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The Self in the Family

A Classification of Personality, Criminality, and Psychopathology

Luciano L'Abate

with the collaboration of

Margaret S. Baggett

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To the United States of America and to its people, who have given the author and his collaborator so mu

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The Self in the Family

In his acclaimed book *A Theory of Personality Development*, Luciano L'Abate introduced a revolutionary theory of personality development and functioning that departed radically from traditional theories. In place of hypothetical traits existing in an empirical vacuum, Dr. L'Abate offered an image of observable interpersonal competencies functioning within the basic contexts of home, work, leisure, and the marketplace. Central to his theory was a developmental model that posited the family as the primordial setting in which propensities are formed and behavior patterns set. By defining personality in terms of the growth and interplay of interpersonal competencies, the L'Abate theory provided an epistemologically and empirically sound basis for understanding personality function and dysfunction as corollaries and extensions of one another.

In *The Self in the Family*, Luciano L'Abate and Margaret Baggett again break new ground by expanding the L'Abate theory of personality development to encompass criminal and psychopathological behavior. Drawing upon mounting empirical evidence that the family paradigm is the major determinant of personality socialization throughout the life span, the authors develop a selfhood model with demonstrable links between the three domains of personality function, criminality, and psychopathology. With the help of the model, they show how it is now possible to arrive at a personality-based interpretation of most deviant behaviors, including criminality, psychopathology, addictions, and even psychosomatic illnesses, and they describe various preventive and psychotherapeutic applications for this expanded theory of family-based personality development.

The authors further elaborate on the theories developed in Dr. L'Abate's previous books by introducing the core concepts of hurt—the basic feeling

underlying much of personality functioning and dysfunctioning—and a continuum of likeness—the fundamental determinant of interpersonal choices and behavior in friendships, parent-child relations, and marital relations.

Offering an empirically rigorous, developmentally based, unified field theory of personality function, criminality, and psychopathology, *The Self in the Family* is essential reading for developmental and clinical psychologists, family therapists, personality theorists, and criminality and psychopathology researchers.

About the authors

LUCIANO L'ABATE, PhD, is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Georgia State University. In addition to his academic career, Dr. L'Abate has maintained a private clinical practice in individual, marriage, and family therapy since 1958. On retiring from Georgia State, Dr. L'Abate was appointed Clinical Director of the International Counseling Center, a church-sponsored facility dedicated to helping minority ethnic groups in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. L'Abate is a member of numerous professional societies, most notably the American Family Therapy Association, the International Academy of Family Psychology—of which he was cofounder and first president—and the American Orthopsychiatric Association. A prolific writer and editor, Dr. L'Abate has written several other books including *A Theory of Personality Development, Handbook of Developmental Family Psychology and Psychopathology,* both available from Wiley, and *Handbook of Social Skills Training and Research.*

MARGARET S. BAGGETT, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in the assessment and treatment of children and their families. In addition to her private practice, she works as a school psychologist. She is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Georgia Psychological Association (in which she holds a board position), and the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. She is also a charter member of the Georgia Play Therapy Association. Dr. Baggett has studied and published with Dr. L'Abate over the past twenty years.

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The Self in the Family

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The Self in the Family: A Classification of Personality, Criminality, and Psychopathology
by Luciano L'Abate (with the collaboration of Margaret S. Baggett)

Series Preface

Our ability to form strong interpersonal bonds with romantic partners, children, parents, siblings, and other relations is one of the key qualities that defines our humanity. These relationships shape who we are, and what we become—they can be a source of great gratification or tremendous pain. Yet, only in the mid-20th century did behavioral and social scientists really begin focusing on couples and family dynamics, and only in the past several decades have the theory and findings that emerged from those studies been used to develop effective therapeutic interventions for troubled couples and families.

We have made great progress in understanding the structure, function, and interactional patterns of couples and families—and have made tremendous strides in treatment. However, as we stand poised on the beginning of a new millennium, it seems quite clear that both intimate partnerships and family relationships are in a period of tremendous flux. Economic factors are changing work patterns, parenting responsibilities, and relational dynamics. Modern medicine has helped lengthen the life span, giving rise to the need for transgenerational caretaking. Cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage are quite commonplace, and these social changes make it necessary for us to rethink and broaden our definition of what constitutes a family.

Thus, it is no longer enough simply to embrace the concept of the family as a system. In order to understand and effectively treat the evolving family, our theoretical formulations and clinical interventions must be informed by an understanding of ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual preference, family life cycle, socioeconomic status, education, physical and mental health, values, and belief systems.

The purpose of the *Wiley Series in Couples and Family Dynamics and Treatment* is to provide a forum for cutting-edge relational and family theory, practice, and research. Its scope is intended to be broad, diverse, and international, but all books published in this series share a common mission—to reflect on the past, offer state-of-the-art information on the present, and speculate on, as well as attempt to shape, the future of the field.

FLORENCE W. KASLOW

Florida Couples and Family Institute

Preface

> . . . one's own theory—in the service of coherence, belief, and beauty—necessarily distorts, as well as organizes, a viewpoint about human nature. (Emde, 1995, p. 1041)

The purpose of this work is to elaborate, update, and expand on a developmental theory of interpersonal competence and socialization (L'Abate, 1994b) by adding parts that were not included in the original work because of space constraints but that are integral components of the theory as a whole. This theory of the self in the family stresses that the family is the major setting in which personality development and socialization take place. From this setting develop functional as well as dysfunctional personality propensities. The latter, up to the present time, were considered separate from the former, and psychopathology was viewed as being separate from criminality. This theory and the *selfhood model*—a specific model of personality propensities derived from the theory—link together all three domains: functional/dysfunctional, psychopathological, and criminal. This work aims, therefore, to show how the existing evidence converges toward the family as the setting from which these personality propensities and their deviations develop and are socialized.

This theory developed from some general ideas about behavior in a *vacuum* (L'Abate, 1964) to very specific ideas about the individual in the family (L'Abate, 1976), family functioning (L'Abate, 1985a, 1985b, 1986), and, finally, personality socialization within a relational context (L'Abate, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c). Everything written here is a sequel to previous works. To avoid repetitious self-reference, no citations of previous works (and their accompanying references) will be repeated unless absolutely necessary. In an early version (L'Abate, 1994b), descriptions of the theory borrowed the metaphors of a compass, a map, and a straitjacket. Here, the metaphor of a coathanger is useful. The theory forms a framework on which can hang a vast variety of constructs from diverse theories, theorettes (small theories), models, and empirical sources.

Examples of how the theory can function as a coathanger can be found throughout this work. For instance, in Chapter 4, there are many formulations

of feelings and emotions. However, most of them, as will be shown, involve *lists* without any framework that would allow for a systematic understanding of how feelings and emotions relate to each other and how they reflect individual differences and personality propensities. A more egregious example, found in later chapters, pertains to psychiatric nosology, which consists of *lists* of symptoms and syndromes that have no relation to each other, much less to personality socialization and criminality.

The metaphor of the theory as a coathanger will become evident in how personality, criminality, and psychopathology can be put together within the same framework. Up to the present time, these domains of experience and knowledge were considered separately; that is, most personality theories avoided references to both psychopathology and criminality. Theories of criminality made only sparse reference to personality or psychopathology, except to mention the possible overlap among these domains. Theories of psychopathology made few references to either personality or criminality. Linking the three domains requires integrating what, until now, have seemed disparate and diverse fields of knowledge.

A theory is different from a paradigm and a model. A paradigm is a very general, abstract worldview—for example, the family as a unit of interdependent personalities that influences personality socialization throughout the life span. A theory has a more specific and concrete function: to develop models that can be tested empirically as well as clinically. Previous paradigms viewed personality in a *vacuum*, or, at best, as a vague and unspecified personality–situation interaction. The theory specifies that the family paradigm is the major determinant of personality socialization throughout the life span. The school/work setting can be very important in the rewards or stresses that it poses for and imposes on growing individuals. Without the support of a secure home setting, many individuals would not be able to cope with either school or work. Leisure activities contribute to enjoyment. Other necessary tasks are performed for survival. We all depend on a grocery store to survive, and most of us need to visit a beauty salon or barbershop to look better. Leisure time can be used to link the physical and recreational activities that mediate home and occupational stresses.

The major characteristic of this work is its reliance on external, observable resources. In many personality textbooks, inferred, internal/intrapsychic, or hypothetical traits or states have reached the level of reification. The traditional *trait approach* to personality theory, the prevailing paradigm in the present day, is reviewed and critiqued. Because it stresses visible relationship patterns rather than internal variables, the present theory is quite different from existing intrapsychic approaches to personality.

Part One introduces and gives evidential support for the theory. Chapter 1 focuses on the basic tenets of the original theory. Chapter 2 reviews: (a) existing theories or concepts that are epistemologically or empirically *independent* of this theory but have constructs that are similar and, possibly, in agreement, and (b) evidence that is *indirectly* related to and supportive of the validity of

the theory. Chapter 3 summarizes evidence that is *directly* supportive because it was derived specifically from the theory itself. Chapter 4 argues that hurt is the fundamental but neglected feeling that determines a great deal of our behavior in interpersonal relationships, intimate and otherwise. Feelings and emotions are considered from the viewpoint of a selfhood model summarized in previous chapters. Chapter 5 includes most of the available evidence to support the validity of a likeness continuum in personality differentiation and intimate relationships (mate selection, marriage, parent–child relationships, and friendships). Chapter 6 reviews seven theoretical models that relate individual behavior to family behavior (or vice versa). Two psychoanalytic models are included—one on relationship styles and one on family defenses—as are Olson's circumplex model, Constantine's theorizing, and McCubbin's empirical work with families. All seven models are integrated, admittedly tentatively, with the theory or with the selfhood model.

Part Two emphasizes particularly how the prototypical selfhood model of personality socialization—derived from the theory—is applied to the classification of personality, criminality, and psychopathology. In linking personality with criminality and psychopathology, Chapter 7 offers a critique of past classifications from the perspective of the present theory and models. A new classification of personality, criminality, and psychopathology according to the relational and contextual selfhood model is described. Chapter 8 presents the selfhood model as a cornerstone for a classification of criminalities. Chapters 9 and 10 expand the theory and selfhood model to affective disorders and psychopathologies, respectively. Chapter 11 advocates that addictions and psychosomatic illnesses be classified separately from criminalities, personalities, and psychopathologies because there is not, as yet, a one-to-one relationship between personalities and addictions nor between psychosomatic illnesses and psychopathologies.

Part Three expands on the implications of the theory and prototypical model for psychological interventions. Chapter 12 relates the theory to preventive approaches, and Chapter 13 shows its potential for crisis interventions and psychotherapies. Chapter 14, in Part Four, demonstrates how a simple arithmetical model can describe and evaluate the theory and the prototypical models elaborated from it.

This work aspires to fulfill Berscheid's (1995) request for a "grand theorist." The author is neither a sociologist nor an anthropologist, as Berscheid would have liked, but, years ago, a graduate course in the sociology of the family brought to his attention the nonexistence of a field of family psychology. If there is a sociology of the family *qua* family, why should there not be a psychology of the family? How is the individual related to his or her family?

The aim of the theory described herein is to correct inadequacies in past classifications by introducing a selfhood model that includes, links, and relates the fields of personality functioning, criminality, and psychopathology. The intended outcome is a possible integration of these three fields, which have developed, until now, in separate and relatively independent fashion.

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Scholars of personality—teachers, researchers, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates—will profit or benefit from reading this work and implementing the selfhood model. Clinicians interested in applying an integrative, contextual, and relational theory to their practice may find it helpful to use the methods and techniques developed in parallel with the theory to test and evaluate it.

This work is different from other texts on personality theory in that it does not repeat shopworn concepts and theories. It integrates social psychological theories (i.e., social comparison, resource exchange, environmental psychology, and ecology) into a competence–setting interaction. Additionally, developmental, therapeutic, normative, and psychopathological viewpoints are blended in a way that is unique in textbooks on personality. The integration of past and current viewpoints is planned as a refreshing respite from the endless repetition of theorists and theories in traditional texts. Instructors who value both novelty and integration of concepts may find here a way to have their students learn something new in personality theory.

LUCIANO L'ABATE

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Contents

PART ONE

Summary and Expansion of the Theory

CHAPTER 1

The Family as the Context for Personality Development and Socialization

> The challenge for any study of lives in a changing society is to keep both individual and environmental variations in the picture. (Elder & Caspi, 1990, p. 202)

This book delineates a developmental theory of personality socialization that poses the ability to love and the ability to negotiate as the cornerstones of personal and interpersonal competence. In contrast to traditional personality theories, which as a whole have been intrapsychically nonrelational and acontextual, this theory is both relational and contextual. At best, previous theories of personality have touched on the personality–situation interaction. Generally, these theories failed to specify what this interaction consisted of because most of their constructs were internal rather than external. For instance, the abilities to love and to negotiate are relevant only to the extent that each is applicable to a specific setting—usually, the home. The ability to love is more relevant, if not specific, to the home, and it is necessary but insufficient to guarantee functional relationships. The ability to negotiate is equally important and has additional relevance to other settings outside the home.

This theory of the self in the family maintains that we need to find ways and means of determining causal relationships that are relevant at *both* individual and multirelational levels of the family. Interactions are between the subordinate level of the individual and the supraordinate level of the family unit. Both levels are the products and the producers of relationships. Traditional personality theories, however, offer little help because most of them are couched in intrapsychic, nonrelational, acontextual terms that have little relevance to personality socialization and functioning in the family or anywhere else. This position is not intended to dismiss past theories of personality development out of hand; on the contrary, it seeks to highlight the differences without which this theory could not have been constructed.

Developmental competence theory, therefore, would be in some ways isomorphic with existent models of personality socialization that have demonstrated empirical as well as clinical validity (see Chapter 2). The theory

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