

# Structural family theory essay sample

[Family](#)



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Individuals, subsystems, and whole families are demarcated by interpersonal boundaries, invisible barriers that regulate contact with others. Subsystems that aren't adequately protected by boundaries limit the development of interpersonal skills achievable in these subsystems (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). Consequently, the family should be considered as a system whose function depends on the members of this structure. Minuchin's Family structural theory was created with subsystems that changed all the time as they were adapting to external (job, school, and relocation) and internal (divorce, illness, and birth) influences. Thus, the dysfunctional family is one whose external and internal boundaries are excessively diffuse or rigid. A diffuse boundary deprives the couple subsystem of integrity, resulting in a lack of identity as a couple.

A rigid boundary, on the other hand, cuts the couple off from its environment. Family dysfunction results from a combination of stress and failure to realign themselves to cope with it. Stressors may be environmental (a parent is laid off, the family moves) or developmental (a child reaches adolescence, parents retire). The family's failure to handle adversity may be due to flaws in their structure or merely to their inability to adjust to changed circumstances. All families face situations that stress the system. Although, there is no clear dividing line between healthy and unhealthy families, healthy families modify their structure to accommodate to changed circumstances, whereas dysfunctional families increase the rigidity of structures that are no longer effective. Structural assessments take into account both the problem the family presents and the structural dynamics

they display. And they include all family members (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004).

Minuchin first discovered two patterns in dysfunctional families: disengaged and enmeshed. In disengaged families, boundaries are rigid and the family fails to mobilize support when it's needed. The example of this is when disengaged parents are unaware that a child is depressed or experiencing difficulties at school until the problem is far advanced. In enmeshed families, on the other hand, boundaries are diffuse and family members overreact and become intrusively involved with one another. For instance, enmeshed parents create difficulties by hindering the development of more mature forms of behavior in their children and by interfering with their ability to solve their own problems.

In other words, when parents are unable to resolve conflicts between them, divert the focus of concern onto a child. Instead of worrying about each other, they worry about the child what in turn victimizes the child and is therefore dysfunctional. Family therapists regard the identified patient's symptoms as an expression of dysfunctional patterns affecting the whole family. A structural assessment broadens the problem beyond individuals to the family system, and moves the focus from discrete events in the past to ongoing transactions in the present (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004).

## Reference

Nichols, M. P., & Schwartz, R. C. (2004). *Structural Family Therapy*. Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods (6th edition). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.