

The family life space. An instrument to qualitative and quantitative analysis of family relations.

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The contribution shows the characteristics and the potentialities of the Family Life Space, a graphic-symbolic instrument aiming to investigate family relations. Its main characteristic consists in being an interactive instrument which involves in a graphic joined task all the family members and which allows, this way, to obtain information on the overall family organisation. The attention focuses, in particular, on the metric analysis procedure of the information that can be obtained using this instrument: it is a very innovative try to connect the qualitative and the quantitative analysis of the family relations. It can be done by using a particular algorithm that converts the family symbolic drawing to a series of mathematical and geometric indicators which consider both its elements composition (lines, dots, space occupation density, etc.) and its global shape (the picture overall gestalt).

One of the most interesting opportunity offered by the FLS metric analysis is to allow comparative exams of a great quantity of graphic-symbolic productions, which refer to families being in very different situations, both under the life circle phase and under the structural and functional profile. What is interesting and absolutely innovative, in this prospect, is the opportunity to run extensive studies on family relationships by an instrument that is respectful of the investigated object specific nature. It is, in fact, well known how one of the most critical and problematic element in family research methodology refers to the need of maintaining a group analysis unity and of respecting the relational nature of family as a study object.

The FLS metric analysis thus answers to a relevant solicitation, which is a constant in recent years methodological reflection; that is the need, especially in family ambit, to build research devices consistently integrating qualitative and quantitative elements. What is unique in this analysis procedure is that it does not contrast with a clinical use of the instrument. On the contrary, it represents a support and an integration to the qualitative analysis of the collected information. The FLS metric analysis, in fact, forces the researches to code and make a complete and rigorous inventory of all the basic elements that compose the graphic-symbolic representation the family produces. This way we gain a lot of information and of measures which are easily checkable between subjects. The automatic processing, using the mathematical and geometric algorithm, gives a great amount of information, that is mainly obtainable on the researcher's choices basis. Nevertheless, it thus protects the inferential process from the most common subjective distortions, that are inherent each interpretative behaviour, risks.

All the outputs the metric analysis produces, both in the numeric and in the graphic version, turn thus out to be a precious guide to the following clinical interpretation of the information the family produces. They also offer to the researcher an easy comparison basis with other family situations. In order to reach such a purpose, it is extremely appreciable the use of metric indexes to evaluate the family transforming processes existence and size; this can be done comparing two representations that refer to different times or to the real vs. ideal situation.

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