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THE COHESIVE(!) FAMILY AS A SOCIAL ECOSYSTEM IN LAWRENCE'S *SONS AND LOVERS*

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Abstract

The family is a fundamental social structure that plays an important role in forming individual identity and emotional well-being. In Sons and Lovers, D. H. Lawrence explores the complexities of familial relationships and the importance of intra-family solidarity. The novel depicts how emotional connections in the family affect psychological development and social experiences of its members, while also exposing fundamental tensions and conflicts. Viewed through the approach of Family Systems Theory, the family is understood as a collection of isolated individuals and as an interdependent system that is shaped by ongoing emotional interactions. This perspective allows for a deeper analysis of the mutual influences and shifting roles in the family unit. In Sons and Lovers, the intense emotional ties between the mother and her sons illustrate the multifaceted nature of solidarity, which serves as a depictive force within personal and relational dynamics. These bonds offer support during periods of conflict, while encouraging individual growth and a sense of continuity. Within this framework, the family emerges as a dynamic ecosystem that supports belonging and personal identity. Thus, this article aims to study the formation and function of intra-family solidarity in Sons and Lovers by using Family Systems Theory.



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Keywords: Family Systems Theory, Solidarity, Emotional Cohesion, Unity, D. H. Lawrence

LAWRENCE'IN OĞULLAR VE SEVGİLİLER ADLI ESERİNDE TOPLUMSAL BİR EKOSİSTEM OLARAK KENETLENMİŞ(!) AİLE

Öz

Aile, bireysel kimliğin ve duygusal bütünlüğün oluşmasında temel bir sosyal yapı olarak önemli bir rol oynar. D. H. Lawrence'ın Oğullar ve Sevgililer adlı romanı, aile içi ilişkilerin karmaşaklılığını ve aile içi dayanışmanın önemini derinlemesine ele alır. Roman, aile içindeki duygusal bağların bireylerin psikolojik gelişimlerini ve toplumsal deneyimlerini nasıl etkilediğini gösterirken, bu bağların zaman zaman çatışmalarla sinendiğini da ortaya koyar. Aile Sistemleri Teorisi bağlamında aile, birbirinden bağımsız bireylerden oluşan bir topluluk değil, sürekli duygusal etkileşimlerle şekillenen karşılıklı ilişkiler ağı olarak değerlendirilir. Bu kuramsal çerçeve, aile bireyleri arasındaki karşılıklı etkileşimleri ve rollerin zaman içindeki dönüşümünü analiz etmeye olanak tanır. Oğullar ve Sevgililer'da anne ile oğulları arasındaki yoğun duygusal bağlar, dayanışmanın çok boyutlu doğasını gözler önüne serer ve bu bağların hem bireysel hem de ilişkisel denge açısından dengeleyici bir işlev gördüğü görülür. Bu tür bağlar, zorluklar karşısında bireysel gelişimi destekleyen bir unsur olarak öne çıkar. Bu bağlamda aile, bireyin aidiyet duygusunu besleyen, destekleyen ve yön veren dinamik bir ekosistem olarak karşımıza çıkar. Bu makalenin amacı, Oğullar ve Sevgililer romanında aile içi dayanışmanın Aile Sistemleri Teorisi çerçevesinde nasıl şekillendiğini incelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aile Sistemleri Teorisi, Dayanışma, Duygusal Bütünlük, Birliktelik, D.H.Lawrence

1. INTRODUCTION

The family has been widely acknowledged as a primary social system in which individual identities are established, and emotional well-being is continuously supported. The family functions as an interdependent system, where the emotional and behavioral paths of each individual in it influence other members and are influenced by the others. This systemic understanding constructs the family from a sheer variety of individuals to a dynamic social system, which

emphasizes ongoing interactions and mutual relationships (Cox and Paley, 1997: 246). Such a perspective permits a nuanced analysis of family unity, especially when applied to literary interpretations, which often reflect and question the complexities of familial ties.

Literary works give solid ground for exploring the image of family dynamics and emotional relationships. In *Sons and Lovers*, D. H. Lawrence intricately depicts the emotional interdependencies within a working-class family, while focusing on the mother-son connections. These portrayals align with the base values of Family Systems Theory, where individual behaviours are rooted within and affected by family roles and patterns. Psychological perspectives underline how literary narratives demonstrate family functioning and emotional well-being, while providing insight into the relational processes that support solidarity.

The role of the family as a societal system also encloses the conveyance of cultural values and the support of resilience between different generations. Lawrence's depiction of family in *Sons and Lovers* embodies these themes while illustrating how family unity operates as both a reason for togetherness and a site of internal conflicts. The existence of unsettled arguments alongside persistent attachments exposes the dual nature of family as a room of support and struggle (LaCapra, 1994: 712). Central to the sustainability of family systems is the progressive nature of solidarity, which is defined as the returned commitment and encouragement among members that steers internal and external pressures. Accordingly, solidarity is a dynamic process that is important for maintaining relational peace within families. In *Sons and Lovers*, such progressive solidarity is depicted through the characters' non-stop negotiation between personal desires and familial duties, which illustrates the family's dual role as a stabilizing social structure and a running system open to any change if needed. This interplay states once more the relevance of Family Systems Theory

to literary analysis, while providing a concept for understanding the compound interpersonal relationships depicted in Lawrence's novel.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the depiction of family solidarity in *Sons and Lovers* through the perspectives of Family Systems Theory, with a focus on the family as a social ecosystem. By searching the complex intra-family relationships and the mechanisms of solidarity shown in the novel, this study intends to contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies and social-psychological theory. To achieve this, it emphasizes the strong importance of the family institution as a crucial social and emotional concept which is shaping individual identity and resilience.

2. FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Family Systems Theory focuses on relational and systemic parts of family emotional dynamics, while making valuable contributions to the study of human psychology. According to Bowen, "the family is an emotional unit; it is a network of interlocking relationships governed by the principles of emotional interdependence" (Bowen, 1978: 1). The notion of differentiation of self, important to Bowen's Family Systems Theory, is about an individual's ability to sustain a clear sense of personal identity, while remaining emotionally attached to others in the family system. It includes a balance between independence and closeness, being able to think independently, sense, and make decisions independently, while not becoming emotionally reactive, or over-entangled. As Bowen states, "those with poor differentiation are fused with their families; their thinking and emotions are often indistinguishable from the group" (Bowen, 1978: 99). Such people often find it difficult to differentiate their own emotional responses from strong pressures and expectations of their family, which is resulting in consumed and unclear boundaries and psychological dependence on others.

Triangulation is another key concept in Bowen's Family Systems Theory, describing a process in which a third person is drawn into a dyadic relationship to alleviate tension, anxiety, or unresolved conflicts. Bowen states that "the smallest stable relationship system is a triangle; its formation temporarily reduces anxiety but often perpetuates unresolved conflicts" (Bowen, 1978: 134). While involving a third person may offer short-term emotional relief, it can also maintain dysfunction by avoiding direct confrontation and hiding the real issues between the original pair. In family systems, triangulation can hinder genuine communication and increase emotional dependence, especially when it becomes a regular coping mechanism.

In literary analysis, triangulation often describes complex emotional entanglements involving three characters, where the presence of the third person heightens rather than resolves relational conflict. This dynamic is clearly evident in *Sons and Lovers*, where Gertrude Morel becomes a constant influence in Paul's romantic relationships, effectively inserting herself into the emotional core of his bonds with Miriam and Clara. Her deep psychological attachment to Paul, which is developed through years of emotional isolation from her husband, renders her unable to relinquish her central role in his emotional life. Paul, in turn, becomes the unwilling apex of multiple emotional triangles, torn between loyalty to his mother and the desire for romantic and sexual fulfilment with other women.

The emotional tension between Gertrude and Paul remains unresolved and is instead projected onto his lovers, who feel judged, excluded, or inadequate. Paul's relationship with Miriam, for example, is characterised by his inability to commit fully: "She was too good for him, and he was too much bound up with his mother" (Lawrence, 2007: 194). Likewise, his affair with Clara is full of rebellion but ultimately superficial, as Paul cannot emotionally detach from his

mother and fully invest on another woman. In both cases, Gertrude's influence permeates Paul's emotional world, positioning her as a third party in relationships that should exist independently. Therefore, triangulation in the novel not only reflects Bowen's theoretical model but also dramatises the destructive psychological effects of unresolved familial fusion.

The family projection process is a vital component of Bowen's Family Systems Theory, illustrating how parents transmit their unresolved emotional anxieties, expectations, and conflicts to their children. This process often occurs unconsciously and can significantly impede a child's emotional development and independence. As Bowen explains, this dynamic "increases the child's vulnerability to emotional problems and clinical symptoms" (Bowen, 1978: 297), as the child becomes burdened with psychological roles and expectations that are not their own. Essentially, the child becomes an emotional extension of the parent, absorbing the parent's unresolved issues and struggling to forge a stable and independent sense of self.

In *Sons and Lovers*, this process is vividly depicted through the relationship between Gertrude Morel and her son Paul. After years of disillusionment in her marriage to Walter Morel, a man she regards as coarse, emotionally distant, and intellectually inferior, Gertrude shifts her emotional reliance onto her sons, especially Paul. Her hopes, dreams, and unfulfilled desires become intertwined with Paul's identity, turning him into a surrogate partner and emotional confidant. As Gertrude once states, "she felt as if her soul had got into the boy's soul" (Lawrence, 2007: 87). This line reveals the extent of her psychological entanglement and underscores how Paul is not permitted to develop as a separate individual; instead, he becomes a vessel for his mother's discontent and emotional longing.

The final key concept in Bowen's Family Systems Theory is emotional cutoff, which refers to the strategies individuals use to handle unresolved emotional tensions within their family of origin by reducing or ending contact. This can appear as either physical distance or emotional detachment. However, as Bowen notes, such separation is rarely a proper solution: "People reduce contact or sever ties altogether to manage unresolved emotional attachments, though this rarely resolves underlying issues" (Bowen, 1978: 382). Emotional cutoff might lessen superficial discomfort, but the unresolved anxiety often reappears in other relationships, repeating the original emotional entanglements in new settings.

In the novel, Paul Morel's emotional life is marked by this very phenomenon. Although he occasionally shows frustration with his mother's possessiveness and seems to pursue independence through relationships, his attempts to distance himself are mostly symbolic or superficial. His relationships are marked by detachment, ambivalence, and guilt, emotional remnants of his unresolved attachment to Gertrude. Paul may try to pull away at times, but his mind remains under her influence. As Lawrence powerfully illustrates, "he could not bear it when his mother was not there; he was afraid when she was. She powerfully affected his mind" (Lawrence, 2007: 203). This contradiction exemplifies the paradox of emotional cutoff: proximity is painful, but distance does not bring freedom.

Even after Gertrude's death, Paul fails to find emotional resolution. Instead of moving forward, he drifts into a state of existential aimlessness and emotional vacancy. The novel's final pages portray a man who is physically free but emotionally adrift, unable to forge meaningful connections or establish a new identity. Bowen's concept thus illustrates that emotional cutoff, in Paul's case, does not equate to psychological freedom; the absence of true differentiation

and emotional processing continues to haunt him. Ultimately, Lawrence's depiction of Paul's emotional struggle embodies Bowen's insight that distancing alone cannot heal unresolved family dynamics. Instead, as the theory suggests, genuine emotional maturity requires confronting and processing familial attachments, not merely fleeing from them. *Sons and Lovers* powerfully depicts the lasting effect of unsolved familial connections and the hopelessness of escape without self-realization.

Monica McGoldrick and Philip Guerin state the interdisciplinary importance of Family Systems Theory, especially its flexibility beyond the reach of clinical psychology. They debate that literature acts as a mirror for the unconscious emotional paths rooted within families, while stating that "literature often mirrors the unconscious emotional patterns of families, revealing systemic processes that govern character behaviour" (McGoldrick and Guerin, 1983: 45). This lens lets the application of Bowen's concepts to literary works, where familial relationships are not only background elements but also essential mechanisms that support character development and narrative chain. Thus, through this approach, *Sons and Lovers* becomes a story of individual psychological conflict alongside being a case study in family dysfunction.

3. THE MOREL FAMILY FROM AN EMOTIONAL SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

Unresolved marital disagreements and parental unhappiness create a general atmosphere of emotional instability in the Morel household, thus making *Sons and Lovers* a classic example of a dysfunctional family system as understood within Family Systems Theory. Gertrude Morel's severe disenchantment with her husband, Walter Morel, is at the root of this dysfunction. Their children's lives may be greatly impacted by the emotional calculations and projections that result from this conflict. The sharp contrast between Gertrude's romantic expectations and her husband's working-class upbringing is the source of her

disappointment: "She had married him because he was full of life and she thought he was manly," writes Lawrence. "But now she despised him" (Lawrence, 2007: 20). This rapid emotional transition demonstrates Gertrude's effort to balance her personal values with the realities of her marriage, in addition to her shift in perspective.

This emotional separation between husband and wife goes beyond a marital issue, and it affects the entire family system. Gertrude, unable to meet her emotional needs through her husband, redirects her affections and ambitions towards her sons. This merging of identity and emotional dependence signifies the start of systemic dysfunction, where the children become substitutes for adult emotional needs, a typical example of family projection and triangulation. This framework shows that the Morel family's struggles are not just isolated psychological problems but interconnected emotional processes within a closed family system. Gertrude's dissatisfaction thus becomes the emotional centre of the novel's family chaos, triggering a ripple effect of dependency, resentment, and emotional entrapment that ultimately prevents the children from forming independent identities.

Bowen contends that when a marital relationship becomes emotionally distant or filled with ongoing tension, anxiety within the family system is often transferred onto the children. This process, typically expressed through triangulation and family projection, enables unresolved spousal conflicts to be indirectly managed by redirecting emotional energy to the children. As Bowen states, "the family's anxiety is often transmitted to one or more of the children, who become the focus of emotional investment, thereby intensifying the system's dysfunction" (Bowen, 1978: 220). In *Sons and Lovers*, this dynamic manifests in Gertrude Morel's growing psychological overinvestment in her sons, initially William, and after his death, Paul.

Gertrude's emotional expectations of her husband remain unfulfilled. Consequently, she redirects her intimate and aspirational energies towards her children, especially Paul, whom she treats not just as a beloved son but as a surrogate partner. The narrator observes that "she had found one thing in her life, and that was Paul. Her life would be changed for her by him" (Lawrence, 2007: 87). This strong declaration captures the depth of her emotional dependence on Paul. It indicates a transfer of her personal and romantic aspirations onto her child, which is a key aspect of Bowen's concept of parental projection. Additionally, Gertrude's attachment to Paul extends beyond the nurturing scope of maternal love into the territory of emotional fusion and psychological enmeshment. Her identification with him becomes so intense that his independence threatens her sense of self and stability. This is not merely a doting mother's love, but a profound entanglement in which the child is burdened with the emotional residue of his parents' failed relationship. Consequently, Paul becomes increasingly conflicted in his romantic life, struggling to balance his loyalty to his mother with his desire for independence and intimacy elsewhere. From the perspective of Family Systems Theory, this behaviour illustrates how unresolved spousal tension and emotional fusion between parent and child can hinder healthy individuation and relational development.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Walter Morel's gradual emotional and physical withdrawal from his family exemplifies what Murray Bowen terms emotional cutoff, a process by which an individual attempt to manage unresolved emotional issues by reducing or severing contact with other family members. This dynamic is mirrored in Walter's descent into alcoholism and his increasing emotional estrangement from his wife and children. Rather than confronting the emotional tensions and disappointments in his marriage, Walter retreats into silence and habitual drinking, creating an even deeper rift within the family

system. From this perspective, Lawrence captures this alienation with poignant clarity, describing Walter as “a man who had no intimacy with his children” (Lawrence, 2007: 49). His detachment makes him a marginal figure in the household’s emotional life, contributing to a divided family structure where Gertrude becomes the dominant emotional force and principal agent of familial identification. This imbalance worsens the systemic dysfunction, as one parent’s disengagement increases the emotional reliance of the other parent on the children.

Bowen observes that in such situations, the child who becomes the centre of intense emotional energy often emerges as the “symptom bearer”, carrying the unspoken burdens of the family’s unresolved conflicts and anxieties (Bowen, 1978: 220). In the Morel household, Paul takes on this role, embodying both the hopes and frustrations of his emotionally fractured parents. His psychological turmoil, romantic ambivalence, and identity struggles are not just personal but systemic, shaped by a family dynamic that shifts emotional responsibilities and avoids direct resolution. Walter’s emotional absence, therefore, does not reduce the family’s anxiety, but it displaces it.

The convergence of emotional cutoff, triangulation, and unresolved marital conflict in Sons and Lovers results in a destabilised family emotional system, where the nuclear family unit fails to offer the psychological safety and developmental support necessary for healthy individuation. Bowen’s theory highlights that when the parental dyad becomes emotionally fractured, there is a tendency to transfer anxiety and emotional investment onto the children. Guerin et al. observe, “[w]hen spousal conflict is unresolved, the natural tendency is to shift emotional energy toward the children, who unconsciously take on the family’s emotional burdens” (Guerin et al., 2011: 72). This systemic

redirection of emotional tension disrupts the generational boundaries within the family and exerts undue psychological pressure on the child.

In the Morel family, this dynamic is most vividly exemplified in the character of Paul. Gertrude's unmet emotional needs become deeply intertwined with her aspirations for Paul's future. Her love becomes possessive and enmeshed, creating what Bowen describes as emotional fusion; a state in which the boundaries between self and other become blurred, hindering the development of a differentiated self. Paul's identity is gradually influenced not by autonomous desire but by his mother's projections and ideals, leaving him emotionally stilled and ambivalent in his relationships outside the family. According to Frank Beards, "Paul Morel is caught in an emotional triangle, simultaneously trying to please his mother while distancing himself from his father" (Beards, 2002: 97). The consequences of this fusion are manifold. Paul struggles to establish lasting romantic relationships, as evidenced by his fluctuating connections with Miriam and Clara. His choices are often influenced by maternal approval, indicating a psychological dependency that hampers emotional development. Therefore, the novel not only depicts a dysfunctional family system but also dramatizes the enduring emotional toll of blurred boundaries and unresolved intergenerational ties. From the perspective of Family Systems Theory, Paul's struggle exemplifies how systemic emotional dysfunction can be inherited, internalised, and tragically carried forward.

4. FROM BREAKDOWN TO TRANSFORMATION: A NEW LOOK AT DIFFERENTIATION

At the core of *Sons and Lovers* is the psychologically complex and emotionally intense relationship between Paul Morel and his mother, Gertrude. This attachment clearly illustrates Murray Bowen's concept of emotional fusion and impaired self-differentiation. Bowen describes differentiation as "the ability to

maintain emotional connection to the family while also being able to distinguish one's own intellectual and emotional functioning from that of others" (Bowen, 1978: 99). In fused relationships, the boundary between the self and others becomes blurred, leading to a loss of independence and excessive emotional reliance. This tension influences Paul Morel's growth, as he tries to establish his identity under the weight of his mother's strong emotional influence.

From his earliest years, Paul is depicted as deeply immersed in his mother's inner world. Gertrude, disillusioned with her husband and emotionally unfulfilled, turns to her sons as substitutes for her failed marital ideals. Her overinvestment in Paul becomes a form of psychological possession. Lawrence writes, "[s]he had found one thing in her life, and that was Paul. His life would be her life" (Lawrence, 2007: 87). This statement powerfully illustrates not only her emotional dependence but also her projection of unfulfilled desires onto her son. Paul, in turn, internalises this expectation, experiencing intense guilt and conflict whenever he seeks emotional connection outside the maternal bond.

Through this perspective, Paul's story becomes a compelling case study of emotional fusion and its damaging effects on the development of selfhood. Paul's "inability to individuate from his mother exemplifies Bowen's idea of fusion" (Kerr and Bowen, 1988: 63), and his eventual isolation and emotional detachment are not signs of resolution. However, tragic outcomes can result from a life lived without achieving true individuation. *Sons and Lovers*, therefore, becomes more than a narrative of maternal attachment; it is a dramatisation of the emotional costs of low differentiation, depicted through deeply human themes of love, loyalty, and loss.

Gertrude Morel's emotional dissatisfaction with her marriage causes her to project her unmet needs and desires onto her son Paul, resulting in a

relationship characterised by emotional dependence and possessiveness. This dynamic reveals a deep enmeshment, where Gertrude's identity becomes intertwined with Paul's, hindering his psychological development and independence. Lawrence vividly depicts this maternal intensity, writing, "when he was a baby, she made him feel like he was her man" and emphasising that "she believed he was hers" (Lawrence, 2007: 73). Such language highlights not only the extent of Gertrude's emotional investment but also her possessive claim over Paul's identity and future.

This relationship is not merely an expression of maternal affection; instead, it forms a kind of emotional fusion that inhibits Paul's development of an independent self. Keith Sagar asserts that "[t]he failure to differentiate from his family—especially his mother—paralyzes Paul's romantic development". (Sagar, 1981: 15). Bowen's Family Systems Theory describes this as a classic example of emotional enmeshment, where vague boundaries between parent and child prevent the latter from differentiating and forming autonomous emotional bonds. Consequently, Paul's emotional independence is weakened, and his ability to engage in intimate relationships outside the family is minimal. This possessive bond places Paul in a psychologically unstable position. While it offers a source of comfort and identity, it also acts as a barrier to his romantic and social development. His interactions with women such as Miriam and Clara are marked by ambivalence, reflecting the unresolved tensions arising from his mother's overpowering presence. As a result, the novel depicts not only a mother's yearning for fulfilment but also the profound cost of such emotional dependence on a child's process of self-discovery.

Bowen's concept of the family projection process explains how parents often unconsciously transfer their unresolved emotional anxieties and demands onto their children, thereby hindering the children's psychological development and

individuation. Bowen notes that this process “increases the child’s vulnerability to emotional problems and clinical symptoms” (Bowen, 1978: 297), as the child becomes burdened with fulfilling roles and expectations that stem from parental dysfunction rather than their own identity. In *Sons and Lovers*, this mechanism is clearly shown in Gertrude Morel’s deep emotional investment in Paul. Her frustrations, disappointments, and unmet needs are projected onto him, creating an oppressive psychological environment where her expectations and desires limit Paul. This dynamic hamper his ability to develop an independent sense of self and to follow his own romantic and personal dreams freely.

The novel repeatedly emphasises Gertrude’s widespread influence and control over Paul’s emotional life, particularly in his romantic relationships. Lawrence states, “she knew she had won him. He was giving in, and she sensed it” (Lawrence, 2007: 192), highlighting the subtle yet powerful hold she has over his affections and decisions. This quote demonstrates how Paul’s emotional independence is compromised; his resistance to his mother’s influence is continually weakened, leaving him trapped in a cycle of loyalty and guilt. Through the lens of Bowen’s family projection process, Paul’s limited emotional development and conflicted romantic experiences are not merely personal failures but signs of a broader systemic dysfunction. Gertrude’s projections hinder Paul’s psychological independence, demonstrating how unresolved parental anxieties can significantly influence the paths of children’s lives.

Gertrude Morel’s subtle yet widespread interference in Paul’s romantic relationships exemplifies Bowen’s concept of triangulation. In this dynamic, a third party is drawn into a dyadic conflict to manage anxiety but ultimately maintains emotional dysfunction. Bowen explains that triangles “stabilize relationships by shifting tension but also perpetuate dysfunction” (Bowen,

1978: 134). In the Morel family, Gertrude effectively inserts herself into the emotional space between Paul and his romantic partners, Miriam and Clara, creating a complex and damaging triangle that hinders Paul's ability to form healthy intimate bonds.

This triangulation creates a continuous emotional conflict, not only involving Paul's lovers but also between mother and son, with Paul caught in the middle. His failure to escape this triangle leads to deep relational ambivalence and emotional paralysis. His confession to Miriam, "I can't love you... I am being suffocated by you," along with his comment, "you are too much like my mother" (Lawrence, 2007: 201), sums up this conflicted condition. Paul longs for closeness and independence at the same time, but his psychological bonds to his mother make pursuing intimacy more complicated. Clara's keen observation that "[y]ou're not really free—you're tied to your mother" (p. 226) further highlights the inescapable hold of Gertrude's emotional grip. Even as Paul tries to assert his independence through these relationships, he remains caught in the systemic family patterns that Bowen describes. The emotional triangulation thus confines Paul in a state of unresolved loyalty and emotional confusion, hindering his path towards mature relational development.

Paul's emotional disengagement continues even after Gertrude's death, showing the enduring influence of these family dynamics on his individuation process. Lawrence poignantly depicts Paul as "alone, without direction" (Paul, 2007: 289), a man physically free from his mother's presence but emotionally adrift. This unresolved psychological state aligns with Bowen's understanding that emotional cutoff does not automatically mean psychological freedom or resolution. Without addressing the underlying family anxieties and emotional fusion, true differentiation remains out of reach. His attachments are also characterised by ambivalence, guilt, and an ongoing struggle to balance

intimacy with autonomy. His relationships fail to provide the emotional security or fulfilment needed for growth, primarily due to the enduring influence of his mother's projections and the triangulated family system. In this light, Sons and Lovers not only narrate individual love stories but also dramatizes the profound and often tragic effects of family systems on personal identity and relational capacity.

5. ROMANTIC ATTACHMENTS AND EMOTIONAL CUTOFF: PAUL'S PASSION FOR FAMILIAL LOVE

Paul Morel's deep need for emotional closeness, combined with a silent and deeply rooted devotion to his mother Gertrude, appears as a constant internal struggle throughout his personal and romantic life. This tension can be thoughtfully understood through Murray Bowen's concept of emotional cutoff, which describes the ways individuals manage unresolved family tensions by creating physical or emotional distance from family members. Bowen describes emotional cutoff as a process that "involves reducing or severing contact with family members" (Bowen, 1978: 382), often used as a coping mechanism for painful or overwhelming family dynamics.

However, Bowen warns that emotional cutoff is rarely a proper solution to underlying emotional problems. Instead, it "rarely resolves underlying tensions and often perpetuates emotional dysfunction" ((Bowen, 1978: 382). In Paul's case, although he may physically distance himself through his romantic relationships or moments of solitude, his psychological and emotional bonds to his mother remain deeply rooted. This unresolved attachment creates a continual ambivalence, where Paul oscillates between the desire for independence and the pull of maternal loyalty, resulting in emotional paralysis rather than freedom. This psychological struggle exemplifies the complexity of emotional cutoff within dysfunctional family systems: physical separation does

not ensure emotional liberation, and unresolved attachments continue to shape an individual's ability for intimacy and self-determination. Paul's experience thus functions as a compelling literary reflection of Bowen's theory, demonstrating the lasting influence of family emotional patterns on personal growth and relational functioning.

Paul Morel's relationships with Miriam Leivers and Clara Dawes in *Sons and Lovers* vividly demonstrate the enduring influence of his family system over his emotional life. Miriam signifies an intellectual and spiritual connection, embodying a depth that could potentially promote Paul's individuation. However, her emotional intensity and steadfastness cause anxiety and ambivalence in Paul, reflecting his internal conflict. Lawrence captures this turmoil poignantly: "He hated her because she was stronger than him, but he wanted her—he wanted to kiss her" (Lawrence, 2007: 152). This paradox of desire and resistance encapsulates Paul's struggle to reconcile intimacy with his unresolved familial ties.

Miriam herself recognises the unavoidable maternal influence shaping Paul's psyche, telling him directly, "your mother is the ground of all your thoughts: she's in your very soul" (p. 163). This acknowledgement highlights the profound psychological imprint of Gertrude on Paul's mental landscape, illustrating how familial emotional fusion complicates the possibility of independent relationships. In contrast, Paul's relationship with Clara Dawes initially appears as a rebellion—both emotional and physical—against his mother's dominance. Clara's confidence and passion seem to offer a form of liberation, a chance for Paul to experience freedom outside the maternal grip. Nevertheless, despite this physical closeness, Paul remains emotionally distant and unable to engage fully. Lawrence writes, "It was no good... She could not take him out of himself" (p. 223), emphasising Paul's continued entrapment within the emotional legacy

of his family system. His physical relationship with Clara is a symbolic but ultimately ineffective attempt to break free from maternal enmeshment.

This cyclical pattern of longing for intimacy followed by withdrawal exemplifies what Nichols and Schwartz term pseudo-differentiation, “an outward display of independence that conceals ongoing emotional dependence and vulnerability to family dynamics” (Nichols and Schwartz, 2006: 93). Bowen’s family projection process further clarifies how Gertrude’s unmet emotional needs cast a long shadow over Paul’s romantic relationships, shaping his interaction patterns and hindering true emotional growth. Even after Gertrude’s death, Paul’s emotional isolation endures, highlighting the strong and lasting influence of family systems on individual psychological development. Sons and Lovers thus offers a profound exploration of how familial emotional entanglements can limit and complicate the pursuit of personal identity and relational fulfilment. The profound psychological effects of the Morel family’s unresolved emotional ties reach their zenith in the climax of *Sons and Lovers*. The novel’s tragic ending clearly shows how Paul’s sense of identity is permanently shaped and limited by the family’s emotional dynamic, leaving him caught in a state of existential uncertainty and emotional stagnation. This ending strongly supports Bowen’s theory of the multigenerational transmission process, which explains how emotional patterns, anxieties, and unresolved issues are passed through generations, often hindering individual psychological growth.

Throughout the narrative, Paul’s efforts to individuate—that is, to forge a self-separate from the overpowering influence of his mother—are repeatedly thwarted. Gertrude’s death, rather than granting him freedom, leaves him “alone, wandering without purpose” (Lawrence, 2007: 289). This image of wandering symbolises Paul’s incomplete differentiation: although physically free from his mother, he remains psychologically tethered to her emotional

legacy. Bowen suggests that individuals with low differentiation who resort to emotional cutoff often find themselves in “psychological limbo,” a state where neither autonomy nor connection is fully realised (Bowen, 1978: 382). Lawrence’s depiction of Paul’s post-maternal loss underscores the emotional emptiness caused by unresolved family conflicts. Paul’s difficulty in forming meaningful relationships, combined with his ambivalence and persistent remorse, illustrates the high toll of enmeshment and indistinct emotional boundaries. The narrator’s reflection that “he could not bear it” and that “one place was the same as another” (Lawrence, 2007: 289) highlights the emotional stagnation and psychological confinement that characterise Paul’s life within the family system. Beyond individual psychological aspects, Lawrence situates the Morel family’s struggles within the broader cultural and socioeconomic constraints of early 20th-century working-class England. The strict class systems and scarce opportunities intensify family conflicts and hinder emotional growth, thereby raising the Morels’ emotional difficulties. This combination of social and psychological factors deepens the novel’s tragic dimension, presenting family dysfunction in a broader sociocultural setting.

6. CONCLUSION

It is important to emphasize the central role of the family institution in the psychosocial development of individuals once again. As shown in D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, the solidarity and attachment among family members constitute an important foundation for identity formation and emotional balance. According to Family Systems Theory, the family is viewed as a dynamic social ecosystem made up of shared experiences and reciprocal connections rather than just a biological bond. This viewpoint has made it possible to fully comprehend the intricacy of intrafamily interactions and how they affect each person’s psychological health. In this regard, my assessments

of the family structure's social and emotional roles facilitate a careful investigation of the topic. Moreover, it has been established that a key element in maintaining the continuance of solidarity within the family is the interdependence of duties and obligations. An analysis of the relationships between the characters in the book shows that the family operates as a social ecosystem where peace is maintained even in times of crisis.

Furthermore, the transmission of social bonds and cultural values depends heavily on the idea that the family is a social ecosystem. Lawrence's work has shown that familial solidarity finds resonance in both interpersonal interactions and larger social systems. In this sense, the family acts as a microcosm mediating the formation of individuals' relationships with society. This necessitates the evaluation of the family institution as not only an individual but also a collective social phenomenon. In my opinion, the multifaceted functionality of the family concept deserves more focused attention in literature.

Finally, through this study, the significance of intra-family solidarity in the emotional and social development of the individual has been reiterated. The family dynamics depicted in *Sons and Lovers* have comprehensively illustrated the determining effect of family systems on individuals and how these effects shape emotional equilibrium. Therefore, the central position of family systems in individuals' lives should be the subject of further research in the social sciences. In light of the findings obtained within the scope of this article, I would like to express that my reflections on the complexity and importance of the family structure have been strengthened.

Conflict of Interest:

The author declares no conflicts of interest for the study.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Giriş

Aile, bireyin toplumsal kimliğinin şekillendiği ilk sosyal yapı olması bakımından hem bireysel gelişimin hem de kültürel aktarımın temelini oluşturan bir kurumdur. Aileyi yalnızca bireylerin bir araya gelmesinden oluşan bir topluluk olarak değil, karşılıklı ilişkiler ve etkileşimler ağı üzerinden işleyen dinamik bir sistem olarak değerlendirmek, onun işleyişine dair daha derinlikli bir anlayış sunar. Bu bağlamda, Aile Sistemleri Teorisi, aile bireylerinin birbirleriyle olan ilişkilerini ve bu ilişkilerin tüm sistem üzerindeki etkilerini analiz etmeye olanak tanır. Kuram, bireyleri bağımsız varlıklar olarak değil, karşılıklı etkileşim hâlinde olan bir bütününe parçaları olarak ele alır. Bu yaklaşım, özellikle aile içi dayanışma, rol dağılımı, duygusal bağlar ve bireysel çatışmaların çözümlenmesinde etkili bir kuramsal çerçeve sunmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, D. H. Lawrence'ın 1913 tarihli *Oğullar ve Sevgililer* adlı romanı, Aile Sistemleri Teorisi bağlamında incelenerek aile içi dayanışma olgusu analiz edilecektir. Lawrence'ın yarı otobiyografik özellikler taşıyan bu romanı, bir madenci ailesi üzerinden aile üyeleri arasındaki karmaşık duygusal bağları, bağıllıkları, çatışmaları ve ayrışmaları gözler önüne sermektedir. Özellikle anne karakteri Gertrude Morel ile oğlu Paul arasındaki simbiyotik bağ, sistem içindeki rollerin nasıl birbirine geçtiğini ve bireysel gelişimin aile sistemi içinde nasıl şekillendiğini ortaya koyar. Romanın çözümlemesi, sadece bireysel karakterlerin iç dünyasını değil, aynı zamanda aile sisteminin bir bütün olarak işleyişini ve değişen sosyal koşullar altında bu sistemin nasıl yeniden yapılandığını da anlamaya imkân tanır. Böylece, Lawrence'ın eseri hem edebi hem de psikososyal düzlemden çok katmanlı bir okuma sunmaktadır.

Yöntem

Aile Sistemleri Teorisi, bireylerin davranışlarını ve ilişkilerini anlamada aileyi bir bütün olarak ele alan, psikoterapist Murray Bowen tarafından geliştirilen sistem odaklı bir yaklaşımındır. Bu kurama göre aile, bireylerden oluşan ama sadece bireylerin toplamından ibaret olmayan, dinamik bir sistemdir. Aile üyeleri, sürekli bir etkileşim içinde olan alt birimlerdir ve bu etkileşimler, aile sisteminin genel işleyişini şekillendirir. Her bir bireyin davranışı, sistemin diğer parçalarını etkiler ve bu da ailede döngüsel bir nedenselliğe yol açar.

Bowen'a göre sağlıklı bir aile sistemi, bireylerin hem duygusal bağıllıklarını sürdürdürebildiği hem de bireysel farklılıklarını koruyabildiği bir dengeye dayanır.

Bu bağlamda, aile içindeki yakınlık ve bireyleşme süreçleri arasındaki denge, sistemin işleyişi açısından belirleyicidir. Aile üyeleri arasında yaşanan çatışmalar, sadece bireylerin içsel sorunlarından değil, sistemdeki rollerin, sınırların ve iletişim biçimlerinin dengesizliğinden de kaynaklanabilir.

Teori, "üçgenleşme", "duygusal ayrışma", "doğal sistemler", "geçişsel kalıplar" gibi temel kavamlarla aile içi ilişkileri açıklamayı amaçlar. Örneğin, iki birey arasındaki gerilimin üçüncü bir bireye aktarılması süreci olan "üçgenleşme", aile içindeki çatışmaların görünümünü etkileyebilir. Bu kuramsal çerçeveye, sadece terapi uygulamalarında değil, aynı zamanda edebi metinlerin çözümlenmesinde de aile içi etkileşimlerin çok katmanlı doğasını anlamak için etkili bir araç sunar. Böylece bireyin psikolojik gelişimi, içinde bulunduğu aile sisteminin bağılamsal yapısı içinde değerlendirilebilir.

Bulgular

Bu çalışmada yapılan çözümlemeler sonucunda, *Oğullar ve Sevgililer* adlı romanda aile yapısının, Aile Sistemleri Teorisi ışığında bütüncül ve etkileşimsel bir yapı olarak kurgulandığı gözlemlenmiştir. Roman boyunca ailenin temel üyeleri olan Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel ve diğer bireyler arasında gelişen ilişkilerin, aile sisteminin iç dinamikleri çerçevesinde şekillendiği ve aile içi dayanışmanın hem koruyucu hem de kısıtlayıcı roller üstlendiği belirlenmiştir.

Özellikle Gertrude Morel'in eşinden duygusal olarak uzaklaştıkten sonra oğullarına yönelmesi, ailedeki duygusal işlevlerin yeniden dağılımına neden olmuş ve bu durum, Bowen'in "üçgenleşme" kavramıyla örtüşen bir yapı ortaya çıkarmıştır. Anne ile Paul arasındaki simbiyotik ilişki, bireysel ayrışmayı engelleyen bir faktör olarak öne çıkarken, bu durum aile sistemi içinde karşılıklı bağımlılığın ve kontrolün belirginleşliğini göstermektedir. Paul'ün romantik ilişkilerinde yaşadığı duygusal kopukluklar da bu aile içi dengesizlikle doğrudan ilişkilidir.

Romanın ilerleyen bölümlerinde aile üyeleri arasındaki etkileşimin, çevresel koşullar (ekonomik zorluklar, sınıfısal yapı, bireysel trajediler) tarafından da biçimlendiği; sistemin esnekliği ve uyum yeteneğinin zamanla zayıfladığı tespit edilmiştir. Aile sisteminin çözümme süreci, bireylerin psikolojik gelişimlerinde belirgin izler bırakmış; dayanışma yerini bağımlılığa, bağıllık ise çatışmaya bırakmıştır. Bu bağlamda roman, aileyi yalnızca bir yapı değil, aynı zamanda bir süreç olarak temsil eder.

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Bu çalışma, *Oğullar ve Sevgililer* adlı romanın aile yapısını bir sistem olarak ele alarak, karakterler arasındaki ilişkileri Aile Sistemleri Teorisi bağlamında değerlendirmiştir. Bulgular göstermektedir ki, D. H. Lawrence'ın romanı, bireylerin yalnızca psikolojik gelişim süreçlerini değil, aynı zamanda bu süreçlerin şekillendiği aile sisteminin yapısal ve işlevsel dinamiklerini de yansımaktadır. Romanın merkezinde yer alan Morel ailesi, klasik çekirdek ailenin sınırlarını aşarak, karşılıklı bağımlılık, rol çatışması, duygusal yüklenme ve ayrışma gibi aile sistemlerinin temel kavramları etrafında yapılandırılmıştır.

Özellikle Gertrude Morel'in kocasından duygusal olarak koparak çocuklarına yönelmesi, sistem içinde yeni bir denge arayışına neden olmuş ve bu süreçte Paul'ün bireysel gelişimi sekteye uğramıştır. Bu durum, Bowen'ın "duygusal ayrışma" ve "üçgenleşme" kavramları ile birebir örtüşmekte, bireyler arası ilişkilerin sistem üzerindeki etkilerini gözler önüne sermektedir. Paul'ün annesiyle kurduğu simbiyotik bağ, aile içi dayanışmanın bir yönü olarak görülebilse de, bireyleşmenin önünde bir engel olarak sistemin işleyişini bozan bir unsura dönüşmüştür.

Sonuç olarak, roman yalnızca bir birey portresi sunmakla kalmamakta, aynı zamanda aileyi yaşayan bir organizma, bir "sosyal ekosistem" olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Bu bakış açısı, edebi metinlerin toplumsal yapıları ve psikolojik süreçleri anlamada nasıl işlevsel araçlar sunabileceğini göstermektedir. Aile Sistemleri Teorisi, bu çok katmanlı yapının hem çözümlemesinde hem de eleştirisinde verimli bir teorik zemin sağlamıştır.