The Bowen Family Theory and Its Uses

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FAMILY PROCESSES

To more clearly conceptualize family processes as an independent variable in the total social complex, selected aspects of the family systems orientation are restated. Bowen's contribution is unusual in its emphasis on the importance of documenting the degree of influence of family variables in all kinds of social research.

Behavioral Determinants

Recent research on families and the state of theoretical formulation in family studies suggest a few distinctive trends. There appears to have been a shift in emphasis from a conceptualization of families as basic social groupings with particular structures, functions, and roles (Parson and Bales 1955) to a conceptualization of families as emotionally charged intradependent units with a wide range of characteristic behavior or processes (Turner 1970, Broderick 1971).

In spite of efforts to relate the American experience to that of other countries, most family theories that originated in the United States are ethnocentric in that they were based primarily on American data. However,

with the recent conceptual focus on family processes, the traditional socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of American families (Farber 1964, Parsons 1943, Schneider 1973) have been researched, together with newer "universalistic" concerns about the enduring impact of patterns of family interaction (Troll 1971), the significance of extended family influences (Sussman and Burchinal 1962), and the influence of intergenerational patterns of behavior.

Although little systematic research has been done on the nature of the interplay of family and nonfamily behavior patterns this topic is beginning to receive greater attention in family studies. Related working hypotheses are that the family can be viewed as a basic ecological unit or maintenance system in society and that the emotional climate generated by the complex interdependence between several generations of family members can have a lasting impact on how each family member behaves in nonfamily settings as well as in the family.

The Bowen family theory addresses itself to the need for a comprehensive conceptual schema to describe and define the complex interplay of emotional processes in family dependencies. Some of the assumptions of the family systems conceptualization constitute ways in which experimental and field observations can be organized to link indicators of family behavior with data from other social contexts. For more details

about these assumptions, see some of Bowen's original work and reviews (1959, 1960, 1961, 1965a, 1966, 1971a, 1971b, 1972).

Family and Nonfamily Behavior

The Bowen theory suggests specific ways in which family and nonfamily behavior may be linked. Some of these linkages may be described in terms of the family systems concepts.

1. A person who acts in accordance with others' expectations for a particular chronological or functioning sibling position tends to repeat the same interdependent behavior patterns in various social settings.

2. A person who is the object of a family projection is more vulnerable to projection or scapegoating processes in other social settings.

3. A person who is "triangled" into a family system tends to be easily triangled, or "caught up" in the emotional interdependencies of other relationships and social groups.

4. An individual's differentiation of self in asocial group depends on the effectiveness of that person's differentiation of self in the family.

These assumptions can be used as a guide to explore the extent to which family processes may be considered primary determinants of behavior. The

more general concept of emotional system can also be used to draw closer parallels between family and nonfamily behavior by documenting some of the shared characteristics of families and other groups and the shared behavior patterns of their respective members.

Emotional Systems

Any investigation of the extent to which family theory can explain human behavior suggests that family processes can be conceptualized as an independent variable in the complex array of influences on human behavior. However, the theoretical approaches used in most family studies rarely lay claim to such a view of family processes (Zimmerman 1962, Lee 1974, martin 1974). In the relatively few studies in which family processes 32 have been used to explain broad ranges of social behavior (Cooper 1970), conclusions have been harshly criticized and essentially dismissed as worthless. Perhaps a more useful way to describe the influence of family interaction on behavior is to view the family as an ecological unit. The family establishes the most significant emotional climate for the functioning of its members and programs its members to recreate similar emotional conditions and behavior patterns in nonfamily settings.

The degree of dependency in a family generates the intensity and "tightness" of the emotional climate of this relationship unit. The emotional

climate establishes the significant postures and functioning orientations of each of its members for a lifetime. Patterns of family interaction and family programming influence past, present, and future behavior. Family systems theory is an emotional systems theory to the extent that social groups such as work, friendship, religious, and political systems manifest relationship characteristics similar to those of families.

Case History Data

Documentation of the influence of family processes on social behavior suggests that family membership is a more significant behavioral determinant than membership in a particular social class, ethnic group, or religious group. Some research findings on these linkages are illustrated by examples draw n from a sample of about six hundred detailed family case histories: three pairs of individuals with similar social backgrounds and different functioning levels, together with three pairs of individuals from dissimilar social backgrounds but with similar functioning levels.

Pairs with Similar Backgrounds and Different Functioning Levels

1. *Individuals from the same ethnic group.* Both men were from the same black family. One was the oldest son, and the other, who was the next to the youngest, functioned as a youngest son in this family. The older son went to

college and acted responsibly in his personal life and in a professional career after his education. The younger son dropped out of college. Although the younger son continued to be a"family favorite," he continually fell into "bad company" and was arrested on several occasions.

2. *Individuals from the same social class.* Two women from the same middle-class family functioned at different levels. The older woman, who was the oldest of four siblings, had been adopted. She described herself as having received much attention throughout her early childhood. The other children in this family were "natural" children. The older sister demanded much attention from others and developed problem behavior when she could not be the center of attention of others: she had an illegitimate child, became addicted to drugs, and attempted suicide. In contrast to her older sister, the younger woman in this family led a peaceful and productive life.

3. *Individuals with the same religion.* Two second sons in separate Jewish families functioned differently in relation to influences in their respective emotional systems. One of the second sons underfunctioned. He was a member of an intense family system that had experienced many deaths and cut-offs during his lifetime. He was unable either to make decisions or to act in his own interests. The second son from the other family had not been given much attention from his parents and siblings. His outside position in the family emotional system enabled him to lead a fairly independent and

effective life and to follow his own interests and objectives.

Pairs with Dissimilar Backgrounds but with Similar Functioning Levels

1. *Individuals from different ethnic groups.* Two second daughters were compared, one from a black family and the other from a white family. In spite of their different ethnic origins, both women were effective in their social groups and both were able to assist their elderly parents without becoming destructively supportive through their care for them. In each case, older brothers from birth had received most of the emotional investment of their parents. One woman's brother developed a drinking problem in adolescence. Each woman consistently functioned from flexible and productive positions in her family and other social settings.

2. *Individuals from different social classes.* Two middle daughters from middle and lower social classes functioned at home and in society in similar ways. Both women had fairly autonomous positions in their families. They were able to mature independently in relation to their parents and to their more inhibited, "trapped-in" siblings.

3. *Individuals with different religions.* Two youngest sons, one a Roman Catholic and the other a Protestant, functioned similarly in their families and in other social groups. Neither liked to assume responsibility for leadership or to make routine decisions in day-to-day affairs. Both men had been the

family “problem” as children and disciplinary problems at school, and they subsequently experienced marital difficulties.

Review of Observations

These brief descriptions can only suggest the possible strength of family processes as behavioral determinants. Data on different levels of functioning indicate that family processes are significant variables in the complex “determination” of human behavior.

When assessing the significance of interdependent processes in a family unit, the functioning positions of family members appear more critical in determining general behavior than rank or sex distribution. Also, the influence of family projection is increased by factors such as the frequency and n umber of deaths in a family and the number, intensity, and duration of emotional cut-offs in the relationship system.

The ecological unit of the family appears to establish a powerful emotional climate, which ‘’colors” members’ activities and perceptions of reality. Comparisons between ranges of emotional intensity in families and variations in societal emotional climate may be a graphic means of drawing meaningful parallels between family processes and their broader environment. The use of such models constitutes an alternative to conventional conceptualization of ecological processes and their influence on

human behavior.

Differentiation of Self

Individual behavior can be considered the product of family processes. To the extent that patterns of social interaction and social institutions evolve as consequences and products of individual behavior, family processes can be viewed as an independent variable in the complex of social reality. The data on which these propositions are based are accumulated case history materials from families in psychotherapy and miscellaneous families. Some of the data are extensively longitudinal in that genealogical research has been used, wherever possible, to supplement three- or four-generation life histories of families.

The concept of self is the focus of many intellectual and research disciplines. Self is considered a family concept to the extent that self is viewed as a product of family interaction. The concept of self has implications that extend beyond an immediate focus on family interaction. A general theory of human behavior can be developed from a starting point of conceptualizing self as a product of family processes. *Differentiation of self,* a concept of the Bowen family theory, describes and defines activity considered necessary for an individual to become responsible and effectively integrated in a variety of social contexts. A detailed focus on Bowen's concept of differentiation of self

distorts some of the systems aspects of Bowen's theoretical orientation. This selectiveness may serve to clarify some of the most significant variables influencing human behavior, rather than to define and describe the complex varied influences exerted on the development of self.

One of the most important premises of Bowen's theory is that a family is the most tightly bonded emotional system an individual participates in for an extended period of time. Not only do family relationships, for most people, largely define an individual's life situation at birth and in the years of early socialization, but they also strongly influence an individual's behavior at all stages of life. Even though family members may be widely dispersed geographically or separated through institutionalization or death, some degree of emotional "bondedness" between them persists, especially in relation to their family of origin (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973).

The emotional intensity of a family system increases in relationship crises such as birth, abortion, adoption, loss, sickness, marriage, divorce, separation, institutionalization, or delinquency. According to Bowen's theory, it is more difficult to be a self in a family than to appear to be a self in comparatively transient social groups, which make fewer and less persistent emotional demands. A related hypothesis is that self can be differentiated most effectively in an individual's family, as other social contexts do not provide a sufficiently challenging, lasting, and reactive arena for this difficult

sequence of behavior.

Effective differentiation of self generally creates crises in the emotional relationships of the differentiating person's family. Differentiation of self may also consist of planned responsible behavior in major crises, such as the death of a significant family member. Some preconditions appear necessary for successful differentiation. Only if relationship issues are dealt with in an emotionally reactive system that will not easily disband, can an individual respond fully to the feedback needed for long-term emotional maturation or differentiation. Only in a family network, can *solid self* most meaningfully encounter and deal with ingrained patterns of behavior which were and continue to be intimately related to self.

Bowen has clarified some of the nuances between the ideal types of differentiation, or individuation, and undifferentiation, or fusion. In more differentiated individuals, behavior is fairly well integrated at the levels of thought, feeling, and action. A more differentiated person can distinguish between thoughts and feelings and is more likely to act consistently in relation to self-selected long-range goals in life. Undifferentiated behavior is emotionally reactive and automatic. Undifferentiated behavior is generally the outcome of the pressures and demands of others and is an immediate response to the tensions of the moment, rather than an actualization of integrated inner principles and beliefs. A less differentiated person's behavior

is so tied to others' responses that there are fewer options for self in selecting postures or courses of activity.

Bowen suggests that most people in contemporary American society fall within moderate ranges of differentiation of self and that members of the same family tend to have about the same level of differentiation of self. It is not possible for a person to change self to become much more or much less differentiated in a lifetime. Action that culminates in a slightly higher level of differentiation precipitates other changes in the ways an individual conducts life. Although there may be a slight momentum that accompanies increases or decreases of differentiation, movements in either direction do not necessarily precipitate further changes in the same direction.

Sequence of Behavior

Behavior patterns appear more predictable in a family than in other social groups. If an individual assumes a less emotionally dependent posture, a negative response from other family members predictably follows. This response frequently manifests itself as a direct pressure on the person differentiating self to assume the former functioning position. If this person is able to maintain the new level of differentiation, other family members are compelled to change their own levels of functioning and differentiation in the long run, and the entire family system eventually moves to a higher level of

differentiation. On the other hand, the person making differentiating moves may succumb to the pressures of other family members and return to the former level of functioning. The latter choice is much easier to make and carry through in action. If this sequence of events occurs, the whole family will remain at the original level of differentiation.

Implications

Bowen's theoretical orientation and observations of family interaction suggest the following tentative propositions:

1. Families and their individual members tend to remain at the same or similar levels of differentiation through several generations, one generation, or a lifetime.

2. Behavior patterns characteristic of an individual's activities in a family tend to be repeated in other social groups whether or not that person's level of differentiation of self changes.

3. Emotional maturation or differentiation of self is more effective when a person engages with family members than when he or she moves away from them, especially with members of different generations of the family of origin. Genealogical research on emotional relationships between members of past generations in a family can also be a phase of differentiating self.

Indicators of Family Trends

Patterns of family interaction may be conceptualized as indicators of family trends in broader processes of social change. This approach is distinct from a static focus on specific family forms or structures, as well as relatively superficial research that explores the composition of households. The quality of family processes appears to have the capacity for predicting changes and degrees of adaptation in families. To be viable, a family must manifest certain characteristics of flexibility and openness in its relationship system and transactions.

The combined findings of contemporary family researchers have not adequately verified the hypothesis that industrialized societies are moving away from extended family forms toward nuclear family forms. The value of substantiating this hypothesis and its consequences for the existing body of knowledge about families should be questioned. The operational problems involved in merely defining or describing family trends can, at best, give rise to limited results, especially given the initially postulated nuclear/extended polarity. No specific theoretical or pragmatic outcome for such efforts is guaranteed.

A research focus on family processes, or reactive emotional behavior in intimate relationship systems, generates richer sources of information and more powerfully predictive indicators than does research on family forms.

Case history data from longitudinal studies of families suggest that the frequency of particular patterns of communication or of specific critical events such as deaths and other kinds of losses among different families can be compared meaningfully. Manifestations of these kinds of behavior appear to provide more accurate evidence of the nature of persisting trends and their underlying emotional processes than do data limited to a structural or geographical definition of *nuclear* and *extended* families.

A considerable variety and quantity of research on families in different cultures and societies, together with syntheses of these findings (Aldous and Hill 1967), indicate that there is a lack of precise data on family relationships in the past and over long periods of time. This state of affairs negates some of the potential usefulness and validity of discussions on the myth or reality of the "historical generalization" that a declining extended family form is being replaced by a predominantly nuclear family type (Goode 1963a). How can the "decline" of extended families be defined, or the degree of "isolation" of a nuclear family with a minimum level of reliability (Harris 1969)?

The changing structure of families may not be the most significant dimension or variable in an accurate and meaningful description of family trends and social change in short or long periods of time. A sufficient number of detailed "vertical," or multigenerational, studies of different families, based on genealogical data and other documentary or oral source materials, may

provide more accurate and more valuable information on trends in families than the conventional "horizontal," or culture-based, survey studies of families at a particular point in time—which make up much of the current research.

Recent Trends

International comparative studies of kinship and families in industrial societies suggest that corporate primary groups based on kinship and neighborhood have declined, at least in terms of their ideological importance. Extended families are supposed to have been replaced by isolated nuclear families characterized by an intensification of emotional involvement and a greater sharing of activities. However, this apparent decline and replacement of one family type by another has not yet been sufficiently substantiated in empirical terms (Goode 1963b).

Research data, primarily from western industrial countries, indicate that there has been an increasing emphasis on the value of companionship in nuclear families (Blood and Wolfe 1960, Dennis 1962, Burgess, Locke, and Thomes 1963, Edgell 1972), on equality and "mutual consideration" (Fletcher 1962), and on the sharing of domestic and financial tasks and responsibilities (Young 1962). Although these quality-of-relationship emphases suggest an increase in nuclear family forms, other studies indicate that the extent and

nature of the supposed decline in extended families has been greatly overemphasized (Sussman 1953, Litwak 1960a, 1960b, Loudon 1961, Rosser and Harris 1965, Adams 1968, Bell 1968).

From this discrepant data it can be concluded that the family may be changing its form, but there is no evidence that it is disappearing. This view of family trends has been shared by researchers in different academic disciplines and in different countries (Elliott 1970).

Patterns and Trends

Patterns of behavior and dependencies between different generations describe long-range changes in a family more accurately than substantive details about family structure. Process data on births, marriages, divorces, or deaths indicate trends more clearly than data that describe how individual family members are geographically located or economically situated (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973). Place of residence and social class data are frequently used to indicate distinctions of form between nuclear and extended families.

Clinical findings suggest that one of the most significant influences on the pervasiveness of effective behavior is the intensity of family emotional processes. Extended or nuclear family structure, or any other kind of structure, appears to have fewer consequences for behavior in the family and

in the wider society than the dependent processes and patterns of interaction between different family members. One variable used to formulate predictions about behavior is the nature and extent of communication in families (Bowen 1972).

Clinical findings also suggest certain negative consequences for behavior from the increasing emotional isolation between nuclear families and their extended networks. The probability of symptomatic or antisocial behavior appears significantly greater when the relationship system of the extended family is splintered through a lack of meaningful communication between the different nuclear families in the broader network.

One condition that precipitates symptomatic or antisocial behavior is the number and intensity of emotional divorces or cut-offs between different family members, particularly between members of different generations of the same family. Another influence on symptomatic or antisocial behavior is the sudden or lingering death of an emotionally significant family member. Temporary or threatened losses in a family also produce stress and generate the same kinds of behavioral consequences (Toman 1972). Incest, homicide, and deaths in fairly close succession may occur when the resulting level of anxiety in families is high (Bradt and Moynihan 1971, Andres and Lorio 1974).

Data of this kind question the significance of research that examines the structure rather than behavior of families. A family systems model (Bowen 1972) may provide a valuable frame of reference for cross-cultural family research (Broderick 1971) and the study of general behavior, especially as no meaningful comparisons of data from different societies can be made unless the same unit of investigation is used (Payne 1973). Although no precise hypotheses about evolutionary trends in families throughout the world can be formulated, a focus on communication and dependency in families is a more significant means of conceptualizing and describing trends and social change than a focus on family structures (Goody 1973).

Further Research

Although new data should ideally be collected to define trends and change in a world perspective, some of the data already compiled could be utilized for this purpose (Zelditch 1955, Britton 1971, Musil 1971). Political conditions and social stratification are significant influences on family structures and processes, but the emotional dependencies and intimate needs (Dennis 1962) expressed in patterns of behavior in families cannot be neglected, especially as these characteristics persist regardless of the particular historical circumstances (Anderson 1971). An exploration of the variety of family processes manifested and their pervasiveness in society can contribute further toward a theory of social change.

Variant Family Processes

Support for the view that effective social adaptation is accomplished through changing family forms has increased, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. Much recent family research in experimental and nonexperimental settings has primarily focused on the range of observed differences in family forms or structures. The Bowen family theory points out some of the shared emotional characteristics of families with different structures. Data on family interaction suggest that the documentation of emotional processes in families is a more effective way to represent the salient survival characteristics of both *normative* and *variant* families than an examination of specific structures.

Variant family processes include a wide range of reciprocal family interaction patterns. Variant family processes consist of emotional or affective behavior, which initiates interaction or reacts and responds to interaction. These processes occur in the context of procreative or other enduring intimate relationships. They may be illustrated with reference to two ideal types of family or intimate relationship forms: an isolated nuclear family and a commune.

The quality of family emotional processes is hypothesized as more significant for the “viability” or effective survival of a family than a particular form or structure. Family processes are conceptualized as products of

tensions between togetherness and individuation strivings within a family emotional unit. Relatively open, flexible relationships appear more conducive to constructive adaptation than relatively closed, rigid relationships. Both open and closed relationship systems and their characteristic emotional processes are found in nuclear and communal ideal types of families.

Forms and Processes

The increasingly widespread use of the term *variant family form* reflects a tendency to view families and intimate relationships as particular structures rather than processes. The recent proliferation of variant family forms has been hypothesized as an unintentional structural response to the changing composition of particular classes or groups in society (Bernard 1971, Paden-Eisenstark 1973). Emotional overload in nuclear families is also viewed as precipitating the increase in variant family forms (Ramey 1972, Whitehurst 1972), with a flexible role structure being considered more characteristic of communes and their larger living-in membership than of nuclear families (Nimkoff 1965, Kenkel 1966, Queen and Habenstein 1967, Weintraub and Shapiro 1968, Sheper 1969, Schlesinger 1970, Olson 1972, Talmon 1972, Muncy 1973, Paden-Eisenstark 1973). Although this research has not exclusively focused on the structural aspects of experimental and nonexperimental variant families, the conceptualization and measurement of processes within these units appears to have been largely ignored.

Other research on variant families has attempted to describe affective behavior in these relationship systems. Studies of commitment mechanisms (Kanter 1968, 1973) have been based on selected parts of these relationship systems. Studies of commitment mechanisms (Kanter 1968, 1973) have been based on selected parts of these relationship systems. However, this research has not been able to define the intricacies and complexities of interlocking interdependencies within a family at producing an adequate theoretical frame of reference to conceptualize the diverse characteristics and consequences of these processes (O'Neill and O'Neill 1972).

In spite of such criticisms, the studies on variant families have many valuable aspects. One generalization is that the current strong interest in structural characteristics of families appears to have led to the examination of variant family forms, such as communes, more for their differences from normative families than for their similarities to traditional or preponderant families (Kanter 1968, Lacey 1968, Bartell 1971).

The Bowen theory highlights shared similarities in emotional processes in different kinds of family structures (Bowen 1960, 1961, 1965a, 1966, 1971a, 1971b, 1974, Alexander 1973). This view of families as emotional systems is a deliberate attempt to avoid the perceptual inaccuracies that occur when families are defined in terms of cultural norms or variations from those norms.

Variant family processes are viewed as significant evolutionary processes. In this respect they can be considered necessary and intrinsic aspects of biological adaptation rather than transient historical or political phenomena (Kanter 1968, Barakat 1969, Cooper 1970, Schlesinger 1970, Taylor 1970, Ferm 1971, Olson 1972, Sussman and Cogswell 1972, Talmon 1972, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973, Muncy 1973).

A variety of family processes are examined to discern whether they are effective and functional for the survival of a family or whether they contribute toward a family's extinction. The capacity of the processes to be effective or functional is considered the degree of *viability* of the family processes. If a particular pattern of family interaction appears destructive to a family and seems to lead toward its extinction, the family processes concerned are assigned a low degree of viability.

Propositions

Accumulated case history data from several hundred families in clinical and regular settings, which have been organized with reference to Bowen's systems concepts, suggest two propositions. These hypotheses are used as a focus for observations delineating similar family processes in the two different ideal-type family forms selected, a nuclear family and a commune.

1. The degree of a family's viability depends more on the quality of its

emotional processes than on its specific form or structure. To the extent that family processes are flexible, family members will function effectively.

2. Family processes and behavior patterns of family members are products of individuation and togetherness strivings within a family. The degree of viability of a family is directly correlated with the effectiveness of the family members' management of tension between the individuation and togetherness strivings.

Processes in Nuclear and Commune Ideal Types

The degree of viability of family processes is documented in terms of strength or weakness. *Strength* is used to denote the high degree of viability of emotional processes conducive to the survival and successful adaptation of a family unit. *Weakness* is used to denote the low degree of viability of emotional processes destructive to the continued existence of a family, eventually leading to the extinction of the family unit.

Research on kin networks suggests the existence of a permeable boundary between nuclear and extended families in many traditional families. In contrast, the ideal-type nuclear family is considered relatively isolated from the extended family. This ideal-type nuclear family has restricted membership in its intense emotional relationship system, with established patterns of interaction cut off from preceding generations.

Although the possibility of opening up the intergenerational network of exchanges persists throughout the condition of cut-off (Slater 1963, Whitehurst 1972), this ideal-type nuclear family is essentially enclosed by an impermeable boundary.

Some communes have generational linkages outside the commune, and a few "three-generation" families may be found in certain types of communes. The ideal-type commune conceptualized here is defined as a lateral extended relationship system (Sussman and Cogswell 1972) that is relatively isolated from the families of origin or extended families of commune members. This ideal-type commune is a group of intimate peers that has endured through time and has maintained its own household throughout this period. Children may or may not be procreated in this group.

Strengths

1. To the extent that either an ideal-type nuclear family or an ideal-type commune allows for the differentiation of self of its members, the relationship system of either family form will be viable and adaptive. When both ideal-type family forms are flexible and sufficiently elastic to allow for the unhampered responsible activity of their members, both forms are correspondingly freer of the symptomatic and "problem" kinds of behavior that could eventually lead toward extinction.

2. A member of an ideal-type nuclear family or of an ideal-type commune who differentiates self within either family context predictably encounters resistance to this new functioning position from other family members. If the differentiating individual is able to maintain the new functioning position in face of the opposition while remaining in emotional contact with other family members, the level of functioning of the other family members and of the entire unit is gradually raised to a higher level of functioning. This predictable sequence of events can occur in either a nuclear family or a commune.

3. Viable family processes in either a nuclear family or a commune are characterized by an open communication system. Such relationships have fewer emotional cut-offs and are less influenced by seniority and sex distributions than are relationships in a closed relationship system of either a nuclear family or a commune.

Weaknesses

1. In either an ideal-type nuclear family or an ideal-type commune, the relationship system can become overburdened by excessive investments of emotions and feelings in togetherness. Role options are limited by the strong pull toward togetherness, and the relationship system becomes rigid and restrictive.

2. If a nuclear family ideal type or a commune ideal type does not allow for meaningful contacts in the most extended parts of their relationship systems, behavior problems develop in the nuclear family or commune.

3. When the most meaningful interpersonal relationships in either a nuclear family ideal type or a commune ideal type are emotionally intense and restrictive, the children socialized in this context strive to maintain a strong dependence on this group or to transfer the same intense dependency to another group. In an historical context, the emotional isolation of nineteenth-century utopian communities and the subsequent homogenization of their members' experiences are considered to have contributed toward their extinction (Kanter 1968, Muncy 1973).

Review of Observations

Some of the associations described suggest that the particular form or structure of a family is not the primary influence determining its survival or extinction. Historical surveys of experimental families (Muncy 1973), contemporary trends toward companionate marriage (Sussman and Cogswell 1972), studies of miscellaneous types of variant families (Farber 1964, Humphreys 1970, Kirkendall and Whitehurst 1971, Ibsen and Klobus 1972, Lyness and Lipetz 1972, Olson 1972, Osofsky and Osofsky 1972, Sussman and Cogswell 1972), and clinical data on families suggest that emotional

processes are essential components and functions of families. This shared characteristic of emotional processes in variant family forms such as the nuclear and communal families deserves a closer examination through systematic research.

Further Research

The emotional forces of differentiation and togetherness are more easily identified and predicted in a family than in "secondary" associations in the wider society because of the greater degree of emotional intensity and bonding between members of families and the persistence of membership through time. However, it is possible, to some extent, to observe and document togetherness and differentiating strivings in more comprehensive, transient and diverse social networks. Family processes are viewed as indicators of broad emotional and social processes in that they are a microcosm of affective behavior patterns characteristic of less intense relationship systems.

Another area of further research is to define more precisely the influences involved in the complex interplay of family interaction and social institutions. In spite of the recent pronounced interest in theoretical concerns (Christensen 1964, Aldous 1970, Broderick 1971), family processes have rarely been conceptualized as an integral part of a general theory that would

relate family interaction to nonfamily events (Zimmerman 1972, Lee 1974, Martin 1974). Some of the foregoing observations and discussion suggest that family processes are a significant influence on nonfamily behavior, rather than that family processes are merely structural and functional responses to broader social changes (Berne 1967, Cooper 1970, Toman 1972, Olson 1972). People may be more conditioned and programmed by patterns of intergenerational family interaction (Berne 1967) than by membership in a particular ethnic group, social class, occupational group, or religion or by location in a rural or urban environment. Family programming predisposes individuals to repeat similar kinds of behavior in both family and nonfamily settings. It is in this respect that family processes can be treated as an independent variable and as a significant behavioral determinant in a more general theory of human behavior.

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