**The Bowens Family Systems Theory**

[Name of Writer]

[Name of Institution]

The Bowens Family Systems Theory brought an inventive insight into the sentimental framework of a family by describing it as an emotional unit. This theory was brought forward by psychiatrist Dr Murray Bowen. The theory claims that the family, as a unit, is codependent emotionally. Even though different families have varying degrees of emotional dependence on each other, it is still existent in all family units. Family members essentially separate the self when they make personal decisions but are in an emotional fusion when the codependence defines their choices. Fusion hence means a dysfunctional family and the level of individuality ascertains the differentiation of self that is needed. (Haefner, 2014)

This theory is monumental in establishing several rules that pioneered in research and practice around the field of family therapy. Over time, the BFST has evolved to include additional parameters and factors like gender, race, ethnicities, sexual orientation and social class. Similar primary rules, however, still apply. (Erdem, 2018) It is generally understood across the spectrum of clinical practice involving mental health that the emotional dysfunction in a patient has roots in their family dynamics. Therefore, collecting family history is a mandatory prerequisite before a diagnosis can be made. Experts agree with the theory in defining that the emotional dilemma in a person originates from the struggle in balancing individuality and togetherness with respect to their family. The emotional codependence exists so family members can lend each other help and support. However, when the relationship gets strained or triangulated and anxiety becomes a factor; it inevitably leads to anxiety and stress in all the emotionally codependent family members. Therefore, the driving force that ensures a constant supply of protection and assistance becomes a lasso that relays one member’s anxiety and depression on to other members of the family. Research and practice apply these rules when observing, examining, diagnosing or treating families undergoing therapy.

Dr Murray Bowen formulated his theory by focusing on systems thinking. He interrelated the evolutionary growth of humans with the way their clinical problems or disorders might manifest. His ideas asserted that humans essentially do every basic thing that other life forms do. However, the constant progression of the human relationships is governed by emotional attachments. Language, a thinking brain and complex social structures all point toward complicated sentimental connections. Moreover, out of all these relationships that are tightly intertwined with emotions, family stumps all. The relationship someone has with their family often decides upon future clinical issues that might affect said person’s mental health. Dr Bowen himself worked extensively on patients with family histories of mental disorders. He incorporated his own personal experience with his family in his work and encouraged his students to do the same. Bowenian therapy still functions on the concept that the anxiety within a familial relationship has to diffuse somewhere and that decides whether the members develop chronic anxiety. (Brown, 1999) The BFST therefore establishes the stability or dysfunction in the family as the source of anxiety and mental disorders in a patient. Most of its principles are still unchanged in practice.

Even though most angles of the BFST have been agreed upon and still used in clinical practice, there is ample room for discussion. How does the Bowenian Theory accommodate feminist issues pertaining to mental health when gender plays a role? What happens when chronic anxiety in a person cannot be traced back to their familial relationships? Why must the initial premise for a clinical diagnosis depend on collecting the family history of a patient? How can race and social class play a role in a person’s anxiety, unrelated to their family history?

# References

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