Art-Based Research as a Means to
A Theoretical Integration of Bowen Family System Theory

A Master’s Project

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Abstract

This project investigates whether Bowen Family Systems Theory can be supported within an art therapy context. The study explored an option for integration of family art therapy and Bowen Family Systems Theory through the use of art-based research. The goal was to demonstrate the efficacy of integrated practice methods through the review of the work of Alfred Adler and Murray Bowen as well as contributors to the field of art therapy. An argument was made for the use of art-based research methods in family art therapy research and included a review of associated literature as well as research on transgenerational aspects of family system. The resulting synthesis was developed through the process of art inquiry in congruence with Bowen’s methods of self-inquiry into the practitioner’s family system. Any references to individuals, including the author, are as impersonal members of a system, and were made in service of Bowenian methods.

Key words: Adler, art-based research, art therapy, Bowen, multigenerational transmission process, generational art therapy
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# Table of Contents

Art-Based Research as a Means to Theoretical Integration ........................................ 6
Definition of Terms ........................................................................................................ 9
The Theory Descriptions and How They Relate to One Another ................................. 11
   A Brief Description of the Eight Concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory ......... 13
      Triangles ................................................................................................................ 13
      Differentiation of self ......................................................................................... 13
      Nuclear family emotional system ..................................................................... 14
      Family projection process ................................................................................. 14
      Multigenerational transmission process ......................................................... 14
      Emotional cutoff ............................................................................................... 15
      Sibling position ................................................................................................. 15
      Societal emotional process .............................................................................. 15
Therapies: Theories in Use ......................................................................................... 16
   Adlerian Family Therapy ....................................................................................... 16
   Bowen Family Therapy ......................................................................................... 16
   Family Art Therapy ............................................................................................... 18
   Adlerian Family Art Therapy ............................................................................... 20
   Bowen Family Therapy Concepts Adapted to Art Therapy ................................. 20
Psychotherapeutic Training and Heuristic Research ................................................... 21
   Bowen’s “Anonymous Paper” as a Research Model for Art-Based Inquiry .......... 21
Art-Based Research ..................................................................................................... 22
Integration in Practice: Art Inquiry Relating to Family Systems Therapy With Art
Adaptations of Bowen’s Concepts ............................................................................ 23
   Relating to Bowen’s Concepts Via Art-Inquiry .................................................. 24
   Image Creation ...................................................................................................... 25
Art-Based Research to Identify Themes of the Thesis .............................................. 27
   Exploring the Family Constellation .................................................................. 27
Created Images ........................................................................................................... 30
   Guiding Concept Images ................................................................................... 32
Theoretical Concept Images ...................................................................................... 33
   Four grandmothers ......................................................................................... 34
   Differentiation of self ...................................................................................... 37
   Emotional cutoff ............................................................................................... 39
   Multigenerational transmission process ......................................................... 42
Work With Previously Created or Preexisting Images ............................................ 43
Reflection on Findings .............................................................................................. 45
Art-Based Research as a Means to Theoretical Integration

The purpose of this project is to investigate the possibility of art therapy through adaptations for Bowen Family Systems Theory concepts through the process of art-based research (McNiff, 1998, McNiff, 2013, Moon, 2002). The result is a theoretical integration of art therapy and Bowen Family Systems Theory that recognizes Adlerian concepts within both orientations. The methodology used included: a literature review of the theories related to the study, including art-based research, and the practical application of art-inquiry as it related to the material identified for the content topics. Due to the nature of these methods of inquiry the data are both subjective and objective, and the outcomes are fundamentally qualitative (Carolan, 2001, Pink, 2003). The inclusive methodology presented is a culmination of the literature review for the project. The multidimensional nature of the inquiry required attention to its multidimensional outcomes with results expressed both visually and literally.

The project began with the question of whether Bowen Family Systems Theory could be supported within an art therapy context, and if so, how? In seeking literary resources where art therapy methods were indicated for traditional family therapy it became evident that the efforts were worthwhile (Bien, 2005; Manicom & Boronska, 2003; Rubin, 1999). A general survey of the history of psychological theory indicated that integrative processes have been a key factor in theoretical development over time (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008).

The next phase of the process came from identifying examples of complementary and integrative method for the theory concepts (Bien, 2005; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008, Riley, 1990, Schaverien, 1999). Art-based research stood out as the optimal
strategy for approaching the problem (Allen, 1995; Malchiodi, 2003). Art inquiry is a highly appropriate method of research when paired with Art Therapy (Pink, Hogan & Bird, 2011). The process is sympathetic to the techniques used in client work and therefore provides the art therapist, as researcher, with a “home field” advantage (Musham, 2001).

Not only do art research methods accommodate multidimensional perspectives (Musham, 2001) art-based research techniques are theoretically similar to the heuristic methods used by Bowen in his personal family history investigation – as indicated in “The Anonymous Paper” (Bowen, 1967).

The skills and tools accessible to art therapists are readily utilized in an art-based research study (Carolan, 2001, McNiff, 2009); encompassing both a heuristic process and a visible means of data collection. Bowen’s lead in the research of his own family history and prescription to his students to do the same (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), points the systems oriented art therapist in the natural direction of a personal family history investigation: one that utilizes art-based research as a means of gathering and processing the relative data and utilizes art responses to synthesize, organize and express results.

Bowen’s “Anonymous Paper” (Bowen, 1967), was the inspiration and foundational of this project. It was the directive from where this immersive family history investigation began, resulting in responses to Bowen family systems theory concepts gleaned from art inquiry. The art was a means of discovery, and method of organizing and processing the data identified in the related literature. The resulting art images served as a form of bracketing or containing the experience but also conveyed new data of their own. The research informed the art expression and in turn the art response
informed the research. The feedback loop resulted in an ongoing dialogue that could potentially be adapted to many, if not all, dimensions of Bowen’s family system concepts. Art-based research also allows for the additional opportunity to create instruments that complement Bowen’s theoretical concepts – the result enhancing both clinical work and further theoretical understanding.

In order to recognize generational trends it was important to identify as much family history as possible – Bowen’s personal research went back 300 years in some lines. This project generated personal research into transgenerational themes within a personal family system. For this project some family lines were easily accessed, going back as far as nine generations, but others were not. Consequently this unevenness was reflected in the overall visual expression of the research. In turn, this prompted inquiry into the less fruitful branches of the family in terms of oral histories and perceived significance among the family system, and in looking at the potential of how and if this impacts sense of self.

Ultimately a whole system is represented in this project, whether data was readily accessible or not. A historical touch point of four great grandmothers to provide a contextual framework was used, as this was the furthest degree of ancestry that retained equivalency. Beyond this generation the histories stopped along some lines and extended extensively in others. Yet within these generational guideposts dimensions of the family were developed using art methods through queries from the research. The heuristic aspects of the research revealed new and surprising outcomes and therefore impacted not only the visual expressions but also pointed to additional systemic questions.
The following is a description of the sources as they were investigated, with heuristic, artistic, and traditional methods along with a summary of the findings.

**Definition of Terms**

**Art Inquiry**

This a process by which an individual utilizes art resources and methods to gain insight into a question or problem. Through the creation of related images or identification of pertinent preexisting images, the researcher can discover new knowledge related to the topic under investigation. This method differs from other research methods in that engages the researcher and as an active and creative instrument, enlivens the process in a way that cannot be achieved otherwise (Allen, 1995, pp.13-20).

**Family Constellation**

This is “Adler’s phrase for the operative influences of the family structure, values, and dynamics” (Watts, 1999). The concept of the family constellation in regard to structure also considers the influence of generation factors but only in regard to the context of the system.

**Family Mapping**

Family mapping is a technique of diagramming a family system that indicates the nature and quality of the person-to-person connections. It is a technique developed by Strategic family therapists (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008).

**Fusion**

A term used by Murray Bowen to describes the result of individuals who have established a relational dynamic where interdependence develops and inhibits the individuation process – social development is consequently stunted (Bowen, 1992).
**Genogram**

Similar to family mapping, serves as a symbolic representation of the family constellation. The genogram shows the generational relationships to the family members and can also incorporate symbols that represent events in the family life cycle stages, such as illness, death and divorce (McGoldrick, Gerson & Petry, 2007).

**Heuristic Research**

As summarized by Shaun McNiff in *Art-Based Research*, (1998), refers to the research process as one by which “knowledge is discovered through inquiry based upon the examination of personal experience” (p. 53). The author goes on to state, “The subjective perspective, once considered inimical to research, becomes a primary feature of heuristic inquiry which encourages the telling of personal stories” (p. 53). In the case of art-inquiry as a method of research, it is likely the most compatible in identifying how to express research results (Carolan, 2001; Moustakas, 1990).

**Labyrinth**

A labyrinth is a circuitous path utilized for contemplation and that is walked in meditation. An option of use for this object is as a symbolic pilgrimage (Atress, 1997).

**Lifestyle**

Lifestyle is a reference to the individual’s manner in which he or she moves through the developmental life cycle. This can be expressed within the family system in addition to how one engages the larger world through what Adler call *the tasks of life* (Carlson, Watts, & Maniaci, 2005).
**Pseudo-self**

The pseudo-self is what Bowen sees as a resulting false sense of self when an individual has made an accommodation in a relationship with their partner. In a union where fusion is present there is a lessening of the “self” that results in the development of a pseudo or false self (Bowen; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

**Psychotherapy integration**

The term is in reference to a synergistic process in which one’s professional orientation allows for multiple and converging theories to be practiced in concert with one another. A theoretical integration functions where areas of convergence are present, allowing for enhanced growth and insights (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008).

**Totem animal**

Nicholas Saunders, in his 1995 book, *Animal Spirit*, defines Native American practice of the totem as “a natural object such as an animal or plant has kinship with a group of people, or an individual, and is an emblem of that group.”

**Undifferentiated ego mass or undifferentiated family ego mass**

A term describing a state of a family system in which there is a high degree of fusion and little differentiation. The individuals arrive at this state through compensatory behaviors involving an adjustment of the amount of self that is required to maintain equilibrium in the relationship (Bowen, 1992)

**The Theory Descriptions and How They Relate to One Another**

The research in this integrative project was inclusive of several theories, with the core theories of Bowen Family Systems Theory, Adlerian Theory and art therapy (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Rubin, 1999; Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987). There are aspects of the
theories that can be attributed to other “mother” theories yet these were the focus of this study (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008)

Both Individual Psychology (Adler) and Psychoanalysis (Freud) consider the individual within the context of early life experiences but Adler in particular took the holism of the individual’s social system into consideration (Carlson et al., 2006). The theorist’s early work examining lifestyle, the family constellation and sibling rivalry are at the roots of family systems theory. Adler’s efforts in identifying the individual, as part of a larger social constellation, developed in the family of origin, was some of the earliest work in identifying social systems (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987). The child guidance centers, begun by Adler and later implemented by Rudolph Dreikurs, where nascent efforts in systems work. Family functioning was observed as a whole and changes were made with and in cooperation by the whole family system (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987).

Many theorists have followed, with more contributors to the field than would be practical to identify in this small space, but efforts within the practices at Palo Alto and later the Mental Research Institute (MRI) brought forth Family Systems Theory (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008).

Murray Bowen, developer of Family Systems Theory is the key theorist of this project. The pioneering efforts of this theory shaped family work in fortifying how clinicians perceive the inner workings of family systems and consequently social systems outside of the nuclear family. Bowen’s concepts were defined and implemented in practice by the theorist and those trained in these methods they later grew to include societal responses to systemic movement. (Kerr & Bowen, 1988)
Bowen’s Family Systems theory considered the individual within the social context of the family system. Behaviors that indicate dysfunction were seen within this context and by association, and therefore, so were their solutions. The family system maintained stability through evolving and adaptive movements that Bowen defined into eight interlocking concepts (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). These concepts are in continual relationship to one another and describe the nature and evolutionary direction of family.

**A Brief Description of the Eight Concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory**

**Triangles.** These were what Bowen called “the ‘molecule’ of the emotional system” (Bowen, 1992). These components are formed through the natural evolution of relationships due to the instability of a two-person relationship. Bowen observed that a two-person relationship became stressed and would identify a third party (triangle in a third individual) to offset stress. All relationships will therefore move toward forming triangles.

Furthermore, triangles will multiply and gain complexity as family systems grow (Bowen, 1992). For example, there is one triangle with three individuals, four separate triangles with four individuals, nine triangles with five individuals and so forth. Additionally, subsystems can form triangles. For instance, a triangle can form between children and the parents where multiple children form one side of a triangle with two parents at the other two vertices or clustered positions and viewpoints can drive the creation of triangles where numerous individuals with two opposing viewpoints will triangle in a third entity to diffuse the tension between them (Bowen, 1992).

**Differentiation of self.** Bowen recognized that inhibiting forces within the family system could stunt developmental growth – what he called *differentiation* (Bowen, 1992).
The individuals within the system affect one another in myriad ways. Individuals can become fused and lose “self” in service of maintaining system functioning – irrespective of the usefulness or efficacy of the interaction. Bowen developed a differential of self-scale to measure the degree of self for the individual. Through this evaluation theorist are able to assess these varying levels and identify patterns within a system as well as growth or regression in subsequent family systems.

**Nuclear family emotional system.** The term describes the systemic functioning among members of a nuclear family system and their varied responses to stressors. Bowen identified four relationship patterns: marital conflict; dysfunction of one spouse; impairment of one or more children; and emotional distance (Kerr, 2003). These avenues of response to stressors are experienced across the whole family system regardless of the identified participants.

**Family projection process.** The parental act of identifying one or more children with issues experienced by one or more of the parents. Kerr defined the sequence to follow the progression as:

1. the parent focuses on a child out of fear that something is wrong with the child; 
2. the parent interprets the child’s behavior as confirming the fear; and 
3. the parent treats the child’s behavior as if something is really wrong with the child.” This “scanning; diagnosing and treating” (Kerr, 2003, pp. 19-25) is a process that begins early on in the child’s life and is something in which both of the parents engage would engage.

**Multigenerational transmission process.** The family system, across its generations, is expressed in terms of its levels of differentiation. The concepts take into consideration the evolutionary development of individuals within the family of origin, their level of differentiation of self and how it impacts choice in partner. Family history research reveals the system’s regressive or progressive evolution, chronicled over time.
Influences on differentiation within the family system were seen as shaping levels of self, and by association, the resulting choices an individual made to seek out in a partner (Bowen, 1992). The concept built from the idea of like attracting like as an underlying cause that drove the evolutorial direction. Differentiation and fusion, and their resulting affects, accumulated over decades of time (Bowen, 1992). Having explored the family system across generations, patterns emerged and informed the possible outcomes of these patterns and how they may effect present day functioning.

**Emotional cutoff.** The action taken when an individual or individuals have affected or been affected by the system to the degree that stress can no longer be managed. The result is the appearance of a disconnection with the family member but in fact they remain very much a part of the family system (Kerr, 2003, pp. 33-36).

**Sibling position.** Like Adler (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956), Bowen () referred to birth order and the influence it has on personality development. Family members’ behaviors are profoundly impacted by position within the family system. While not fixed, sibling position can be a determining factor in how an individual moves within the nuclear family and in how partnerships will develop outside of the nuclear family when eventually forming new family systems.

**Societal emotional process.** According to Bowen (1992), within the nuclear family emotional system the family goes through experiences of regression and progression and society at large undergoes parallel processes. The family system moves within their projection process, as does society at large. The progressive and regressive periods occur through an adaptation to social changes. Bowen drew comparisons to his work with delinquent adolescents where parents had progressively become permissive
through failed attempts at discipline. Bowen saw larger social consequences mirrored in this parent and delinquent, child, models, seeing society had yielded to criminal behavior in a similar manner to how the parents had with their children’s misbehavior.

**Therapies: Theories in Use**

**Adlerian Family Therapy**

This theory was seen as “a theory of use” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The work with the client was done in a collaborative and engaged manner, pragmatically addressing real-time solutions to maladaptive behaviors (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987). Psychoeducation of the participants was of paramount importance and the work occurred when the participants were engaged and contributing. This was most evident in the example of early work done by Rudolph Dreikurs (1960) in the *Child Guidance Centers*. Participants learned along with the practitioners and observed along with trained professionals, as changes within a system occurred. This keen observation of the family constellation included transgenerational concepts, drawing in experiences from the parents’ early life, allowing for the participants to relate to both the nuclear family of the present day but also the family of origin, as all look back on how events had influenced the developing system over time. These factors set the stage but Adler saw the individual as the creative force in the outcome of his or her life (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987).

**Bowen Family Therapy**

In Bowenian therapy the family system was reviewed over the generations. The evolution of the family was regarded in the context of the larger system and in consideration of patterns of progression and regression. The individual’s degree of success in differentiating from the family system could be evaluated on Bowen’s
Differentiation of Self-Scale; with low scale scores indicating a tendency to operate from a stronger, *feelings* approach to life and high scaled score resulting in an individual who would function from a more *thinking* oriented mindset (1992). Individuals with higher degrees of “self” would be better equipped in family functioning and Bowen saw the family system patterns of behavior as representative of how the individual would function in the larger world. Bowen saw the work environment as a family system that mirrored the individual’s home environment. The systems approach to Bowen family therapy recognized that if a change was made with an individual, then the whole system would respond.

A similarity between Bowenian and Adlerian theory is that the family is a contained system whose inner functioning is expressed in the larger world. While Adler addressed the individual’s creative state of being (1956) Bowen regarded the family and the individual over the generations (1992). The Multigenerational transmission process, a key concept of Bowen family therapy and while both theorists regard the individual within the system, this is when the theories begin to diverge.

The practitioners’ efforts to understand the family system require methods of tracking family data. When an individual is working transgenerationally the use of a graphic organizer such as genogram is helpful and oftentimes essential. Tools of this nature are useful in communicating information about the family system with the family members as well as in professional dialogue. In the early 1990’s efforts were made to define methods of organizing the system through a symbol system with genograms (McGoldrick et al., 2007). McGoldrick’s efforts to establish a common system of genogram symbols has become a mainstay in many family system practices. Structural
family therapists, such as Salvadore Minuchin, also have created a relational symbols system that identifies the nature of the connection and bonds between family members and has been used in the creation of “family maps” (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008).

Visual tools of this nature are highly useful when communicating basic information about a family system and can contribute clarity around complex topics, but when these methods are adapted to expressive methods by a trained practitioner, they can also be used in conjunction with art therapy practices.

**Family Art Therapy**

Early art therapists entered this field with contributions that profoundly influenced the theoretical integration of Family Therapy (Rubin, 1999). Pioneers such as Kwiatkowska, Landgarten, Rubin and Wadeson began to evolve and integrate family therapy perspectives (Malchiodi, 2003). Practitioners and theorists emerged in settings such as the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), with art inclusive contributions such as art-based assessments and the utilization of art process to facilitate communication were among the art therapy approaches practiced early on (Rubin, 1999).

The manifestation of the art object elucidates the therapeutic act by externalizing the problem and creates objectivity and safety from the issue at hand (Schaverien, 1999). Similarly, Bowen has recognized that in an exploration of generational patterns, the individual has an increased comfort in dialoguing about family issues due to the perceived degree of separation creating a psychological distance, even when the pattern has persisted across the generations (Bowen, 1992).

An added benefit of art therapy is the ability of the work, to serve as a leveling tool (Manicom & Boronska, 2003). The art image is regarded as the relevant subject,
irrespective of the age or abilities of the maker. The image “holds court” and ensures that its content is engaged, allowing the creator’s vision to be expressed, and all participants to regard this manifested perspective. The image-maker also has the opportunity to observe how others engage with his or her objective interpretation of the issue at hand (Dreikurs, 1986). Furthermore, if an individual is to explore a family system without the whole family in session, the work can ensure the entire system is represented at all times.

When working with large, intergenerational, family systems the genogram is integral in facilitating the process (McGoldrick et al., 2007). It is a real-time articulation of the system, affording multiple perspectives, benefiting both the client and clinician. The client can see how he or she is positioned within the system while the work in session is co-occurring. Furthermore, the clinician observes this process and these observations can be shared in the moment. This dimension of the work naturally lends itself to the psychoeducation of the client. While this is a diagram and map of the family system, there is also a potential added value as an art therapy instruments and, in regard to the contents gleaned, a means of accessing foundational family content needed in Adlerian lifestyle analysis (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987). Psychoeducation empowers the individual to actively take part in the healing process. It establishes a partnership between the therapist and the client; work occurs conjointly and collaboration is established within a partnership of mutuality (Carlson et al., 2006). The work effort is driven by the content that the therapeutic union puts forth and it is the individual’s output that fuels the evolution of the developing therapeutic relationship – a dynamic that fuels the therapeutic experience.
Adlerian Family Art Therapy

The Adlerian principle of regarding the individual as both “artist and picture” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 177) has resonance with art therapy. There is an emphasis on the creative nature of the human experience. A professional orientation that includes this perspective allows for an evolution of the art process and it leads to a natural acceptance of the collaborative nature of the therapist-client relationship (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). In Adlerian art therapy attention is given to the style of interaction among the group, the nature of the movement, observing interactions, levels of participation, and engagement (Sutherland, 2011). This is possible in group work but the family can be addressed in work with an individual client as well (Kerr, 1988).

This present relational exploration is through a single perspective engaged with a whole family system. It elicits the adaptation of certain materials as they suit this family system and individual. It is essential to listen to the individual’s needs and allow the incorporation of materials to unfold as the process dictates. It is a highly personalized process and while one set of ideas will work for one, they may not work for all. Furthermore, it is a client driven process, and prescribed directives will likely limit therapeutic outcomes (Dreikurs, 1986).

Bowen Family Therapy Concepts Adapted to Art Therapy

Bowen Family systems therapy includes highly organized concepts that guide both the therapists and participants (Kerr, 1988). These concepts serve a function of analysis of the system through providing context around elements of the system and they provide valuable resources for the patient. The incorporation of visual records such as genograms, in reviewing multigenerational transmission processes, reveal the need for
image integration into the therapeutic process. This graphic organizer was created for additional understanding of the family system through alternative perspectives and externalized concepts. It can be challenging to hold multiple perspectives in the mind at one time (McGoldrick et al., 2007). The creation of the genogram facilitates this process and by incorporating art therapy, the participants are actively involved and creative insights are layered into its construction. This action of transforming the image from a diagram to an utilizable art object is key to art therapy (Schaverien, 1999).

**Psychotherapeutic Training and Heuristic Research**

**Bowen’s “Anonymous Paper” as a Research Model for Art-Based Inquiry**

In 1967 Murray Bowen faced a dilemma of whether he would share his personal experiences of researching his family system. It was a challenging time in which he battled inwardly as to whether it would be the right approach to let his colleagues in on the personal particulars of his life to his work in service of the promotion of his theory (Bowen, 1992). Research is often perceived as something that happens in a controlled and clinical setting and it certainly is not usual for it to involve first person insights from a practitioner and subject. But Bowen was resolute on this matter, stating,

> the family therapist usually has the very same problems in his own family that are present in the families he sees professionally, and that he has a responsibility to define himself in his own family if he is to function adequately in his professional work. (pp 467-469)

This is not an entirely new notion. We see practitioner analysis as part of the psychoanalytical training as well as with Adlerian professional training and its compulsory component of the Lifestyle Analysis (Bowen, 1992; Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987). The Lifestyle, which includes an exploration of the student’s family constellation as well as didactic instruction, where both individual and group work plumbs the depths
of one’s functioning through teleological movement forged in the originating family system (Carlson et al., 2006). Art therapy training also includes this perspective of personal experience of doing and reviewing, rather than observing and reporting (Wadeson, 1987). These engaging approaches all offer the practitioner the experience of therapeutic work via self-exploration. With Bowen’s objective being to prepare the therapist to remain “outside” of the emotional system (Bowen, 1992) work on our own roles within our family or origin allow one to attune to the distinction of functioning inside and outside of the system. Which would likely be a difficult state to assess without prior personal experience.

**Art-Based Research**

Art Based Research is a method of inquiry where the researcher utilizes images in service of identifying content related to the topic under investigation or review (McNiff, 1998). Through this process a depth of study is developed revealing and creating new ways of perceiving the topic at hand. Art-based research is not an exclusive method to art therapists yet the art therapist possesses many necessary skills to optimize this approach to research (Musham, 2001). Embedded in the education of the art therapist is a training to recognize the depth and utility of visual language, understanding of symbolism, as well as a working knowledge of materials and discernment into which media might best suit particular content, either in relation to the subject or the manner of expression of the research results.

While supervising art therapy graduate students, the author and educator, Shaun McNiff, recognized the need to offer access to art-based research after seeing the facility of this method among the art-oriented students (McNiff, 1998). The conventional
research approach relating to the scientific model potentially limits the methods of inquiry to the written word, that by its devise, is a form of communication restricted to a linear format (Carolan, 2001). Conversely, images have the capacity to communicate holistically and with multidimensionality (Pink et al., 2011). Furthermore, it only stands to reason that the research skills art therapists implement in client work, be of equal value in academic study but art-based research has broad potential among many fields (Pink et al., 2011).

Currently we see art inquiry used in contexts such as Sociology, Anthropology and other myriad areas, and many more will benefit in this method of research and development (Pink et al., 2011). It is in this author’s opinion, that individuals with strong visual skills, both perceptively and expressively have much to offer various fields of research. The image allows for an ease of dimensional perceptions that may not be readily accessed via conventional verbal means (Kerr, Hoshino, Sutherland, Parashak & McCarley, 2008). An individual, who is skilled at operating in this realm, offers a depth and breadth or abilities to any subject that can uniquely be achieved through a well-cultivated knowledge of work with images (Allen, 1995).

**Integration in Practice: Art Inquiry Relating to Family Systems Therapy with Art Adaptations of Bowen’s Concepts**

The importance of integration of art inquiry into this project was the value of the art process and resulting art product providing a visible demonstration of how the content was expressed (Allen, 1995). Through this experience the theory was visible in a new context, which resulted in new perspectives (Musham, 2001). In a clinical setting, where art therapy is practiced, the objective is to guide the client to a place of insight and
understanding (Rubin, 1999), and it is with an awareness of this efficacy that there can be confidence in how the process parallels that of art-based research. There has been a history of compatibility with art therapy and family therapy and a deepening of this extends to an integration of Bowen family systems therapy through art-based research.

**Relating to Bowen’s Concepts via Art-Inquiry**

As we venture out into the world, away from our early childhood family system, we take our family with us in one way or another. We may or may not remain geographically close but the early learning that occurs within the family system stays with us as self-concept is formed (Bowen, 1992). What function can the image bring to this experience that allows for the maker to identify his or her own sense of self? Bowen suggests suggested that in order to achieve differentiation we must remain a part of the family yet operate outside family emotional system (1992). The author suggested that one way for us to do this is through direct contact during emotionally challenging events and observing the experience through a degree of separation – to be present in the event but not a contributing part of the distressing event (p.476). In Bowen’s “Anonymous Paper” (1967) he indicated that he was in fact the intentional creator of the mess at one pivotal time, in order to better engage a sibling who had been physically removed from him – all in the effort of working “outside” of the emotional system.

Another suggestion of Bowen’s was for the individual to form independent, person-to-person relationships with all of one’s family. While the author acknowledged that this is not always possible, the objective is clear: The new framework for the relationship bypasses preexisting triangles or the *undifferentiated family ego mass* (p. 474).
In art therapy the individual has access to new avenues of expression and connection to the exploration of their life (Riley, 2004). Oftentimes the art form, while an externalization of feelings or experiences, serves as another presence in the therapeutic relationship. In *Integrative Approaches to Family Art Therapy*, Riley (2004) stated, that in a clinical situation where the therapist is only working with one individual “art work can be the means by which the client ‘brings the family in’” (p. 116). Art allows the individual to fortify this experience and take it further, accounting for multiple generations through creative thoughtful engagement. Many people will never know their great grandparents, yet as a child they may gain a sense of who they were through family stories, and these narrative “seeds” can be used to inform an art-inquiry.

**Image Creation**

Through image creation and independent investigation, the explorer is able to forge connections and relationships with these ancestors. Through the art image an inner rapport can develop between the individual and the ancestors (Bien, 2005). While not knowing this person in their life, a relationship is developed, nonetheless. The experience is partially informed via the parent, relative or written record of the individual, yet it is distinct and differentiated from the family system, precisely because no other individual can have the same experience (Bowen, 1992). Only the image-maker can create his or her own image. It is this giving of voice that is not attainable in the undifferentiated family ego mass (Bowen, 1992). Yes, aspects of the undifferentiated ego mass could certainly influence thoughts, yet the results are outside of the system and owned by their creator. The art object metaphorically exemplifies individuation. It exists not of itself yet is born of the individual. This externalization of the problem provides a
context for the therapeutic work (Schaverien, 1999). This perspective of the created object, further highlights the ‘both artist and picture’ (p. 177) concept first identified by Adler (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

As a therapeutic tool, the created image brings a dimension that had not previously existed outside of the fused family ego mass (Schaverien, 1999). While it may speak to the mass, it was only born by the creator, thus having the potential to empower and differentiate a fused family member – at least for a period of time.

Bowen and Adler both attend to the entirety of the family constellation in their theories. The addition of art makes these elements observable to the individual, the therapist and if desired, other family members (Dreikurs, 1986). While Bowen’s contributions have profoundly influenced current practice some elements may be complicated, yielding a general understanding among an entire family system. Not all family members may have the resources to fully engage in all of the dimensions of the theory. By making art therapy adaptations the accessibility of these dimensions is ensured (Riley, 2004). Furthermore, the introduction of art creates a visual record of the client work, allowing for the clinician to observe the degree of engagement by all of the family members – a secondary benefit to be considered (Sutherland, 2011).
Art-Based Research to Identify Themes of the Thesis

Exploring the Family Constellation

Elements of Adlerian and Bowenian theories are expressed via art inquiry through the use of clinical tools such as the genogram, which lend themselves to visual image making (McGoldrick et al., 2007). In fact, in order to better understand or in some complex cases, comprehend the complexities of a family system this visual tool is indispensable. The question though, is whether the genogram is a literary device or a visual tool and in part, an art experiential. An argument can be made that it can be both, and as an art object, this image achieves its full value.

In art therapy it’s recognized that there is therapeutic value in externalizing the subject, physically placing concepts and ideas outside of oneself where we can observe and reflect (Wadeson, 1987). The object also allows for a third party to metaphorically, join that conversation. If the genogram moves into the realm of art, it is when the maker creates the addition of personal perspective regarding the subject (Skaife, 2001). The object then has a value attached to it that reaches beyond utility. When exploring multiple generations within a system, cultural shifts within the system become evident and are brought forth through this expression (Bien, 2005). The genogram is an initial organizing tool that is utilized in this research work.

The second element that came forth in the research was the need to identify a unifying theme for the work. This was done in consideration of how to integrate this work therapeutically, and identified how themes or symbols served to ground the intention of the process. This became important as the numbers of individuals began to accumulate in the family tree from the family history research dimension of the project.
In order to identify project themes, a large and random assortment of visual images from magazine clippings and photographs were observed. Through intuitive process two working symbols for the project were identified: a Labyrinth and the totem animal of a Salmon. Both of the images have relevance to the family history research component of the Bowen study.

The Ancient origins of the labyrinth indicated that it was a device created to represent a pilgrimage; in fact, a walk on a labyrinth is often seen as a spiritual pilgrimage (Artress, 1995). The individual walks the circuitous path, in a reflective mindful state toward the labyrinth’s center and then returns to the beginning. Along the mazelike path the individual walks both toward and away from the center as well as walking toward and away from what is both the start and endpoint. The symbol challenges the linear perceptions in that one actively moves forward and backward in the goal of movement through life. This metaphor aligned nicely with the concept of multigenerational transmission process. As a practitioner the nature of movement was evaluated (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) and a focus on the quality of the action yields higher value than the perceived linear progress (Figure 1).
The second symbol identified was a spirit animal of a Salmon, due to the animal’s persistent drive to return to its origins prior to spawning (Saunders, 1995). This symbol is a reminder of the nature of family history research. The action of going back to the beginning, one that pushes against the currents. This research can require a strong resolve and fortitude and at times, counterintuitive intentions – Qualities that were highly useful in the accomplishment of the project.

An intuitive art process allowed these symbols to be identified for the project (McNiff, 1998). While neither of these images nor the processes of arriving at them are a dimension of either Bowen or Adlerian theories, they have been particularly helpful in

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Figure 1. Labyrinth by C. Cich, Copyright, 2014. Reprinted with permission.
setting the tone and maintaining the objectives of the project. Concreted images provided a beneficial touch-point for the dysregulating work of family systems exploration (Wadeson, 1987). They served as a constant, visible reminder of the intentions and expectations of the research.

Family research can quickly become complicated and the genogram was a highly useful, if not essential, graphic organizer. In the process of this study a theme of pilgrimage developed that required more. The family search was a journey to the center of the self. Not unlike walking a labyrinth, the path moved in many directions, sometimes two directions at once – toward and away – but it consistently led toward the center (Artress, 1995). As the research data accumulated the awareness of interrelated symbolism came to the fore: The labyrinth as a pilgrimage: the labyrinth as a meditative mandala; the mandala as self; the salmon as the spirit animal and symbolic traveler on a similar journey home. In this case the journey was inward, as a way toward individuation and the differentiation of self, the reality of home as oneself, all layered into the project.

**Created Images**

In conjunction with the literature review, some examples of art inquiry as they relate to family research, are offered (Figure 2). This is done in service of the reader so that the visuals demonstrate in a small way the function of the image, rather than provide a personal experiential. As in Bowen’s work with his family system, it was the process and the means by which it evolved that are at the forefront.
The intention was to review Bowen Family Systems Theory through the lens of art therapy, seeking potential options for an incorporation of the adaptation of art therapy methods. Much, if not all, of the concepts had potential for art therapy adaptation because all of Bowen’s concepts evoked the potential to concrete particular aspects of the family system that could convey a visual form (Bowen, 1992). It would be at the future practitioner’s discretion as to which concepts would most benefit from this adaptation in regard to the particular needs of the given situation.

The art adaptations are twofold; they served as visual manifestations of the guiding concepts in Bowen Family Systems Theory and secondly, as touch points for the family history research in parallel to Bowen’s “Anonymous Paper” (1967).
Guiding Concept Images

The image of the labyrinth (Figure 1) came forward in the context of this topic in many ways, among which is the movement while on a journey. Figure 1 is a resource for the reader to better understand the descriptive nature that we move in during a family history investigation. If the center of the labyrinth is viewed as the goal destination – the family history – the journey begins with a step toward the past. It is a contrary motion, and something that is helpful to be mindful of for anyone working on multigenerational aspects for the family system. Because of the nature of the movement, there is a potential for the journey to be disorienting and for this reason this symbolic map has benefit as a visual reference.

The salmon, spirit animal image (Figure 3), similarly to the labyrinth, symbolized the journey but in this case, an individual working on multigenerational themes. The salmon, swimming to the left – the reverse direction of a linear written history - is facing the past. Actively moving toward its origins but a process that demands a substantial amount of energy to swim against the currents. The goal is to move forward by swimming upstream, back to the beginning. In the case of the salmon, the lifecycle can only move forward by returning to its origins, which are in the past. Documenting a journey from freshwater streams and rivers to the salt water of the ocean (Saunders, 1995). The roiling current indicated the energetic environment of the journey – difficult but not impossible. Through its gaze, the fish is also engaging the viewer, which can be seen as a connection to the present. The gaze is outside of the picture plane and if the image is to be viewed, the gaze connects to the viewer.
The next phase of image making came in direct response to the family history research dimension of Bowen’s Family Systems Theory. The theorist’s directive to develop person-to-person relationships with all of one’s family was of particular interest (Bowen, 1992). Portrait painting as art-inquiry allowed for an in-depth exploration of the concept and revealed the richness of the theory. The following images are the result of the ongoing art-inquiry in response to that directive (Figures 4, 5, 6, 7).

*Figure 3. Swimming Home, by C. Cich, Copyright, 2011. Reprinted with permission.*

**Theoretical Concept Images**
Four grandmothers.

Figure 4. Grandmother by C. Cich, 2015.

Figure 5. Grandmother by C. Cich, 2014.

Figure 6. Grandmother by C. Cich, 2014.

Figure 7. Grandmother by C. Cich, 2014.

While abstract in concept, there are multiple opportunities for art therapy adaptation in regard to the goal of differentiation of self. The spirit of the concept is an expression of a personal independent identity within one’s family system (Kerr, 2013). This is achieved through developing person-to-person relationships with family members (Bowen, 1992). The process of working in dyads circumvents the tendency to draw in a third party in an effort to reduce the anxiety that can form from the instability of a two-person relationship – what Bowen saw as the most unstable relationship (1992).

Bowenian theorist, Michael Kerr saw family therapy as something that occurred irrespective of who was physically present in the therapy space, in part because change within the individual can effect change within the system (Fraser, McKay & Pease, 2010). Work with images that address specific individuals in service of creating the person-to-person relationship can be highly effective in demonstrating the feeling of a dyad encounter with a family member. It can serve as either practice for engaging another family member or to encounter an individual who has passed on.

Four portraits were created through family history research and facilitated by art process in an effort to simulate an encounter with ancestors (Figures 4, 5, 6 & 7). The images of grandmothers were chosen to economize the process but any variant would be acceptable. The artwork was created from photographs while remaining mindful of any stories about these women, with the intention to reflect on stories that were about these people rather than stories that narrated experiences that involved another family member.

For example, one of the great grandmothers had several children and she and her husband farmed, but also, she, as an individual migrated on her own to the United States. She, identified the community with which she chose to dwell and grow her family. Being
attentive to her individuality while working with her image (Figure 6) mirrored an experience of getting to know her. While not having the reciprocity of a deceased ancestor getting to know ourselves, there is the inner experience of increased self-knowledge through the encounter. As Picasso once said, “every portrait is a self-portrait.” This is a process of seeking self-awareness and individuation. The portrait making experience did not allow for accommodating another person’s views, thoughts, and opinions. The experience was exclusively between the subject and the author.

These images resulted from several art-inquiries as they related to themes of Bowen’s Family Systems Theory Concepts. The process of inquiry follows: as the portraits were painted there was an opportunity for reflection on the generations. There was a recognition that many family members were within the painted image: a mother, aunts, cousins, sister, self. Certain images were more productive for this than were others, but that did not necessarily connote value. In some ways a limited response suggested a different nature of the relationship or perhaps an opportunity for further inquiry. While this experience was highly active during the process of painting, the image’s presence retained the quality of suggested connection. An image is an active thing. It is never really fixed (Skaife, 2001).

The inspiration to paint great grandmothers came from Bowen’s concept of multigenerational transmission process but during the art-inquiry it became clear that the portraits would be extremely useful for adaptations of other Bowen concepts, including family projection process, emotional cutoff, differentiation of self and triangulation (Bowen, 1992). Remaining mindful of the theory while engaged in the art process
elicited insights into the concepts as well as reinforcing an understanding of the theory and generating methods for further inquiry.

As work began in creating likenesses of the ancestors, their images and stories were sought. Some of the stories were more familiar while others were not. All stories were considered in the context of the individual, with the story’s relevance being seen as attributable to its influence on family culture. This was significant as a starting point for the portrait work in order to ponder their stories during the work time with their likenesses.

This process of portrait painting was approached as being similar to dyad work but also in service of Bowen’s directive to form individualized relationships with all family members (Bowen, 1992). The objective of the person-to-person relationship is to give oneself the opportunity to know all family without becoming drawn into a triangle. The painting experience felt like a dyadic exchange in that it was possible to listen to the individual’s story while responding to it through painting. The color choices and brushstrokes were the interpretive responses and became part of that person’s image. The images came forth through the expression of personal impressions and were a visible manifestation of what was recognized in Adlerian theory as movement (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The art objects are the result of the dyads and in that process the experience of a better understanding of the person was achieved through the encounter (Dreikurs, 1986; Wadeson, 1987).

**Differentiation of self.** The childhood self-portrait is a concept of individuation and differentiation of self (Figure 8; Bowen, 1992). The preadolescent girl is significant in the context of Adler’s belief in the sense of self being determined before puberty.
(Carlson et al., 2006). It is a state where the child is “on the fence” – a time of questioning. There are forces that are suggesting caution: “Keep Out”, a dense wooded area and the existence of a fence, but the figure is in charge and in choice. The fence is hers as well as its environment. Unlike in the spirit animal image, this figure is future oriented, facing right and mostly outward.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 8. Child. by C. Cich, Copyright, 2014. Reprinted with permission*

This image symbolizes individuation because it shows the early stages of the developing person as independent and in command of her world. The large tree can be seen as symbolic of the family system and the stance upon the cautionary statement as one of
early defiance, evoking another Adlerian concept: *masculine protest* (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) that bears a similarity to the concept of differentiation of self (Bowen, 1992).

In reflection of this segment of the project it is easy to be sympathetic to Bowen’s fluid position on sharing his personal family research. The thought feels incredibly daunting yet it’s difficult to fully understand why. Therapists of all kinds, enter this field with the awareness of their own influencing constellations and to proceed without self-examination would seem cavalier. It is not the norm to disclose within a professional context (Goldenberg, 2008) though and it’s likely to wonder why. While there is no necessity to know the personal details of colleague’s families of origins, it is assuring to know that their systems are being attended to, and in regard to systems as a whole, they are thoroughly curious.

**Emotional cutoff.** This goat image came about after reading about emotional cutoff and Schaverien’s article, *Imaging the invisible* (1999), in which the author explored the function of the art image as that of the scapegoat (Figure 9). The more biblical understanding of a scapegoat is that of a beast of burden, something a community can project the root cause of their misdeeds and hardships onto. The beast then embodies these woes and is consequently sent off – banished – to relieve the individuals of the encumbrance of their distress. Schaverien saw the art image as a stand-in for the scapegoat. The image can embody the stress and discomfort and be held for safekeeping in the office of the practitioner or after appropriate processing of the manifested experiences, destroyed.
This concept of the scapegoat bears a resemblance to Bowen’s concept of emotional cutoff. With emotional cutoff, there is an impasse in the distress of the system, and an individual is consequently shut out of the family system (Bowen, 1992). This disconnection, as a consequence of an irreconcilable difference, is a curious thing. As with the scapegoat, the action of uploading feeling onto a beast of burden, is clearly done in the service of the individual(s) who have ceased to manage their feelings of stress and anxiety (Schaverien, 1999). The action appears to be a consequence of the scapegoat’s behavior, but it is more so that of the banisher. In the case of emotional cutoff this action is a declaration about the nature of the relationship, but the action of cutoff is that of the
dominating actor – the sentence is assigned to one divorced from the system. This can moves in a couple of directions though; the ones cutoff can remove themselves as well.

The goat image that came forth during an art inquiry was a bit of a surprise. In this case the beast is not a beast of burden but rather a placid, yet watchful creature. Moving into the inquiry it was anticipated to be an exploration of the haggard and destroyed perspective of this symbolism, yet the image was not that at all. The art inquiry delivered a perspective of choice, in regard to emotional cutoff that hadn’t yet been explored. For the individuals within the system who had become removed from the nuclear family, this perspective offered a new light on their situations. It revealed the dimension of choice, in how one perceives and reacts to a given situation (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

The exercise began as an opportunity to work with the post burdened beast image, but it did not materialize as such. This example now serves as one of the art inquiry processes in regard to art-based research. The image that was sought, was created with the intention to explore the results of cutoff and the result was surprising. Perhaps this revealed a perspective into the nature of Bowen’s concept of emotional cutoff.
Multigenerational transmission process. The ancestor image (Figure 10), resulted from an art-inquiry into transgenerational themes. Bowen’s concept of multigenerational transmission process described the perpetuation and degree of differentiation based on our selection of life partners (Bowen, 1992). Bowen observed that individual’s with low differentiation of self, chose partners with equal and lower levels of differentiation of self, while those with higher levels chose partners with equal and higher levels.

Figure 10. Grandparents. by C. Cich, Copyright, 2015. Reprinted with permission.
This arrangement will influence child rearing, resulting in parents on the high end of the differentiation of self-scale raising offspring of similar levels, while those rating on the lower end of the scale, raising children who will likely remain comparatively the same as their parents (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

The accompanying art-inquiry to this concept led to the ancestral image of the immigrant farming couple (Figure 9). This simplified and basic image conveys a sense of the pioneer. The image of the immigrant relates to family origins, beginnings, and the laying down of an investment into the future. While there were several ancestral images of divergent experiences that could have been selected, the process of art-inquiry led to this outcome. The metaphors of the immigrant and the farmer are in keeping with the developmental and evolutilional qualities of multigenerational transmission process. The image’s essence was that of potential for change, investment and growth: nuanced perspective of the theory that came forward through art-based research.

**Work With Previously Created or Preexisting Images**

The prior examples were created for an immediate need. They came into creation out of the demands of the moment. But what happens to these images after the moment has passed? In the case of an image that is used to collect difficult feelings – what Schaverien equated with the myth of the scapegoat – the image is retained until the client is able to process the experience (1999). When they are ready, the image can be transformed, destroyed (which is another form of transformation), or discarded. At this point, the process is more aligned with the concept of differentiation of self, rather than emotional cutoff because the therapeutic work has adequately established that the experience that had manifested has been established as an event “outside” of the self.
(Bowen, 1992). Under these circumstances, there is a big difference from a premature separation, as is the case with emotional cutoff. In the case of the cutoff both parties remain “inside” of emotional systemic conflict.

Images remain useful under other circumstances as well. In the case of the research for this project the images that were manifested, continue to be a part of the process long after the engaging phase of producing them (Wadeson, 1987). While the process is a richly therapeutic experience postproduction value is significant. This can be seen with the example of the labyrinth (Figure 1). The symbol existed prior to the art-inquiry and the art process of painting a labyrinth is very different than following a labyrinth path because it needs to be constructed in a segmented and in a non-contiguous manner. The process, both through art inquiry and in construction, served to identify and solidify thematic elements but the created object functions to instill the effect of the symbol’s intention and reinforce the theme of the thesis.

A relationship to an image will change from person to person, which further illustrates the pattern of externalization of the individual (Schaverien, 1999). The relationship with the image illustrates how feelings and thoughts can change and evolve with a fixed object. There is a counterintuitive experience where the inward reflections of feelings are experienced as just that, feelings and not “the self.” There isn’t a dismissal of the relevance of these feelings, quite the contrary; it reveals the empowerment of the individual as opposed to the empowerment of the event. While working on this project the manifested images became reference points for the work – guideposts but not the guides themselves.
Reflection on Findings

Bowen’s research has been an inspiration. Entering this field of human exploration is done with curiosity and frequently borne of interest in personal family functioning. Bowen offers his personal observational experiences of his family system, evaluating the outcomes of his interventions in respect to his suppositions. Oftentimes therapists are discouraged from indulging these impulses but Bowen offered, that when a therapist has thoroughly reviewed their place within the system, then their work as a family therapist becomes more effective (Bowen, 1992). The idea being that the stumbling blocks they may have experienced within their family systems are addressed and managed, allowing for the practitioner to have greater self-awareness and as a result, they are then less apt to become avoidant or blind to client issues that recall related, personal experiences (Bowen, 1992). As Arthur Robbins (1997) observed, in *Therapeutic Presence: Bridging Expression and Form*, the therapist was the best diagnostic instrument and so it stood to reason that without clarity and self-awareness, diagnostic efficacy and likely the clinical rapport would be impacted. An unexplored relationship has the potential to impede the path toward differentiation of self and the process of forming one-to-one relationships with the entire family is the prescribed method to remedy this potential malady.

If our portraits are, as Picasso mused, “self-portraits” then the object is a form of the self. The Adlerian principle of the individual as both picture and artist follows this line of thinking (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). We create things in our own image, they are manifestations that come from our hand and are imbued with bias; the act of creation may be a form of narcissism but we can only know another through knowing
ourselves. If this is true for the image then is it also true of the relationship? Does what exists at the nexus of this all, comprise a perception of the sum of a union. Is this relationship potentially a yoke of our own devising? If so, would the awareness of this imposed, if not self-created, connection evolve proportionally with the individual’s self-awareness?

Of the theories explored in this thesis – Bowen, Adler and art therapy– the art therapy proved to be highly adaptable to integration. This is likely due to the nature of the theory and its development out of traditional roots of psychotherapy (Rubin, 1999).

The incorporation of art process in family therapy witnesses Adler’s efforts in engaging participants in mutuality of the process (Sherman & Dinkmeyer, 1987). The addition of art is more than that. It allows the family to ante up at the outset and this offering not only provides the fuel for the therapeutic work, it sets the tone for how the “problem” is perceived and within that tone resides clues (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). While there are shades of this present in verbal language, the verbiage is spoken and a shifting memory that only remains until it is forgotten. In the case of the image the original telling creates a static form but our perceptions and feeling about this telling have the ability to transform. This is the beginning of change (Rubin, 1999). It first occurs with how we engage the image showing the way for the accommodation required for systemic change.

There is a priming of the mind for change when we allow for acceptance of the possibility for things to be different (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The image shows us how we might do that. Any created work is a practical step toward addressing the problem. The object or image is the materialized form of the individual’s present
experience and offers the first effort in reshaping what is perceived to be the problem. The creative act empowers people to take some form of control, even if that control is limited to problem identification. The image names the perception of the problem as personal and by association shows us that this perception is what we have control over and what is well within our ability to influence. This image work can take on many manifestations, from a sketch to a sculpture to recognition of a preexisting image that resonates with the participant; the key is to establish a thoughtful and ordered integration that can support the process.

**Summary and Thoughts for Future Study**

Bowen family system concepts and the “Anonymous Paper” (1967) are the underpinning for exploration of this family system exploration and the impetus of idea for using the related images to function as therapeutic resources. Through the research there has been ample opportunity to experiment with some adaptations of Bowen’s concepts. These concept images offer the art therapist fertile ground for inquiry. The names of the concepts are somewhat suggestive of visual cues, particularly in the work with triangles. The dynamic nature of the triangle concept is challenging but the use of a graphic representation is potentially educational and therapeutic. The image empowers the family to teach the caregiver what they know. It can also help family member to educate one another and this requires the incorporation of an art process to be fully effective. An art therapist can guide the individual(s) within a system to express and identify their visual language and bring the family concepts into a new light.

This project was fulfilling on several levels. The goal was to have a similar personal family history experience to that which Bowen prescribed to his students. This
dictum seemed sound and in the interest of maximizing professional skills it would be heedless not to try. An art therapy student is trained to think in terms of inclusion of the image and adaptation of art therapy techniques into client work. It is also commonly practiced among art therapists to process clinical experiences through the creation of personal artwork. There is no doubt that personal and professional orientations have a great deal to do with the appeal of Bowen’s approach to the development of, and training in, the theory concepts.

The direction of the study became clear through the seeking of a thesis through art-inquiry. In having this opportunity to utilize art-based research to further understand Bowen Family systems theory, individuals are encouraged that this method of study is worthwhile. The process not only deepens understanding of family systems in general, it enhanced the outcomes of personal family research. The art-inquiry experience shows that there are resources existing within personal experience and engaging with images is a highly effective means of drawing them out.

A note for the practitioners or supervisors: diversity, cultural and ethnic considerations and the regarding of gender should be considered in the undertaking of this nature (McGoldrick et al., 1982). There is still a tendency to view the family system through a culturally restrictive lens. In the instance of this project, it was self-guided and involved work within this author’s personal, cultural and social lens and involved research into the cultures of ancestors prior to their immigrations. Had it been the case, where attending to another individual, the creation of intentional accommodations would need to be made. It could be argued that if therapists allow this to be a client driven
process, then those adaptations will be self-evident but it is a potential blind spot for the therapist if it goes uninvestigated.

There are two avenues of exploration for the next phase for this project. One is to delve more deeply into the geographical and cultural influences prior to the immigration of more recent ancestors. The work will likely be ongoing and the outcomes are unclear at this point. The second is to implement these findings in client work, after identifying supervision that can support an effort to introduce these art therapy concepts into a clinical setting. With the consent of the patient I would like to begin the incorporation of the related art therapy directives and compile results for further inquiry. The project has been fruitful on many personal levels and I believe that others will benefit from the effort.
References


