individuals within a family rather than within a group.
- The distant family: Communication between family members is minimal, they show no interest or sympathy for any member who feels stressed, pressured, or in trouble, and the family atmosphere is tense.

Distant and intertwined families experience many more crises than other types of families, which is a result of the family structure that leads to crises. (Kafafi, 1999, pp. 282–285)

The most important concepts underlying constructive therapy theory are as follows:

•**Family construction:**

Constructive family therapy focuses on the role of the social context in perpetuating and resolving problems in the individual. It focuses on the role of family organization and the effective role of the therapist as an agent of change. According to the structuralism perspective, problems persist and continue due to dysfunctional family organization. Therefore, the therapist focuses on how to help the family work to solve its problems rather than on the causes that led to them. The therapist is not concerned with the history of the problem, but rather focuses on current issues, viewing family problems as the result of dysfunctional family structure, which can only be resolved by rearranging this structure. (Bnat et al., 2010, 220).

This structure consists of patterns of interaction between individuals that are governed by a set of rules predetermined by the family, which define the responses and interactive behaviors of its members in terms of who responds? How do they respond? In addition, when do they respond?

•**Boundaries:**

These refer to the degree of emotional closeness and distance between family members. The clearer these boundaries are, the more it indicates that the family system and its structure are built on solid foundations and are functioning clearly and well. If these boundaries are unclear, rigid, or fluid, this is an indication of poor family system performance. Boundaries are fluid if the closeness is so intense that it leads to a fusion of emotional relationships between individuals, making it difficult for them to be independent, creating a state of dependency, and exposing them to emotional problems such as shyness and others. If the boundaries between individuals are rigid, this will make communication between them difficult and create a gap between them, making it difficult for them to establish social relationships outside the family.

•**Hierarchy:**

This refers to the order of the family structure in terms of authority and leadership in a hierarchical order. Parents usually occupy the top of the hierarchy and enjoy parental authority over their children, who occupy other ranks according to their position within the family in terms of their role and status. However, each family structure has its own hierarchy. Therefore, hierarchy is a fundamental requirement in family structure for solving family problems and making decisions. This hierarchy ensures family cohesion, as every ship has a captain, every team has a leader, and every family has a leader who represents its authority.

The concept of hierarchy is linked to the concept of boundaries, as the existence of rigid boundaries in distant families and fluid boundaries in integrated families makes it difficult to establish hierarchy in these family structures.

•**Biases, coalitions, and alliances:**

Families usually have certain ways of responding to crises or dealing with everyday events, through which the subsystems within the family respond .

Alliances refer to the ways in which family members join and cooperate or conflict with each other, and differ from each other in dealing with a situation.

Coalitions refer to alliances and alliances that occur between family members against another family member. Sometimes these alignments and alliances are flexible, while at other times they are fixed and rigid, remaining unchanged over time. For example, when a mother and daughter work together to control the destructive behavior of the father (Bowles, 2014, p. 205).

3.2 .The healthy and disordered family interaction context according to strategic theory:

Like other psychotherapists, Hely opposed internal psychological explanations of illness, emphasizing the disruption of relationships and communication patterns within the family system in which the illness occurs. This therapeutic approach emphasizes technique and style more than theory. Strategic therapy achieves its goals in family therapy by disrupting the family system and making it unstable and unbalanced, as this disruption paves the way for therapeutic change. This is done in order to achieve two goals:

The first goal: to bring about a change in the behavior of the individual whom the family has identified as sick.

The second goal: to bring about a change in the patterns of interaction between family members and thus destabilize the family system.

When the family structure is disrupted and becomes unstable, the methods that the family has become accustomed to using in their interactions will no longer be effective, forcing family members to adopt new patterns of interaction that improve relationships. (Kafafi, 2009, pp. 413-416)

This theory does not focus on resolving past issues, but rather on solving current problems in the present, with counseling tending to be concise, focusing on the process rather than the content, and viewing the problem as a realistic problem and a metaphor for the functioning of the family system, in which the counselor and therapist attach great importance to power, control, and hierarchy in the family and family sessions. To bring about change in this problem, the counselor must be well guided and in control, in a way that helps change behavior, which will consequently change feelings and reduce the recurrence of maladjustment, while offering as many alternatives as possible. (Al-Shalabi, 2013, p. 31).

For effective strategic therapeutic intervention to help the family overcome the current problem, the strategic therapist goes through several stages during the preliminary interview and family therapy, including the following:

- Social stage:** Making family members feel comfortable about participating in the therapy session.

- Problem stage:** Discovering the reasons behind the family's request for help and asking all members to change their perception of the problem.

- Family interaction stage:** The therapist pays close attention to how family members talk to each other about the current problem and shows particular interest in the following behavioral patterns: hierarchy, communication patterns, and subgroups, with the aim of identifying therapeutic strategies that can be used in future sessions.

- **Goal-setting stage:** In this stage, the therapist and the family work together to identify the nature of the problem. In this final form of the preliminary family session, a contract is often drawn up that specifies the goals and methods of intervention by which the family's goals will be achieved. (Boulessnene, 2014, p. 178)

3.3The healthy and disordered interactive context according to Bowen's theory:

Bowen's research has resulted in a theory on how family relationship patterns are linked to the development of schizophrenia. Bowen's theory is based on two interrelated variables: the level of differentiation of the individual and the amount of anxiety in the individual's emotional sphere. There are basic concepts that form the theory of family functioning, which are interrelated concepts that build the foundation of the theory and the basic system of interdependence, namely:

- Self-differentiation:** This refers to the relative degree of independence that an individual tries to maintain within the emotional family system while remaining in a loving relationship with others. (Boulessnene, 2014, p. 171).

Understanding Bowen's theory depends on understanding its core concept, which is self-differentiation. This concept describes people in terms of their ability to keep their emotional

and cognitive systems separate, without merging or mixing them. People who fail to do so and whose systems become mixed are ruled by their emotional system and find themselves drawn to companionship and dependence. People who are able to strike a balance between their cognitive and emotional systems are able to choose what suits them in their life experiences. (Kafafi, 2008, p. 326).

Plurality and the Trinity:

The Trinity refers to a situation where tension or conflict arises between two individuals in the family, let us say a married couple, and they turn to a third person, usually a child, to help ease the tension and maintain family balance. The couple may turn to a counselor to mediate the conflict, making the counselor a third party in the tension. The counselor must be cautious in this matter and remain neutral and objective.

Emotional processes within the nuclear family:

When tension arises in the secret system, there are four possible ways for the family to reduce tension, and the higher the degree of integration in the family, the greater the need for these methods:

Emotional distancing:

This means distancing oneself from the other party, treating them as if they do not exist. This method seems to arise from excessive closeness.

Marital conflict:

This is another solution to address the contradiction between the need for closeness and integration on the one hand and the need for distance and independence on the other. It manifests itself as oscillation between periods of excessive closeness and periods of quarrelling and then distancing.

Poor performance of marital roles:

This is another method of relieving tension in the family system, in which one spouse gives in or adopts a compromise solution in order to maintain harmony. While this method achieves its goal, which is in the interest of the system, it may lead the spouse who gave in to feel that the compensation was at their expense and thus feel a sense of collapse.

Harm to the child:

When tension arises between spouses, the conflict between them can affect the child, who becomes a scapegoat if the spouses focus on one of the children instead of focusing on the real nature of the tension. (Bouthalja, 2017, pp. 49–50)

Conclusion:

Social changes have resulted in new interactive systems within the family structure, where family members experience conflicts that cause family breakdown. A healthy and cohesive family is not one that does not face problems, but rather one that has appropriate strategies to face and overcome various events and problems that may hinder the stability of its members.

Given the importance of preserving the family structure and avoiding disintegration, family counseling and therapy services are provided to families with the aim of maintaining harmony among individuals. If family problems are not resolved, they can contribute to the development of various psychological disorders among family members, which in turn affect their social behavior.

In order to avoid this, it is necessary to adopt effective strategies for dealing with pressures and problems, as well as to promote dialogue and positive communication between individuals and avoid cliques within the family that may exacerbate conflict. Family members must behave in a way that allows everyone to live in comfort, security, and stability within their family; this will be reflected in the rest of their relationships. Families need to learn how to cope and maintain their cohesion, as well as be trained in the basics of positive interaction and dialogue, and building good relationships between different individuals, in order to ensure a healthy family environment for them, which in turn ensures their healthy development on various levels.

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