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The thesis of Ayanna A. Epps entitled
The Limitations of Traditional Individual Focused Conflict Resolution
Techniques within the Family Structure

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies in the School for Summer and Continuing Education of Georgetown University has been read and approved.

[Signature]
Mentor(s)

[Signature]
Director, Liberal Studies Program

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THE LIMITATIONS OF TRADITIONAL INDIVIDUAL FOCUSED CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES WITHIN THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

Ayanna A. Epps

School for Summer and Continuing Education
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.
May 3, 1999
The results of my finding showed that it is necessary to incorporate a systematic procedure in family therapy. In addition, therapists exercising in the field of family therapy should be educated to a systems procedure.
THE LIMITATIONS OF TRADITIONAL INDIVIDUAL FOCUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES WITHIN THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

Ayanna A. Epps

Mentor: Dr. Elizabeth M. James-Duke

ABSTRACT

Traditionally when family members are at conflict with one another, and they wish to resolve the conflict they seek the assistance of a family therapist.

The family then sets a goal, and that is to define the conflict. In the process they may find that there are many different factors in the conflict, but in general they can agree upon a major or most outstanding issue.

A nuclear family may be troubled by an impending divorce, but they may also be troubled by their children's failing grades. They may acknowledge different factors to the conflict, but will probably agree that the major problem is the impending divorce. Falsely, the family may feel that if the marriage can be reconciled, then their children's grades will improve because the children will be happier. This is their approach upon entering therapy and more than likely the therapist will also take that approach, because therapists are ill trained when it comes to addressing family therapy.
Currently there are no schools or standard guidelines to follow but there are studies, which are fathered by a Dr. Murray Bowen, a professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center. Dr. Bowen's research has showed that in order for family therapy to be effective, therapists need to follow a standard systematic process that prevents them from getting emotionally involved which makes therapy more effective and provides a larger scope for the therapist to view when analyzing the family and their problems. This systematic procedure allows therapists to see how many more conflicts actually exist within a conflict. It also provides the opportunity to see how individual personalities affect other members actions within the family.

To support my finding, I researched Dr. Bowen's work and compared it to the basic tenets needed for effective or successful conflict resolution. In doing so, I was able to identify how traditional therapeutic methods fall short of achieving successful results in family conflict.

I also provided examples which displayed how family dynamics and individual personalities disrupt conflict resolution by upsetting the equilibrium that is needed for successful results. I also supported my findings with lectures on stress reduction.
The results of my finding showed that it is a necessary to incorporate a systematic procedure in family therapy. In addition, therapists exercising in the field of family therapy should be educated to a systems procedure.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Traditional conflict resolution techniques are ineffective at solving conflicts in most family therapies. Dr. Murray Bowen, a professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center and father of the Family Systems Theory, principally supports my argument. Dr. Bowen argues that psychologists fail in their assessments to regard the family as an emotional unit and that individual members are a part of that unit rather than an autonomous psychological entity. Therefore, traditional conflict resolution techniques by means of psychotherapy are ineffective because psychologists' comprehension of family dynamics is inaccurate. This inaccuracy results from the emphasis on individualism in American culture. Americans link this value to freedom. According to Robert Bellah, author of Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life, freedom is perhaps the most deeply upheld American value:

Yet freedom turns out to mean being left alone by others, not having other people's values, ideals, styles of life forced upon one, being free of arbitrary authority in work, family and political life. (Bellah et al. 1996, 23)

Robert Bellah explains that there is a cost of freedom as the predominant American value. The cost is that each person becomes endowed with the right to be free of others' demands, therefore making it difficult to cooperate with others or
form attachments since they would create obligations that would impinge on one's freedom.

The birth of American cities in the 1920's created a change in the American economy as well as the American social structure. The need for large families diminished with fewer family farms to support. City dynamics influenced a change in family structure as well as interpersonal relationships. The city environment and an economic market system created an environment that required its citizens to compete in order to succeed. The birth of cities meant that people:

... faced challenges and uncertainties for which they were not prepared. Less than ever could they count on relating to others simply on the traditional grounds of kinship, local community or inherited status. In the new, mobile middle-class world, one autonomous individual had to deal with other autonomous individuals in situations where one's self-esteem and prospects depended on one's ability to impress and negotiate. Social interactions under these conditions were often intense, but also limited and transient. "Friendliness" became almost compulsory as a means of assuaging the difficulties of these interactions, while friendship in the classical sense became more and more difficult. People could be, and indeed had to be, useful to one another. They could also enjoy one another's company. But the concept of a common good that the relationship served became even harder to specify in a world where individuals mainly sought their own private good or the good of the organizations that employed them. (Bellah et al. 1996, 118)

Individualism became necessary. According to Bellah, it was also at this period in America's history that a concern and quest for mental health began to receive more attention.
members, narrowing the therapists' findings. For instance, a young girl addressing her difficulties in taking responsibility for her life, may be sent to therapy by her parents. The therapist may assess character inadequacies and spend a great amount of time working with their patient prescribing treatments, confidence building exercises, etc. However, one day after a session, the patient is met by the mother whom the therapist meets. In a short period of time, after a brief conversation, the therapist is able to assess a few overbearing qualities in the mother. This encounter permits the therapist to reassess her patient's problems. Although the patient may have character inadequacies, there is now an entirely new equation to be factored. What the patient may not have vocalized was inadvertently exposed in a five-minute conversation between the mother and the therapist. The therapist recommends a family session and meets the father as well. He appears to be passive, and the mother continues to be overbearing and controlling. However, the therapy sessions also reveal that the mother always comes through for her daughter at critical moments. For instance, the daughter has a large tuition deadline to meet in order to enable her to continue her education. If the deadline is not met, she will not be able to register for another semester. When the deadline date arrives, the daughter is overwhelmed and upset that she was not able to meet the deadline, and believes that she will not be able to register for school. On that date, her mother
writes a check for the amount needed, yet expresses to her daughter how angry she is that her daughter did not secure the necessary funds. In therapy sessions, however, the daughter did not verbalize the positive aspects of her mother. Instead, the daughter's primary emotion was the anger she felt towards her mother for pointing out her inadequacies and failures. If the therapist had not met the mother, a reciprocal relationship would not have been identified. A reciprocal relationship is one in which one person feeds off the other's actions. The daughter becomes "weak" to her controlling mother. She feels helpless and inevitably fails. The mother then misinterprets her daughter's behavior and feels an obligation to remain "strong" for her daughter's sake. Although the mother comes through and "rescues" her daughter, she is also the cause of the daughter's failure.

For a therapist to study one family member without studying the other, is like studying for a final examination with only mid-term knowledge. Bowen teaches us that family relationships are reciprocal and serve as explanations of behavior. Dr. Bowen's study showed that:

... reciprocal functioning could be so precise that whenever a significant personality characteristic was found in one family member, its mirror-opposite characteristic would, predictably, be found in another family member. The two opposite characteristics would so strongly reinforce each other that the intensity of a particular trait in one person could not be understood apart from the intensity of the opposite trait in another person. (Kerr 1988, 37)
CHAPTER 2
HISTORY OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Historically, family psychologists practice psychotherapy based on the American values of freedom and independence (Bellah et al. 1996). Psychologists have failed to acknowledge the dual obligations of an individual to freedom and family. Although individuals desire independence, they also have obligations to their family members and/or their religion. As an example, an individual strives to move to the head of his company but also spends the weekends as a health provider to his ailing mother. Acknowledgment of obligation in psychotherapy would make conflict resolution in family therapy more successful as this investigation will reveal.

"Conflict is variously defined in terms of incompatible behaviors, or divergent perceptions (Ross 1993, 74)." Conflicts are rooted in differences in interests and interpretations (Ross 1993) and always cause some type of reaction whether it is resistance or submission. Culture also affects, or in some cases, causes conflict. The American goal to achieve freedom of the individual causes conflict by creating a tension between freedom and obligation. For instance, an Asian-American family member may struggle between issues pertaining to American independence, and Asian cultural family obligations. Whenever conflicting goals are attempting to be achieved, conflict will arise (Kreisberg 1982).
When conflict arises, in order for it to be resolved, it requires the meeting or gathering of the parties involved in the conflict. Some conflict resolutions require the attendance of a mediator or arbitrator who serves as a buffer. Many corporations spend thousands of dollars to hire an arbitrator to solve conflicts within their firm. The two parties present their disputes and an arbitrator provides a fair solution, thereby resolving the conflict. Families, however, spend thousands of dollars on years of therapy with far less than satisfactory results.

Typically, when families are in conflict there is a need to focus on an individual, or to place blame. The focus, or sometimes the target, becomes the child or the children. Parents react by sending their children to therapists independently. In doing so, the parents turn the focus from a family issue to an individual issue. If a therapist does not recognize that the family is an emotional unit, then they assist in helping the family to focus on and blame an individual, rather than acknowledge that the entire family plays a role in the problem or conflict.

When families are experiencing conflict, what is actually occurring is all the parties involved are failing to meet one another's standards and needs. An example of how this may happen occurs when a parent becomes upset at their child's decision to get a tattoo, and they are very adamant and expressive of their
disappointment in their child's decision. The parent associates a tattoo with a
delinquent lifestyle and, therefore, may feel disappointed by and/or scared of their
child's decision. The child on the other hand is disappointed in the parent for
thinking poorly of an independent decision they made in reference to their life. The
surface conflict is the tattoo, but the conflict actually lies deeper than that. It is
important to look at the parent-child relationship. Then we can see that the conflict
has arisen out of the two having failed to be supportive of one another. The parent
is not comforted by the child's decision to get a tattoo. The parent fears that the
child may be headed toward a delinquent lifestyle. The child is upset with the
parent who has not accepted their right to make an independent decision one which
they associate with artistic expression and not delinquency.

Dr. Murray Bowen's theory is built on previous psychoanalytic theories, as
are most theories of therapy. Sigmund Freud, the Austrian father of
psychoanalysis, and his psychoanalytic theory contributed to the birth of Bowen's
Family Systems Theory. Sigmund Freud argued that our characteristics or
personalities were motivated by the unconscious as well as childhood experiences.
The experiences of one's childhood defined one's adult behavior. The parents
transfer these experiences to the children (Kerr and Bowen 1988). Freud's findings
gave Bowen a reference to study and compare his own findings and conclusions.
Freud, like Bowen, also believed that family behavior was affected by family
members actions. Bowen's Family Systems Theory, however, takes into account the affects of individualism in America. Prior to Dr. Bowen's introduction of family systems therapy into the medical field:

...psychoanalytic theory did have the concept of object relations which was sometimes invoked to account for what transpired in relationships; however, this was not really a relationship concept. (Kerr and Bowen 1988, 10)

Some psychotherapists apply developmental theories to their patients. Their goal is to investigate the issues of development in the family to find areas of development which are lacking (somewhat similar to Freud's theory claiming that if a child does not receive adequate nourishment in a particular stage in life, they become fixated on that stage in their adulthood). When they find the areas that are lacking "nourishment" they can then address the need and, in essence, solve the problem by feeding the missing element. Erik Erikson, a German psychiatrist and author of *Childhood in Society*, formatted the Psychosocial Development Theory which was built on Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory. Erikson expanded Freud's theory by adding to Freud's stages of development. Erikson's theory gained attention because it addressed the issue of individualism. He believed that the main quest in life was for one to find their identity. Erikson believed that "identity transformed from one stage to the next, and early forms of identity influence later
forms (Miller 1993, 159)." Erikson's theory, however, failed to address the influences of the individual patient's immediate surroundings and influences. Erikson's theory also failed to address how to resolve issues stemming from the failure to move ahead in a healthy manner, to one's next stage in life, towards adulthood. In addition, individual patients were generally studied in isolation without the input or contributions of other family members.

Dr. Murray Bowen is a family therapist who recognizes that therapy can be most beneficial to the family when pursued by the family and not by an individual or "the trouble maker". Bowen views conflict as "a symptom manifestation of an active process that involves the entire family (Bowen 1985, 45)."

Dr. Murray Bowen has studied and researched family dynamics since the 1950's. He is noted for making a major step in the development of Family Systems Theory by:

...conceptualizing the family as an emotional unit and the individual as part of that unit rather than as an autonomous psychological entity. (Kerr 1988, 35)

In this theory/hypothesis, Bowen deviated from mainstream psychological thinking in that he recognized human behavior as an extension of the family. Dr. Bowen based his theory on the premise that:

...if a psychological deficit could be dealt with to the extent that is no longer exerted an influence on the patient, then the psychological arrest in the patient could begin to move toward a higher level of maturation on its own motivation. (Bowen 1985, 5)
CHAPTER THREE

FAMILY DYNAMICS

Previously, mainstream psychological thought failed to acknowledge sufficiently the influence of the family on individual personalities. In short, Dr. Bowen recognizes that each person is influenced emotionally by another member or members of the family. He also argues that psychologists' in comprehesion and failure to regard individuals as part of a larger entity make traditional therapy and family therapy ineffective at resolving conflict. Dr. Bowen's studies reveal that in family disputes, there is a difference between describing a problem and accounting for a problem. Family psychologists need to acknowledge the family and its dynamics. Otherwise, techniques in family therapy will continue to fall short of producing positive outcomes when attempting to resolve conflict. Psychologists in general, however, have not changed their therapeutic techniques. They continue to base their therapeutic techniques on how they view an individual rather than what they should do in therapy, making traditional therapy too narrow in scope. They have failed to see the larger picture, and change their techniques in therapy. Dr. Bowen's studies have provided a process to be followed, an equation to be applied, that will increase the therapist's scope and make therapy more successful.
Dr. Murray Bowen is credited with developing a Family Systems Theory, which helps to organize complex family relationships. His theory provides a process for therapists to follow in their relationships with families they counsel. It further provides an avenue of assessment and provides guidance and a framework for the therapist to build their relationship with the family. Bowen's theory of family systems provides a "systematic way of collecting, organizing and integrating information from all levels of observation (Kerr and Bowen 1988, viii)."

Dr. Bowen's theory is the first to define a new set of variables that exist in one's lifetime, which he believes influence physical diseases, emotional illnesses, and social-acting out problems. In addition, Bowen clarifies these variables so therapists can identify the interrelationship of the emotional process and the result of the emotional process. In other words, Bowen defines the reaction to the action. Bowen's theory also enables a therapist to clearly distinguish between the subject matter (the person or family) and treatment or proper actions when evaluating a clinical family. Bowen's theory provides for a therapist a method of relating the two pieces of information while acknowledging the family emotional process (Kerr 1988).
Family Systems Theory assumes that because we are social beings, human behavior is therefore naturally influenced by other people's behavior. Even illnesses can progress or cease with family influence. A family member will at times have a physical reaction due to their relationship with their family (Kerr 1988). Bowen refers to this as psychological symbiosis. A mother, for instance, physically gives birth to her child yet psychologically she is unable to give up her child. This results in a "state of relative physical maturity along with a state of marked psychological immaturity (Bowen 1985, 4)."

The Family Systems Theory acknowledges the family as a unit and a network of interlocking relationships and influences. The theory acknowledges individualism, but does not support individuality. No person is a fully autonomous psychological entity. Individuals are influenced by the relationship system and by members in their family. This automatically places the psychology of the individual in a larger context than what has been previously applied in traditional psychotherapy which can "describe rather than account for human functioning (Kerr 1988, 35)."

Bowen's research was initially developed by his interest in the relationship between schizophrenic patients and their mothers. However, later studies supported his findings that the same principles applied regardless of whether there
were schizophrenic family members. They were merely exaggerated in families with schizophrenic members. In 1954, Bowen began a five-year study by moving nuclear families with schizophrenic members into an inpatient unit to be studied. An astounding discovery was made:

First, the emotional intensity of the relationship between the mothers and the schizophrenic offspring were so involved with each other, so influenced by each other, that it was difficult to think of them as separate people. The second observation, perhaps even more important than the first, was that the intensity of this mother-patient process was not particularly different from the emotional intensity of relationships throughout the nuclear family. The process involved the entire family. The father and the patient's siblings, too, played a part in fostering and perpetuating the problem. Not only was it difficult, therefore, to think of mother and patient as separate people, but it was difficult to think of any family members that way. (Kerr and Bowen 1988, 6)

Bowen found that family members typically functioned with each other based on "reciprocal" relationships. In other words, family members typically play off one another's strengths and weaknesses:

A parent, for example, might feel and act "strong" in response to his or her schizophrenic child's acting "weak" or helpless. The schizophrenic child, in turn, would feel and act weak in response to the parents acting strong. It was as if one person gained or borrowed strength as another person lost or gave it up. The functioning of one person, therefore, could not be adequately understood out of the context of the functioning of the people closely involved with him. (Kerr 1988, 37)  

Unfortunately, in individual therapy sessions, psychiatrists can misinterpret characteristics or qualities by not extending their interest to the other family
The following are examples of reciprocal relationships: overadequate and inadequate, decisive and indecisive and dominant and submissive (Kerr 1988). Dr. Bowen's study emphasized the importance of knowing family members for productive individual therapy.

There are dynamics which serve as motivating forces of reciprocal relationships, or a term referred to as a transfer of anxiety (Bowen 1985). Bowen provides an example of a transfer of anxiety and its motivating force:

A mother's transfer of anxiety begins when a projection involving primarily the mother's own feelings of helplessness, weakness and inadequacy are transferred to her child:

With her adequate self she mothers her weak self which is perceived to be in the child. An example was a mother who fed her child when she herself felt hunger. The giving is then governed by her own wishes rather than the reality needs of the patient... There were repeated observations to indicate the mother's attention was determined from inside herself rather than the reality of the situation. (Bowen 1985, 8)

The effects of family dynamics may continue to occur for generations. Current theories fail to acknowledge the consequences of the reality that, upon entering this world, children are dependent on others for their well being. Parents are responsible for encouraging and creating independence in their children. They also "have the task of functioning in ways that permit that individuality to emerge" (Kerr 1988, 41), while not encouraging qualities associated with individualism,
such as lack of recognition of obligation to one's family. This task can be achieved through the implementation of house rules, moral or religious beliefs and practices. The way children differ in individuality is explained by their degree of emotional separation from their family, and these degrees are influenced by their parent's emotional separation from their parents and so on. These degrees describe one's level of differentiation, or emotional attachment or detachment with the family. They enable a child to grow to be an individual, but an individual within the family system. Each family member, parent or child serves a variety of functions within the family structure. Their level of differentiation describes who they are.

Perhaps it's easier when explaining family dynamics and levels of differentiation, if we look at an example of a "rebel" (Kerr 1988) whom we may feel is totally independent and adamant about claiming his/her individuality as a product of his/her family environment. If a parent wishes to understand their rebellious child, it would be more beneficial to examine the family in therapy rather than just the rebellious child. It is not to say any one person(s) is at fault for being too overbearing, but a parent's degree of emotional separation from their parents affects the type of emotional separation their child will have. Rebelling is not so much a character deficiency, but a scream for independence or differentiation, which is not being nurtured by the family:
In a poorly differentiated family, emotionality and subjectivity have a strong influence on family relationships. The high intensity of emotionality, or pressure for togetherness, prevents a child from growing to think, feel, and act for himself. The child functions in reaction to others. A good example is a rebellious adolescent. His rebellion reflects the lack of differentiation that exists between him and his parents. The rebel is a highly reactive person whose self is poorly developed. He operates in opposition to his parents and others; they, in turn, are sufficiently unsure of themselves that they react automatically in opposition to this behavior. Most of his values and beliefs are formed in opposition to the beliefs of others. Based more on emotional reaction than on thinking, the beliefs are usually inconsistent. More of the parents' emotional immaturities influence their relationship with this child than with his siblings. The acting-out child, in turn, responds in a more immature manner to the parents than do the siblings. It is a reinforcing system of interaction transcends blame, although mutual blaming is common. When the child leaves home, he replicates some version of the family relationship patterns with others. He plays his part in fostering the replication, and the others play theirs. Having achieved little emotional separation from his family, he achieves little in other relationships. (Kerr 1988, 41)

The rebellious adolescent also takes advantage of the opposition and conflict that exists between him and his parents. In a situation such as the one just mentioned:

... conflict can serve as a critical mechanism for the articulation of goals, for the definition of creative solutions to problems, and for the development of collective identity. Conflict and threats of conflict are important weapons of the weak. If disadvantaged groups and individuals refuse to consider open conflict, (such a rebellious teenager upsetting his parents with body piercing), they deny themselves what sometimes is their most effective means for bringing about needed change. (Ross 1993, xiii)
Depending on the degree or need for emotional independence, individuals struggle with the need to define one's self. This can cause a great deal of stress and anxiety, not only for the individual but for the family members as well. It means that an individual and family members are forced to confront emotional issues that can be very painful. During this time, one may desire other people to change in order to assist them in achieving differentiation. This is not always possible or necessary. The more resistance other family members give, however, the more difficult it is to achieve differentiation which can lead to chronic anxiety.

Anxiety is also infectious. If a parent experiences chronic or acute anxiety, it is more than likely the spouse and child or children will experience it as well. A poorly differentiated family member will experience higher levels of anxiety in response to stress. Anxiety is an emotional response to other family members.

If a family does not handle stress well, then they will look for other people on whom to place blame before taking responsibility for the problem. This is typical of how a poorly differentiated family reacts to stress. They have not learned to handle the conflict without becoming emotionally involved. On the other hand, a family that is well-differentiated will attempt to find solutions to their current problem. A well-differentiated family will work together to arrive at solutions. They will see the strengths in their relationships that may help them to resolve the conflict within the family. In addition, a well-differentiated family is less likely to
be damaged by stress because they anticipate stress. Therefore, when they are confronted with stress, they are prepared to handle it. They also understand that the source of stress is temporary and they actively attempt to find solutions to the conflict.

A reduction of anxiety is also a key to resolving or at least reducing conflict within a family. A reduction of anxiety can improve one's sense of differentiation and independence. This can have a positive impact on other family members because, just as anxiety is contagious, so is pleasure. Sometimes, however, when anxiety is released from one family member it may be transferred to another family member, resulting in one persons' happiness at the expense of another.

Bowen refers to the anxiety relationship system that occurs in families as an interlocking triangle. Michael Kerr, who has researched Dr. Bowen's studies, provides an example of how experiencing anxiety affects family relationships. "The triangle is the basic molecule of an emotional system (Kerr and Bowen 1988, 134)." Although the triangle refers to a three-member relationship, it can consist of more than three. However, it takes more than three members to cause the effect that occurs in an interlocking triangle. What is also interesting about the interlocking triangle is that, if an issue is not addressed, the conflict can last indefinitely. The lower the level of differentiation the more intense is the pattern. When members leave or die, they can be replaced by other or new family members.
The issues or anxieties are merely transferred to new generations. Michael Kerr
provides an example of an interlocking triangle:

A husband, on the outside (in fact or fantasy) of the relationship between his
wife and his oldest daughter, becomes sullen. The wife predictably reacts to his
sulleness by focusing more on him and attempting to cheer him up. The
daughter, in reaction to being on the outside in relation to her two parents
becomes overly solicitous toward her father. The mother, reacting to being on
the outside in relation to her husband and her daughter, criticizes the daughter's
physical appearance. The daughter responds defensively, and she and her
mother have a long discussion to resolve their differences. The system is never
still. So in calm periods the insiders are trying to preserve what they have and
the outsider is trying to break into it. (Kerr and Bowen 1988, 136). As long as
the daughter and "father are in conflict, harmony can be preserved between the
parents and between the daughter and her mother. (Kerr and Bowen 1988, 138)

There may appear to be some benefits to an interlocking triangle. In the
previous example, although at the husband's expense, the mother and daughter were
able to build a strong relationship. However, an interlocking triangle may also
backfire. An individual may attempt to draw another person into the conflict by
expressing anxiety, but their "recruit" may not always react to another person's
anxiety, particularly if the "recruit" is a well-differentiated person. The individual
("recruit") may, in fact, withdraw thereby increasing the anxiety that already exists
between and among the conflicting parties. This individual's withdrawal, or their
desire to not be involved in the conflict, may cause another member to feel
criticized or ignored. This may result in an escalation of the existing anxiety.
If a person feels rejected they may invite another party to listen to them express their anxiety, thus perpetuating an existing triangle, or even creating another one. A family member may also unknowingly join the triangle. An objective person (such as a therapist) would be able to recognize a triangle escalating because the newly "recruited" person would begin to react in such a way that they begin to adapt their character around the behavior of the other parties. A child may, for instance, react to tension exhibited or verbalized by his parents and change their actions accordingly. As a result, if the child becomes extremely dysfunctional and overly emotionally dependent, then it is quite possible he will be sent to a therapist. If the therapist were to be successful, one would need to not just focus on the child but focus efforts on the family and detriangling. The goal of the therapist is to teach the child how to be emotionally non-reactive, or emotionally separate from the family. This process does not require the child or the most affected party to be physically removed. The goal is to change one's reactions and one's emotional involvement or dependence to family members. Due to the difficulty in achieving the process, the therapist should play the role of the emotionally separate person, the one who can remain objective, detached and differentiated. The assistance of a neutral person aids in solving the problem between the conflicting parties. When there is no emotionally detached party, a member can continue to add more
members to the triangle by recruiting others to take pity on them. They want others
to empathize with them.

An emotionally detached therapist can help in the process of detriangling
because they can:

...recognize communication as reflecting the activity of a triangle rather than
being a straightforward comment by one person to another. (Kerr and Bowen
1988, 286)

The process of detriangling partially depends on whether or not the therapist
is able to recognize all the triangles that exist in one family. A family member may
be involved in more than one triangle at a time and not even be aware of it.
Effective detriangling is also contingent upon how effectively the therapist can
remain neutral and factual, and whether or not he/she can identify the two people
who are in the actual conflict:

Managing a conflict effectively then means addressing both the issue about
which the parties are contending and the deeper concerns which if ignored, are
likely to resurface in a short time. Conflicts are intense and hard to manage not
only because of the intrinsic value of what is being fought over, but also
because of the emotional importance of the object of contention. (Ross 1993, 2)

It is difficult for a therapist to bring together two people in disharmony.

One person may experience sympathy while the other experiences rage or anger.

This also causes anxiety. A good therapist knows how detrimental anxiety can be
to productive therapy and will provide a means to help the family deal with anxiety (Bowen 1985).

The therapist needs to encourage family members to take more responsibility for their actions, to overcome denial through questions, and not to embrace the values of individualism.

The success of therapy may be contingent on the therapist's level of differentiation from his or her own family. The more successful one is in achieving differentiation in their personal lives, the more likely they are to remain emotionally neutral.

A therapist can be in practice for years and never realize he is often a pawn of the families he treats. Or that the families he treats are often pawns of what is needed to make him feel comfortable. Psychoanalytic training addresses this problem by requiring analysts to have a personal analysis. Family systems training addresses the problem by requiring trainees to bridge the cutoff from their families of origin through differentiation of self. Both psychoanalysis and differentiation of self in one's family of origin enhance a therapist's ability to monitor the effect of his own emotional functioning on his clinical work. (Kerr and Bowen 1988, 285)

Furthermore, an extensive period of practice is encouraged because it allows a therapist to work on non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice that support the interpretation of neutrality, and also helps to remind the therapist to remain neutral. If a therapist is a target of attempted manipulation, a lack of facial expressions will help maintain and establish an emotionally neutral relationship. For instance, a patient attempts to manipulate a story in order to shock the therapist. Their mission
is to make the therapist sympathize with their "side of the story". If the therapist maintains a "neutral" face (even if they are shocked by the story presented), their expression will reinforce to the therapist the need to remain neutral, and also conveys to the patient and family members the sense that the therapist is not taking sides.

The evaluation process should follow a course such as: a history of the presented problem, the symptoms and their effects on other persons in the family. This process is not easy to perform. Many people are not ready to take responsibility for their actions and are at times dishonest. This task is made easier by asking the persons involved to relay the history or perceptions of the problem. It is then the therapist's responsibility to listen carefully and pull the potential problems from the shared information. A therapist must continue to ask questions. They should never assume that they have been fully informed by their patients. A therapist should assume that their patients intentionally omit facts. Questioning encourages the family to feel that their therapist cares as they gain much needed information. In addition, the therapist is learning how the family handles and reacts to anxiety. The more information a therapist gains, the easier it becomes to identify the emotional process that exists within the family. The accumulation of information helps to define each family member's position. The following emphasizes the importance of supplied information:
Conflict management for many people focuses on the outcome—a solution that all the parties in a dispute can adopt... as a conflict unfolds and as the parties, their interests, and their interpretations of what is happening change.... The steps a party takes as a conflict develops and how it interprets the motives of others are directly related to its willingness to accept whatever outcome is reached. In other words, the viability of any conflict outcome is directly related to how it is achieved. Success and failure, from this perspective, are related to the process of conflict management as much as to any specific formulas the parties devise to work out their differences. (Ross 1993, x)

When a therapist follows a Family Systems process, their success in the accumulation of pertinent information is greatly increased. Following such a process promotes consistency which in turn ensures trust and inspires a family to be honest with their therapist. In addition, this process enables the therapist to systematically evaluate the information shared by all members of the family.
CHAPTER FOUR

THEORY IMPLEMENTATION

Implementers acknowledge the Family Systems Theory for addressing the needs of certain communities, especially those which embrace cultural values founded on the strength of the family. Native American communities traditionally base their existence and ability to survive on the strength and unity of the family. Their culture provides an example of a community that, by tradition, enforces the strength of the family. Native American families acknowledge that each member has a role to play and that each member has an obligation to the family unit. All kinship, duties, obligations and privileges are reciprocal. There is an obligation to give and an expectation to receive (Hirschfielder 1995). The concept of individualism is not an option nor is it understood. A family consists of one's immediate biological family members and all other members of the tribe. An individual who does not act as a tribal member would not survive without the support of his tribe or his family. Native Americans, therefore, had a battle with the concept of individualism. It was not possible to assimilate into industrial America and maintain their cultural identity. There was a constant struggle between the American agenda of individualism and the cultural and spiritual desires of Native Americans.
A social problem within the Native American community is alcoholism. Their tradition compels Native Americans to react by taking care of the family member that is plagued by alcoholism. Rehabilitation facilities are a final option in the Native American community. Their familial obligation incites family members to help the alcoholic family member before seeking help from outsiders (Hirschfielder 1995). However, offering this type of support is becoming increasingly difficult. Our present culture consists of single parents and broken families, which clashes against the foundation of Native American culture, the strength of one's family. Native American communities are fading and they are struggling to find a new identity.

Historically, certain cultures more than others regard the family as an emotional unit and by tradition acknowledge each individual member as part of the unit rather than an autonomous entity. Native American culture incorporates Dr. Bowen's Family Systems Theory. Family Systems Theory has even been implemented into certain public family health programs.

In Seattle, Washington, the Ina Maka Foundation, a public service that supports and provides family health, implements Bowen's Family Systems Theory because it addresses cultural values of Native Americans who are a large part of the community. The Ina Maka Foundation acknowledges the detriment of autonomy as
does Bowen's theory. The Foundation holds the philosophy that for a family to function, dysfunction and its consequences need to be identified and addressed. Their intervention techniques are based on the Family Systems Theory. The Foundation's goal is to prevent the break up of at-risk families. The Foundation implements a curriculum which they call "The Parenting Journey". This curriculum includes Family Systems Theory and traditional Native American healing practices such as meditation and prayer. The goal of the Foundation is to help parents cease and prevent destructive parenting patterns. In the process of improving relationships with their own children, parents also deal with issues that stem from their own childhood experiences. The Parenting Journey is a family preservation program and its design is to prevent the dissolution of families. The Foundation appeals to Native American Families because it incorporates theories concerning family unity and traditional Native American healing practices. This combination permits families to heal by increasing the bond of the family and getting in touch with their cultural identity (U.S. Department of Justice 1997).
CHAPTER 5

OPPONENTS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

There are, however, critics of Family Systems Theory. Salvador Minuchin, author of "Family Systems Techniques", is an avid opponent of Bowen's techniques. Salvador Minuchin was involved with establishing Family Systems Theory. However, many of his views disagree with Bowen's. Unlike Bowen and the Ina Maka Foundation, Minuchin believes that families have a right to their individuality and their behavior. Bowen disagrees and believes that individuals need to be responsible for how their behavior affects other members of the family. Native American tradition perceives this as detrimental to the unit of the family. Minuchin also believes that there are "geographic territories" within families, which need to be respected. Minuchin feels that there is too much "blame" and responsibility placed on the family and not enough responsibility placed on outside influences. He does not acknowledge emotional anxiety due to familial obligation:

In addition, Minuchin believes the phrase "techniques of family therapy" poses problems. It brings images of people manipulating other people. Specters of brainwashing, or control for the sake of personal power, hover. The moral concern is absolutely justified. Furthermore, technique alone does not ensure effectiveness. If the therapist becomes wedded to technique, remaining a craftsman, his contact with patients will be objective, detached, and clean, but also superficial, manipulative for the sake of personal power, and ultimately not highly effective. (Minuchin 1981,1)
Unlike Bowen, Minuchin argues that a therapist should not take a position of neutrality because it may imply to the patients a lack of empathy. Although it may not be the intention, the therapist may actually begin to lack empathy.

Other critics are concerned with the theory's failure to recognize the influence of power and society on human behavior. Regardless of the amount of "good parenting skills" parents may possess, the Family Systems Theory fails to acknowledge that there are other factors in a person's development other than the immediate family. In addition, some critics worry that the focus on the victim's roles in the dysfunctional relationship may be abused or overemphasized, thus relieving the victim of responsibility. We see this occurring in today's common defense tactics for criminals. Defense attorneys place emphasis on the criminal's abused childhood, thus inciting pity from jurors. In the process, the criminal becomes the victim, thus somewhat relieved of responsibility of their actions by the leniency of the verdict. Whether it is acknowledged or not, their defense is supported by Dr. Bowen's theory and his explanation of a poorly differentiated individual (the rebel), critics maintain.

Although there are critics of the Family Systems Theory, Dr. Murray Bowen is one of the first to devote an entire process to Family Health and Development. It is my belief that a theory created specifically for families is far more successful than methods applied in traditional therapy which do not take into account family
dynamics. The success of Bowen's systems theory is based on "defining new variables that are believed to have a significant impact on the onset and course of all clinical conditions." (Kerr and Bowen 1988, ix) It is generally agreed that:

Whenever a clinician begins to treat a clinical problem, his first step must always be to assess the nature of that problem. While such a statement provokes little disagreement among clinicians, it is amazing just how many treatment failures result from an inadequate assessment of the important variables influencing a given clinical situation. (Kerr and Bowen 1988, 293)

Prior to Bowen's Systems Theory, the concept of individualism and its affect on intra-family dynamics was not adequately addressed as a valid social influence. Dr. Murray Bowen and his Family Systems Theory have addressed the issues of individualism in America and its impact on conflict resolution. Dr. Bowen has acknowledged that individualism as an American value has fostered a continual de-escalation of family unity and values. If society continues to accept individualism as evidence of achievement of the American dream, then there will continue to be negative consequences. Marc Howard Ross, author of The Management of Conflict, Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective explains the impact of culture on conflict:

Culture affects conflict behavior, and conflict can also be understood as cultural behavior. All conflict occurs in a cultural context which shapes its course in important ways. (Ross 1993, 21)
When we are born, Americans begin the journey towards individualism. The journey's goal is to obtain independence and leave home. Individualization is attained when we are no longer dependent upon our parents:

Clearly, the meaning of one's life for most Americans is to become one's own person, almost to give birth to oneself. Much of this process, as we have seen, is negative. It involves breaking free from family, community, and inherited ideas. Our culture does not give us much guidance as to how to fill the contours of this autonomous, self-responsible self…. (Bellah 1996, 82)

As Robert Bellah concluded, Americans celebrate independence as a completion of a goal. However, we fail to acknowledge that even though we have physically removed ourselves from our parent's homes, we have not removed ourselves from relationships with our parents. Total human independence is a contradiction in terms. It implies one is one's own entity. No one is ever fully independent. Total independence is not possible as no man is an island. Bowen's Family Systems Theory recognizes that separation does not end the dynamics of familial roles and the conflict scenarios are replayed in our surroundings. Intra-family dynamics continue regardless of physical location.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory has also acknowledged the affects of immigration on the American psyche. Bowen acknowledges the detriment of the American context of individualism on family dynamics of our mixing bowl society. Bowen's Family Systems Theory is a reaction to a social problem that arose when the American industrial society met new populations and an emerging urban
environment. Social problems arose due to the impact of the Industrial Revolution, and the compulsion for immigrants to identify and assimilate with American culture. Bowen, like Bellah, recognized that the need to create an American identity required a relinquishment of former identities. Immigrants who did not assimilate were considered outsiders and were forced to create quasi communities (Bellah et. al 1996). These quasi communities are still visible in many American cities, such as Chinatown in New York City, a major tourist attraction. The induction of America's period of industrialism necessitated change to survive in the economic market. Change did not exclude members of quasi communities. The members of these communities, like those of Native Americans, battled between issues surrounding the prevailing industrialism of the culture and their own cultural norms and identities.

Leisure too became more independent. The structure of metropolitan life influenced leisure and family life (Barth 1980). The concept of unity quickly faded and this inevitably affected the family, not only immigrants with cultural ties, but the entire society.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I believe Bowen's Family Systems Theory provides a method to reconstruct the unity of the family, which was lost in the emergence into an industrial society. The American city and the new social attitude:

... generated a novel degree of personal freedom that allowed great numbers of people to live as individuals more fully than before. The chances of building a new life rested primarily on the possibility of responding immediately to the myriad opportunities to better one's lot. (Barth 1980, 16)

Bowen's theory provides our society a method of personal transformation of consciousness. Although personal transformation is a beginning, it does not adequately influence a societal transformation (Bellah et.al 1996). To effectively influence society, the adaptation of a norm is necessary. Bowen's Family Systems Theory provides a frame for this new norm. Adaptation and implementation are necessary for social transformation as history shows. In the 1960's it was necessary to adopt Civil Rights laws to develop and force change in societal thought (Ross 1993).

If we expand our awareness of any issue then we can adopt a method of resolution (Ross 1993):

Culture—a shared, collective product—is particularly important for understanding conflict and conflict management and provides both a repertoire of behaviors and standards of reference to evaluate the actions of others. (Ross 1993, 12)
Awareness also enables us to address a social issue that affects our society and recommends a viable solution.

I believe Dr. Bowen's Family Systems Theory provides therapists with a venue of successful healing to families in conflict. Failure to embrace a theory, which encompasses intra-family dynamics and cultural influence for the benefit of conflict resolution in families, contributes to the breakdown of the family structure. As history reveals, freedom has consequences. Bowen provides a means to overcome some of the consequences as a way to repair American values and reestablish the strength of the family.
REFERENCE LIST


