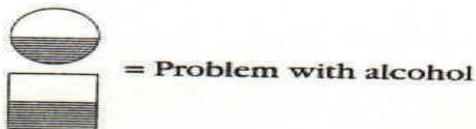
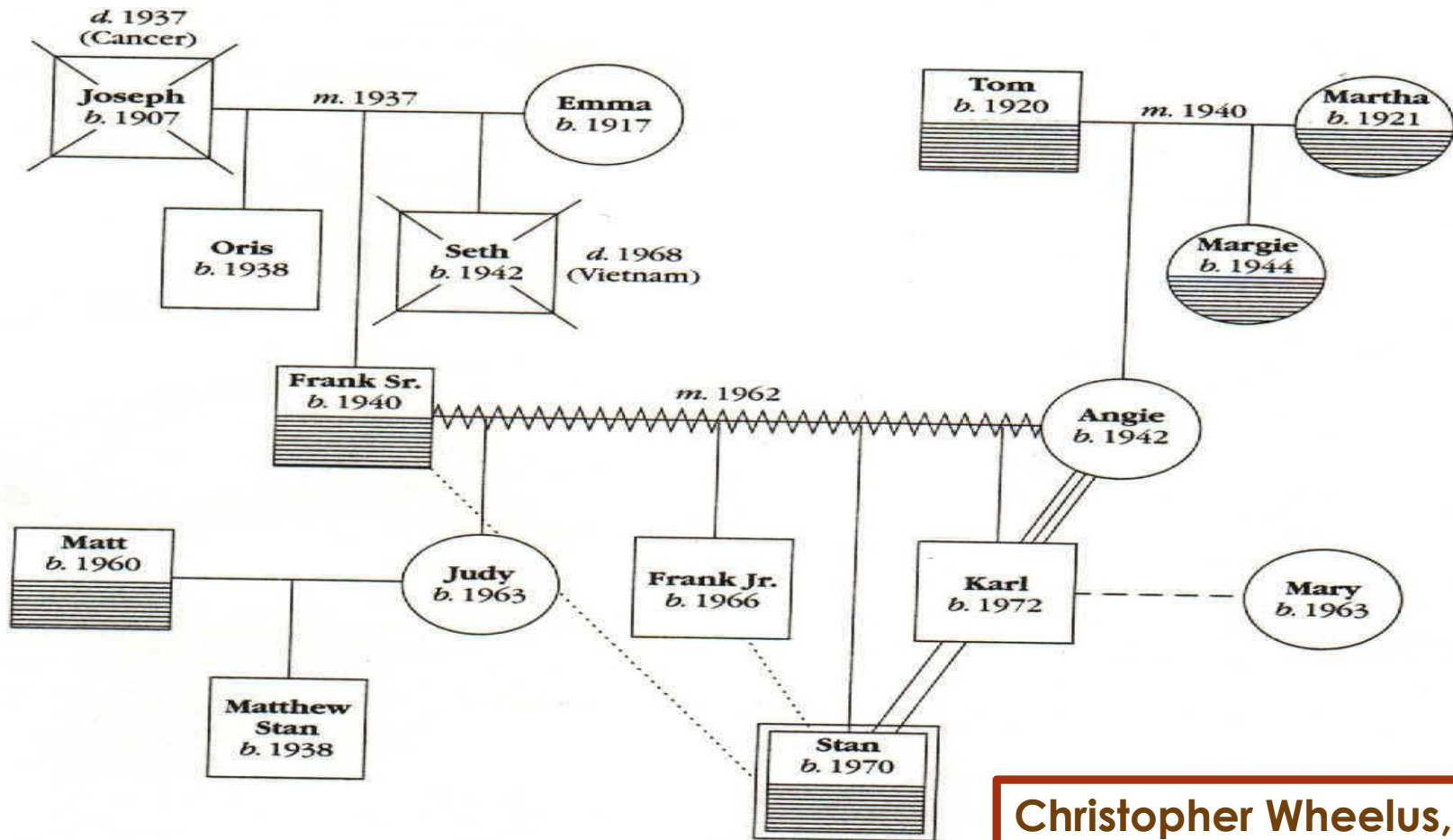


A family therapy for college counseling?

An intro to Bowen's Intergenerational Family Therapy



Christopher Wheelus,

PhD, LMFT, LPC

Shorter University & Richmond Graduate University
for GCCA 2019 Annual Conference



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(Sub-sub Title)

**"You'll eat your _____
and like it!"**

**(Implied) "...and be
happy about it!"**

**(Further Implied) "...that's what
this family does!"**

(Even further implied) "...and you will too!"

LO's

- This session is an attempt to bridge the fields of college counseling and family therapy.

- Participants will...
 - 1. summarize this theory's conceptualization of the presenting problem
 - 2. list two goals of therapy
 - 3. practice at least one technique of Intergenerational Family Therapy

The theory is never far from the theorists... (Yarhouse & Sells, 2008, p. 70)

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Murray Bowen:



Grew up in Waverly, TN (pop. 1000)

Several generations of Bowens

Worshiped at Bowen's chapel

Most lived/died in here.

But, for Murray, this was his training lab.

Left for University of Tennessee undergrad and med school

WWII army surgeon

Became psychiatrist at Menninger Clinic (Kansas)

Researcher at NIMH and Georgetown U. (schizophrenia studies)

Anxiety remains the most frequent present problem in college counseling centers (AUCCCD, 2017).

Intergenerational Family Therapy (Bowenian) is a counseling approach developed with *Anxiety* in focus.

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As a systems theory approach...

...it considers **individuals**
and *Anxiety*
in the
contexts of
family and society.

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As a systems theory approach...

...change in an **individual** client can effect change in the extended family system.

Examples

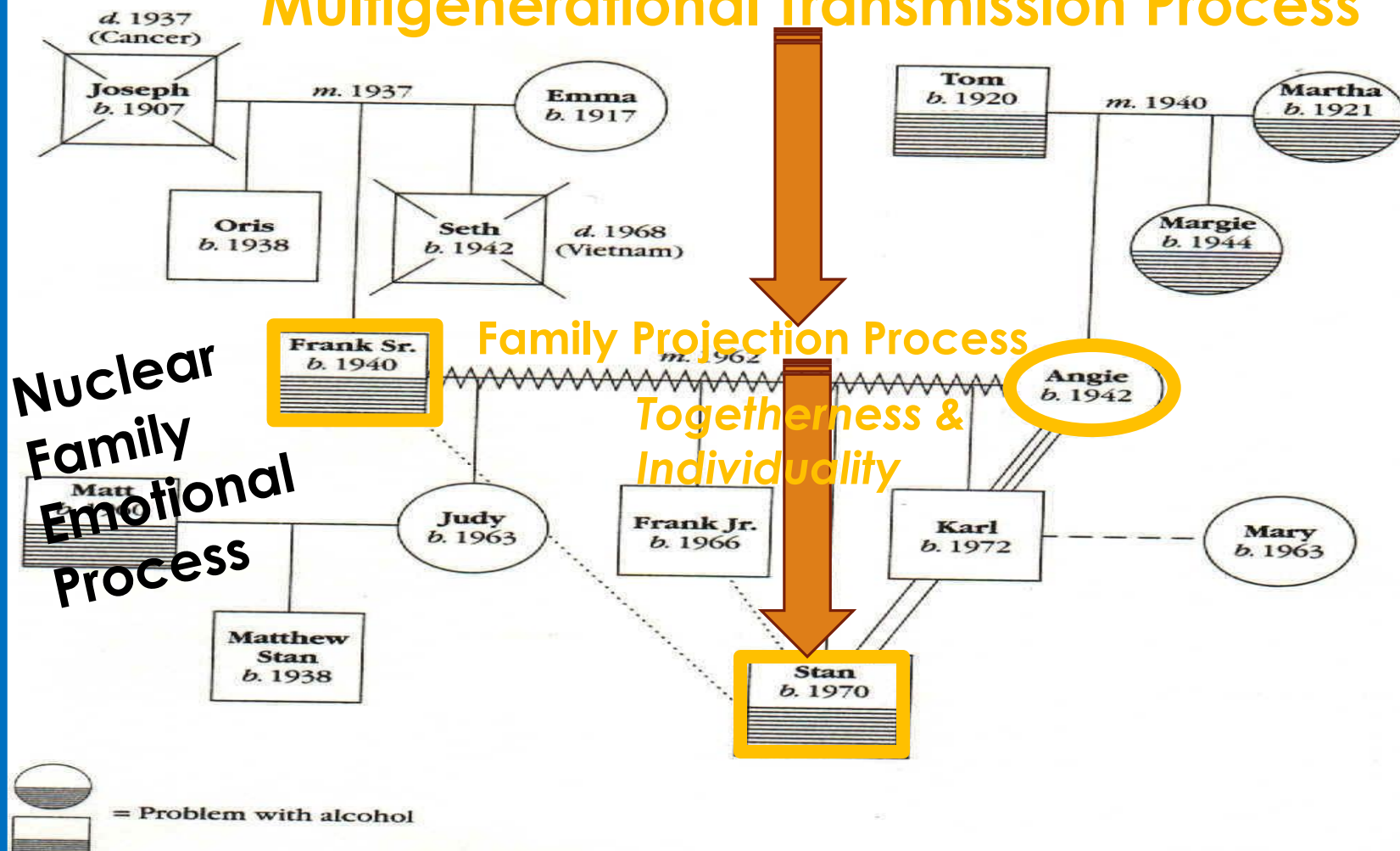
- ▶ How often do you hear your students mention family as a part of their anxiety?
- ▶ My examples -
 - ▶ 1. choice of major but family is not supportive
 - ▶ 2. anxiety about M&SF divorcing, anxiety about employment-academic demands
- ▶ **Tell of a case where you've had the "family in the room" with you and the student.**

Theoretical Conceptualization Overview

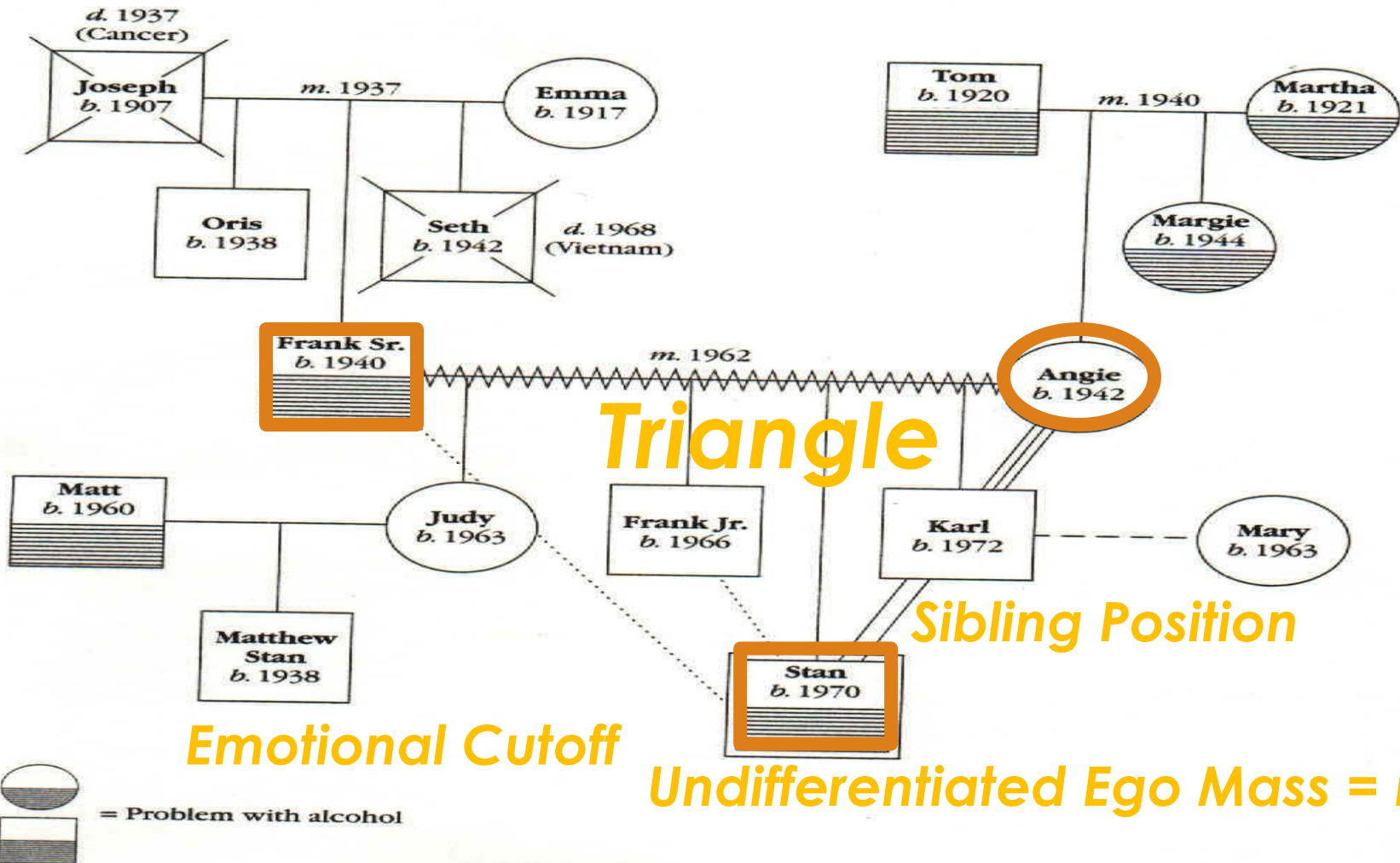
Family as "Emotional Unit"

Societal Emotional Process

Multigenerational Transmission Process



Conceptualization



The Problem = Fused “Undifferentiation”

Anxiety is inherent in relationships.

Anxiety is a highly motivating **force** that directs interpersonal behavior, along with the complementary **forces** of **Togetherness & Individuality**

*Emotional and relational **problems** result from a **family’s** failure to **teach members** how to handle **emotion processes** while maintaining **self-definition (differentiation)***

The Problem = Fused “Undifferentiation”

Fusion = Over-togetherness, blurred self-boundaries

Fusion (over-togetherness) is **characterized** by:

- ❖ anxious attachment
- ❖ emotional reactivity
- ❖ dependency or isolation
- ❖ difficulty with clear interpersonal boundaries
- ❖ difficulty making decisions
- ❖ not allowing different opinions
- ❖ not allowed to voice your differing opinion

Fusion says...

“Because I am this way, you should be too” (Fogarty, 1975, p.85)

“I/we seek certain reactions from you in response to me/us.”

Fusion and Presenting Problems

Fusion sets up a *struggle*...

...intra-personally & inter-personally.

...in direct proportion to the intensity and closeness of the relationship."*

Fusion and Presenting Problems

But, think about human growth/development and family life cycle...

Was there a stage when fusion served a different purpose?

Differentiation takes place through childhood and adolescence, becoming central to young adulthood with**
decisions about... (what?)

Fusion and Presenting Problems

But, now your **symptomatic college student** to you and is **conceptualized** as:

- Not allowed to transition “from dependent child to independent young adult”*
- Having low differentiation (undifferentiated)

Leaving your student with a lot of *Anxiety* and not knowing what to do with it. *

Fusion brings identity foreclosure**

The Problem = “Undifferentiation”

Members attempt to **manage the fusion** and **decrease anxiety** by;

1. **Triangulation** – pull in a 3rd person
2. Create emotional distance through **emotional cutoff**
 - silence, disinterest, depression, isolating, stop contact or interaction
 - by physically leaving families or by staying in physical contact but avoiding sensitive or emotional off can happen issues in dialogue
3. Create **conflict**

Presenting problems are *symptoms* of emotional **fusion**

Emotional fusion ↔ **undifferentiated self**

Treatment Focus = *DIFFERENTIATION*

- = “an individual’s ability to function in an autonomous and self-directed manner **without being controlled** by family members or significant others and **without emotionally cutting off** from these significant relationships”
(Johnson et al., 2014)
- Aware of **my feelings** and **others’ feelings** such that *neither one dictates my behavior.**
- **2 ASPECTS:**
 - **Intrapersonal differentiation** = separation between feelings and thinking
 - **Interpersonal differentiation** = emotional separation between self and others
- **Freedom to choose** to be guided by either...
...**MY feelings** or **MY reason** or a chosen **combination** thereof.*

Characteristics:

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Differentiation vs. Undifferentiation

Differentiation	Undifferentiation
Inner-directed, take "I"-position	Emotional reactivity to external events
Maintain intimate relationships that balance togetherness-individuality with manageable anxiety	Attempts to control each other's thoughts and actions
Not overwhelmed by emotionality at the expense of their intellect	Thoughts over-ridden by emotions
Healthier psychosocial development, identity attainment, well-being	Chronic anxiety, symptomatic distress, depression, physical health
Ability to calm down, shift attention, adopt logical reasoning in stressful events	Higher aggression, dating violence
More resilient & flexible	
Are in good emotional contact with families of origin	Fused or emotionally cutoff / hide

Practice the 4 Components of Differentiation

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SKOWRON AND FRIEDLANDER

Appendix

Differentiation of Self Inventory

These are questions concerning your thoughts and feelings about yourself and relationships with others. Please read each statement carefully and decide how much the statement is *generally true* of you on a 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very*) scale. If you believe that an item does not pertain to you (e.g., you are not currently married or in a committed relationship, or one or both of your parents are deceased), please answer the item according to your best guess about what your thoughts and feelings would be in that situation. Be sure to answer every item and try to be as honest and accurate as possible in your responses.

	Not at all true of me	1	2	3	4	5	6 Very true of me
1. People have remarked that I'm overly emotional.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
2. I have difficulty expressing my feelings to people I care for.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
3. I often feel inhibited around my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
4. I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
5. I'm likely to smooth over or settle conflicts between two people whom I care about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
6. When someone close to me disappoints me, I withdraw from him or her for a time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
7. No matter what happens in my life, I know that I'll never lose my sense of who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
8. I tend to distance myself when people get too close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
9. It has been said (or could be said) of me that I am still very attached to my parent(s).	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
10. I wish that I weren't so emotional.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
11. I usually do not change my behavior simply to please another person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
12. My spouse or partner could not tolerate it if I were to express to him or her my true feelings about some things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
13. Whenever there is a problem in my relationship, I'm anxious to get it settled right away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
14. At times my feelings get the best of me and I have trouble thinking clearly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
15. When I am having an argument with someone, I can separate my thoughts about the issue from my feelings about the person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
16. I'm often uncomfortable when people get too close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
17. It's important for me to keep in touch with my parents regularly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
18. At times, I feel as if I'm riding an emotional roller coaster.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
19. There's no point in getting upset about things I cannot change.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
20. I'm concerned about losing my independence in intimate relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
21. I'm overly sensitive to criticism.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
22. When my spouse or partner is away for too long, I feel like I am missing a part of me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6
23. I'm fairly self-accepting.	1	2	3	4	5	6	6

Emotional Reactivity

1, 6, 10, 14, 18, 21,
26, 30, 34, 38, 40

"I" Position

4, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23,
27, 31, 35, 41, 43

Emotional Cutoff

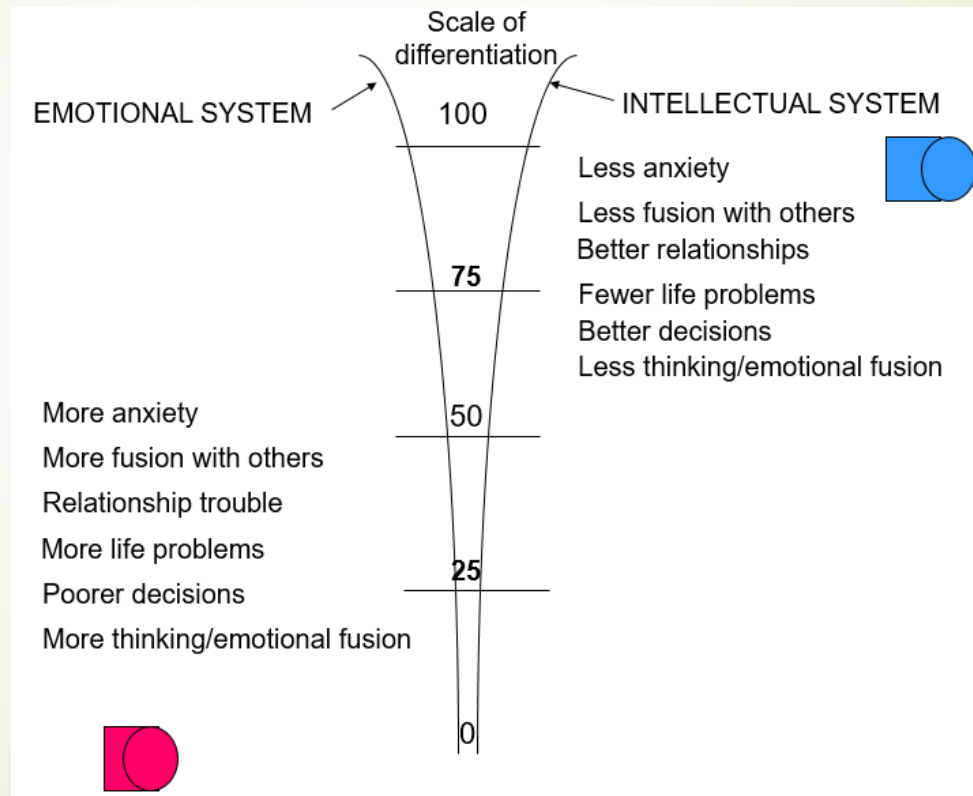
2, 3, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24,
28, 32, 36, 39, 42

Fusion

5, 9, 13, 17, 22, 25,
29, 33, 37

Treatment Goals

Anxiety



Differentiation

Treatment Goals

- Reducing anxiety levels by increasing differentiation & de-triangulating
- Opening currently closed communication
- Increasing self-understanding of each member
- Developing healthier attachments throughout family system

Therapist Stance

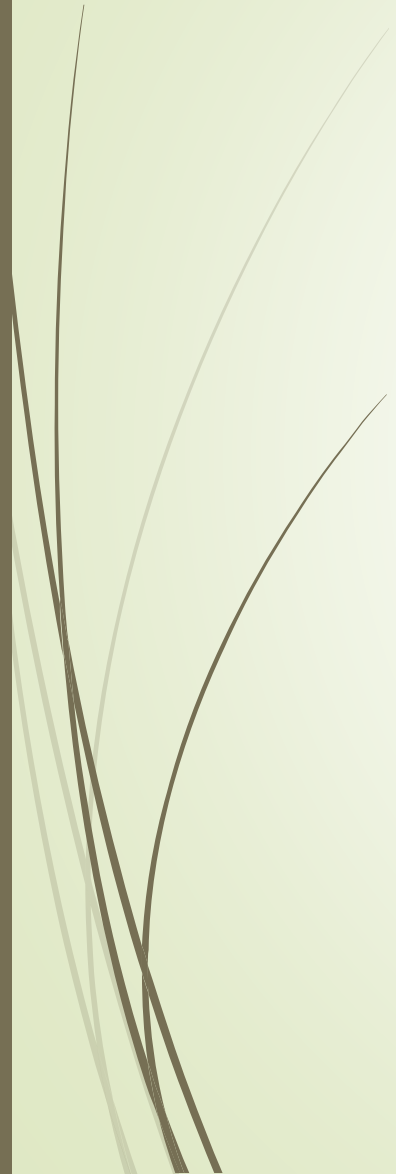
- Maintains a **neutral & objective stance**
- Models **non-anxious presence**
- **Detriangulate by use of self:**
 - Avoid taking sides
 - Avoid making a judgment
 - Avoid speaking for a client

Change

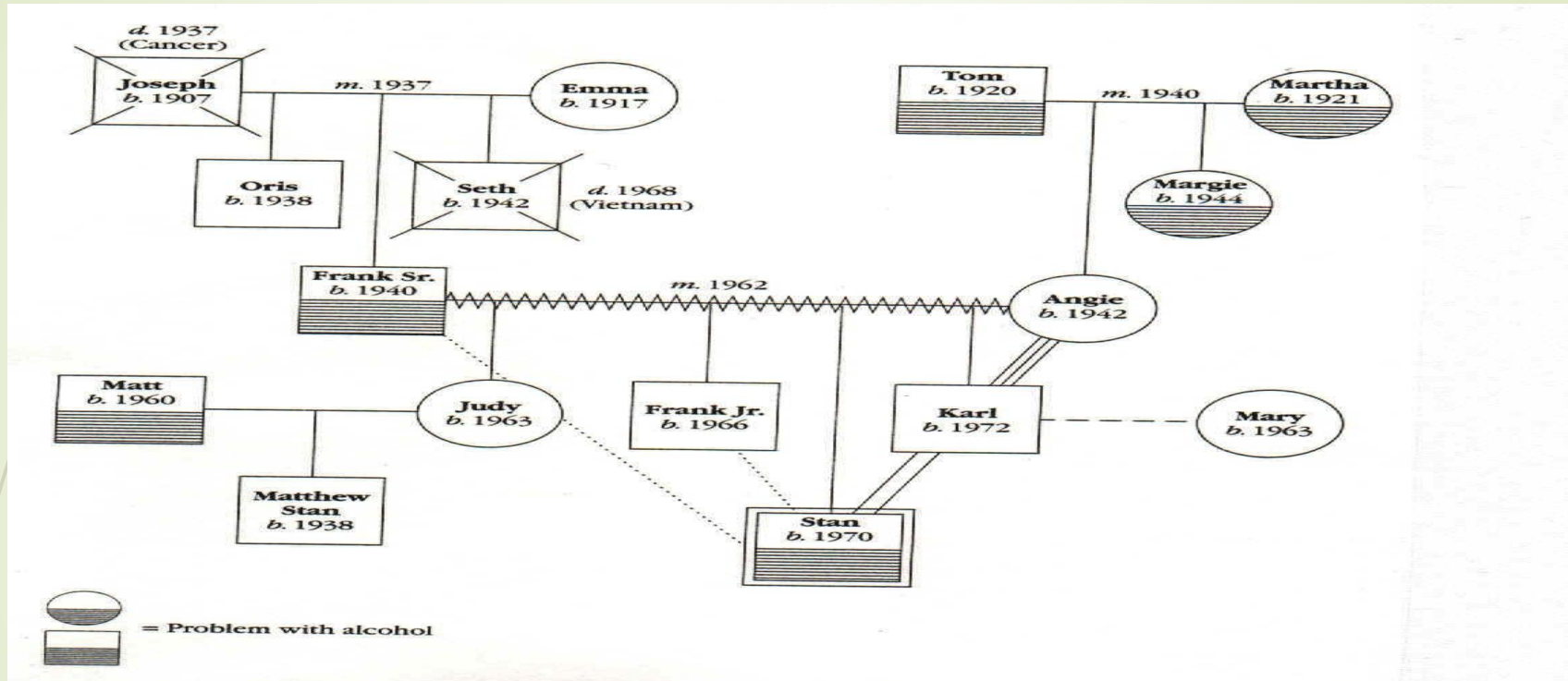
- ***Find an intellectual/emotional balance:*** increasing one's ability to distinguish between thinking & feeling within the self and with others
- **Learning to** use the techniques to direct one's life, solve problems, & manage relationships
- **Understanding & Insight** = vehicle for change

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Does anyone come to mind?



Technique: Genogram



Visual map – 3 generations or more

Common details questions – who, when, where, etc.

Family strengths & resources

Major life events

Dynamics – closeness, cutoff, triangles, conflict, distance, etc.

Techniques

Nonanxious presence of therapist

- *Minimizes emotionality of sessions*

Detriangulating (or the “therapy triangle”)

- *Encouraging personal responsibility*

“Going Home Again”

Emphasize “I-position” (differentiation)

- *Establishing & maintaining person-to-person relationships*

Techniques

Process Questions

- *What about your roommate's criticism upsets you most?*
- *What makes talking about _____ so difficult?*
- *How do you express your anger?*

Helps clients...

think about their struggles

keep anxiety lower

have less emotional reaction in the moment

Think about what's going on in an interpersonal exchange that's emotionally overwhelming

See the dance that occurs in relationships

Coaching on...

- *how to establish person-to-person relationships with family members*
- Recognizing triangles and how to remove self from them
- Remain calm and rational in exchanges

But how is a Family Therapy useful in my individual client session?!

Your college student may be the most differentiated member of that family and is seeking higher differentiation.

If one member changes and refuses to play the usual part in the family system, the system must change.*

*“Real change can be accomplished by one or more family members.”**

Empirical Examples

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- ▶ Peleg, O., Deutch, C., & Dan, O. (2016). *Test anxiety among female college students and its relation to perceived parental academic expectations and differentiation of self*. *Learning & Individual Differences*, 49, 428–436.
- ▶ **Students with higher levels of fusion or cutoff**
 - ▶ reported higher perceived **parental academic expectations**
 - ▶ and higher levels of **test anxiety**
 - ▶ (fusion being a mediating factor).

Empirical Examples

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- ▶ Heiden Rootes, K. M., Jankowski, P. J., & Sandage, S. (2010). **Bowen Family Systems Theory and Spirituality: Exploring the Relationship Between Triangulation and Religious Questing**. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 32(2), 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-009-9101-y>

- ▶ **Students may use religious questing as an attempt to individuate.**

- ▶ Johnson, P., Schamuhn, T. D., Nelson, D. B., & Buboltz, W. C. (2014). **Differentiation Levels of College Students: Effects on Vocational Identity and Career Decision Making**. *Career Development Quarterly*, 62(1), 70–80. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2014.00071.x>

- ▶ **Students with higher levels of emotional reactivity**

- ▶ Had lower levels of voc identity and decisiveness

- ▶ **Students with higher “I” position**

- ▶ Had higher levels of vocational identity and healthier career development

Revisit your student example from the beginning of this session.

With Bowenian therapy in mind.

Closing Thought...

“When anxiety increases, one has to decide whether to give in and retreat or carry on in spite of it.

Anxiety does not harm people. It only makes them uncomfortable. It can cause you to shake, to lose sleep, or become confused, or develop physical symptoms, but **it will not kill you and it will subside.**

People can even grow and become more mature by having to face and deal with anxiety situations.”

- Bowen, 1961, p. 56