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Multigenerational Relationships and Nuclear Family Functioning

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Bowen theory hypothesizes that the functioning of families is enhanced with viable emotional contact between its multigenerational members. This study generally supported the hypothesis. Open relationships with the multigenerational family, contact with cousins, and knowledge of multigenerational family facts were associated with less symptomatic nuclear family functioning. The participants' openness with their parents also correlated with their openness with the multigenerational family.

MULTIGENERATIONAL INVOLVEMENT AND NUCLEAR FAMILY FUNCTIONING

“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.” (Bowen 1978, p. 383). All families have varying levels of difficulty or success in maintaining viable emotional contact between the generations (Bowen & Kerr, 1988; Papero, 1990). This is related in part to the degree of fusion and the resulting emotional sensitivity between parents and their offspring. The fusion between the generations is expressed in heightened reactivity to each other, in lack of emotional self-regulation and predominance of relationship-regulation, and in unclear, absent, immature, or rigid principles and life goals. As fusion and the perception of threat increase, the intergenerational relationships are more susceptible to increased tension. Bowen theory posits that this discomfort in intergenerational relationships is often handled through varying levels of distance or emotional cutoff.

The distance may be interpersonal or intrapersonal. Interpersonal distancing may be expressed behaviorally in geographic distance, lack of

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