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**Fundamentals of Family Theory**

**Questions to Answer:**

**Lesson 1**

**Explain “Differentiation of Self”.**

The ability to discern between ideas and feelings within an emotional relational system is known as differentiation of self, a notion in Bowen's theory. As a fundamental component of the theory, it improves health professionals' evaluation and intervention procedures, especially when it comes to psychological differentiation (Bohlander, 1995). According Foose & Cicio (2018), Bowen introduced the misunderstood concept of differentiation of self (DoS) in the early years of family therapy. Despite its unique facets, differentiation remains elusive and often misunderstood. Bowen, a renowned anthropologist, wished he had never discovered it, comparing it to Charles Darwin's "discovered" evolution. The ability to remain emotionally neutral in the face of extreme anxiety in a system while still interacting with important individuals inside it is known as differentiation of self, or DoS (Calatrava et al., 2022). The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family (2023) states that, families and social groups significantly influence individuals' thinking, feelings, and actions. Differences in individuals' susceptibility to groupthink and pressure for conformity reflect differences in their levels of differentiation of self. People with a poorly differentiated "self" depend heavily on others' acceptance and approval, either quickly adjusting their thoughts or dogmatically proclaiming what others should be like. This can lead to extreme rebels and bullies who push others to agree with them instead of with others. On the other hand, a well-differentiated person recognizes their dependence on others but can remain calm and clear-headed in the face of conflict. This type of person can act thoughtfully in the best interests of the group, defining themselves without being pushy or wishy-washy. Society has its well-differentiated people, poorly differentiated people, and those at various gradations between these extremes.

**Explain “Triangulation” in family systems theory.**

Triangulation is a systemic process wherein a child intervenes in their parents' confrontational interactions by choosing a side, diverting their attention, and conveying signals meant to prevent or lessen parental conflict (Buehler & Welsh, 2010). According to McCauley et al. (2021), interparental conflict in psychology, known as "triangulation," can cause a breakdown in the relationship between parents and children, causing adolescents to become maladjusted and parents to get distracted from the underlying stress. However when it comes to the Triangulation in the family systems theory, Gavazzi & Lim (2023), purports that the family systems theory offers a comprehensive framework that emphasises the reciprocal and dynamic character of connections between adolescents and their families. In addition to being widely used in the research on family interventions, the family systems framework has also been used more and more in the literature on the development of children and adolescents. According to Gale & Muruthi (2019), the concept of triangulation, introduced by Murray Bowen in the late 1950s, is a method used in a dyadic relationship to balance intimacy, conflict, or distance, providing stability and reducing anxiety. This concept has been used in various studies, including the rigid triad and perverse triangle, all based on the idea of a third person entering a relationship.

Triangulation, a theoretical concept in family development, involves a pair of family members incorporating or rejecting a third member. This concept is linked to cross-generational coalitions within families. Theories by Murray Bowen and Salvador Minuchin have established triangulation as an important concept, influencing the development of maladjustment in children and extending beyond the dyadic level (Marriage and Family Encyclopedia, 2023). Hence, triangulation in relationships refers to a communication pattern in which one person avoids direct engagement with another by employing a third person as an intermediate. This can lead to misunderstandings and disputes, and is frequently used as a manipulative method to obtain or retain authority (Frothingham, 2022).

**Lesson 2**

**How does Bowenian therapy seek to reduce chronic anxiety?**

Bowen's theory shifted from individual problems to the family emotional system, emphasizing the interconnectedness of family members in thinking, feeling, and behavior. He believed that a child's problem was likely in the marital relationship, and therapy should involve all family members, regardless of the number of individuals present. The Bowenian approach provides a method for organizing, categorizing, and controlling events within the family, focusing on life rather than families. This approach helps in understanding the complex interplay between family members and the system they operate within (Galica, 2023). Therefore, Bowenian therapy's major purpose is to lessen chronic anxiety by 1) raising knowledge of how the emotional system operates and 2) increasing degrees of differentiation, with the emphasis on making changes for oneself rather than trying to change others. His therapy improves communication among family members by breaking destructive habits and fostering autonomy via an intergenerational approach to healthy relationships and limits (THC Editorial Team, 2023).

**What is one critique, positive or negative, about Bowen’s model?**

Cepukiene (2020), in doing his research concluded that, the study supports Bowen's theory (Bowen's theory suggests that early family life experiences and psychosocial functioning in adulthood are interconnected) by showing that interparental relationship quality indirectly affects the differentiation of self, which in turn affects adult psychosocial functioning through couple relationship satisfaction. This highlights the importance of considering family-of-origin interactional background in analyzing psychosocial functioning. According to Peleg (2011), Bowen's theory of differentiation of self in a study, focusing on Israeli university students resulted in showing that family differentiation negatively correlates with social anxiety and physiological symptoms. The study suggests that less differentiated students may be at risk for high levels of social anxiety and suggests therapists should consider various aspects of differentiation when treating clients.

**Lesson 3**

**Give a brief description of the four background concepts and assumptions:**

**Chronic Anxiety**

Chronic anxiety is a type of anxiety that lasts for an extended period of time. Treatment can help, but it may not fully eliminate it. There are several types of chronic anxiety and they are: Generalized Anxiety disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder and Panic Disorder. The causes of chronic anxieties are: Genetic Factors; a biological relative's role in anxiety can offset genetic risk, promoting a stable and calm family life to mitigate the potential for anxiety, Environmental factors; anxiety often triggered by stress, can be influenced by various factors, including trauma, which can lead to a more severe condition, social issues; anxiety can be exacerbated by larger societal issues such as climate change, discrimination, political factors, or a pandemic, and finally personality traits; people who were shy as children or who felt frightened or upset in unfamiliar settings may be more prone to anxiety as adults (Gupta, 2022).

**Basic Life Forces**

Two conflicting fundamental forces of life are proposed by the theory. While the other is an equally strong emotional bond, the first is an innate drive towards distinctiveness and the distinction of a distinct self. Bowen's concept of responsibility in life involves two forces: togetherness and individuality. Togetherness forces agreeing on beliefs and principles, while individuality forces, or differentiating forces, encourage self-separation and self-reflection. The differentiating force, on the other hand, focuses on one's own happiness and well-being, demonstrating the interconnectedness of these forces (Baege, 2022).

**Emotional Process**

Current clinical research indicates that essential treatment goals for illnesses like major depressive disorder, which are characterised by deeply ingrained patterns of psychopathology, include promoting psychological flexibility and emotional processing and reducing rumination and avoidance (Yasinski et al., 2019). The phrase "emotional processing" describes a collection of interconnected activities, such as the verbal or behavioural presentation of emotions, the bodily and mental experience of one's activated emotions, and cognitive reflection on the objectives, significance, and consequences of one's experience (Lumley et al., 2021). Henriques (2017), posits that the experiential system, comprising sensory-perceptual experiences, drives, and emotions, is a crucial component of the core consciousness system; a theater of experience that coordinates our behavior in the world, preparing and energizing actions in response to perceptions and drives. However, "Emotional cutoff and societal process: Russia and the Soviet Union as an example," (2014), states that the social emotional processes have the power to either promote positive adaptation or contribute to social extinction. Achieving successful adaptation results in emotional processes that are more malleable and growth-oriented, which in turn produces positive societal improvements. Being together is the primary emotional process in families and society, which makes it difficult to distinguish between individuals and groups. Growth and development are hampered by fusion pressures because people find it difficult to work well in such constrictive emotional environments.

**The Family as an Emotional Unit.**

Baege (2022) states that, Bowen's conception of the family as an emotional unit marks a substantial change in perspective. The idea that a family is an emotional unit suggests that there is a strong, multigenerational bond among family members that profoundly affects each member's behaviour even when they are not aware of it. It views the family as a single entity. An imbalance in the family's emotional system is reflected in the pathology of a single member.

**Give a brief description of the eight interlocking concepts of Bowen Theory.**

**Differentiation of Self**

Differentiation is a critical concept in Bowen's family systems theory, guiding individuals to maintain their sense of self while being connected to others. Well-differentiated individuals navigate emotions, take responsibility, and are not easily swayed by others. Poorly differentiated individuals may struggle with decision-making and emotional involvement. Highly differentiated parents can support and guide their children, while poorly differentiated individuals may struggle with emotional involvement.

**Triangles**

Bowen's family systems theory emphasizes the concept of triangles, where involving a third person in a relationship can reduce tension or avoid direct conflict resolution. However, this can lead to unhealthy communication patterns and damage relationships, as seen when a parent involves a child in a conflict.

**Nuclear Family Emotional Process**

Bowen's process highlights the emotional dynamics within nuclear families, which can perpetuate generational behavior patterns, including issues like tension, intimacy difficulties, and emotional suppression in children, affecting their ability to communicate and regulate emotions.

**Family Projection Process**

The family projection process involves parents projecting their emotions and anxieties onto their children, potentially leading to difficult-to-change behavior patterns. Bowen's family systems theory suggests that parents may unconsciously pass on emotional issues, such as anxiety about their child's academic performance, causing stress and anxiety.

**Cutoff**

Emotional cutoff is a coping mechanism for dealing with difficult emotions and stress in family members. This behavior can lead to isolation and disconnection, especially when dealing with significant trauma or abuse. While it provides safety and protection, it can also hinder healing and support for family members.

**Multigenerational Transmission Process**

The theory of Bowen's family systems theory explains how emotional patterns and behavior are transmitted across generations within a family. This transmission can create difficult-to-change patterns, such as avoiding conflict, which can hinder children's development of healthy conflict-resolution skills.

**Sibling Position**

The sibling position within a family, influenced by birth order and gender, significantly influences an individual's emotional and social development. Bowen's theory suggests that first-born children may exhibit responsibility and achievement-oriented traits, while younger children may exhibit rebellious or creative tendencies.

**Societal Emotional Process**

The theory of Bowen's family systems theory highlights the significant impact of social issues on family dynamics and behavior. It suggests that societal issues, such as politics and economics, can influence individual emotional functioning and societal patterns (Chesson, 2023).

**Lesson 4**

**Example of “Triangulation” from your own experience? Include an analysis of the example.**

Example Triangulation:

The family of Joel and Crystal Brown, has been married for years. However, Joel is the first and only boy for Mitchell. Joel is very close with his mother and he tells her everything and listens to her instructions, while taking her advice over his wife and rest of family.

Analysis

The parent emotional involvement in her son's personal life has caused serious conflict in his marriage and pushes him to be confused and unhappy. When Mitchell was 7 years old, her twin brother died and her world came crashing. She said she felt lonely and despite having other sisters around, they could never replace her brother. When she got married she was attached to her husband and they had one child which was Joel. The husband could not manage the attachment and left her to work on the farm work program in the USA and thus, she was left with Joel for years and until her attachment turned to Joel her son. She tried to have other children but was not successful. With all that was happening, her love turned into full governorship of her son. When Joel was grown and was ready to get married, she was broken and felt as if he was going forget her and so she bought a house near him and from that moment there has been chaos. The mother of Joel channeled all her attention from her husband to her son, and in a manipulative way, has been using him to try to control his family. The mother will often cry and make up stories about feeling sick and lonely and that would cause Joel to go over to spend time. This caused him to be away from his wife very often as she was using different methods to reduce the wife’s attending from her husband and financial assistance.

**Lesson 5**

**Example of “Differentiation of Self” from your own experience? Include an analysis of the example.**

Example of Differentiation of self:

The Jermaine, Crystal, and Brown triangle illustrates the lack of self-differentiation within a family unit. In the first two years of their marriage, Jermaine and Crystal were content, with Jermaine making big choices and Crystal valuing his accountability. However, Crystal believed it was her duty to consider all options and communicate her opinions. The less adaptive moderately differentiated marriage and the more adaptive well-differentiated marriage may appear similar due to less tension in the early years. In the third year, Crystal became pregnant and managed some physical issues calmly. Jermaine's non-condescending listening helped her think about her concerns more clearly. The triangle could function differently if Brown, Crystal, and Jermaine were more distinct individuals. The less adaptive well-differentiated marriage and the less adaptive moderately differentiated marriage may be similar in their early years.

Brown, Crystal, and Jermaine experienced anxiety due to pregnancy stressors, but their contact does not worsen or become chronic. Crystal has higher expectations from Jermaine but is in charge of controlling her nervousness. Jermaine acknowledges his nervousness but does not respond strongly to Crystal's demands. After an uneventful labor, Crystal was cleared to return home and did not experience significant worry about the baby or her own efficacy as a mother. Despite Jermaine's mounting job demands, he remains emotionally accessible to Crystal, even over the phone. He is concerned about job matters but refrains from broaching them with Crystal. He hoped Crystal would not worry about things, but he knew she could handle it and did not have to "make things right" for her.

Brown, a young girl, is a self-assured and self-assured individual who is not burdened by obligations or unwarranted concerns about her safety. Crystal, a self-assured partner, can relate to Brown without feeling overburdened by expectations or unwarranted concerns. Jermaine, a confident and dedicated individual, can handle his work responsibilities without upsetting Crystal. Both partners acknowledge the strain their spouse is under and have faith in each other's dedication and loyalty. Brown's parents' separation has not drawn her into marital strife, and they have managed to carve out time for alone time. Crystal, who is not concerned about Brown, sees her as a well-mannered child who respects boundaries and doesn't throw tantrums. Brown is seen by Jermaine and Crystal as a unique individual, and they can interact closely with small triangles due to their high degrees of differentiation.

**Lesson 6**

**In the Nuclear Family Emotional System, what are some therapeutic considerations?**

Nuclear family emotional process: This refers to how the family behaves in their emotional relationships. These patterns might include marital conflict, dysfunction in a partner, impairment in one or more children, and emotional distancing. There are things to consider such as:

* Because family systems therapy focuses on interactions among family members, it is critical that the entire family participates in therapy. This can be difficult in instances when one or more family members are resistive to therapy
* There has been little research to support the use of family systems therapy. However, research is ongoing, and the existing information suggests that this therapy might be used for a number of objectives
* It is critical to emphasise that family systems therapists maintain a neutral position throughout the therapy process. This might be difficult for family members who desire feedback or to question harmful behaviour from the therapist. From the perspective of certain family members, this neutrality may appear to be an implicit support of certain behaviours (Cherry, 2022).
* According to GoodTherapy (2018), Bowenian family systems therapy is a popular modality of treatment, with both therapists and patients attesting to its success, there is still a small body of scientific data supporting the technique. Though the evidence base is expanding, more data, particularly from objective sources, may help validate its effectiveness. A second critique of the technique is its practitioners' apparent unshakable neutrality. Some mental health professionals argue that by staying neutral, unaffected, or silent at all costs, family systems therapy practitioners may be offering implicit support to any harmful behaviours that persons in treatment may be subjecting themselves or others to.

**Lesson 7**

**Family Projection.**

Family Therapy in Clinical Practice highlights the importance of the projection process in a child's development. The intensity of the attachment between mother and child within the mother-father-child triangle is crucial for a child's maturity. The projection process, which begins in the parental triangle, moves organically through the larger family, engaging siblings and the extended family. This increases anxiety for the child, leading to poorer functioning and amplifying anxiety-driving attention from adults. The combined focus on the child can result in increased anxiety and impairment, potentially setting the child in a lifelong position of being regarded as inadequate in the family. Dr. Bowen saw the projection process in society as a large-scale version of that in the family. The collective anxiety of a society is focused on targeted groups, either for overly harsh and punitive treatment or overly lenient and sympathetic treatment. The end result for those on the receiving end of the powerful projection process is put into a "one down" inferior position. The projection process can be seen as a threat to the continuation of the mother-child symbiosis, as it attempts to make two lives stand still at a particular pleasurable phase in both life cycles (Ferrera, 2022). In summary the family projection process illustrates how parents' emotional difficulties are mostly transmitted to their children. This projection process can affect children's functioning and make them more susceptible to clinical symptoms (Huang, & Rohlfing 2019).

**Which core competency do you need to strengthen the most, and why?**

There are several of the competencies I do believe, once venturing out I would need to strengthen and they are Outcome and Process Research, Family Law, Sex Therapy and Marital/Couples Therapy and Parenting Issues. However the ones I do need significant strengthening is on sex therapy and Marital/ couples Therapy and parenting Issues. The rational for such is that I have little information from the psychological perspective that can aid the family circle especially in the Caribbean, wherein a number of problem that affects families are centered around these.

**Describe the “Multigenerational Transmission Process”.**

Alzoubi (2018), states that the multigenerational process is a concept that emphasizes the emotional connection between family members and how changes in one member's functioning affect others. Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen argue that the emotional transmission process through generations is anchored in the emotional system, including emotions, feelings, and subjectively determined attitudes, values, and beliefs. They argue that while genes are part of the emotional system, they are not responsible for the nuclear family emotional mechanisms or the way they transmit through generations. The multigenerational process involves slight upwards and downwards changes in children's levels of differentiation, indicating that some children may have less, more, or the same level as their parents. The multigenerational process results in social, physical, and emotional dysfunction in families. The most serious dysfunction is the linear downward multigenerational functioning, where the nuclear family faces high levels of stress or anxiety. The more differentiated the nuclear family, the more stable the emotional transmission process, leading to increased awareness of the present generation's functioning and prediction of future generations. Kerr and Bowen argue that the clinical course of specific diseases is significantly related to family emotional processes, assuming they are inherited by ancestors and exist beyond specific contexts (Klever, 2019).

**Lesson 8**

**Example of “Societal Emotional Process”.**

* An example of the societal emotional process is the study of and justification for juvenile delinquent behaviour observed outside the family. Children may transgress social norms outside of the house if anxious parents hold them less accountable for upholding favourable social standards within the family (Study.com, n.d.).
* Another example is parents, like Michael and Martha, face numerous problems in raising their children during a period of societal regression. The loosening of standards in society makes it difficult for less differentiated parents to maintain a line with their children. Grade inflation in schools allows students to maintain grades with less work, leading to lawsuits from irate parents. The prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse adds to parents' worry about their adolescents. The current societal regression is characterized by increased child focus, anxiety about the future generation, and criticism for parents being too busy with their own pursuits. Children like Amy report feeling alienated from parents and their values, but critics fail to appreciate the emotional intensity that generates such alienation. Some argue for more focus on children by citing their problems, but this approach overlooks the emotional process in society. A more constructive direction would be for people to examine their own contributions to societal regression and work on themselves rather than focusing on the future generation (The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2023).

**Example of “Emotional Cutoff”.**

The natural defense systems characterised as "too much closeness," or extreme anxiety or strong emotional fusion, are called emotional cutoffs. A cutoff might manifest as emotional or physical retreat, avoiding touchy subjects, physically relocating apart from relatives, or seldom visiting home. When individuals stop attempting to control a relationship, it may appear "better," but the issues still exist and are latent. For instance, a guy may turn more and more on his spouse, kids, and friends for support the more he distances himself from his family of origin. Because of this, he is more likely to feel pressured to live up to their expectations of him or to bend over backwards in order to save the connection. Also, take the ideas of "tough love" or "letting someone hit bottom," which are frequently advocated when a loved one is battling addiction, as examples. Families that have recently divorced also experience emotional and physical breakups since loyalty is a major problem (Hudak, 2020).

**Lesson 9**

**What is your opinion of “Sibling Position”?**

If According to the theory of "sibling position," a family's duties are determined by birth order. Due to differing experiences and expectations from their families, the oldest, middle, and youngest children will assume diverse roles (Counselling, 2023). Then it would appear that once the parent have their first child, then the possibilities lies that they might be very strict and hard on such child. If the family unit should subscribe to this phenomena, it will leave room for a lot sibling disputes over roles and responsibilities and can also affect the growth and process of the family overall. Take for instance, a family of three and the oldies of the three much expectation and resources was push into the first child with great expectation that he or she should do well academically, get married and in return demonstrate the family ethos and, while being that strong leader role model for the rest and finally help in their overall development. This high expectation can cause the children (other siblings) to under develop their own person, because they might want to copy the same pattern of the first child and hence differentiation of self would be affected. The pressure might be too great on the first child and as such might suffer from various form of depressions. The family can be affected if the first child waste the opportunity and choices otherwise from the structure of the overall family. While there is a good theory, it can pose great challenge for the family. I believe that there should be flexibility to the family and each family members while knowing their position should also be given equal trust and opportunity to bring out their creativities, with respect mutually given.

**Lesson 10**

**Describe 3 aspects of the Bowen model being used in Clinical practice.**

According to Atlantic International University, (n.d.) Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist, developed a theory based on eight interlocking concepts stating that an emotional system governs human relationship systems and is the primary driving force in clinical problems. The Bowen Center provides resources and recordings for further understanding.

1. The first stage tries to diminish clients' worry about the symptom by helping them to discover how the symptom fits into their relationship pattern.
2. Stage two focuses on ‘self' concerns for adult clients in order to raise their degrees of distinctiveness. Clients are assisted in resisting the draw of the 'togetherness force' in the family, as Bowen described it.
3. In the final stages of treatment, adult clients are encouraged to distinguish themselves from their family of origin, with the premise that advances in differentiation will immediately translate into lower anxiety and more self-responsibility within the nuclear family structure.

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