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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to integrate some ideas from family systems theory and attachment theory within a theory of public opinion and social movement. Citing the classic "The Authoritarian Personality," the paper states that the first authorities children know, their parents or other caregivers, shape children's attitudes toward all authorities. The paper argues that family systems and attachment theories demonstrate how authoritarians' families help to form extreme political attitudes, noting that many scholars have viewed the family as a major socialization agent of political attitudes. The paper also notes that education tends to have a negative relationship with authoritarianism, whether defined as tolerance, prejudice, or dogmatism--formal schooling may have a liberating effect on authoritarian attitudes because of increased cognitive development; increased opportunity to meet people of varied backgrounds; and augmented political expertise and understanding of the importance of democratic principles. Future research work on the theory will connect key concepts to social movements--two concepts are especially useful, family "dysfunction" and "multigenerational transmission process." The paper concludes that a systems theory of family socialization, public opinion, and social movements, based on these concepts, would focus on the distribution of dysfunctions in families within a community or a society, studying in particular which kinds of people tend to be aroused to action by various types of movements and what conditions foster right-wing attitudes versus left-wing attitudes. Contains 3 figures, a table, 12 notes, and 128 references. (NKA)

LINKAGES BETWEEN FAMILIES AND POLITICAL EXTREMISM:

A THEORY OF THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY AND FAMILY SYSTEM DYNAMICS

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ABSTRACT:

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Few studies have inspired more research on the role of families in creating political attitudes than the classic, *The Authoritarian Personality.* Its primary thesis is that the first authorities children know, their parents or other caregivers, shape children's attitudes toward all authorities. Authoritarians are rigid, repressed, conformist, dogmatic, submissive to higher authorities, lack empathy for others, and displace aggressive attitudes onto weaker social groups. Family systems and attachment theories demonstrate how authoritarians' families help to form extreme political attitudes. Future work on the theory will connect key concepts to social movements. Two concepts are especially useful, family "dysfunction" and "multigenerational transmission process." Dysfunction refers to maladaptive mechanisms which some families develop to cope with increased stress. If stress is too great or prolonged, or if the family system reserves are too depleted, maladaptive mechanisms and symptoms can develop. Multigenerational transmission process describes families' incorporation of dysfunctional and functional responses from generation to generation. Children from families with a legacy of pain may be at greater risk for abuse and neglect, while passing these behavior patterns to their descendants. These ideas are particularly relevant today with the appearance of right-wing citizen militias, neo-Nazis, government resistors, survivalists, and extremist religious groups.

LINKAGES BETWEEN FAMILIES AND POLITICAL EXTREMISM:

A THEORY OF THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY AND FAMILY SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Few research efforts have inspired more scholarly research and debate on the role of the family in creating political attitudes than the classic, *The Authoritarian Personality*, frequently referred to by initials, *TAP* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 195Ø). The primary thesis of *TAP* is that the first authorities children know, their parents or other caregivers, shape children's conscious and subconscious attitudes toward all societal authority structures.

The spectacular rise of the Nazi party in Germany during World War II and the accompanying Holocaust stoked the interest of social scientists in authoritarian personalities and their relationship to anti-Semitic attitudes, as well as to racial and other attitudes later. Authoritarians are characterized by rigid, repressed, conformist, dogmatic, superstitious, stereotyped attitudes, submission to higher authorities, lack of empathy for others, displacement of aggressive attitudes onto weaker groups such as minority races and ethnic groups, and strongly developed defenses against anxiety (Stone, Lederer, & Christie, 1993). According to Stone, et al. (1993), authoritarians repress and deny their socially unacceptable drives which have severe restrictions against their expression by rigid, punitive parents and social norms. The repressed individual becomes anxious, insecure, highly conscious of external authority, and concerned with conformity.

Interest in the authoritarian personality peaked in the 195Øs and 196Øs, but other political research concerns superseded it after that, not because the authoritarian personality was an obsolete theory but because researchers were

attracted to other subjects (Stone, et al., 1993; Duckitt, 1989; Eckhardt, 1991; Altemeyer, 1988). Activities of the new right-wing groups reawakened interest in *TAP*. Stone, et al. (1993) devoted an edited book, *Strength and Weakness: the Authoritarian Personality Today* to a comprehensive assessment of the theory. Renewed attention to this area is especially evident in the journal, *Political Psychology* (e.g., Milburn, Conrad, Sala, & Carberry, 1995; Eckhardt, 1991; and Duckitt, 1989).

This paper seeks to integrate some ideas from family systems theory and attachment theory within a theory of public opinion and social movements.[1] The theory model is in Figure 1. The paper focuses on the linkages between families and the development of extremist political opinions, drawing on authoritarian personality theory in the context of social stratification. Future work on the theory will concern the relationship between political attitudes and social movements, especially the primarily leftist student activist movements of the 1960s and the right-wing movements of the 1990s.[2]

[Figure 1 about here]

Links Between Authoritarianism and Families

Many scholars have viewed the family as a major socialization agent of political attitudes, including attitudes toward authority (e.g., Milburn, et al., 1995). Harold Lasswell (1930/1960) investigated the association between political beliefs and unresolved issues and emotions deriving from families of origin, based partly on Freud's work (1930/1961). Lasswell concluded ". . . primitive psychological structures continue to function within the personality long after the epochs of infancy and childhood have been chronologically left behind. The prominence of hate in politics suggests that we may find the most important private

motive is a repressed and powerful hatred of authority" (1930/1960:448). Recent work connects harshness of parental discipline to later aggressive behavior of the child (Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992), as well as children's aggressive behavior to hostile attitudes (Quiggle, Garber, Panak, & Dodge, 1992).[3]

Two relatively recent theories of attachment and family emotional systems together enlarge our understanding of linkages between families and extreme political opinions. Hopf (1993) stressed the usefulness of attachment theory to understanding the process by which attitudes, values, and prejudices are formed. She used a classification scheme (Ainsworth, 1967; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) which differentiates among (1) children with secure attachments to their primary caregiver, (2) insecure ambivalent attachments, and (3) insecure avoidant attachments (the latter including lowest levels of attachment and lack of attachment).

Family systems theory provides some concepts which show how family relationships develop and change and how children's attachments to their caregivers are transmitted across generations, often perpetuating family tendencies toward insecure relationships beyond a single parent-child relationship. The theory demonstrates how normal human events can lead to destructive behavior within a dysfunctional family system. Other socialization sources exist in society, of course, but the theory proposed in this paper assumes the family is the most fundamental element in shaping political ideology.

Family Systems Theory Concepts

Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist, was the primary architect of family systems theory.[4] Bowen's theory of the family as a system of emotional relationships employs eight interrelated concepts which mold family functioning (1966, 1976, 1978, 1991; also see Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996; Lawson, Peterson, & Lawson, 1983). All of

the main concepts are relevant to a systems theory of public opinion and collective behavior, but five (with asterisks) will be emphasized here.

*1. Differentiation of self	5. Emotional cutoff
*2. Triangles	6. Sibling positions (of spouses)
*3. Nuclear family emotional system	7. Societal regression[5]
*4. Family projection process	*8. Multigenerational transmission process

Resulting family behavior patterns can be *functional* or *dysfunctional* (Bowen, 1966; Toman, 1961). Dysfunction refers to maladaptive mechanisms which some families develop to cope with increased stress (Kerr, 1981). The levels of tension are held in check, but the dysfunctional response does not address the systemic problem. If stress is too great or prolonged, or if the family system reserves are too depleted, maladaptive mechanisms and symptoms can develop. Frequently, these are exaggerations and distortions of the mechanisms which previously helped to preserve equilibrium. For example, alcoholism and schizophrenia are often families' adaptations to some emotionally charged situation which have become exaggerated and impede equilibrium (Kerr, 1981).

Bowen perceived the dysfunctional family as trapped in repetitive, destructive behavior patterns and unwittingly hamstrung by family rules and norms which rigidly maintain those patterns, even for many generations, until members become conscious of them and deliberately change them (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Some oppose and fight change in order to maintain some kind of homeostasis.

Families encounter "transition points" which produce stresses and require structural changes to continue healthy functioning. Many transition stages are "normal and expected developmental crises or challenges that occur within our culture," such as marriage, birth, death, and the movement of children through such

stages as schooling, adolescence, and departure from the home (Becvar & Becvar, 1993:197). Others can include serious illness of a family member, birth of a handicapped child, divorce, adding or subtracting a household member, job loss, and so forth. Families proceed through these stages without clear guidance in many cases; they "are organisms in a continuous process of changing while trying to remain the same" (Minuchin, 1984:72). At each stress encountered, families have the potential to change in functional or dysfunctional ways (Minuchin, 1974, 1984).

Differentiation of Self

Bowen observed that some families seemed to respond to stress by pulling together into a single identity or isolated "oneness" in order to maintain system balance. Indicators included an over-dependence on each other, a tendency to discourage uniqueness of members, and tendencies to distance by geographic separation or dysfunctional emotional distance, such as an emotional cutoff or separation from a relationship without true individuation (Bowen, 1978; Lawson, et al., 1983). Bowen's term for this was "stuck togetherness." Such families figuratively pulled their wagons not only into a circle but into one collective wagon when threatened by outside tensions or threats to one or more members, since a change affecting one member also influences the others. Often, these families perceived that dysfunctional behaviors, such as chemical abuse, helped to sustain equilibrium and thus would tolerate them.

Bowen's theory predicted that people tend to marry others with similar self-differentiation levels. High differentiation protects individuals from fusion with the emotions within the family, especially during stress and anxiety. Conversely, those with low differentiation levels are especially vulnerable to fusion with family emotions. Family functioning processes will tend to produce at least one child with a level of differentiation lower than the parents, who in turn will

choose a spouse with a similarly low differentiation level (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Children of each successive generation are born who develop increasingly poor differentiation. High amounts of stress can speed up the process, which ultimately results in an individual with schizophrenia, alcoholism, or similar other symptoms (Bowen, 1978; Lawson, et al., 1983; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). This process can work in the opposite direction, also, with increasingly greater levels of differentiation and functioning. It takes many generations to produce a Jeffrey Dahmer or a Theodore Kaczynski. The process can work in the opposite direction to produce people with increasingly higher self-differentiation across generations. Formal education may contribute toward higher levels of differentiation. or perhaps more highly differentiated people may seek greater education.

Bowen (1978) considered self-differentiation to approximate emotional maturity, denoting the individual's degree of separation from parents, the kind of relationship the individual has with parents, and the amount and type of emotional separation as a young adult. He developed a "scale of differentiation" from Ø (lowest) to 1ØØ (highest). Its purpose was theoretical, not to provide scores for any particular person. At the top of the scale are people who have developed a "solid self." At the bottom are those with a "pseudoself." The consistency of life principles is most solid at the highest levels of differentiation and least firm at the lowest levels (Bowen, 1978; Lawson, et al., 1983).

People scoring 6Ø or higher on the scale are the most emotionally developed. Examples of their abilities include being goal oriented, maintaining intimate relationships, achieving a high level of self-differentiation from their families, tending not to feel threatened by others' opinions, and operating more in terms of rational principles than emotional responses (Bowen, 1978; Lawson, et al., 1983).

Those in the middle of the scale tend to be able to divide emotional responses

from intellectual ones but also are likely to keep their views to themselves in case others would be offended or they would be criticized. These individuals are less likely to hold firm convictions and are more likely to be swayed by authority than are those higher on the scale. They are able to empathize with others, but they are also likely to be ruled far more by affect than by intellect (Bowen, 1978; Lawson, et al., 1983).

Those persons falling into the Ø-25 scale range are controlled by their emotions, live day to day, and lack ability to make decisions or develop opinions. They do not have selves; what passes for selves is a sense of self-worth which comes from outside them (Bowen, 1978; Lawson, et al., 1983). Different opinions and ideas often feel threatening to a person who grew up in a family which chose "stuck together" solutions to its problems, discouraged individuality, and operated at low levels of self-differentiation (Lawson, et al., 1983).

The characteristics of the least well-differentiated persons fit well with the characteristics of the authoritarian personality: tendency to respond to ideas of others, especially *different* others, with a sense of being threatened; lack of empathy for others; inability to feel self worth which does not derive from the approval of others; domination by their emotions; and difficulty in sustaining relationships. Other attributes which fit are histories of unhappy, conflicted relationships with parents and others, often involving abuse, abandonment, or dysfunctional symptoms such as chemical and other addictions.

Family Emotional Systems and Triangles

Bowen's family systems theory rests on the "basic building block in a family's emotional system," the "triangle" (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996:173). Exchange of emotion between two persons in the family may occur at comfortable levels when family anxiety is low and external conditions are calm. The introduction of internal

or external stress or anxiety will elevate the tension level to uncomfortably high points. Then, the pair becomes an unstable system and may seek a third person to take on some of the "excess" emotionality (Bowen, 1978). The third person may be predisposed to form a triangle with them as part of the family's script for behavior. The anxiety level within the threesome may decrease then, and equilibrium will return. If anxiety expands again, one of the group may reach out to involve another person outside the original triangle. Triangulation can concern even social agencies or courts. The goal of this process is to support a comfortable degree of closeness and distance among members while decreasing anxiety (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). The number of potential triangles in a family (not counting those involving outsiders) increases with the addition of each new family member.

The person in the family with the least well-differentiated self is most likely to be chosen as the third point of the triangle. The less differentiated the family members are, in general, the greater the probability of their emotional fusion. Higher rates of chronic anxiety, fusion, and potential instability tend to lead to greater emotional distance between the spouses, chronic and unresolved marital tensions, physical or emotional dysfunction developing in a spouse, and psychological harm to at least one of the children (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Some families may choose just one of these means of preserving equilibrium, and others may select several (Kerr, 1981).

Since parents respond differently to different children, their influence on the children may range widely. Children who become a greater focus for their parents' projections are more likely to become more fused emotionally with the family. They will be the most vulnerable to familial stresses and thus the most likely to have emotional problems, and ultimately, to have more trouble separating from the family as an individual (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996; Bowen, 1976).

Bowen believed that parents who initiate this family projection process are immature, and they subconsciously select the most immature of their children as the target. Some other experts view the selected child as likely to be closest to the mother, or the oldest child of the sex valued less (or some experts say, valued more) by the family, the only child, a child born during a family upheaval, or a child with some impediment or handicap (Lawson, et al., 1983). According to Kerr (1981), the less mature and undifferentiated the parents, the more they will set the projection process in motion to bring homeostasis to the family, which increases the chance that several children will be emotionally impaired. This process can begin as early as the child's birth and the bonding process starts (Kerr, 1981; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

The fusion process leads to inability to discriminate thinking and feeling or to differentiate one's self from that of others. It also leads to inability to resolve emotional attachments or issues with the family of origin (Bowen, 1966; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). The least differentiated child or children of a family are more susceptible to feeling stress and at risk for developing stress-related symptoms and slower recovery from the symptoms than are the more differentiated family members. When stress and anxiety run high, the less differentiated members are vulnerable to loss of their sense of self in the family or other relationships (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996; Bowen, 1966, 1978). People can improve their level of functioning within their range of differentiation but cannot move great distances on the scale from their initial level, according to Bowen's theory.

Multigenerational Transmission Process

Empirical results support the concept of multigenerational transmission process (e.g., Plass & Hotaling, 1995; Benoit & Parker, 1994; Doumas, Margolin, &

John, 1994; Goodwin, McCarthy, & DiVasto, 1981; Jacobvitz, Morgan, Kretchmar, & Morgan, 1991; Miller, 1981, 1984, 1990; Rubenstein, Cutter, & Templer, 1989/90; Smith, 1988; Simons, Wu, Johnson, & Conger, 1995; Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989).

Hoopes (1987:196) defined "family system" as a "nuclear family," a two generation system consisting of the marital couple, or parental subsystem, and their children, or sibling subsystem. A subsystem is a natural sub-group within the family system, such as the spouses, the siblings, or parent and child. The "extended family" is the nuclear family and other generations or family levels (such as uncles, cousins, great-aunts, second-cousins, and so forth).

Hoopes (1987) distinguished among *multigenerational*, *intergenerational*, and *transgenerational*. Multigenerational means more than two generations. Intergenerational describes a space where action occurs within or between two or more generations. Trans refers to movement of something over, across, beyond, or thrcugh generations. Kerr (1981:248) described the multigenerational transmission process as:

> "the ebb and flow of emotional process through the generations. The concept expands the perception of the nuclear family as an emotional unit to the perception of the *multigenerational family as an emotional unit.* To think in these multigenerational terms is to be able to see serious physical, emotional or social dysfunction in this generation as an end product of an emotional problem that had been growing in the family for many generations." [Emphasis added]

The multigenerational expression of unresolved emotions such as grief or anger has been traced back as many as eight generations or more. The emotional devastation of the Great Depression, the Civil War, and even more distant conflicts and upheavals in people's lives may be reflected still in emotional systems of families today.

Many persons subconsciously carry the unresolved emotional burdens of their ancestors in addition to their own pain, and they may express their feelings in destructive ways (Miller, 1981, 1984, 1990). Until people experience their own pain consciously, they cannot see the pain of others.

Unresolved feelings may be especially powerful in families with rigid responses and poorly developed coping mechanisms. Stress intensifies affect. Individuals tend to repeat their unresolved conflicts, until they progress toward emotional health, although some choose to remain stuck in dysfunction (Kerr, 1981; Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1980; Guerin & Guerin, 1976:93). Children from families with a legacy of pain may be at greater risk for abuse and neglect, as well as probability of transferring these behavior patterns to another generation. They may also be likely to acquire hostile attitudes toward outgroups, and some may be attracted to certain kinds of social movements which permit venting their anger at "safe" targets.

Other Sources of Psychopathology. All psychopathology does not necessarily originate in the family. It can derive from external sources such as punishment, torture, wartime conditions, severe deprivation, and sustained periods of danger, including being a prisoner or a concentration camp inmate, a displaced person, or a war refugee. Many studies demonstrate the transmission of psychological survivor symptoms of Holocaust victims, usually as depression, anxiety, and excessive somatic concerns (Rubenstein, et al., 1989-1990), and child abuse (Rothenberg, 1977). Several investigations have found such transmission even in the third generation. Perhaps additional effects will be found in fourth and fifth generations.

Early Research on Authoritarian Families

The early model of authoritarian families depicted a stern, remote father and

a submissive, morally restrictive, martyr-like mother, whose approach to discipline was highly rule-oriented as compared with perceiving the needs of the child (Hopf, 1993). Research perspectives on the ability of parents to respond appropriately to their children's needs were lacking until recently (Ainsworth, et al., 1978; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Hopf, 1993).

Early authoritarian research ignored the role of mothers. Hopf emphasized that about one-third of one early sample of authoritarian men had mothers who died when the men were children or in early adolescence. The difficulty of such a loss for children and young people and its continuing effect far into adulthood was not acknowledged by the *TAP* researchers. (Hopf's comments reveal that early researchers were usually unaware of their own biases and the influence of their own childhoods in obscuring or illuminating their findings. For this kind of research, ideally, scholars would first spend time researching their own psyches.)

Attachment Theory

"The maltreated-maltreating cycle is the most striking example of the psychodynamic notion that early relationship experiences are carried forward and reenacted in subsequent relationships" (Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989:177). Dozens of studies document how abused, abandoned, and neglected children grow up to be parents who inflict the same treatment upon their own children (e.g., Doumas, et al., 1994; Egeland, 1988; Goodwin, et al., 1981; Maden & Wrench, 1977; Nelson, Saunders, & Landsman, 1990; Simons, et al., 1995; Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989).

Freud's theories contribute the notion of the compulsion to repeat, an idea underlying psychodynamic theories seeking to explain this process (Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989). Freud's developmental theory contributes also because it concerns the pattern for close relationships in later life which a child receives from the parent-child relationship (Ricks, 1985). Bowlby developed the construct of internal working

models, together with attachment theory (1969, 1980), which shifts the focus from transmission of abuse and neglect per se to *organizing themes* of parent-child relationships and *internal working models* of maltreatment transmission (Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Conceptualization of how people are attached to others and how people relate to others intimately is central to attachment theory and therefore to study of transmission of maltreatment across generations (Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989). Despite the roots of attachment theory in early work, empirical studies to test theoretical ideas derived from it are recent (Ricks, 1985).

According to Bowlby's theory (1969, 1973, 1980), the child's picture of self is developed similarly. When parents are responsive and supportive, the child develops a self image of being worthy of help (Ricks, 1985). On the other hand, when parents are consistently non-responsive or abandoning, the child's self-picture tends to be unworthy and unlovable. An important ingredient in the theory is Freud's conception of continuous reorganization of the past to fit needs and structures in the present, which Piaget developed further (Ricks, 1985).[6] People may re-work their relationships consciously over and over across time and can progress toward correcting faulty self-images and relationship pictures. These changes tend to come at critical junctures such as adolescence or birth of a child (Ricks, 1985).

Attachment theory describes the primary mechanism by which parenting patterns are transmitted from one generation to the next. The literature distinguishes three main types of attachment (e.g., Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). Each has a different organizing theme and internal working model. The shared elements of internal working models of maltreatment relationships are rejection, role reversal, and fear. Anthropological studies including such themes show similar results: rejected children tend to have difficulty managing hostility and aggression, to be overly dependent or pseudoindependent, to have low self-esteem, to be emotionally unstable

or unresponsive, and to have a negative thinking system (Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989). Patterns of parent relationships may be related to patterns of child attachment to parents, influenced to a degree by levels of education and dysfunction in families (Crittenden, Partridge, & Claussen, 1991).

Some evidence indicates that mothers who consciously feel anger about their own rejection or abandonment by their mothers in childhood tend to be more successful in establishing secure attachments with their children than are mothers who idealize their childhood or cannot remember it (Main & Goldwyn, 1984). Parents who take out their anger physically and emotionally on children tend to isolate themselves, to have trouble controlling aggression, and to show lack of feeling or even to show anger at others' distress or pain.

A mother's responsiveness to her child's behavior and signals is a central determinant of secure attachments. Rejecting mothers tend to have children with insecure avoidant attachments, and mothers who give mixed signals are likely to have children with insecure ambivalent attachments. Mothers of children with secure attachments tend to be consistent and positive in their communication with their children (Main & Goldwyn, 1984).

The content and meaning context of maltreatment bound into organizing themes of the caregiving relationship are what is transmitted from parent to child, not particular types of maltreatment (Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989). A general antisocial orientation, not just learned aggression toward family members, is transmitted, and social deviance theories may further explain the process (Simons, et al., 1995). At the very least, "psychological dysfunction" tends to characterize abusive parents, compared with control group parents matched on a number of variables (Maden & Wrench, 1977). A reinforcing variable, marital violence in the nuclear family or the family of origin, frequently occurs in families experiencing child abuse (Doumas, et

al., 1994).

Hopf (1993) demonstrates that children with insecure attachments show many of the same characteristics which define the authoritarian personality, such as low self-esteem, reduced capacity for empathy, and a tendency to be in peer relationships which emphasize dominance-subordination patterns (see also: Sroufe, 1983; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986, 1988; Main & Weston, 1982; Ainsworth, 1967; Ainsworth, et al., 1978). Moreover, mothers of children with insecure avoidant attachments often recall rejection by their own mothers during their childhoods (Main & Goldwyn, 1984). These women have trouble remembering their childhoods, and they tend to idealize their mothers without being able to give concrete examples to support the idealized memory. Battered and abused children learn either to be victims or to be offenders. Boys more often than girls identify with the violent offender and become offenders. Bonding with the offender is a way to overcome the feeling of helplessness and powerlessness. The person bonding with an offender literally loses his own reality and becomes the offender. In that way he feels he can survive (Bradshaw, 1988:132-133). Figure 2 depicts the relationships among functional and dysfunctional family adaptions to stress and attachment processes.

[Figure 2 about here]

Abusing Families Are Closed Systems

Intrusive parenting, overprotectiveness of children, and parent-child role-reversal are forms of boundary violations and, like child abuse, arise from parents' insecure attachment issues (Jacobvitz, et. al., 1991). Unrelated to affect and warmth, these parenting patterns are likely to underlie children's later disorders and relationship difficulties. Not only is children's autonomy hindered, but also

they may be at risk for low self-differentiation.

As closed systems, abusive families tend to be male dominated and to have powerful and rigid boundaries between the family and outsiders but not respectful of boundaries within the family. Exterior boundaries frequently are preserved by inflexible religiosity, perfectionism, thinking in extremes (black and white) and unbending rules (Bradshaw, 1988). This structure isolates the family in its pain. New information cannot easily enter the family system. Religious or political thought differing from the family's own ideas, and psychology are viewed as threatening and suspicious. The levels of violence and abuse burden family members with shame, further hampering their escape from the setting and contexts. The result is tremendous loss, especially the loss of self for everyone (Bradshaw, 1988).

Secrecy, a primary element in dysfunctional families, accelerates the level of pain and dysfunction (Smith, 1988). For example, even when people have never known of a grandparent's alcoholism, they are affected by psychopathology emanating from that dysfunction and related phenomena and may themselves develop a chemical addiction or a similar symptom. Much shame is attached to having a problem which they cannot control on their own. The family is oriented toward concealing difficulties, exhibiting a false front, pleasing others by not expressing their own needs, responding to problems with a quick fix (Smith, 1988).

The greater the intimacy of a group's relationships, the higher the level of conflict tends to be. No social group is more intimate than the family (Steinmetz & Straus, 1974; Lawson, et al., 1983). Conflict can be resolved in peaceful, productive ways, but families which bottle up their conflict inside thick walls tend to have characteristics which turn them toward violence, such as low tolerance for frustration, impulsivity, immaturity, and inability to understand needs and abilities of infants and children (Spinetta & Rigler, 1972; Lawson, et al., 1983).

Miller (1981, 1984, 1990) emphasizes that denial of past painful childhood experiences erects a wall separating people from their feelings and memories. She shows that children will respond normally to the trauma of abusive treatment by feeling pain and anger. Children from punitive, harsh environments often are not allowed to express any emotion about their treatment and thus are isolated in their pain (1984). Usually, they have little or no choice about repressing their memory of the painful incidents. They must idealize their parents to maintain their denial. The memories will emerge again only under "safe" conditions, such as psychotherapy in adulthood; often, they never are consciously felt again. The feelings of rage, despair, helplessness, and pain become disconnected from the original incidents and can be directed against other targets, including themselves. Figure 3 shows elements of Miller's (1990) analysis of Adolf Hitler's family history over three generations and its role in fueling Hitler's anger and inability to feel empathy for others.

[Figure 3 about here]

Social Support Networks

Isolation is a common component of both retrospective childhood and present-time reports. Lack of social support networks or networks of mainly resource-draining and non-supportive people are major factors in families which abuse their children. This finding is congruent with the attachment notion and intergenerational transmission of blueprints for relationships (Ricks, 1985). Abuse-prone families frequently experience high levels of mobility, greater social isolation, and lack of community connections (Maden & Wrench, 1977). Socioeconomic status (SES) affects availability and quality of networks and ability to develop social skills; however, some disadvantaged families do maintain stable, supportive networks. Stable networks

are associated with lower risk of abusive behaviors. Lower SES mothers in one study, whose parenting was adequate and non-abusing, had friendship and kinship networks (more open systems with friendships tending to be long-term), and their children tended to have more secure attachments, in comparison with abusing or neglecting mothers (Crittenden, 1985). This suggests that abusing and neglecting mothers carry distorted and fragmented pictures in their heads of how to have relationships with friends, relatives, spouses, and children. Maltreating mothers divided into those isolated from support systems and those with networks of more intermittent, distrustful, draining contacts. Presence and type of maltreatment and social network variables were related much more to degree of security of children's attachments to their caregivers than were mothers' age, marital status, and number of children in the family. The adequate mothers were slightly better educated than were the maltreating mothers (Crittenden, 1985).

Distribution of Dysfunction and Abuse in Society

Evidence suggests that family dysfunction is unequally distributed in society, with the largest distributions occurring at the bottom socioeconomic rungs. Social conditions and environments at lower levels help to create and sustain dysfunctions, and some types of dysfunctional individuals and families (for example, the mentally ill) tend to move downward in the social hierarchy. Child abuse, a major indicator of dysfunction and a component in the development of authoritarian personalities, occurs at *every* level of society, but certain types are represented disproportionately among lower socioeconomic groups than higher ones.[7] Although many ingredients go into abuse and neglect besides SES, low levels of income and education and factors related to them are primary components of child maltreatment, particularly, physical abuse and neglect (Crittenden, 1996; Jones & McCurdy, 1992; Wolock & Horowitz, 1979).

Violent child death appears to occur more often among lower SES groups than among higher SES groups (Pelton, 1978; Smith, Hanson, & Noble, 1973; Nixon, Pearn, Wilkey, & Petrie, 1981). Some researchers think, however, one explanation is that higher SES families halt their abuse short of causing death (Nixon, et al., 1981). Others suspect that health professionals are reluctant to diagnose any child maltreatment by people of their own socioeconomic background (Browne & Saqi, 1988). Thus, it may be that our society has more structures in place to intervene in child maltreatment by lower SES groups than by higher SES groups.

Urbanism appears to be a factor in child maltreatment (Crittenden, 1996; Jones & McCurdy, 1992; Finkelhor & Baron, 1986), as well as an element in marital violence (Woffordt, Mihalic, & Menard, 1994). Type of neighborhood may mitigate the impact, however. In a study of two low-income neighborhoods, mothers living in a neighborhood with low levels of abuse gave and received help and had competent social networks (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980). The neighborhood with a high level of abuse showed "very 'needy' families competing for scarce social resources" (p. 194) and energy-depleting patterns of "social impoverishment" (p. 188). Children in the high-risk neighborhood were under additional stresses from within and without; few, if any, available supports existed.

Physical Abuse. Families with physical abuse tend to be relatively young with many, closely spaced children, and parents often have low education and incomes (Maden & Wrench, 1977; Crittenden, 1996). Often, mothers are unmarried, divorced, or separated. Social and kin networks outside the nuclear family are fragmented or inadequate (Crittenden, 1985, 1996; Garbarino & Sherman, 1980).

Neglect. Neglect is "defined as an act of omission rather than commission" and "may or may not be intentional" (Erickson & Egeland, 1996:4). Neglect not only can have as damaging effects as abuse but when combined with poverty severely impairs

children's life chances. Physical neglect particularly is linked to poverty and AFDC status (Jones & McCurdy, 1992; Erickson & Egeland, 1996). Extreme forms of neglect of babies and young children may result in failure to thrive and even death (Erickson & Egeland, 1996). Families which neglect their children (and often, they neglect all family members) are likely to live in poverty, to be large, to include few adults, and to be structured around the mother and the children with fathers and father-substitutes left on the outside (Crittenden, 1988, 1996; Nelson, et al., 1990; Polansky, Hally, & Polansky, 1975). "Indeed, although most maltreating parents have less education than nonmaltreating parents, neglectful parents have the least education, with many functioning in the mildly retarded range" (Crittenden, 1996:162; also see Polansky, Borgman, & De Saix, 1972). Usually, such families are urban, dependent on public assistance for survival, highly mobile, and isolated. Maternal grandmothers may be present and take parental roles. Social networks tend to include relatives who live in poverty and who lack childrearing knowledge (Crittenden, 1985, 1988, 1996; Gaudin, Wodarski, Arkinson, & Avery, 1990-1991; Polansky, Ammons, & Gaudin, 1985).

Marginally Maltreating Families. This category takes in several heterogeneous groups, which resemble those discussed above in low SES characteristics and unstable relationships. Disorganization, confusion, chaos, and continual crises are major features of their lives (Crittenden, 1988, 1996).

Abusing But Not Neglecting Families. These families contrast with the above groups because they tend to have only one or two children, to have average education and intelligence, and to be employed or employable (Crittenden, 1988). Often the families are young. Fathers usually are present, but hostility and abuse permeate marital and child relationships. Social relationships are unstable.

Sexual Abuse. Although sexual abuse occurs disproportionately among lower SES

groups, it tends to be less related to SES than are other types of maltreatment (Jones & McCurdy, 1992; Finkelhor & Baron, 1986). Families experiencing sexual abuse are likely to be urban, white, and have both parents present.

Psychological Maltreatment and Educational Achievement. Educational achievement in psychologically maltreated children from very disadvantaged families is lower than among matched peers of the same background (Erickson & Egeland, 1987; Hart & Brassard, 1991). One form of parental neglect is failure to obey laws regarding school attendance (Erickson & Egeland, 1996). Such behaviors help to perpetuate the cyle of poverty and neglect, demonstrating part of the difficulty in halting the effects of impoverished environment and the persistence of cycles.

Positive Interventions. The picture is not unrelievedly grim. The combination of poverty, abuse, and their attendant variables can be ameliorated by several kinds of interventions. Two are mentioned here briefly. First, "Project STEEP," focuses on expectant parents before birth of their first child, a time when people are less likely to feel their competency is being judged and when they are most receptive to information. The model has been introduced successfully into several locations (Erickson & Egeland, 1996; Egeland & Erickson, 1990; Erickson, Korfmacher, & Egeland, 1992). Second, lower SES children's ability to learn and to develop optimum IQs can be enhanced with interventions from birth to age 3 or 4 (Ramey & Ramey, 1992; Blair, Ramey, & Hardin, 1995; Campbell & Ramey, 1995). These interventions have been carried out with many children from poor homes, mainly headed by less educated single mothers.

Social Stratification and Authoritarianism

Education tends to have a negative relationship with authoritarianism, whether defined as tolerance (Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Wood, 1995), prejudice

(Duckitt, 1992), fascism (Stone, et al., 1993), dogmatism (Lipset, 1960), social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), or authoritarianism per se (Adorno, et al., 1950; Lipset, 1960). Pratto, et al., (1994) however, cited some contrary evidence. Formal schooling may have a liberalizing effect on authoritarian attitudes because of increased cognitive development, sophistication, and abstract thinking; increased opportunity to meet people of varied backgrounds; augmented political expertise and understanding of the importance of democratic principles; and improved self-esteem (Stone, et al., 1993; Altemeyer, 1988; Marcus, et al., 1995; Sniderman, 1975). These characteristics are related to exposure to information and receptiveness to new ideas, and to decreased defensiveness, powerlessness, and alienation (Sniderman, 1975).[8]

While "tolerance" indicates another facet of authoritarianism and is correlated with education, higher education is not always linked to higher tolerance for outgroups in society (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982/1993). The more educated tend to be more intolerant of right-wing groups, and the less educated tend to be more prejudiced against left-wing groups in the U.S. (Sullivan, et al., 1982/93; Wilson, 1994). This pattern has held as well in Israel but not in New Zealand, which showed little difference (Sullivan, Shamir, Walsh, & Roberts, 1985). Subjective social class had the opposite relationship in the U.S. The higher the subjective social class, the greater the support for right-wing groups (Sullivan, et al., 1982/1993). Why this occurred was not totally clear. It may argue for dividing socioeconomic groups into smaller segments for analysis; inter-group differences may be masked by being lumped together (Gaziano, 1995b).

Altemeyer (1988) noted a tendency over a twelve-year period among former students at the University of Manitoba to become less authoritarian on items regarding different social groups and some attitudes toward submission to

authorities. Some graduates became more authoritarian, however. Parenthood was the explanation, although reasons why were unclear. One possibility is that the birth of children triggered previously repressed negative childhood feelings. Much evidence supports the idea that depression associated with unhappy childhood memories can be triggered by the birth of children (Zuckerman, Bauchner, Parker, & Cabral, 1990; Unterman, Posner, & Williams, 1990; Green, 1994; O'Leary, 1988). Both men and women can experience depression associated with the birth of a child, and it is not unusual for both parents to be depressed (Ferketich & Mercer, 1995; Ballard, Davis, Cullen, Mohan, & Dean, 1994; Harvey & McGrath, 1988; O'Leary & Gaziano, 1995).

Childrearing practices also are fostered by cultural norms, which vary within the U.S. while remaining fairly stable within regions over several hundred years, even after transplantation to the New World, according to one historical analysis (Fischer, 1989). For example, childrearing and cultural patterns derived from four main British cultural traditions remain today, despite the movement of non-British groups into all parts of the U.S. One evidence of the strength of these cultural traditions is their continued influence to the present day on Presidential voting patterns. Fischer's analysis would lead us to expect greatest authoritarianism in the South. Earlier studies of authoritarianism by region have found levels highest in the South, even when education was held constant (Williams & Allen, 1966).

Suggestions for Research

This paper combines psychoanalytical concepts within a social systems and family systems framework to view the distribution of authoritarian-related attitudes and family dysfunctions in society. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches will contribute to such research.

In order to gather information which can be suited best to analysis of child socialization as a process, Hopf (1993:142) recommended work in a psychoanalytic

mode on "narcissistic problems in the behavior of authoritarians," more intensive study of parental responsiveness and rejection, greater attention to the mother's role in addition to the father's role, and scrutiny of defense mechanisms employed by authoritarian personalities. Hopf (1993) argued for longitudinal or retrospective biographic studies rather than surveys, to uncover the complexities in the relevant relationships and variables.[9] She desired more attention to mother-child relationships, in comparison with past emphasis on father-child relationships. Family systems theorists would emphasize study also of the mother-father relationship as a critical component in the family system, as well as the totality of family system relationships. Frequently, a child's problems are an expression of larger difficulties with the parents' relationship, and the child presents symptoms because it is safer in the family system to have problems in the child than in the parents' relationship (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Guerin & Guerin, 1976).

Baumrind's work (1967, 1980) suggests a useful typology in developing this theory further. Her categories (authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive modes of child rearing) can be crosstabulated with parental behavior concepts of "control" versus "acceptance," according to Maccoby and Martin (1983) to produce a typology of parenting patterns with respect to the two dimensions being discussed (Hopf, 1993:126). Their model is shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

On the other hand, if survey research approaches are adopted, the patterns of relationships discussed in this paper suggest a segmentation scheme, such as discriminant analysis. Education groups may divide according to the influence of other variables. Perhaps, for example, one might find two better educated groups and

three less educated groups, all well differentiated by such variables as childrearing patterns, age, sex, religion, values, alienation, and dogmatism. Other potentially useful variables are political attitudes, knowledge (such as public affairs, health, or child development), childhood memories, family of origin structure, marital status, community size and structure, urban-rural residence, and connectedness to community, relatives, and friends.

Authoritarian attitudes are predicted to relate to family dysfunctions, and both attitudes and dysfunctions are likely to connect to the family's location in the social structure. Special attention should be paid to conditions under which more extreme attitudes develop. Of particular interest in future theory development is comparison of authoritarians holding extreme leftist views with those holding extreme rightist views.[10]

Anecdotal evidence, mainly in mass media and concerning student radicals of the 1960s, suggests that extreme authoritarians can switch poles on the scale. It may be easier for a rigid leftist to become a rigid rightist than to become a center-leaning leftist (congruent with Hoffer's "true believer," 1951). One example is Lyndon LaRouche, who initially was a member of the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party but now embraces neo-Nazi ideology (Stone & Schaffner, 1988:99). Altemeyer (1988:258-259) stated: "And so the real issue has been 'Does the same kind of *personality* become a Communist *or* a Fascist, or both (like Mussolini), but not a 'democrat'?" Further, is part of the key to choice of views a split view of authority? Do authoritarians (or do most people) perceive a "good" authority to reside in one place, such as one's own government, and a "bad" authority to be elsewhere, perhaps in some particular group or in some other nation's government? This topic should be studied more systematically.[11]

Conclusions

When strong emotions are triggered by political elections or times of economic hardship, individuals with low differentiation of self may tend to fuse with the emotionality rising in their families -- and in society -- and to increase their rage at people who think or live differently from them, especially those appearing to be better off. Poor personal boundaries and higher levels of stress in the social system may combine to heighten their anger toward out-groups in society, such as minority racial or ethnic or religious groups, or at any groups with different viewpoints. This may be an important reason for the emergence of extremist groups in the social system at times of economic or political stress. Since the gap between rich and poor has increased so dramatically in the past two decades (Wolff, 1995; Smith, 1995; Karoly, 1996) with a more punitive impact on lower SES males (Levy, 1995), one might predict this group would be more likely to form protective groups if members felt threatened by social and economic trends. Characteristics of the right-wing militia movement and other extremists of the religious right tend to fit this profile.

An interesting contrast is posed by the largely middle and upper class student demonstrators of the 196Øs and early 197Øs (for some descriptions, see Flacks, 1967; Braungart & Braungart, 199Ø). These individuals too may have had lower differentiation of self, weaker personal boundaries, and a punitive or abandoning home environment; this remains to be studied systematically. When the level of emotionality in American society ran high over the Viet Nam War, civil rights, and other issues, this group was highly responsive to it and reacted by forming protective groups and spewing rage at authority figures perhaps in lieu of directing the anger to their parents.

A systems theory of family socialization, public opinion, and social

movements, based on these concepts, would focus on the distribution of dysfunctions in families within a community or a society.[12] It would demonstrate how family dynamics can play significant roles in the development of social movements and social change, for good or for ill. These concepts are particularly relevant today with the appearance of right-wing citizen militias, survivalists, and extremist Christian groups in the 1980s and 1990s in the U.S. Juxtaposed with their leftist counterparts, the protesters of the 1960s, these phenomena raise questions about which kinds of people tend to be aroused to action by various types of movements and what conditions foster right-wing attitudes versus left-wing attitudes.

Unprocessed emotions can come down through the ages with a powerful force. Individuals from closed family systems can experience inability to move on through life roles, emotional shutdowns, depression and other mental illness, or even suicide. Individuals from open family systems can take on more constructive approaches and behaviors. The kinds of trauma and dysfunction depicted in *The Authoritarian Personality* often occur as families undergo normal events and changes, which are stressful (Minuchin, 1984; Kerr, 1981; Becvar & Becvar, 1993). Dysfunctions can be widespread, especially in families with more closed emotional systems. These processes often have been at work for generations in families, with increasing evidence of psychopathology in each new generation. They can have painful and even tragic consequences for individuals, families, and society, as people's unresolved issues play out against a backdrop of the larger processes of public opinion and social movements.

NOTES

1. A system is a set of interrelated parts (Boguslaw, 1965; Buckley, 1967, 1968). A change in one will affect the others. A system can be of any size (for example, varying from a microscopic cell to a universe). This conception involves both structure and process (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

2. An earlier paper also dealt with this topic, describing authoritarian personality theory and measurement problems in greater detail (Gaziano, 1995c).

3. See Milburn, et al., 1995, for a fuller discussion of these ideas.

4. Bowen pioneered a program which required mothers and their schizophrenic children to live in an inpatient unit for long periods, so that he could observe their relationships. The resulting therapeutic process shifted Bowen's thinking from an individual psychotherapy model to a larger family emotional system model. His family systems theory has roots in the psychoanalytic work of Freud (Bowen, 1966, 1976a; Kerr, 1981).

5. One of Bowen's concepts, **societal regression**, incorporated his theory on a social system level (1977). Little developed before he died, this concept remains to be exploited fully (Kerr, 1981; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Bowen (1977) thought society embodies the same kinds of opposing forces as the family does and that chronic stress, such as over-population or incursions on the environment) will impede society's functional level of differentiation over time. Scholars who choose to work on this portion of Bowen's theory will face the problem of different levels of analysis. Conceptual ideas which work on one level, such as the individual or the family, may need to be altered on the level of a community or a society. It is desirable to determine linkages among levels (e.g., Pan, McLeod, & Rucinski, 1994).

6. For technical information see Ricks (1985), Cicchetti and Rizley (1981) and Main and Goldwyn (1984).

7. In one study, mothers of abused children were less likely to work outside the home than were non-abused children's mothers, though substantial proportions of the sample lacked data for this variable (Jones & McCurdy, 1992). This finding may be due partly to the lower tendency of less educated women to be employed outside the home, according to census data (e.g., see Bartos, 1982).

8. Authoritarianism is relevant to "knowledge gap" literature. The knowledge gap hypothesis posits that increased information flow in a social system often leads to increased knowledge differentials between the "haves" and the "have-

nots" (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970; Gaziano, 1995a; Gaziano & Gaziano, 1996; Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996). Knowledge gap studies rarely use concepts related to authoritarianism. In one which did, higher dogmatism was more prevalent among the less educated and also was related to public affairs knowledge gaps in Brazil (Simmons & Garda, 1982). Perhaps low education often may reflect the combined influence of low self-differentiation and high dysfunction.

9. In order to reveal contradictions, inconsistencies, and memory lapses, Hopf (1993:141) stated: "As a prerequisite, however, the childhood experiences must not be recorded in a standardized form, but rather in a manner that promotes unconstrained narration, reflection, and the conveyance of vivid descriptions of childhood memories."

10. Not all scholars agree there is an authoritarianism of the left, although they tend to agree on an authoritarianism of the right (Altemeyer, 1988; Eckhardt, 1991; Stone & Schaffner, 1988; Stone & Smith, 1993).

11. A related unresolved and seldom discussed problem is that researchers cannot probe the emotions of their subjects successfully until they have examined their own. Moreover, taking a highly cognitive theoretical stance allows researchers to avoid emotion-oriented explanations, which can in itself be a psychological defense mechanism. Eckhardt (1991) and Altemeyer (1988) were among the few social scientists to reveal ideology, both self-described liberals (the present author is a liberal, also). Rothman and Lichter (1982) pointed to some conservatives' criticism of social scientists for lacking objectivity on liberalism, Jewishness, and their own liberal tendencies.

12. If public policy-makers could choose only one target for efforts to decrease crime, deterioration of the family, and chemical and other addictions, the best choice would be parents at risk for abusing their children, and the most efficient and effective weapon would be social service support during the period when children are born, bond, and attach to their caregivers (birth to three years). Of course, families may need aid at other times, but this early period is most critical in children's lives. Otherwise, these social problems may multiply to unmanageable proportions.

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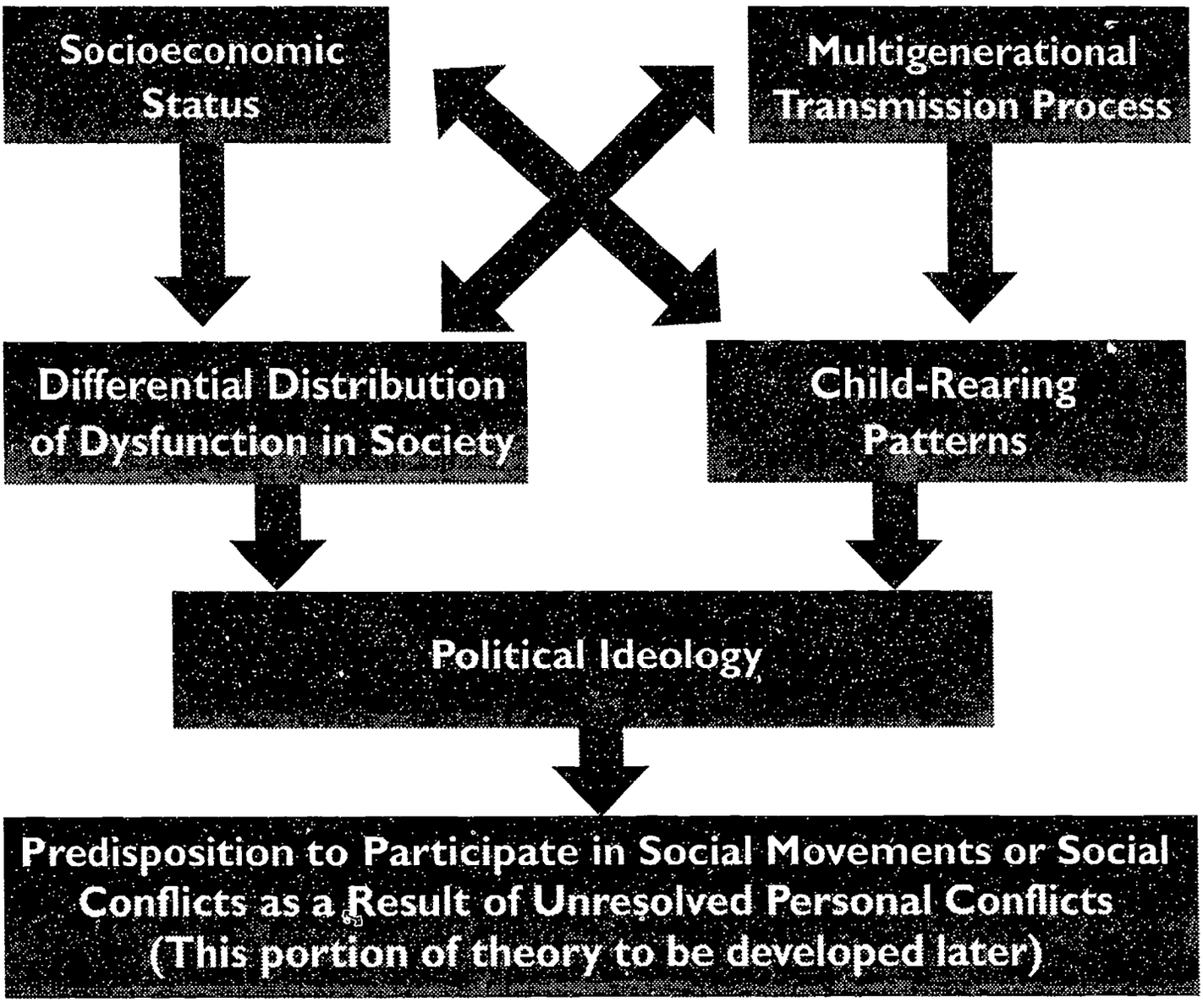


Figure 1. Model of the main elements of the theory of family socialization, public opinion, and social movements.

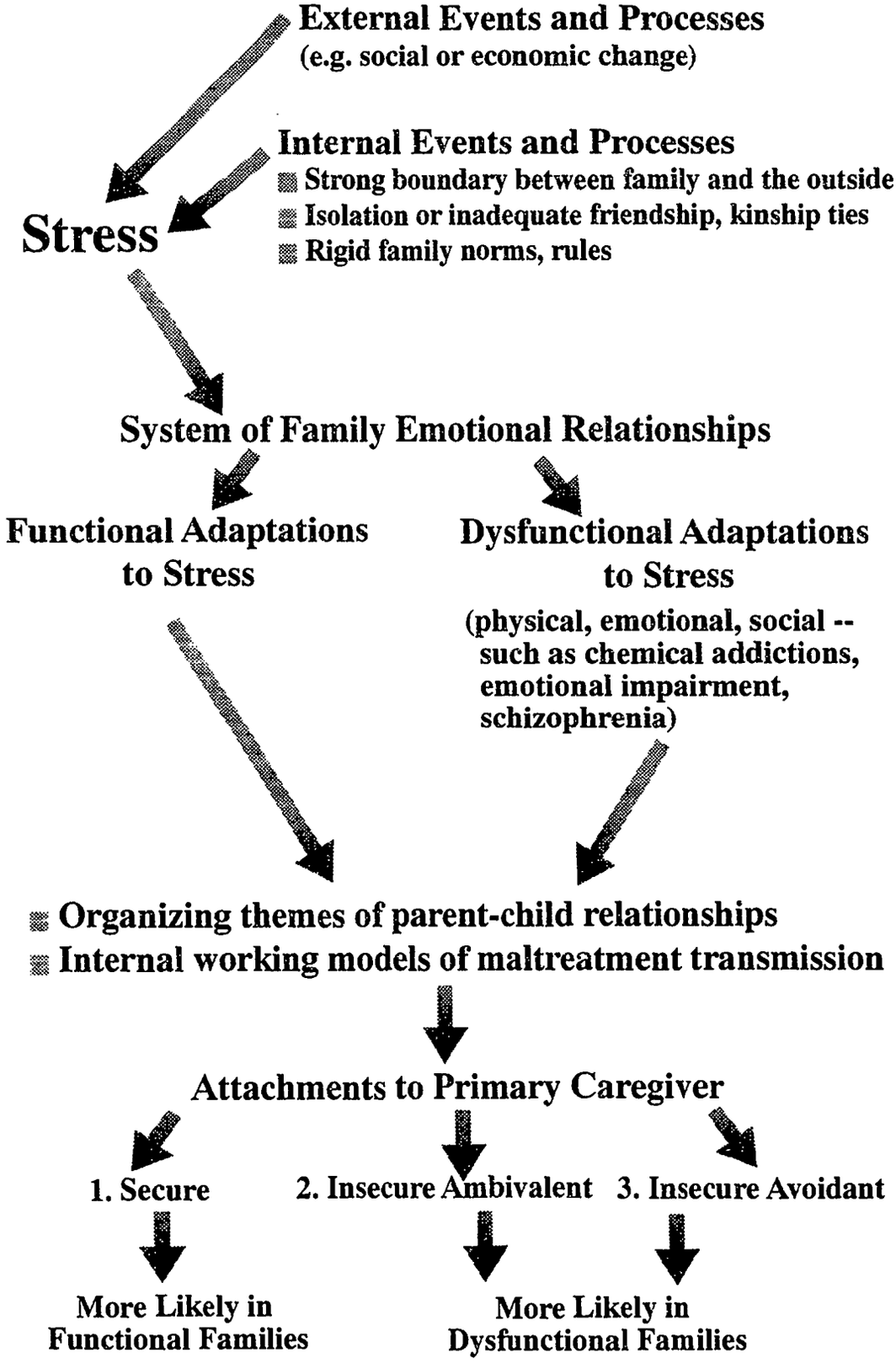
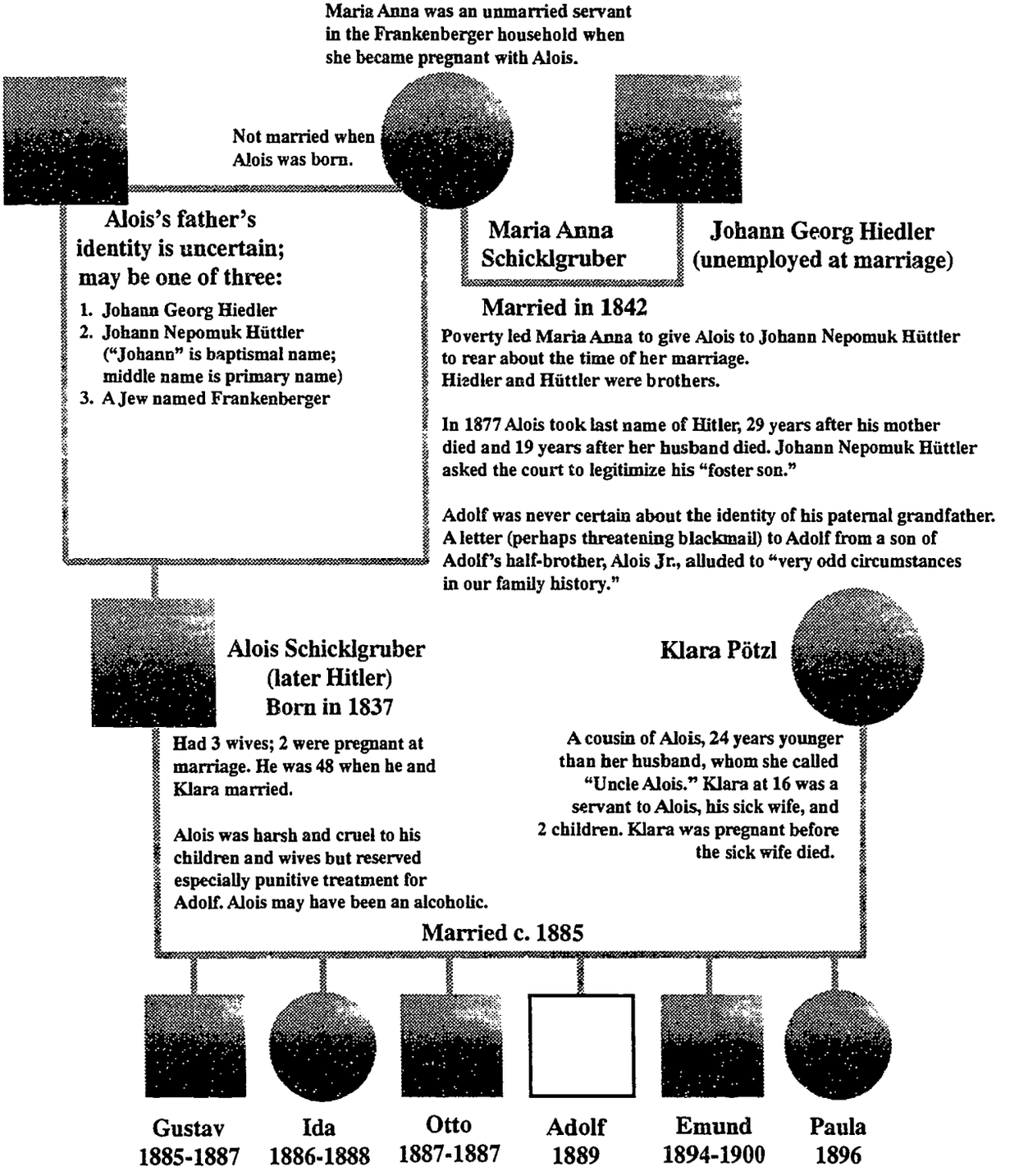


Figure 2. How external and internal events and processes combine in functional and dysfunctional adaptations, which then affect quality of attachments in families.



Genogram based on Alice Miller, 1990. "Adolf Hitler's Childhood; From Hidden to Manifest Horror," in *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence.* New York: Noonday Press, pp. 142-197.

Figure 3. Genogram showing the influence of transmission of multigenerational family processes on development of Adolf Hitler's authoritarian attitudes.

Table 1. A two-dimensional classification of parenting patterns.

	Accepting, responsive child-centered	Rejecting, unresponsive, parent-centered
Demanding, controlling	Authoritative-reciprocal, high in bidirectional communication	Authoritarian, power assertive
Undemanding, low in control attempts	Indulgent	Neglecting, ignoring indifferent, uninvolved

Source: Maccoby, E. E., and Martin, J. A., 1983, "Socialization in the context of the family: parent-child interaction, page 39. In Mussen, P. H. (ed.), *Handbook of Child Psychology, (Vol. IV, 4th ed.)*, copyright 1983, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reproduced by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.