



# Family change in Greece, contradicting values and personal growth: implications for psychotherapy

*Apostolis Angelopoulos & Nikos Stathopoulos*  
*HOPE in Group Analysis*

# Western thought on family structure

- the term “family” is used by many sociologists and psychologists as synonymous with “nuclear family;”
- the nuclear family has become a dominant ideological pattern of social thought of the post-war years;
- social evolutionary thought indicated nuclear family as the highest level of development in western civilization.

# Modernistic hypothesis

- as nations become more “modernized,” primarily because of increasing industrialization and affluence, they tend to converge;
- people reject traditional values and traditional culture, and inevitably converge toward a system of “modern” values and increasing individualization;
- **family interdependence should decrease and individualization, separation/ nucleation should increase.**

# Family change in the west

- the bourgeois family, in which an institutionally legal, lifelong, sexually exclusive marriage between one man and one woman, with children, where the male is the primary provider and ultimate authority, no longer exists.

# Family change in the west

- Demographics: the decline of the family or the crisis of the family;
- The institution of the family is growing weaker, losing social power and social functions, and becoming less important in life.
- The new family system is **postnuclear**.

# Family change in the Majority World

- changes due to urbanization and economic development;
- increase of nuclear family households;
- traditional family has turned into a modified extended family system in urban areas with close contacts with kin;
- material interdependencies weaken, but emotional (psychological) interdependencies continue.

# Family change in the Majority World

- Kagitcibasi: the family model of **emotional/psychological interdependence**;
- prototypical models: **independence** (western middle class nuclear family) and **interdependence** (traditional collectivist family).
- In the model of emotional interdependence, however, there is independence in the material realm together with interdependence in the psychological realm.



# Greek family

- a great amount of changes for the last 50 years;
- “westernization” or “modernization” of the Greek culture, decline of traditional way of living;
- family change is viewed as a result of progress; nuclear family seems to be dominant.

# Greek family

Family change in Greece

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1980</b>	
<b>2000</b>			
<b>Average age at first wedding</b> 26,9	25,1	23,3	
<b>Divorces for every 1000 marriages</b> 152,7	56,7	103,9	
<b>Average duration of marriages ended by divorce</b> 11,9	14,4	15,1	
<b>Births of fourth child</b> (%) 4 (1990)		56	14
<b>Total fertility indicator</b>			
	2,28	2,21	1,3

*Source: Bagavos 2004*

# Greek family

- In Eurostat demographic survey of 2001 *Greece* had a higher percentage, 38 percent, of nuclear families than Britain or Austria (33 %) and Germany (34 %);
- On the other hand, the average of three-generation households, (extended family type) is highest with 22 percent in Greece.
- The survey examined the existence of separate, nuclear households, without any notion about **kin relationships between nuclear families.**

# Greek family

- kinship relationships of young married nuclear families are very close, both in terms of closeness and interaction;
- It is a duty of parents to make provision for buying a home for their children when they marry.
- Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins reside very near the nuclear family, either in the same apartment building, in the neighborhood, or in the community.
- *They visit each other frequently and telephone each other frequently.*

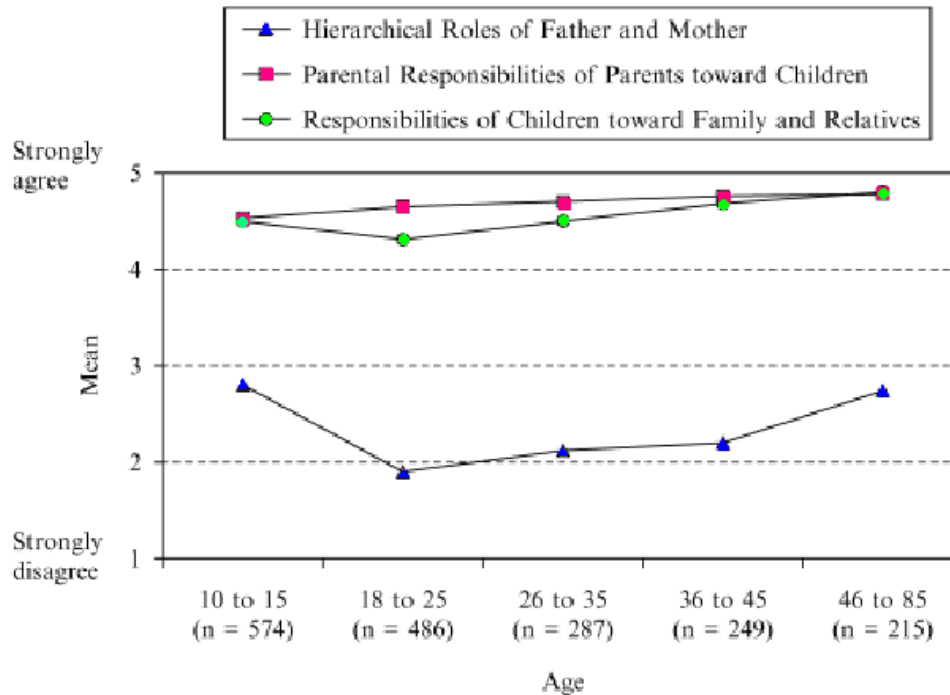
# Greek family

- The Greek family is taking the form of an urban extended family system with a continuation of contacts with its network of kin;
- each of these families is structurally nuclear, but functionally, their ties are that of an extended family or joint family;
- The Greek family appears to be *phenomenologically nuclear but functionally extended*.

# Traditional values

- Roles in the traditional Greek family: **father** takes the lead role; **mother** accepts his decisions, her goal is being a good mother; **parents** are protective and supportive; **children** are obedient, respectful, and caring for their parents when they become old;
- the family ingroup includes best man at the wedding, the godfather, in-laws, and friends. The appropriate behaviours toward the ingroup were cooperation, protection, and help; appropriate behaviours toward the outgroup were competition and hostility;
- **philotimo** is “to give to others,” “to be correct in fulfilling your obligations,” “to sacrifice yourself for others,” “to respect others”.

# Changing values

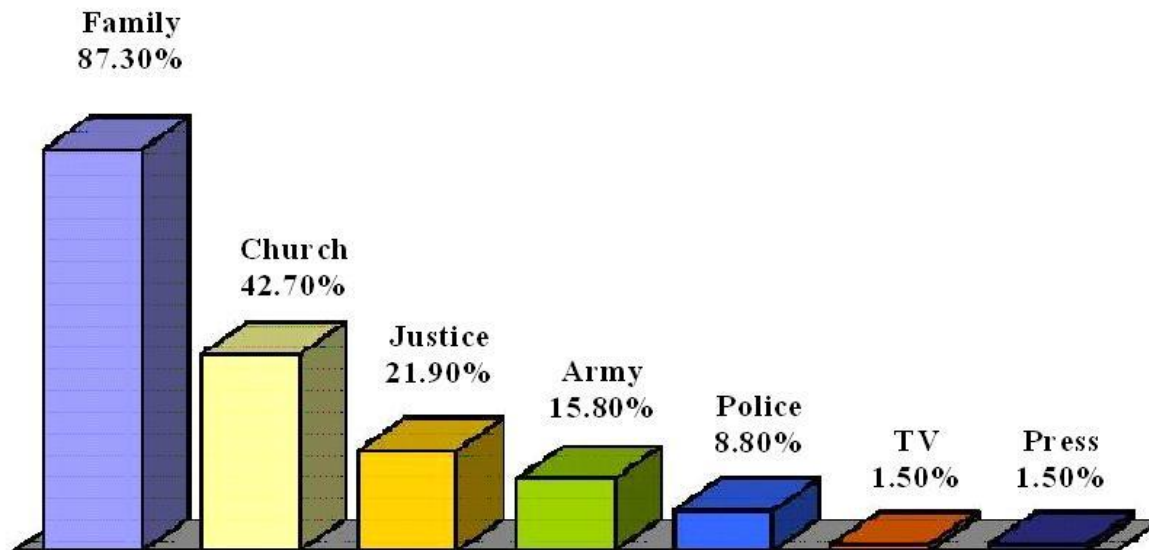


Source: Georgas et al 2004

*Means of hierarchical roles of father and mother; parental responsibilities of parents toward children; responsibilities of children toward family according to age groups in Greece.*

# Changing values

Confidence in institutions (2004)



*Source: Interview @ Athens  
2004*



# Changing values

Confidence in institutions (2004)

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS	AGE					
	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	65+
Army	12.5	10.3	11.1	24.4	14.3	25.7
Church	31.3	29.3	31.1	46.3	51.0	74.3
Police	12.5	3.4	8.9	7.3	10.2	14.3
Justice	18.8	20.7	20.0	26.8	26.5	17.1
Family	93.8	91.4	91.1	82.9	85.7	77.1

*Source: Interview @ Athens  
2004*

# Changing values

- Katakis survey: “Why do people get married?”
- I) This is a man’s destiny  
(Grandparents’ answer in rural areas).  
Traditional value: Family as survival.
- II) In order to raise children, to educate them, and make useful citizens out of them  
(Middle aged parents’ answers in urban areas).  
Child-centered family.
- III) Marriage is not important, nor necessary. Relationship is, what it really matters  
(Youth answers in urban areas).  
The notion of “relationship” is not clear and it is related with individual psychological survival.

# Changing values

- Individuals often find themselves in great stress trying to serve the needs of the family (collectivistic values) and their own needs for intimacy/connection and, on the other hand, seeking self sufficiency, privacy and autonomy (individualistic values).
- These contradictions are merely served also by the culturally ignorant models of social and psychological explanation, which stress the importance of early human separation and individuation for healthy psychological development of the self.

## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- Psychotherapists often witness the struggle between different cultural values, patterns of social behaviour, and forms of interaction, as they mirrored in the psychic level of our clients;
- individual pathology is viewed as a group phenomenon - namely that of the primary group of nuclear family;
- nuclear family group interaction should be seen in the light of larger group dynamics.

## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- If psychotherapists are unaware of such cultural phenomena, and guided by a separation/individuation model of psychic growth, there is a risk that we just stress the poles of an inner conflict (acting more in a super-egotic manner).
- A patient should identify him/herself in the set of the unconscious dynamics of the family system.

Contradicting values:  
implications for psychotherapy

- R is a 35 y.o. female who was born and raised on a Greek island, well-known for its traditional values. She was born in a typical father-mother-children family setting, from which she left at the age of 18, in order to get higher education in Athens. She came to therapy complaining for “inner anger” and “tendencies for aggressive behaviour”.

## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- S is a male of 30 y.o. He was born in a small northern village of Greece – where “everybody knows each other” - in a typical father-mother-children family setting. The father runs a small family business in the tourist industry. He first came to therapy complaining for anxiety and inability to do things he normally did. He often finds himself stuck in unpleasant life situations or relationships, being unable to identify, what “he really wants”.

## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- M is a woman of 49 y.o. She had lived all her life as a housewife and a mother – she was married at the age of 16 and gave birth to her first child at the age of 19. Raising children and keeping the household, was the only thing she knew, and, despite the fact that, “she had a good family”, she was depressed and felt alone.



## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- the family is guided by the task of preserving itself or defending itself from change – which is not inconsistent with the cultural values of the members;
- individuals demonstrate irrational behaviours in conflict to their personal tasks;
- these behaviours are so relevant to their values of family relationship maintenance, that they are not perceived as irrational – they are justified.
- The preservation of the nuclear family is related not only to the maintenance of relationships within the family, but also in the broader system of reference, namely the kin system.

## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- The individual and the family both share a phantasy of the annihilation of the group, because of the separation of a member/object.
- They also share a phantasy of failing the expectancies of the kin system - a really threatening perspective for the nuclear family;
- it is not like loosing an object; it is more like loosing hope.
- The family struggles and defends itself from trauma, regressing to basic assumption group.

## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- The group experiences incohesion, which evokes annihilation phantasies and the members act as if they were cohesive – but they are not. They are aggressive and envious. They form illusionary states of group life, which are “loose” (aggregates or masses) trying to deny the trauma and its effects on group functioning. Members then behave as if the group remains a psychological whole.
- Denial is a central concept in our cases. The same defence is obvious in the behaviour of the other members of the families.
- Their distorted interaction, which creates problems, anxieties, and fake alert situations between the members of the family, forms an empty shuck - good enough for the extended system of relationships.

## Contradicting values: implications for psychotherapy

- aggregation and massification are also perceived as threatening for individual identities;
- recognising their part in this broader system of interactions is very helpful and relieving for the patients. It gives them a meaning for their aggressive feelings and it amplifies their capacity for self-containment.
- The task for group therapy then is to contain the large group in the small group.

