

## The Effectiveness of Family Therapy Training based on Bowen Systemic Approach on Humor and Intimacy of Female Couples in Tehran

### Article info

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this study was the effectiveness of family therapy in Bowen's systemic approach on humor and intimacy of couples.

**Methodology:** The research design was quasi-experimental with pre-test-post-test design with experimental and control groups. The statistical population of the study was all couples in Tehran in 2020. The statistical sample size of the study is 50 couples who, after consultation and explanation of the research conditions and the satisfaction of the sample, are divided into experimental and control groups (25 in the experimental group and 25 in the control group). The experimental group was exposed to the Bowen systemic approach during eight sessions of family therapy, and the controls did not receive any training from the researcher. The research instruments were the Thompson and Walker Marital Intimacy Scale 1983 and the 2003 Martin Humor Questionnaire. Analysis of covariance was used to analyze the data.

**Findings:** Data analysis showed that the experimental group in the post-test phase after receiving family therapy Bowen systemic approach in the variables of humor and intimacy had a positive difference compared to the control group and the research hypotheses were confirmed.

**Conclusion:** Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Bowen's systemic approach to family therapy has an effect on couples humor and intimacy.

**Keywords:** Family Therapy, Bowen Systemic Approach, Humor, Intimacy

## Introduction

The family is one of the main institutions of any society and one of the groups that can meet the emotional, material and spiritual needs of human beings. Today, the main reasons for marriage and spouses' expectations of each other have changed dramatically, and the need for love and intimacy, intimate relationships and satisfaction of emotional and psychological needs are among the main reasons for couples to marry (Kōu, Bailey, 2017). Intimacy in marriage is valuable because it leads to the commitment of the couple to the stability of the relationship and marital satisfaction. Intimacy as a dynamic process is the closeness, similarity and personal romantic relationships with positive feelings and emotions towards the other person, which requires knowing, deep understanding of the other person, expressing thoughts and feelings with each other. From Bagarozzi's point of view, true intimacy is a dynamic and interactive process based on mutual trust and respect, which includes components that are related to each other (Andersson, 2016). Intimacy is a basic human need. Intimacy is not something one needs and desires or wants to have. It is actually a real need that has internal roots and stems from a very basic need for attachment (Cao, et al., 2017).

Bagarozzi considers intimacy to include nine dimensions: emotional, psychological, intellectual, sexual, physical, spiritual, aesthetic, socio-recreational, and temporal intimacy. Research shows that intimacy is related to the quality of married life and as a multifaceted psychological structure that describes the quality of marital relations (Mashayekh, Asgarian, 2019). One of the problems that marriage counselors face is intimacy problems in couples and helping to improve and increase their intimacy. Intimacy is a key and important feature of marital relationships and is a prominent feature of a successful marriage. This feature indicates the existence of interaction between spouses. Its absence or deficiency is one of the indicators of turmoil in marital relationships (Jaberi, Etemadi, 2015). Intimacy is one of the necessities of married life and at the same time it is a prominent feature of a successful couple. The existence of intimate relationships between couples is very important. Such relationships affect the physical, psychological, and ability of individuals to function effectively in a variety of personal, family, and occupational contexts. In recent years, the reasons for marriage and the expectations of spouses from each other have changed dramatically, and the need for love and intimacy with the spouse and the satisfaction of emotional and psychological needs are among the main reasons for marriage today, and most people seek marriage for intimacy. (Mehdipour Bazkiaei, Sedaghatifard, 2015).

Intimacy in couples in order to have a sweet color and smell in married life needs a factor that can increase its durability. One of the factors can be the couple's humor. Humor can be a tool for communicating with others and expressing deep feelings, beliefs and desires of people. The role of humor in coping with daily stresses, creating appropriate social relationships, facilitating the solution of life problems as well as managing emotion and motivation is important. It can be inferred that humor in the context of marital relationships can play a decisive role and is related to marital satisfaction. Humor styles were first introduced by Martin et al. (2003). They emphasized that there are two main axes of humor, for example, the others themselves, positive-negative. As a result of these two axes, four styles of humor can be identified. These four styles include; they are cohesive, self-deprecating, self-destructive or self-degrading, and aggressive (Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2013).

People who have a connection style tell a lot of jokes and tell funny stories to establish positive communication and social interaction with others. This style of humor creates the highest level of intimacy in a person's relationship with others (LaFrance, Hall, 2012). In contrast, people who use self-deprecating humor styles use more humor to adapt to others, and this style is more self-centered than other circuits, compared to the cohesive humor style. However, aggressive humor is very annoying and ugly and avoids

others, and people who use self-destructive humor more often try to break out of their inner isolation and connect with others (Cann, Zapata, & Davis, 2011). Research has shown that bonding and self-deprecating humor styles lead to couples' emotional relationships and satisfaction, while self-deprecating and aggressive humor styles are predictors of couples' dissatisfaction and eventual divorce (Khodabakhshi). Kolai, Mir Afzal, 2017).

It has been observed in many families that in case of a high level of intimacy and having proper communication, families need a solution that can distinguish between their inner feelings and recognize issues in a more complete way. One of the most widely used approaches in family therapy is the Bowen systemic approach. According to Bowen (1965), the degree to which a person separates himself indicates the extent to which he is able to distinguish the intellectual process from the emotional process he experiences; in fact, the main purpose of separating oneself is to strike a balance between emotion and cognition; The process by which a person can achieve a personal definition or identity without having to deal with emotions in order to perform rational behaviors. No study was found to study the separation of self on the feeling of homesickness; but research has shown the effectiveness of self-segregation on various variables (Heras, 2018). If a family is functional, it will raise healthy people. In the definition of a healthy and efficient family, it is said that it is an open system in which its members, while having a warm emotional relationship with each other, maintain their individual identity. In such families, love is unconditional and members are receptive. They are each other, the threshold of tolerance of people in the face of conflict and anxiety is high, and when needed, they voluntarily seek help and seek it (Moradi, 2010).

Family therapy as a specialized intervention can be a good solution to make the relationship between couples as enjoyable as possible. Allows to increase and by emphasizing the ability to resolve conflict and communicate, reduce emotional divorce and improve the quality of life of couples (Shirzadi, Shafiabadi, 2018). Many theorists have tried to explain the functioning of the family. One of the most famous theorists in this field is Murray Bowen, who proposed a system theory. According to Bowen, marital disputes are due to systemic issues. Bowen describes marital relationships as satisfying when there are no symptoms. Bowen's main goal in building a successful marriage is to persuade the couple to make the highest possible difference. His goals are to reduce anxiety, eliminate symptoms and maximize the personal separation of each couple (Nilab, Ghanbari Hashemabadi, 2018). Thus, the main goal of Boeing treatment is to reduce chronic anxiety by being aware of the family's emotional system; increasing the level of differentiation and focusing on self-change instead of trying to change others (Kim, et al., 2015), Bowen (1988) states that the relationship between members of a family is directly related to the function of each member and the ability of each member for individual function is directly related to the function of the whole family (quoted by Gandy, 2007). Given the above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the important question: Is the Bowen systemic approach effective on couples humor and intimacy?

## **Methodology**

According to the research hypotheses, the present research method was quasi-experimental with pre-test and post-test design with experimental and control groups. Thus, in the pre-test stage, intimacy and humor tests were taken from both groups, and then the experimental group underwent the Bowen systemic family therapy approach for eight sessions, and the control group did not receive the intervention program during this period. At the end of eight sessions, the post-test intervention program was performed and intimacy and humor were taken from both groups. The statistical population of the study was all couples in Tehran in 2020. Statistical sample size of the study: 50 couples who after consultation and explanation of research conditions and satisfaction of the sample were divided into experimental and control groups (25 in the

experimental group and 25 in the control group). Entry and exit criteria are: 1- Age range 25 to 40 years. 2- Minimum level of diploma education. 3- At least 5 years of living together. 4- Not having mental problems (such as anxiety and depression, etc.). 5- Not having marital problems. Thompson & Walker Marital Intimacy Scale 1983 (MIS): This questionnaire was designed and developed by Thompson and Walker (1983). The Thompson & Walker Marital Intimacy Scale is a 17-item tool designed to measure affection and intimacy. This questionnaire was evaluated by a trustee to determine the validity. This scale was translated by Sanaei (2000). To determine the content and face validity, first the questionnaire was reviewed by 15 counseling professors and 15 couples and its face and content validity was confirmed (Etemadi, 2005).

Also, Khazaei (2007) in his master's thesis through the simultaneous implementation of the Bagarazi questionnaire and estimating their correlation coefficient has calculated 82% and was significant at the level of 0.01, which indicates the validity of the criterion for this scale. In his doctoral dissertation, Etemadi performed on 100 randomly selected couples in Isfahan. The total reliability coefficient of the Cronbach's alpha method was 0.96 and indicated the acceptable reliability of the questionnaire. Khazaei (2007) also achieved a total reliability of 0.85. The subject score in this questionnaire is obtained by adding the scores of the questions and dividing it by 17. The range of scores is between 1 and 7, and a higher score is a sign of greater intimacy. Before conducting the research, this questionnaire was presented by 30 researchers to 30 couples for two weeks to determine reliability. The reliability of this questionnaire was obtained by the researcher using Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

Martin's Humor Questionnaire 2003 SHQ: In 2003, Martin designed a humor questionnaire that Khoshoui et al. (2009) localized. This questionnaire has 25 questions in the Likert range from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7). 5 subscales are measured in this questionnaire: 1- Enjoyment of jokes (questions 1 to 5), 2- Laughter (questions 6 to 10), 3- Verbal jokes (questions 11 to 15), 4- Humor in Social relationships (questions 16 to 20), 5, Humor in stressful situations (questions 21 to 25). The minimum score obtained in this questionnaire is 25 and the maximum score is 175. The developers calculated the reliability test of four subscales with a sample of 1195 people and reliable internal consistency for all four styles, so that for linking, self-evaluative, aggressive and self-deprecating humor, 0.80, / 81, respectively. 0, 0.77, 0.80 are obtained. The retest validity of this scale was determined in the study of Kolaei and Mir Afzal's God of forgiveness (2017) by examining 179 students between 0.80 - 0.85. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.78, 0.57 and 0.57, respectively.

**Bowen Family Therapy Meetings:**

Session 1: Introduction, creating a good relationship, performing pre-tests of intimacy tests and couples' humor.

Session 2: Informing the couple about the degree of fusion (unity) or separation (singleness) with the extended family and their spouse by mentioning the explanation of fusion (unity) and explaining their separation (singleness).

Distinguishing between one's intellectual and emotional processes is a manifestation of separation. Bowen pays special attention to knowing emotions and thoughts and separating them from each other. When thoughts and feelings are not separated, fusion occurs. A completely separated person is well aware of his ideas and feels self-sufficient. Those who differentiate between their emotions and their intellect due to family differences can get their due and not be captured by their emotions, while the fusion of thoughts and feelings causes them to express their false selves instead of expressing their true values and beliefs. Give.

Session 3: Informing the family about triangulation, explaining triangulation and teaching triangulation. Triangulation is the result of little separation. When two family members have a problem with each other, they cut a third person in the middle to reduce anxiety or tension. This is called triangulation.

Session 4: Family genealogy training (genealogy) and knowledge of how the current problem arises, drawing the couple's family genealogy, training the technique of returning home.

Genogram is the drawing of families. In this method, important information about families is recorded, including the age of family members, gender, and date of marriage, death and place of residence. In addition to providing an overview of the extended family, genograms shed light on the segregation of paternal family members and generations before them, as well as the emotional pattern of each couple's paternal and maternal families.

Session 5: Explaining the process of family projection, examining the process of family projection in couples' relationships, explaining the concept of emotional severance.

The slight separation of the parties causes them to project their psychological pressure on their child. The way a child has the most emotional attachment to his parents, the less separation of feeling and intellect and the most difficulty in separating from the family. When children suffer severe stress due to severe conflict with family problems, they are separated from the family by emotional cutting. Adolescents run away from family, distance themselves, or take refuge in college and school, and their interactions with family become superficial and brief. In general, the greater the level of anxiety and emotional dependence, the greater the likelihood of emotional breakdown.

Session 6: Examining multi-generational transmission in couples, teaching the concept of multi-generational transmission, teaching person-to-person relationships.

Session 7: The order of birth and the functional position of the individual in the main family and its effect on the couple's relationship.

Session 8: Summarizing the previous contents, concluding, conducting the post-test

After selecting the sample individuals and interviewing the couples and obtaining their consent to participate in the study, the couples were first asked to answer the questionnaires for the pre-test stage. For the welfare of the subjects, an online questionnaire was used to answer the questions. After completing this stage, the experimental group underwent a Bohem systemic training program for eight intensive sessions, Held on the cyberspace channel. Then, for the post-test stage, the questionnaires were once again provided online to the subjects.

## Findings

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of pre-test and post-test scores of couple intimacy and humor in experimental and control groups

Variable	group	pre-exam		Post-test	
		Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation
Couple intimacy	Witness	51/00	2/50	51/40	2/50
	the experiment	52/11	2/72	57/86	2/82
Enjoy the joke	Witness	15/10	2/06	15/80	2/11
	the experiment	15/53	2/13	18/00	2/00
Laugh	Witness	16/69	2/00	16/80	2/42
	the experiment	16/80	2/00	19/46	1/92
Verbal joke	Witness	14/26	2/28	14/20	3/05
	the experiment	14/26	2/43	17/80	2/33
Humor in relationships	Witness	15/37	2/40	15/00	2/50
	the experiment	15/06	2/40	17/53	2/13
Humor in stressful situations	Witness	14/06	2/52	14/53	2/53
	the experiment	14/80	2/45	17/73	2/52
sense of humor	Witness	74/06	8/42	74/05	7/73
	the experiment	75/05	8/18	88/60	7/92

The results of Table 1 show that the mean of couple intimacy and humor in the control and experimental groups in the pre-test was almost the same and the experimental group increased in the post-test stage.

**Table2.** The main output of analysis of covariance is the effect of groups on the variables of humor and intimacy

Variable	the level	Total squares	Degrees of freedom	Average squares	F	significant	Effect size
sense of humor	pre-exam	40/432	1	40/432	30/481	0/001	0/512
	group	6/258	1	6/258	4/718	0/038	0/140
	Error	38/467	47	1/326			
	Total	478/403	50				
	Total correction	79/018	49				
Intimacy	pre-exam	0/252	1	0/252	0/036	0/852	0/001
	group	25/683	1	25/683	3/636	0/066	0/111
	Error	204/842	47	7/064			
	Total	2329/500	50				
	Total correction	233/219	49				

The table above shows the value of the effect of Covariance on the humor variable 4.718, which is significant because the probability is less than the significance level of 0.05. After removing the effects of the confusion variable, there is a significant difference between the means of the two groups and it can be said that there is a significant difference between the two groups in the humor variable in the post-test stage. Also in the table above, the value of F is the effect of Covariance on the intimacy variable 3.636, which is significant because its probability is less than the significance level of 0.05. After removing the effects of the confluence variable, there is a significant difference between the means of the two groups and it can be said that there is a significant difference between the two groups in the couple intimacy variable in the post-test stage.

## Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that the scores of the experimental group in the post-test stage were higher than the control group in the humor variable and showed the effectiveness of family therapy with Bowen systemic approach. This finding is consistent with the research results of Qarabaghi, Besharat, Lavasani (2018), Nabavi Hesar, Arefi (2017). In the explanation, it can be said that establishing a relationship is rooted in human existence. Communication has two components of attitude and behavior. Attitude is rooted in people's beliefs, feelings and intentions, and on the other hand, behaviors are a reflection and reaction of people's underlying perceptions and are rooted in it. In addition to these two components, love and affection also play an essential role in the marital relationship. Couples in married life need more verbal communication, which if implemented properly, can be a good model for others and children, as well as resolving misunderstandings, conflicts and disagreements. Bowen's systemic approach focuses on the fact that in the Bowen's approach, when marital problems arise, education is provided to all family members about the functioning of the family system and the reduction of its level of anxiety. Because the only solution to their current problem is to change the individual's relationship with the family, and only then will people achieve separation and react less negatively to the current emotional force by speaking and listening to each other. Verbal skills Promote couples, as well as provide the couple with the skills to talk about problems and listen to healthy empathy, without bias and prejudice rooted in the individual's beliefs. Attention to oneself begins to move in the cycle of consciousness. In this situation, couples are more self-centered and believe in controlling their behavior instead of controlling the other. This will increase the awareness of

each couple about the problems of diagnosing and generalizing them. At this stage, each person observes and evaluates their behavior and increases the positive interpersonal behaviors in the relationship and the amount of anger experienced towards the spouse and aggressive and reprehensible behaviors and boredom from the relationship decreases and the level of life satisfaction and consequently happiness increases. According to research, humorous styles have positive and negative effects on marital adjustment, so that couples who enjoy higher levels of positive humor are more satisfied with their relationship and in contrast to people who have lower marital satisfaction, use lower levels of temperament. People whose spouses use more of a cohesive joke and less of an aggressive joke during the discussion are more satisfied with their relationship and report increased intimacy and better problem-solving through discussion. These results highlight the importance of positive and negative humor styles in regulating intimate relationships.

The results of the present study showed that the scores of the experimental group in the post-test stage were higher than the control group in the intimacy variable and showed the effectiveness of family therapy with Bowen systemic approach. This finding is consistent with the results of Shah Mohammadi, Shafi'abadi (2018), Saeedpour, Asghari, Sayadi (2018), Nabavi Hesar, Arefi (2014). In the explanation, it can be said that intimacy is a two-component process, which includes self-examination and self-expression to the spouse. Therefore, in order to establish and maintain a stable and intimate interpersonal relationship, one must have the ability to know oneself in relation to another and be aware of one's feelings, expectations, needs, fears and desires in order to be able to have an adult relationship without fusion with others. While maintaining individuality, express oneself and exchange support and care in a reciprocal relationship with one's spouse. Achieving these conditions is like defining intimate self-centered intimacy. Instead of focusing solely on interpersonal interactions, one should reach a level of personal development to be able to experience such intimacy with one's spouse. Safe and quiet group and its characteristics such as solidarity between members, an atmosphere free from judgment and blame, providing conditions for information exchange and evacuation of emotions, receiving empathy from others, a sense of belonging - conditions are created for members to have both aspects of intimacy. (Self-awareness and training in constructive ways of self-expression such as conversation, expression of feelings, empathy) Establish an emotional bond with another while maintaining individuality. In this way, they achieve a strong "self" so that they can express themselves while maintaining a bond with their spouse and do not consider their self-esteem to be dependent on receiving approval from others.

In couples who were trained in the Bowen systemic approach program, after self-awareness, their needs and emotions can have this attention and awareness to their spouse, and in such an empathetic atmosphere, couples can enjoy living together and understanding good feelings. Plan togetherness, intimacy, happiness, and problem-solving, and create new models for resolving existing conflicts and problems in a constructive communication environment. In this situation, problems are not seen as unsolvable problems, but as a part of the relationship that instead of suppressing and ignoring them, which eventually leads to boredom, they can talk in the open air and creative and empathetic ways to solve them. Consider. At the same time, in such situations, each couple experiences a greater amount of perceived social support, which in turn increases the level of intimacy. Success in building a good relationship through Bowen intervention and focusing on solving marital problems and avoiding relationships that lead to failure reduces frustration, anger, feelings of worthlessness, depression and failure, and increases empathy and better understanding of each other's needs and desires, The desire to continue the marital relationship and eventually reduce tensions and frustrations.

This study had some limitations. The sampling method was non-random, which may not be an introduction to the study population; therefore, it is necessary to be careful in generalizing the obtained results. Another is that the present study was conducted only in Tehran, which may be due to the different cultural context

of couples' communication patterns with other cities. Another suggestion is to study this intervention on other psychological disorders such as depression, physical disorders and behavioral problems, which Bowen cites as signs of anxiety in the family emotional system. It is suggested that due to the effect of Bowen's approach on increasing humor in social relationships, couples try to communicate more closely and distance themselves less from others when they are with family or friends, and tend to communicate more sincerely with humor. Have. It is also suggested that couples regularly watch comedy programs in the presence of the family in order to raise the mood of humor and a sense of happiness, and this action causes the family members to get more spirit from their happiness and badge and receive satisfaction and peace from them.



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