

# Systems Psychology

## I. Family Systems Theory:

A psychological perspective that views the family as an interconnected and interdependent system. Developed by Dr. Murray Bowen, it suggests that each family member affects and is affected by others, much like parts of an organism. In this view, the family is not just a collection of individuals but rather a whole unit, where dynamics between members shape each person's behavior, beliefs, and identity.

### Key Concepts in Family Systems Theory:

1. Interdependence: Each family member's actions influence others, often in patterns that reinforce or challenge the family's structure and roles.
2. Boundaries: These are invisible lines that define family roles, rules, and expectations. Healthy boundaries allow family members to interact without intruding on one another's independence, while enmeshed or overly rigid boundaries can cause dysfunction.
3. Roles: Each person may adopt specific roles (like "peacemaker" or "rebel") that serve the family dynamic but can also limit personal growth and self-understanding.
4. Homeostasis: Families often strive to maintain balance, even if it's unhealthy. When one person changes behavior, others may respond to "keep things as they are," which can resist or undermine personal growth.
5. Generational Patterns: Family Systems Theory considers how emotional and relational patterns pass down through generations, often unconsciously shaping each new generation's relationships and self-concepts.

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### **Family Systems Theory (cont.):**

By examining family interactions and recurring dynamics, Family Systems Theory helps individuals see how their family context shapes their behaviors, relationships, and sense of self. For astrology students, understanding Family Systems can deepen insight into how family patterns (like those seen in synastry or natal chart comparisons) influence their psychological makeup and relational tendencies.

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### II. Internal Family Systems (IFS):

A therapeutic model that views the mind as composed of multiple "parts" or subpersonalities, each with its own feelings, desires, and roles. Developed by Dr. Richard C. Schwartz, IFS proposes that these parts interact within us similarly to family members within a family system. IFS encourages understanding and harmonizing these parts to foster personal healing and self-awareness.

#### Key concepts in IFS include:

1. Parts: Each of us has multiple parts within our psyche, each with unique emotions, beliefs, and purposes. In IFS, parts are grouped into three types:
  - Exiles: Parts that carry deep pain, fear, or shame and are often pushed away or "exiled" from conscious awareness to protect us from feeling overwhelmed.
  - Managers: Protective parts that try to keep us safe by controlling how we interact with the world. They work to avoid situations that might trigger painful emotions or memories.
  - Firefighters: Parts that emerge to put out the emotional "fires" when exiles are activated. They often use intense or impulsive behaviors (like numbing, distraction, or anger) to suppress difficult feelings.
2. Self: IFS believes that everyone has a core Self, which is calm, compassionate, curious, and wise. The Self can observe and engage with each part without judgment. In therapy, strengthening this connection to the Self is crucial for healing.
3. Blending: This happens when a part temporarily "takes over" and colors how we feel, think, or react. In IFS, we learn to unblend so that the Self can compassionately observe and communicate with the part rather than becoming engulfed by it.
4. Internal Harmony: IFS aims to build internal relationships that allow each part to be acknowledged, appreciated, and harmonized. Instead of suppressing or battling parts, IFS encourages accepting and integrating them, allowing us to respond to life more freely and authentically.

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### **Internal Family Systems (IFS, cont.):**

For astrology students, IFS offers a valuable model for understanding how different aspects of our psyche may correspond to astrological placements, helping us see how different inner “parts” can work together (or be in conflict). It also provides tools for understanding and working with our complex inner world, so we can respond from a place of greater self-awareness and balance.

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### III. Family Constellations:

A therapeutic approach developed by Bert Hellinger that explores how unresolved family dynamics, traumas, and patterns may unconsciously affect individuals within a family system across generations. This method helps people uncover hidden influences and entanglements within their family of origin, allowing for a healing resolution of those patterns.

#### Key Principles in Family Constellations:

1. Family System and Ancestral Patterns: This approach views the family as a system where each member, including ancestors, plays a role. Emotions, traumas, and unresolved events from previous generations can be passed down and experienced by descendants, influencing their lives, relationships, and behaviors.
2. Systemic Conscience: Family Constellations work from the idea that the family system has its own conscience, or underlying sense of order, where each person "belongs" and has a place. When this order is disrupted (through exclusion, shame, or trauma), imbalances arise, often showing up as emotional or relational challenges in later generations.
3. Representative Roles: In a Family Constellations session, participants or representatives stand in for family members (alive or deceased), embodying and acting out their roles. This setup reveals hidden dynamics and patterns within the family system, including loyalty bonds, unresolved traumas, and unspoken emotions.
4. Orders of Love: Hellinger's concept of the "Orders of Love" suggests that healthy family relationships follow certain natural orders, such as everyone having a right to belong, respecting the hierarchy of generations, and balancing giving and taking. When these orders are disrupted, problems often appear in relationships or personal issues.
5. Resolution and Healing: Through this process, participants become aware of how they may unconsciously carry emotional burdens that aren't theirs to carry. By recognizing these dynamics and restoring a sense of order, individuals can release inherited patterns and find a deeper sense of peace and connection to their family.

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### **Family Constellations (cont.):**

For astrology students, Family Constellations can provide insight into ancestral influences on their natal chart. This method helps students explore how unresolved family patterns might be reflected in astrological placements, encouraging them to integrate family history consciously and compassionately into their own lives. Our ancestors live in our charts, meaning that our family lineage, with all its patterns, gifts, and unresolved issues, is present in our astrological blueprint.

### **The Individuation Process**

The journey toward wholeness, as described by Jung in the individuation process, is about reclaiming and integrating every part of our chart. The parts of ourselves that we may have projected outward onto others—parts of our psyche that we see in family members, partners, and friends—are ultimately part of us. Individuation involves bringing these parts back into our conscious Self (with a capital "S"), integrating them to feel more whole and authentic.

Our natal chart is like a map of our psyche. It not only represents our inner world but also reflects the people around us who play significant roles in our life story, or "psychodrama." The people we're drawn to or have strong reactions to often resonate with specific parts of our chart, showing us areas of our own psyche that we are invited to explore and integrate.

In our studies, we're tracking and mapping the psyche through the lenses of both psychology and astrology. This dual approach helps us to see how our personal story and the stories of our ancestors are woven into our chart, guiding us on our journey toward understanding and healing.

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### IV. Psychological Triangulation:

A dynamic in relationships where a third person, object, or issue is introduced into a relationship between two people to reduce tension, control interactions, or avoid direct communication. This concept is common in Family Systems Theory and can create complex relational patterns, often leading to confusion, conflict, or dependency within the relationships.

#### Key Aspects of Psychological Triangulation:

1. Reducing Tension: Triangulation often happens when there's tension or conflict between two people. Instead of addressing it directly, one or both individuals may involve a third party to ease the stress, divert attention, or gain support.
2. Creating Alliances: One person may bring in a third party to validate their perspective or align against the other, which can create an "us vs. them" dynamic. For instance, a parent may align with one child against the other parent, creating loyalty conflicts and emotional strain.
3. Avoiding Direct Communication: Triangulation can be a way to avoid direct confrontation. Instead of communicating openly, a person may express feelings or frustrations indirectly through a third party, leading to misunderstandings and unresolved issues.
4. Perpetuating Dysfunction: Over time, triangulation can become a pattern that keeps people stuck in unhealthy dynamics. It often prevents individuals from developing direct communication skills or from working through conflicts in a healthy, open way.

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### **Psychological Triangulation (cont.):**

Understanding psychological triangulation helps us see how indirect communication and alliances can interfere with authentic relationships and emotional growth. In astrology, triangulation might be reflected in certain planetary placements or aspects, where we can see potential patterns of dependency or conflict in relationships that offer insight into our psychological patterns.

### **V. Psychological & Astrological Complexes in Depth Psychology & Archetypal Astrology:**

In depth psychology, a psychological complex refers to a group of emotionally charged thoughts, feelings, memories, and perceptions clustered around a central theme. Complexes operate largely at the unconscious level and can significantly influence a person's thoughts, behaviors, and relationships, often without their full awareness. They're often understood to have roots in past experiences, particularly in childhood, or archetypal patterns that resonate on a universal level.

For example, someone with an inferiority complex may unconsciously interpret many situations as evaluations of their self-worth, leading to feelings of inadequacy even when they're objectively capable.

Carl Jung, a foundational figure in depth psychology, viewed complexes as autonomous and possessing their own "psychic energy." They can become activated or "triggered" by certain stimuli, bringing past experiences into the present and affecting our perception and behavior. Integrating these complexes into conscious awareness is seen as a key part of the therapeutic journey, as it helps reduce their grip and allows for greater psychological freedom.

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### **Psychological & Astrological Complexes in Depth Psychology & Archetypal Astrology (cont.):**

An astrological complex mirrors the psychological complex, but is specifically associated with patterns in an individual's birth chart that reflect a deep emotional, psychological, or relational theme. In archetypal astrology, it refers to a network of planetary placements, aspects, and configurations that together signify a specific core issue or recurring pattern of experience that resonates with the themes of a psychological complex.

For example, if someone has a Sun-Saturn square in their birth chart, they may be prone to an inferiority complex, feeling inhibited or doubtful of their self-worth. The Sun (representing identity and vitality) in tension with Saturn (signifying restriction, fear, and responsibility) can lead to a sense of unworthiness or feeling blocked in expressing oneself. When an individual experiences transits or progressions that activate this configuration, the complex might be triggered, bringing certain fears or self-critical tendencies to the forefront.

Astrological complexes thus reflect psychological complexes but with added archetypal and symbolic dimensions. They offer insight into the timing, quality, and potential healing paths for these deep-seated themes, suggesting ways to work through and integrate them within the broader context of one's life and psyche.

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### **VI. The Systems View:**

A systems view in archetypal astrology involves seeing the birth chart not as a set of isolated planetary placements but as an interconnected, dynamic whole, where each element influences and is influenced by the others. This perspective draws from systems theory, which emphasizes the interdependence and holistic nature of all parts within a complex system.

In this view, the birth chart is seen as an integrated system of archetypal energies—represented by planets, signs, houses, and aspects—working together to form a coherent picture of the individual's psyche and life themes. Each planetary aspect or configuration is not just an isolated influence but part of a larger pattern that interacts within the context of the whole chart. This allows the astrologer to interpret how different archetypal complexes, such as a Moon-Pluto conjunction or a Venus-Mars square, relate to and modify each other, shaping the individual's experiences, relationships, and inner life.

For example, a person with a Mars-Saturn square may experience internal tension between assertiveness and restraint. However, if this aspect is part of a larger T-square involving Jupiter, this Jupiterian influence can shift the experience, potentially adding optimism or a drive for growth, which modifies the expression of the Mars-Saturn tension. In this way, each archetypal complex is understood as a part of a network of relationships that collectively shape a person's life journey.

The systems view allows for a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the birth chart, supporting a view of the psyche as a living, evolving whole. It also highlights the process-oriented nature of archetypal astrology, where personal growth is seen as emerging through the interaction of multiple energies rather than as fixed or predetermined traits.