



HOW TO

Bowen Family Systems

Developed by American psychiatrist Murray Bowen, Bowen family systems theory is “a theory of human behaviour that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit (The Bowen Centre for the study of the family, 2018)”. The theory holds fast to eight concepts to help people get a better understanding of its psychological model, one of which is termed ‘Differentiation of Self’. Differentiation of Self is partly explained here:

“Families and other social groups tremendously affect how people think, feel, and act, but individuals vary in their susceptibility to a ‘groupthink’ and groups vary in the amount of pressure they exert for conformity. These differences between individuals and between groups reflect differences in people’s levels of differentiation of self. The less developed a person’s ‘self’, the more impact others have on his functioning and the more he tries to control, actively or passively, the functioning of others. (The Bowen Centre for the study of the Family, 2018)”

Bowen theory goes on to describe someone with a poorly differentiated “self” as someone who has an excessive dependence on the approval and acceptance of others, so much so that this person promptly changes his thinking, expression and behaviours to please other people, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, he demands other people think, express and behave in such a way as to conform to his expectations (The Bowen Centre for the study of the Family, 2018).