

## **Daniel Papero, PhD**

### **Developing a systems model to assess family system functioning**



In personal conversations Murray Bowen often floated the idea of a system of family diagnosis or assessment. He believed that it would be possible to create a family diagnostic system that could be used alongside or even in place of the DSM. In his portion of the book *Family Evaluation*, Michael Kerr proposed a general schema for such an assessment. Although several attempts have been made informally to follow the Kerr proposal, none has been published and tested broadly.

In 2011–2012 the NIMH began development of the Research Domain Criteria (RDoC), “...a research framework designed for studying the full range of human behavior from normal to abnormal based on biology, behavior, and context.” (“NIMH RDoC Publications”, accessed September 28, 2017, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/research-priorities/rdoc/nimh-rdoc-publications.shtml>) The RDoC moves away from the categorical classification model of the DSM to a dimensional or continuum model. It currently comprises 5 domains or areas of functional continua and proposes two additional. The current domains are; negative valence systems, positive valence systems, cognitive systems, systems for social processes and arousal/modulatory systems. Two proposed additional domains include neurodevelopment and environment.

The RDoC use of dimensions led the author to consider a new approach to family assessment that differed from the Kerr model. Beginning with Bowen’s conceptualization of the family as a system and his focus on the functioning of that system as it faced adaptive challenges and accompanying anxiety and stress, it becomes possible to develop a dimensional model of family system functioning.

#### **3rd International Conference on Bowen Family Systems Theory**



That model includes five dimensions ranging from optimal to dysfunctional; resourcefulness, tension management, connectedness and integration, systems thinking, and goal structure. At this point, a systems model for assessing family functioning remains a preliminary proposed schema.

### **3rd International Conference on Bowen Family Systems Theory**

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