

Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory in Clinical Practice

Name and Qualification of the Presenter

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Current Employment: Private Practice in Ithaca, NY.

Previous Clinical Employment: The Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County, Inc.

Subject/Topic of Workshop

The goal of this workshop is to draw a distinction between a systems model of thinking about clinical problems and an individual model. A systems model assumes that a clinical problem originates and is perpetuated by the system, e.g., the family. Therefore, therapeutic interventions focus on initiating change in the systemic forces that influence an individual or family. Each person is coached to assume responsibility for changing her or his reflexive responses to others.

There are several schools of thought and practice that are grounded in family systems theory. This presenter will use the conceptual framework of the Bowen Family Systems Theory. Much of the presentation will be based on Bowen's concept of differentiation of self.

Differentiation of self is a life long journey of defining a self. According to the Bowen Family Systems Theory, when one person begins to think and behave differently from others in the family, he or she will experience emotional pressure to conform to the family's prescribed ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Families differ in the degree to which they pressure each other. However, influencing others is a quality common to most human systems. Learning how to tolerate the anxiety of being independent yet connected to the system, or defining the self in the system is the subject of this presentation.

Consistent with Bowen's theory is the assumption that the therapist is part of the system. Accordingly, this presentation will explore the function of the therapist in relation to the person or people present for therapy.

Learning Objectives of Workshop

Participants in this workshop can expect to:

- Learn to use family diagrams to trace family emotional and behavioral patterns
- Exercise thinking about relational problems and clinical symptoms in accordance with the Bowen Theory
- Learn to develop, alongside the client(s), contracts for change that are consistent with a systems model of thinking
- Understand the role and function of the therapist in relation to the client(s)

Description of Teaching Methods

This presenter will use a combination of teaching methods such as lecture format, video clips, and PowerPoint slides. Additionally, the presenter will rely on interactive teaching methods such as role play and discourse. Finally, a bibliography will be provided to each participant for further reading and learning.

Description of Course/Education Activity Content

This workshop consists of three interconnected parts:

The first part will be an introduction to the theory. Family diagrams will be used to assist participants in their understanding of the various concepts. Short video clips will be used to underscore the key components of Bowen Family Systems Theory.

During the second segment, the presenter will provide a number of clinical case examples for discussion. The goal is to demonstrate the use of a systems model of thinking about the clinical problems and the directives for change.

The third part of the presentation will be an exploration of the function of a Bowen Family Systems therapist. Participants will learn about the implications of therapeutic interventions based on a systems model of thinking.

Starting and Ending Times of Each Section of the Workshop:

Section I: 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM with a break of 15 minutes

Lunch: 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM

Section II: 1:00 PM to 2:40 PM

Break: 20 minutes

Section III: 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM

Contact Hours: 6.5

Location: Tompkins County Public Library- Borg Warner Room