

## The Updating in Satir's Family Therapy Model

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### Abstract

Virginia Satir (1916-1988) is one of the first experts who has worked in the field of family therapy in the United States. In 1951, she was one of the first therapists who has worked all members of the family as a whole in the same session. She has concentrated her studies on issues such as to increase individual's self-esteem and to understand and change other people's perspectives. She has tried to make problematic people compatible in the family and in the society through change. From this perspective, change and adaptation are the two important concepts of her model. This is a state of being and a way to communicate with ourselves and others. High self-confidence and harmony are the first primary indicator of being a more functional human. She starts her studies with identifying the family. She uses two ways to do this; the first one is the chronology of the family that is history of the family, the second one is the communication patterns within the family. With this, she updates the status of the family. Updating is the detection of the current situation. The detection of the situation, in other words updating, constitutes the very essence of the model that she implements. In this study, communication patterns within the family are discussed for the updating, the chronological structure has not been studied. The characteristics of family communication patterns, the model of therapy that is applied by Satir for these patterns and the method which is followed in the model are discussed. According to her detection, the people who face with problems, use one of those four patterns or a combination of them. These communication patterns are Blamer, Sedative/Accepting, distracter/irrelevant and rational. Satir expresses that these four patterns are not solid and unchanging but all of them "can be converted". For example, if one of the family members is usually using the soothing (sedative/accepting) pattern, in this case, it means that he/she wants to give the message that he/she is not very important in the inner world of the individual itself. However, if such a communication pattern is to be used repeatedly by an individual, he/she must know how to use it. According to Satir, this consciousness may be converted to a conscious gentleness and sensitivity that is automatically followed to please everyone. This study was carried out by using the copy of Satir's book, which was originally called "The Conjoint Family Therapy" and translated into Turkish by Selim Ali Yeniçeri as "Basic Family Therapy" and published in Istanbul by Beyaz Yayınları in 2016. It is expected that the study will provide support to the education of the students and family therapists.

**Keywords:** Virginia Satir, Family, Therapy, Model, Update.

### Introduction

Satir uses two ways in her studies; the first one is the chronology of the family that is history of the family, the second one is the communication patterns within the family. She has identified that the problematic person being away from his/her real identity shows four different personality types. These are Blamer, Sedative/Accepting, distracter/irrelevant and rational. After diagnosing the cause of the resulting communication pattern in talking with the family, she took the "a family shot", "a family statue" or "a family photo" for solution and "updated" the status. After that, she is focused on the change. Change will be fulfilled by family members.

By basing on the updating, Virginia Satir's<sup>1</sup> therapy model supports four objectives: to improve self-confidence, to feed or support to make better choices, to increase the responsibility and to develop harmony within the family or between people. These four objectives are not necessary only for their clients, but also necessary for the therapists to improve themselves. To make better choices, it is necessary to begin therapy and to guide the person. To initiate effective therapy and guide creates the process of gaining deliberate and self-awareness of consciousness. And thus the possibility of making a better choice is obtained. The other purpose of the therapy in Satir's model is to encourage the therapists to take responsibility to work with unresolved problems. They are responsible for responding to advisors who are pitying others, non-judgmental and transparent.

### 1. Satir's Family Therapy Model

The concept of therapy, in French *thérapie*, means the treatment of disorders such as sickness and disability by any method. In other words, therapy is the name of the process to recognize the solutions and take action by reaching out to person's his own resources. Family therapy refers to techniques and methods for treating disorders in the family structure. The techniques used in Family therapy provides to achieve the objectives of intervention. To select the appropriate one among these techniques is at the discretion of the therapist. The aim of therapy is to recognize a person himself or the family itself, and to make people aware of their power, structure and goodness. As it is put in the proverb "those fish that are in the sea, but they do not know the sea" or "the fish floating in the water are unaware of water". Like that, it may not often be possible for the people to be aware of their relationship. With therapy or family therapy it is tried people to be aware of the network of these relationships. Family therapy generally refers to the meeting sessions that problematic families attended with all members. In the family therapy, members reveal the problems in the family by their perspectives. At this stage, the therapist try to help to each of the family members on the following topics:

- To listen to the others with respect,
- To see and understand their perspectives,
- To talk about the problem,
- To express their thoughts and feelings towards others more openly,
- Not to engage in hurtful behavior against them,
- To accept others as they are,
- And helps them to make their expectations clear (see, Satir, 2016, 1-15).

In summary, by providing a comfortable and reassuring environment, the family therapist tries to help them to find solutions for their problems, get to know themselves and each other as members, and communicate openly and sincerely with each other. The important thing here is not the individuals that make up the family the subject of the review; it is the quality of the communication and the relationship between individuals (Satir, 2016, 16-29). The family therapist tries to uncover family members' defects in their relations with each other, and to see the family members these defects.

Stair uses two methods in the therapy; family history-chronological structure and communication patterns within the family.

#### 1.1. To Use the Chronology of the Family for the Update

Satir's one of the methods used in the therapy is the chronology of the family. She reveals the family history by a chronological structure and uses it get to know the family; and emphasizes that this is important. Because she express that every family has a different history, a separate structure, traditions, visible and invisible rules and internal and external factors. In the first contact, by obtaining information about family and by drawing a map of the family on a blackboard she detects that who and in what position he/she in the family. She expresses that this is a method of collecting information,

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Satir (1916-1988) was born on a farm in Wisconsin. She learned to read at three. Because of her illness, she was separated from the school for seven and a half years. Her illness has increased her sensitivity to other people. This sensitivity has been influential in her departing from teaching and starting to work as a social worker. She began her career in Chicago as a therapist and was interested in alcohol addicts and street people in the first place. She settled in California at the beginning of the 1960s and helped found the Institute of Mental Studies at Palo Alto with Don Jackson and Jules Riskin. She emphasized the importance of mutual trust among people and stated that a good balance must be established between personal development and respect for other people's wishes. (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Satir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Satir), e.t; 16.01.2017).

the map looks like the questions related to the person's health and vital functions, so completely consists of factual information and it is not intended to threaten emotionally anyone. "In this approach the therapist can obtain extensive information that helps to understand the lifestyle of the family: Who is whose father? If a second wife is involved, where is the mother of the children now? Etc." (Satir, 2016, 182). The most important feature of the approach of gathering chronological information for the therapist is to observe the behavior of individuals within the family and their reactions while gathering the information. These responses can be noted to use later or can be used at the time they emerged. She stated that, by drawing a family map, she acknowledged the family, found the opportunity to review the given information and thus presented a model that does not contain "blaming". Satir (2016, 183) related to her model in order to provide a model includes a statement in her book as following:

*"For example, I learned that the adult male in front of me was a stepfather. Then I'll ask him: 'which one of the kids here was born from this marriage? This made me one of the boys ask questions such as 'Oh, you're thirteen years old. Well, what is it like to be in this new family for you? This question gives the message that the child is living a new experience. The emphasis is not the type of new experience, but the presence of it... I can ask where the mother is or I say to the child: 'how are things going; what's it like to find a new mother?' This kind of well-timed a few questions makes it easier for me to enter into the family."*

According to Satir (2016, 180) if the therapist are able to identify these features in the family he/she is achieved a significant contribution in the session. In addition, she also states that the parents are under the influence of their family traditions, and constitute the marriage and family structure by these effects. For this reason, the therapist must begin the sessions knowing the unique history of each family. Family chronology is the past events that happened in the family's internal and external world. While reviewing them, it is possible to understand how individuals reacted and interpreted the events in the family. Spouses generally apply what they see from their parents. By pointing out that the therapist should know this situation: she requires that the therapist should identify how the adults model their parenting and marriages understanding affected from their parents. According to her, there are past events that happened in internal and external world of the family. These should be examined. The internal ones:

- a- Birth or death of child,
- b- Divorce or one of the parents' death,
- c- A grandmother or grandfather living with the family or leaving the house.

The external ones:

- a- War
- b- Economic depression,
- c- A strict or new law
- d- A significant change of the family's the socio-economic structure (fall or rise).

With a chronological structure, Satir observed that there are three different generations in the family. The first of three different generation is the grandmother and grandfather; second is the parents, the third one are the kids who got married and went out of the family. Therefore, she says "a family is composed of from the parents, and their parents, and their children" (Satir, 2016, 179). According to her, each generation within the family represents different contexts at different places and different times. In therapy, by evaluating the different generations in the family In terms of time and context, she has noted the development of the family. In these observations; she stated that the therapists, by looking at three generations in the family, can reveal easily that each family carries a unique history that has a unique meaning and interpretation for its members; has created its own rules how to approach to the life; and how the visible and invisible rules in the family works in everyday life.

Three generations in the family, regarding the visible and invisible rules, will reveal their attitude:

- Directly,
- By denying that there are rules, and reflecting them on the others,
- By denying that the rules exist, and pretending on the contrary,
- By breaking the rules in such a way,

- by cancelling the rules whole”.

This needs to be known to diagnose problems within the family.

According to her (2016, 179), “to gather information of the symptom of the problem about the content within the family system, is the first step to start to get to know the family”.

According to Satir (2016, 180-181), the therapist may suspect there are some cramps in the marriage. The important thing is to understand how this pain showed itself. Here it must be examined how the spouses solved their own problems. Noting that the person’s way of approaching about the event is related to his self-confidence and feelings, she emphasizes that this situation also will give some information about the invisible rules within the family. To make the events Chronological in time and space will show the therapist the path that the family’s development. She stated that, to collect historical information, she learned the way of approach of family members to the issues and events, and the contents of these problems/incidents and gave the value it deserved.

If we judge the idea people always do things that they believe the best from the observer’s perspective, she realizes that the behaviors shown / made by people are not always “the best and most sensible thing”. She says that detecting of this case shows what attention directed at the individual within the family, how experienced and how interpreted them, and in which patterns of behavior he/she referenced to this interpretation (Satir, 2016, 181). She indicates that all of these would summarize the person’s way of approach to the events and issues. She also indicates that the change of the person’s perspective and the things he/she looked at, to see new possibilities and interpretations, to notice the various options would naturally lead him/her to a new approach.

Apart from these, according to Satir (2016, 182), family chronology reveals the names, dates, relationships, behaviors, etc. that appear familiar and attractive for the family. Chronology asks unseen menacing questions that Individuals within a family can answer and approaches to life in a way that the family understands.

### **1.2. To Create the Family Statue or Family Pose for Updating**

While making the application, Satir detailed everything from the seating position of the family that will get therapy until the questions she addressed. A regular therapist can start with a general question “what is the problem?” but herself, in terms of to help people focus more on themselves, starts with a question like “what do you expect to happen as a result of your coming here?”. According to her (2016, 308) such a question will lead to a weakening of a piece of negative vibrations between people and people (family members) will be seized by the thought “if he/she feels better that I’d feel better too”.

Satir (2016, 309) is specified that she has followed a method as the “sculpture” or “exposure” in terms of determining the problem; because this kind of sculpture work will reveal clearly what really happened in the family. In addition, it also reveals the real “but not accepted” family environment. The purpose with this is not to show people how bad they are, but to show what is happening in the family. Stating that she includes humor in her works, she says that such humorous things allows people to see more clearly what is happening by servicing the negative trend in them. She said that it is very important to distinguish People from their values and themselves than from their behaviors. She stated that she used a variety of methods to show people how they interact, and while doing this she also help them to make contact with many ways and did these to strengthen their own values.

Satir (2016, 310) says that, after she started the therapy, instead of watching the system and method of the steps, she moves on her instincts and is interested in stories that are currently would be out there rather than the story of the family. Because this position brings herself up to another point: she asserts that she considers herself as “the leader of the method during the interview” but not as the “People’s leader”. Because she is the only person in that environment who knows how this method works and what it does

### **1.3. Communication Patterns That Arise During the Update**

According to Satir communication patterns that arise between family members can be examined under four headings: soothing (sedative/accepting), accusatory (blamer), unrelated (distracter/irrelevant) and rational. By examining the status of an unnamed family as applied, she has summarized this classification in the fourth chapter of her book named “Conjoint family therapy” starting with the title “When I meet someone” (see pp.305-323). An adult husband and wife have five children, the youngest of them is five and the eldest is eighteen years old. The family have problems and they couldn’t solve them. In this section, Satir explains the patterns of communication that she uses in her model by summarizing the

situation in the sample family. She experienced that when family members have difficulties to express their feelings and love openly to each other, they hid their real identities and instead they choose to adopt the roles of personality.

Satir (2106, 304), who believes that "The life of expression is the foundation for personality and everything about personality", stated that she didn't tell anything about the problem while getting acquainted with the family in the first therapy session; communicated with everyone on a humane level; the family came to her office because they have already experienced the problem; she listened to the answers they gave to her when first establishing contact, and she had observed that after a very short while, they were responding to each other. At that moment, she has noted that until they come up to her and experience the first contact, their thoughts hidden within a cocoon begin to be expressed one after the other, and she used the communication patterns that constitute her thesis; that is they speak soothingly, accusatorily, calculatedly, irrelevant and fluently. Within a short time, by detecting mentally people from their forms of communication and by adapting them to their body positions that reflects their communication style, she makes the following observations about sample family.

"...in the family I saw yesterday I observed that the man gave answers in the calculator way. This means that the man stands upright in the mind, moves very little and speaks in a monotonous tone. The woman kneeling on the ground spoke in the soothing position, but at the same time, in doing so, I observed that she had an accusatory attitude by extending her index finger her husband. The eldest daughter stands upright like her father, she doesn't look at the two parents, but was secretly pointing to her father. One of her younger sister was clearly reaching out her forefinger to her mother. The youngest of her was a boy. I saw him standing next to his mother and is trying to soothe her. I observed that His youngest brother was walking around casually and was interested in no one. Their youngest five-year-old sister was also irrelevant like her brother" (Satir, 2016, 305).

According to Satir these people's following behavior patterns such as soothing, accusatory, calculator or indifferent/irrelevant showed that none of them was able to establish personal contact with each other in fact. They were probably misunderstanding each other; they were watching the roles rather than the real personalities. Satir (2016, 306), who says as a therapist her primary purpose and effort is to help people to communicate with each other on a personal level, indicates that this may be able with a strong confidence as a result of contact.

## **2. Satir's Problem-Solution Approach at Therapy Model**

Satir, who calls the therapy method she uses as "resistance method", emphasizes that what is important in the method of resistance is to create change. For this, she uses the positions of communication within the family. According to her, people struggling with the problems uses one of the four communication patterns pointed above or a combination of them. To explain her method in the treated sample family; she specifies that all of the four patterns are used; soothing, accusatory, calculator and irrelevant. She explains the four communication patterns are not solid and unchanging, but all of them "can be converted". "If you are generally using a soothingly pattern, this means that you are giving yourself a message that you are not very important in your inner world. She says "However, if you know how to do it, you can convert the behavior which you're doing automatically in the direction to please everyone to a conscious courtesy and sensitivity" (Satir, 2016, 316).

She calls this converted accusatory. The converted accusatory is the format of to be able to defend the things you believe right and protect your rights. Everyone wants to be able to do it; but it's necessary to do it in a rational and conscious manner not automatically. In terms of communication patterns, she indicates how the converted accusatory to use and how should they are used and what the results should be. For example, "the converted calculator behavior may mean to use your mind creatively. It is enjoyable to use your intelligence; but if you use it just to protect yourself, otherwise over time, you will be boring and unsatisfied. She gives similar examples for other communication patterns; for example, the converted apathy (irrelevancy) can be used in the development and transformation of the ability to improvise. Satir (2016, 316) says "when it's necessary, you can go in new directions without losing your awareness". She, taking account of the communication options within the sample family, describes how she works with communication patterns during therapy. According to this, the following titles are mentioned:

### **2.1. In Terms of the Calculator Communication Pattern**

She tells us that the hardest thing for her is to meet a "calculator" person; because this type of people "sit upright and motionless; they move on their faces very little, their sound is monotonous and they always speak as a logician not logically. According to Satir (2016, 317) such people are extremely tiring and like they are trapped inside themselves. Such a person is the defender of values and always knows what is right and what is wrong" (informer). These people may listen to you (they may look like listening), but she thinks that they didn't understand the things they listened to, nevertheless, in order

to understand them you need them to talk as much as possible. For example, in the case of the sample family, she stated that she understood the father who uses the calculator communication pattern, trying to fix some things in the family and how to fail every time and telling him to give up trying on therapy using emotionless and robotic tone. Stating that she also observed they used a lot of words in their answers, Satir says that it is important for her to assess every opportunity in terms of to touch and establish a connection with the other person.

Satir indicates that she did the leading in therapy. Now it is the perfect time; because the father who uses the calculator communication pattern does not give a very hopeful image about therapy. She says, here at this hopeless point, *"I asked him what happened to his dreams". "I started to see a piece of light in his eyes. The half bottom of his face hadn't changed, but his eyes was just opened and flashed a little more. While I was listening to his answers, he confessed that it was true he had a dream any more. All of his dreams had been demolished. I saw Him as a lifeless internal identity inside a hard shell. I use this postures and communication patterns as my guide during my discussions with people. If this is done in a manner that really listens, reassuring and understanding, new insights arise"* (Satir, 2016, 317-318).

When she says new insights emerge, she indicates that change can occur. This is already her purpose; to bring about a change in the family, do "update" by confronting with problems and made the family members solve problems personally.

## **2.2. In Terms of the Soothing Communication Pattern**

The woman in the family (mother) uses a soothing communication pattern to ensure the balance of the family. According to Satir (2016, 320) this pattern wearers may be unable to express himself well. Descending to their level mentally, she has tried to listen and to see them, to make a connection with the personality they want to be and help them to talk about their hopes and aspirations. She provides that she specifies that directing the woman in the sample family.

Satir had wondered other family member's thoughts and dreams too after the father. Predictably dreams has not been realized; if dreams had already taken place, they couldn't be here to receive family therapy. *"Woman's dream was to live a life with her husband that is different from her own life. She said in the beginning of her marriage, she has constantly tried to make her husband happy. That was the thing taught herself; but she was get bored of it"* (Satir, 2016, 320). The main problem was here; she has noticed that she was facing with a traditional family structure where all sacrifices were installed to the mother. After that she tries to show the landscape by painting or sculpting. Because she thinks that she has caught up with the problem, she asks the woman whether she will paint with herself; upon acceptance; she takes her husband on a table, and asks the woman (wife) to kneel down at the bottom of the table and wants her to look at her husband. She emphasizes that this is the view at the beginning of their marriage (sculpture, painting, pose). In summary, the man and the woman in this family are not equal in terms of being human; the man is at the top and the woman is kneeling at the bottom and looks at her husband and continues her life as an ordinary being who fulfills her husband's wishes. She paints the landscape in this way, or makes her statue and wants them to look at it and asks both of them:

Satir (2016, 320) updates the situation by asking the woman: "... whether she has already felt feelings similar to what she felt at that moment". The woman says, "That's it, but I do not want to go on like this anymore." She directs the same question to her husband. Her husband states: "he does not like the woman (his wife) being below him, nor does he liked to stand above her".

Satir has used the method of "sculpture" or "pose" as it is at the end of every communication pattern and by facing The woman and the man (mother and father) with the situation they live in, she has "updated" the fact that they live, and put the scene (sculpture, picture or pose) in front of family members. After that she allows them to move into a position where they feel comfortable and brings them to a level where they can face each other; she realizes that new hopes are revived both on their faces. In summary; Imbalances in the family were identified; pictures, sculptures or poses of imbalances were made; and the individuals were confronted with these imbalances; the situation has been updated and by leaving whether the change will be done or not to the family, helped only to ensure equilibrium. Undoubtedly, the family (the family members) will give to be balanced by decision of change, not as a therapist herself.

## **2.3. In the Terms of Accusatory Communication Patterns**

Satir (2016, 321), pointing out that it is necessary to reveal the aspirations of those who act in a deliberate (accusatory) manner, has pointed out that during the therapy, she leaves the person in front of her rest and remains motionless, and to do so she either touches the person with her hands or for a moment let the person motionless to gather attention. The border of the person using the accusatory communication pattern is wide and sharpen. In the sample family, the children

have used accusatory patterns in the problem they have experienced with their parents. She explained how to "update" them in order to solve the problem with the titles "Problem Diagnosis through Speech, looking and Touch".

#### **2.4. In the Terms of Irrelevant Communication Pattern**

These individuals feel that they are excluded and treat them as irrelevant to everything in the family or everyone else. They give an image that they cut their ties with their families. For example, the attitudes of the younger siblings (boys and girls) in the sample family showed an example of an irrelevant communication pattern, which was dealt with under the title "Communication Patterns Occurring During Therapy" (Satir, 2016: 321).

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Practical and practical family therapy work began in the United States in the 1950s and has now become a profession that requires expertise. The practitioners try to understand the person as if he/she is without trial and to help (guide) the problem.

The discomfort that Virginia Satir (1916-1988) had at the beginning of her life has been effective in choosing the profession of social work and therapy. She has developed her own approach while working with families and family members; in 1951, she became one of the first therapists who works on the same session as a whole with all of the family members. Satir's approach began with the treatment of a young, schizophrenic woman. Instead of taking a protective role in this therapy; she has included the mother of the patient to the therapy until the communication with her daughter has become appropriate and effective. After the mother, she also added her father and her eldest brother to the therapy until the family reach to a balance. She has concentrated her works on increasing the self-confidence of the individuals and understanding and changing the perspectives of other people. Harmony is a very important concept of her model. This is a state of existence and a way of communicating with ourselves and others. High self-worth and harmony are the first basic indicators of being a more functional person.

Firstly, she has gathered information about the family with family chronology. Here she focused on bringing out the family map and gained important clues about the relationships within the family. She distinguishes four different personality types, namely "accusing", "calming", "distracting" (irrelevant) and "calculating" (calculator) by giving the name of communication patterns and moving away from the actual identity of the problematic person. After identifying the cause of the communication pattern that emerged in his or her speech with the family, she Revealed the "family pose" (map), "family sculpture", or "family picture" for the solution and "updated" the situation. Then she is focused on the change. The change will be carried out by family members. As it is understood, the basis of her model is based on to understand the reasons of these communication patterns.

The update is important in Satir's therapy model to focus the family on change. That is already her purpose. She determines the family chronology and communication patterns for this. The psychoanalysis method was trying to achieve success by bringing consciousness to subconscious states through hypnosis for the treatment of mental disorders. It is similar to Satir's method. We can say that both models are trying to bring out what is happening by updating the events based on the patient's past.

However, the psychoanalysis method cannot be applied quickly because it requires more professional expertise than Satir's method, so it can be applied in a narrow environment. But Satir's method can be applied more easily in all cultures and societies with little effort and change.

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