

TRAINING AND CONSULTATION SEMINAR IN BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY AND ITS APPLICATIONS: COURSE OUTLINE AND READING LIST 2012-2013

The Training Seminar in Bowen Theory is a small training and consultation group for postgraduate professionals in health and human services seeking basic knowledge and expertise with Bowen family systems theory. The seminar is structured to guide and facilitate learning the Bowen theory and how to apply it in practice. The seminar is designed as a one-year program and as a multiyear program for those seeking increasingly higher levels of comprehension and skill.

Over eight sessions a year, the training seminar will address five basic subject areas. They are listed here with subtopics that will receive different emphasis depending on the needs and interests of the individuals in the seminar. The goal in terms of knowledge is to learn to “see and think systems” which means observing the interaction of multiple variables rather particular variables in isolation.

For the most part the topics are not sequential but interweave continuously throughout the meetings. For those in the second year of participation and beyond, the system relating the different processes are reviewed at a more advanced level each succeeding year.

1. Basic assumptions and scientific basis of Bowen family systems theory

- The biological basis of the family emotional system – the family as a natural system
- The family as an emotional unit
- Family and the brain in evolution
- Counterbalancing forces for individuality and togetherness
- Differentiation of self in the emotional system

2. Evaluating the family emotional system

- The family diagram
- History and functioning of nuclear and extended family
- Symptoms and problems of the family emotional system
- Case formulation and therapeutic focus based on family evaluation
- Emotional systems other than the family

3. Stability and change in family systems

- Symptom development, maintenance and resolution
- Anxiety binding mechanisms – Conflict, distance, dominant subordinate relationships, projection of problems to children
- Emotional Cutoff
- Triangles
- Chronic anxiety and emotional reactivity
- Unresolved attachment to the past
- Differentiation and fusion in the family emotional system

4. Basic principles of helping relationships

- Differentiation of self and the clinician/consultant
- The triangle in addressing difference and conflict
- Reducing anxiety
- Teaching about emotional systems
- Neutrality and emotional objectivity
- Coaching the individual towards self regulation in the family
- Operating inside vs. outside the emotional system

Intervention with multiple people

5. **The therapist/consultant's own family**

Self-regulation and containing emotional reactivity
Observing the emotional system
Chronic Anxiety
Triangles
Differentiation of Self

In addition to the five basic topics the following areas will be addressed according to the needs of the seminar participants in their area of professional practice:

- A. Extension of principles of the emotional system and differentiation of self from the family to other systems, e.g. work systems, family business, administrative systems, organizations, congregations, civic groups, corporations, non-profits, cultural, ethnic and social groups among others.
- B. Comparison to other theoretical, therapeutic systems adapted to needs of seminar participants, e.g., Attachment theory, Emotion Focused therapy, Cognitive Behavioral, Interpersonal, Client Centered, Freudian, Group, etc.
- C. Special Topics as adapted to needs and interests of seminar participants and special expertise of visiting faculty. In 2011 – 2012, leadership succession in family business, anger management for court referred domestic violence offenders, and court ordered child custody mediation were specialties of participants that were a focus of learning in addition to the core curriculum. Transition to adulthood and the family system is one specialized topic for 2012 – 2013 and the others will be determined by the specialties of who participates. Systems thinking focuses on general principles of emotional systems that can be applied productively across specialties and enables professional working in different areas to learn from one another.

Consultation and Training Seminar Structure:

The seminar topics are covered through didactic presentations, teaching videos, discussion and consultation and feedback to participants in their efforts to use theory in practice. The didactic morning session is followed by consultation and supervision of participants' efforts to apply theory between meetings. Seminar participants are asked to present something they are working on or are thinking about at each seminar. These presentations are based on the participant's effort to use apply theory in their cases and work systems as well as in their personal efforts towards differentiation of self. The effort to apply theory in one's own family to learn systems thinking is an important in learning the phenomena of the emotional system first hand. The goal of feedback from the leader is to help sharpen and clarify the participants' effort to apply theory to the problem being addressed.

Assignments:

Reports: At the heart of learning is the effort to apply theory then report on the effort for feedback in the seminars. Participants are encouraged to write a brief description of their efforts between meetings for the purpose of clarifying their thinking as much as possible in order to get the most out of presenting their work and receiving feedback.

Reading: There are three basic texts that are suggested:

- Bowen, Murray, Family Therapy In Clinical Practice, Jason Aronson, Inc., New York, 1978
- Bowen, Murray and Kerr, Michael, Family Evaluation: The Role of the Family as an Emotional Unit That Governs Individual Behavior and Development, WW Norton, New York, 1988
- Papero, Daniel, Bowen Family Systems Theory, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 1990

Participants will be introduced to the growing bibliography relevant to Bowen theory in science, research and clinical practice and directed to resources for special topics as relevant to their interests and practices.

Seminar Participants:

Some participants have continued in the seminar over a period of years either continuously or by returning to the seminar from time to time. Thus the composition of the group usually involves new and advanced participants, which has worked well and has been stimulating for the learning for both advanced and new students of Bowen theory.

Optional individual coaching:

For serious students of Bowen theory individual coaching is usually important at some point. Private practice coaching sessions, for a reduced fee, in person or by phone are offered as an option those who wish individual consultation while enrolled in the seminar. Referrals are also available to a national network of clinicians expert in coaching and therapy based on Bowen theory with various specialized experience.

Leader and Visiting Faculty

Laura Havstad, PhD, director of Programs in Bowen Theory and a clinical psychologist in private practice in Sebastopol, California maintains responsibility for the clinical consultation and training seminar in her clinical practice. Dr. Havstad, who has taught this seminar for over 20 years, was trained under Murray Bowen. She is a consulting editor for the journal *Family Systems*, and leads Programs in Bowen Theory as a network program of the Bowen Center in Washington in Washington DC. Visiting faculty participate when the opportunity arises.

Location, Schedule & Cost:

Location: 120 Pleasant Hill Ave. N, second level meeting room, Sebastopol, CA 95472

Schedule 9:30 to 4:30 on the second Friday of the month: September, October, November, January, February, March, May, June

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