

FAMILY SYSTEMS CUTOFF



Resources: Murray Bowen, Roberta Gilbert, Daniel Papero and John Millikin

COVENANT

- Confidentiality
 - What is said here, stays here. What is learned here, leaves here
- Mutual Respect
- Grace
- Listening to Others
- Safety
- Encouragement
- Space for internal and external processing

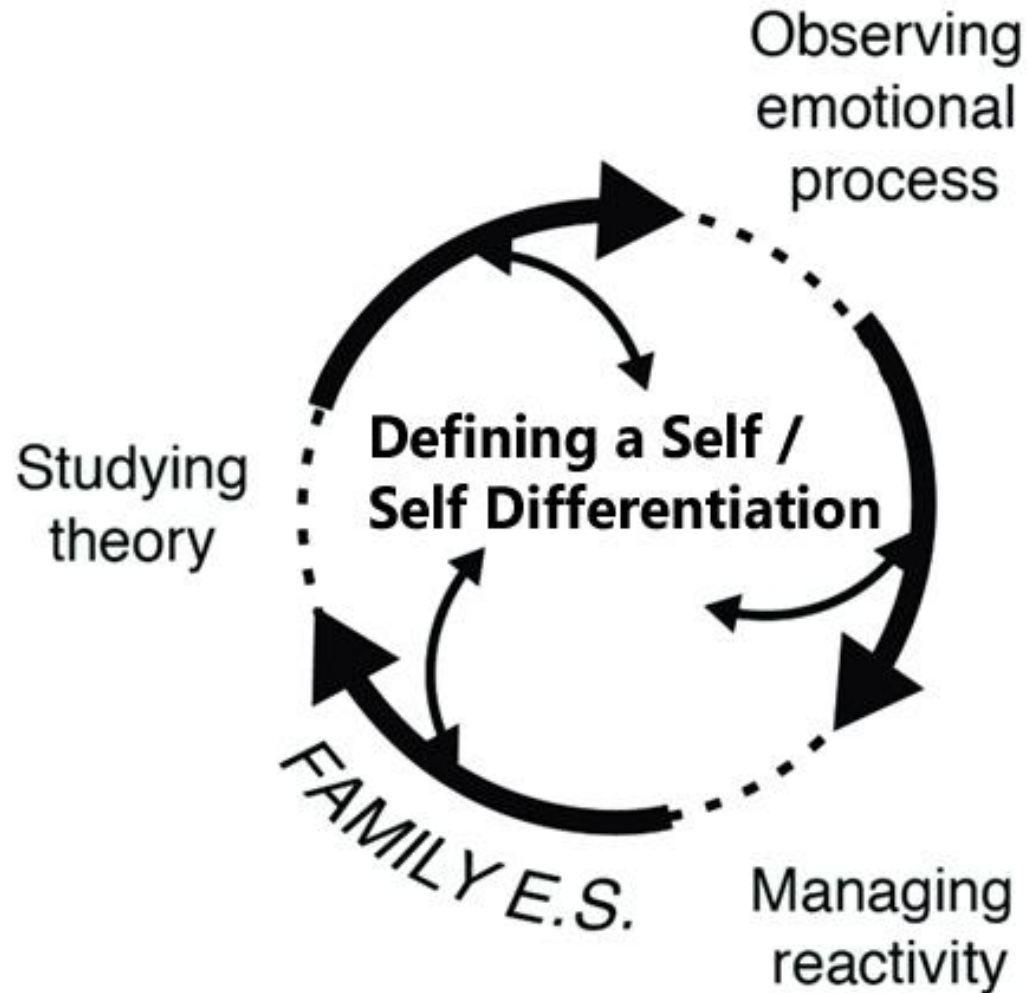
BOWEN'S 8 CONCEPTS

- Differentiation of Self
- Triangles
- Nuclear Family Emotional Process
- Family Projection Process
- Multigenerational Transmission Process
- Sibling Position
- **Emotional Cutoff**
- Societal Emotional Process (Societal Regression)



FAMILY EMOTIONAL SYSTEM

Image adapted from:
Helen Reynolds
Research Gate



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER TODAY...

- How do you manage your emotional reactivity?
- How did your family of origin manage emotional reactivity?
- How did past generations manage emotional reactivity?

SELF-REFLECTION...

- How did your family of origin manage emotional reactivity?
 - What did you witness growing up?
 - How did that shape your reactivity or responses?



BOWEN QUOTES DEFINING CUTOFF

All in context of the family as an emotional unit

“The concept deals with the way people separate themselves from the past in order to start their lives in the present generation.”

“the process of separation, isolation, withdrawal, running away or denying the importance of the parental family”

“The principal manifestation of the emotional cutoff is *denial of the intensity of the unresolved emotional attachment to parents*, acting and pretending to be more independent than one is, and emotional distance achieved either through internal mechanisms or physical distance”

DISTANCE VS. CUTOFF

DISTANCE

- Usually describes the *nuclear family* emotional process

CUT OFF

- Usually describes how it *plays out in generations*
- Is not conflict between two people but an expression of high anxiety in the family system and patterns of managing anxiety across generations
- Cutoff will actually have the effect of *increasing* emotional intensities

CUTOFF IS NEITHER GOOD OR BAD...

It is the expression of:

- Level of differentiation
- Level of anxiety
- Emotional patterns of the family



BOWEN'S THOUGHTS ON VALUE OF CONTACT

“The more a nuclear family maintains some kind of viable emotional contact with the past generations, the more orderly and asymptomatic the life process in both generations.”

(the more we stay connected, the less symptomatic)

“The degree of unresolved attachment to the parents is equivalent to the degree of undifferentiation that must somehow be handled in the person's own life and in future generations.”

(direct correlation between not being a self and not attending to unresolved tension or anxiety)

**LOWER
CAPACITY/FUNCTIONING**

EMOTIONAL FAMILY PATTERNS

**HIGHER
CAPACITY/ FUNCTIONING**

High anxiety/unmanaged

Level of anxiety

Low anxiety/well-regulated



Low Differentiation

Level of Differentiation

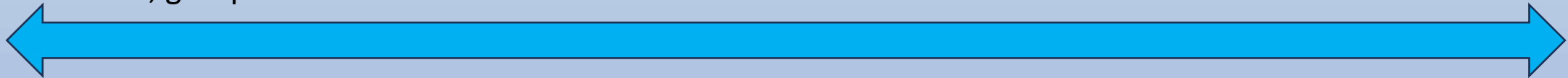
High Differentiation



High over-involvement, emotional dependence, sensitivities -
Inflexible, group think

Fusion/Stuck Togetherness

Low Fusion
Flexible,
independent think



Cut off- avoidance, withdrawal,
denial emotional/physical
distance

**Connectedness
(contact)**

Broad contact, open relationships –
extended and nuclear family is important,
meaningful one-to-one relationships,
absence of criticism, judgment and telling



Adapted from Daniel Papero

WHAT HAPPENS AS A RESULT?

CONNECTEDNESS-CONTACT

Low

High

- High levels of over-involvement
- High levels of emotional dependence
- High levels of agreement or low levels of differences – getting along
- Emotional distance is more likely to manifest in depression, alcoholism and physical dysfunction

- Reduces isolation, chronic anxiety
- Provides practice in being self-regulated, responsible and a defined self while in contact with the family emotional system
- Provides support – help with children, moving, finding work etc.
- Promotes knowledge about the family emotional system and patterns of reactivity

HOW IT PLAYS OUT ON A CONTINUUM



- Isolation
- Withdrawal
- Blame
- Denying the importance of parents
- Combination of emotional distance and physical distance
- Devaluing or pathologizing family member(s) as “narcissistic”, “the sick one”, “toxic” etc.

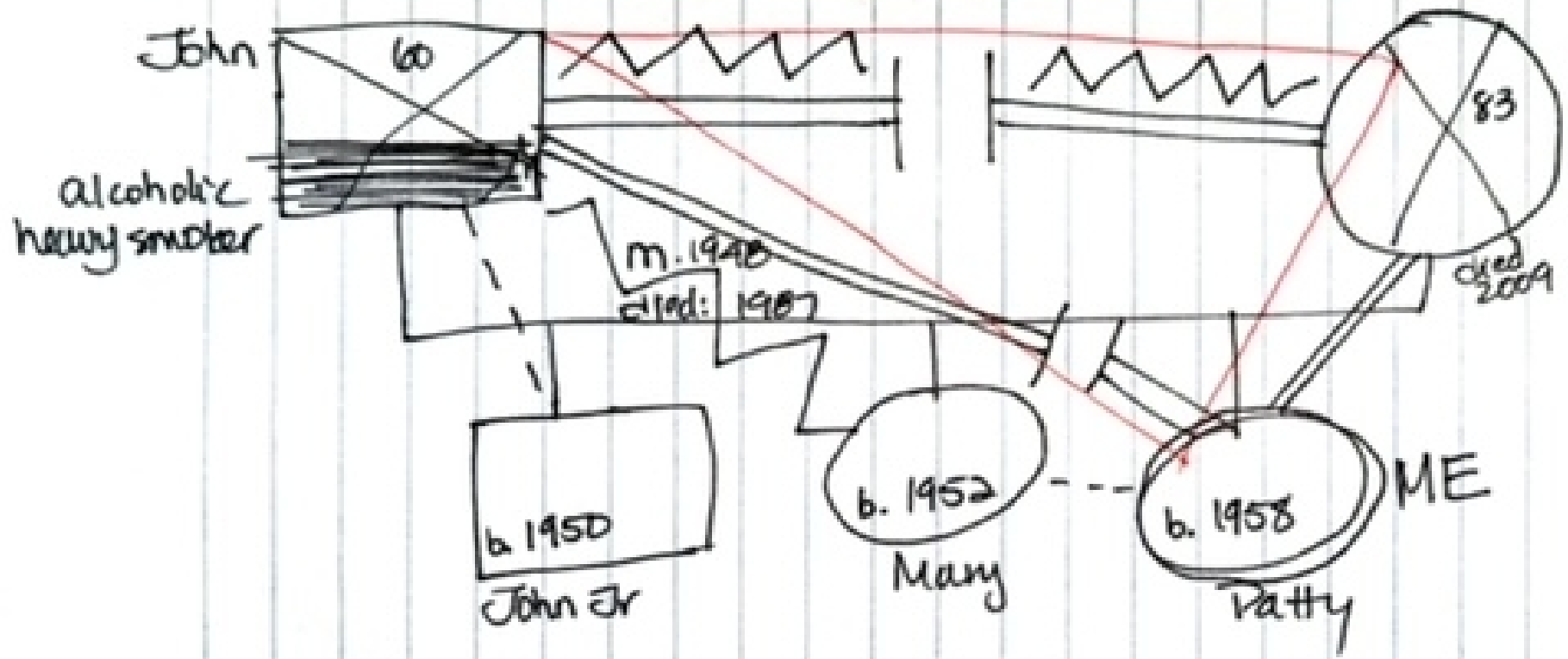
- Contact is meaningful – worthwhile and important
- Open relationships with extended and nuclear family
- Absence of criticism, judgment and telling
- Recognition and active management of emotional tension

Self-Reflection- Examining cutoff in our families...

- Where are distance/cutoff in your family?
- What anxieties/nodal events were present at the time?
- Where can you trace cutoffs in past generations?



BREAK

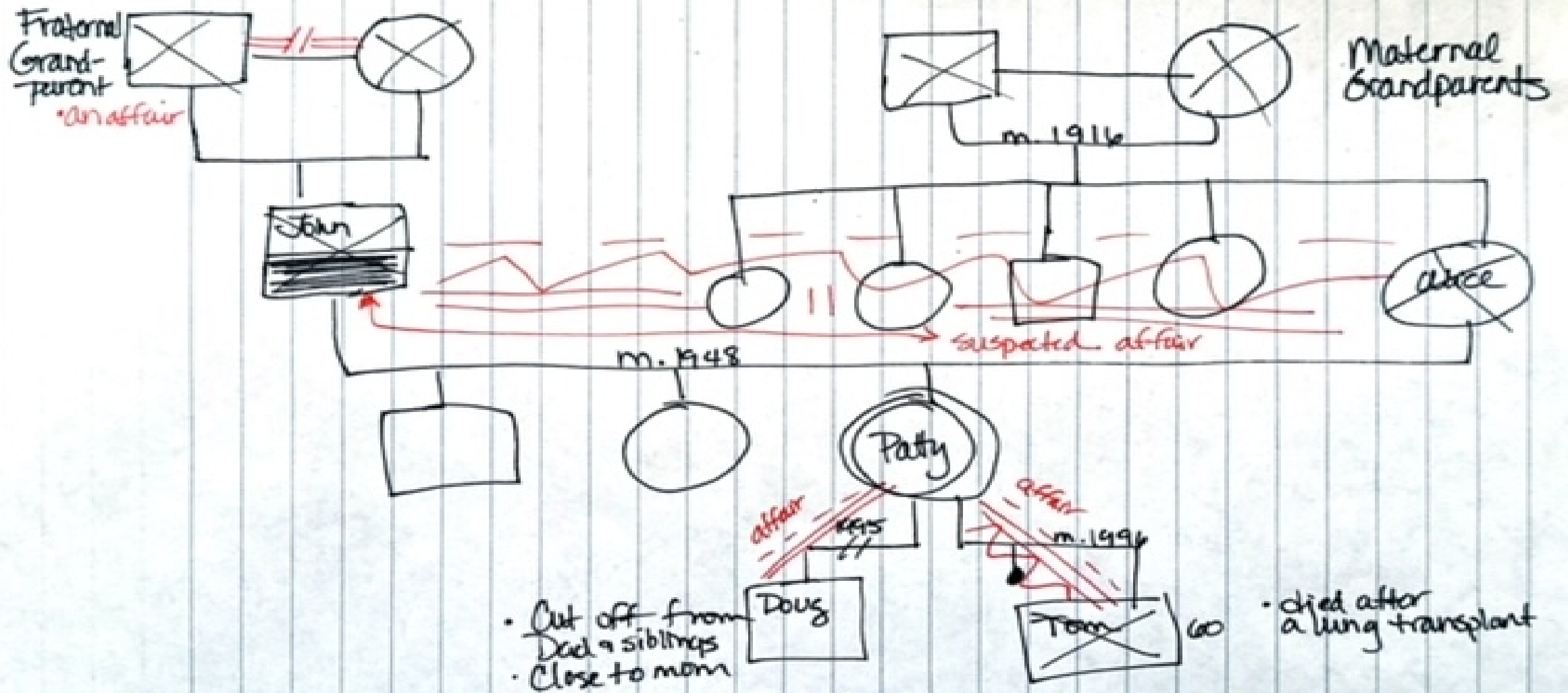


Nodal events

- illnesses
- ulcers
 - vascular problems
 - diabetic

Nuclear Family

Extended Family



Breakout groups

- Introduce self
- Where on the continuum is cutoff present in your family system? In past generations?
- What makes sense about cutoff or distancing?
- What is puzzling about cutoff or distancing?



HOW DO WE BRIDGE THE GAP?



SELF-DIFFERENTIATION – Engaging serious challenges head-on...

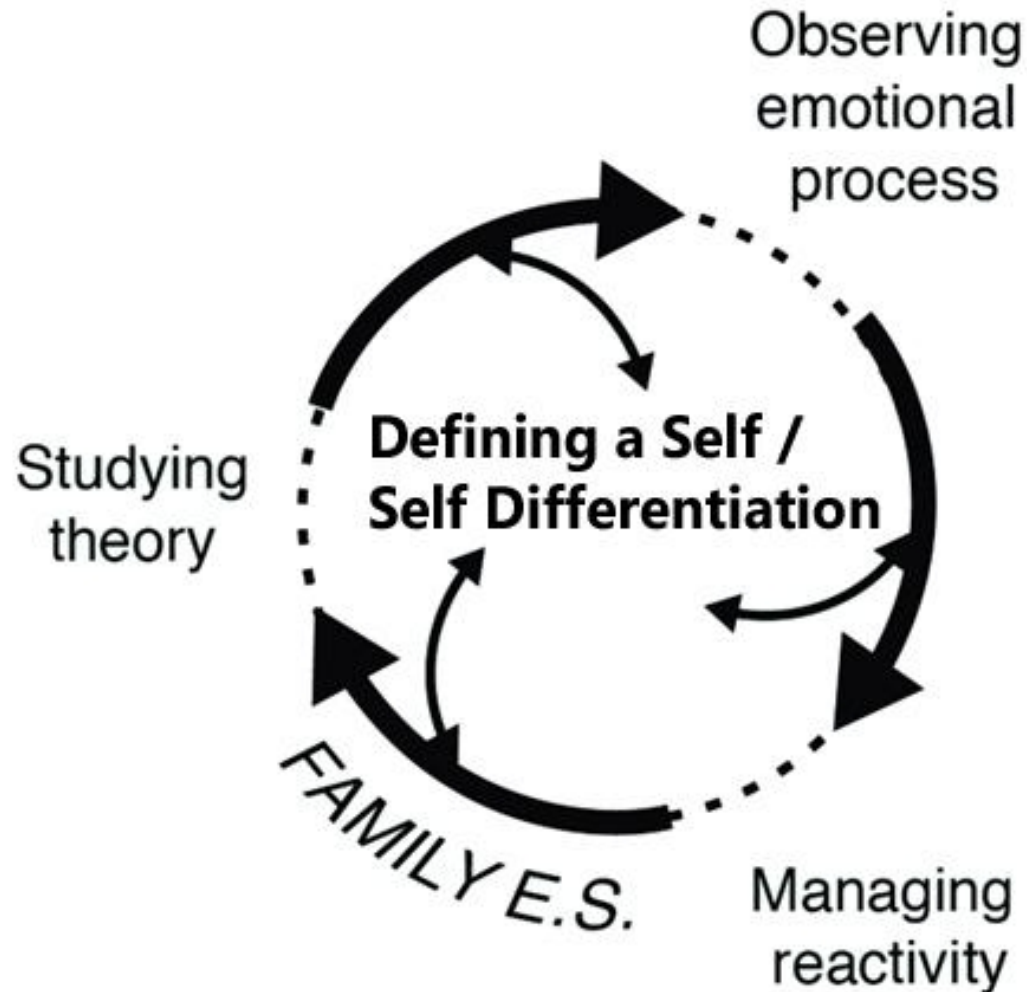
- Acknowledging the cutoff
- Deciding to attempt to bridge the cutoff
- Managing your ambivalence
- Thinking and deciding how to begin – who, where, when and how
- Distinguish between thoughts and emotions
- Distinguish between self and others

“Know thyself, know thy family”



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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER TODAY...

- How do you manage your emotional reactivity?
- How did your family of origin manage emotional reactivity?
- How did past generations manage emotional reactivity?
- What new learnings occurred?

Bowen quote, the day before he died...

“You have inherited a lifetime of tribulation. Everybody has inherited it. Take it over. Make the most of it and when you have decided you know the right way, do the best you can with it.”

1990



TAKE AWAYS...

- Spend 3 or 4 minutes reflecting on what you learned today
- Learnings shared with the large group