

Bowen Kerr Interview Series – 16
Obstacles to Changing Theory

Murray Bowen: Dr. Michael Kerr and I are going to talk about obstacles in changing theory. You know what was kind of a problem in these training tapes? Because we'd forget what date they were. So, in case we forget, I think we'd say that this is June 2, 1987.

One of the major problems we've had in the training course here, that we've had in writing, in communicating with offices everyone with audiences everywhere, has to do with the difficulty in communicating that we're talking about a different theory. When people hear the baseline is coming from conventional Freudian theory. And this is pandemic. It is everywhere, and how in the world do you account for it?

At the Family Center, it is difficult for both the faculty and the trainees. One thinks one has communicated clearly only to discover that the other has not heard. Where is the problem? Is it in the faculty in not being able to communicate? Is it in the trainee in not being able to hear? Or is it in the middle somewhere?

It is in the nature of the human organism. Are people that interested in their environment, or that lack of interest? They have that lack of interest in their environment, but they just don't think about it. Is that due to the human need to avoid the situation? Part of the human need to live life as the individual first heard it, or understood it? How in the world do they account for it?

It's probably a combination of all three, because we are all human beings. We, the faculty, trainees, and all the people in between. The human is mostly oriented toward a relief of anxiety without much regard for future complications. There are a few exceptions to this, but it is generally true. That is all of us tend to find ways to relieve the immediate anxiety without regard for what it will cost us in the long run.

The human has the ability to learn to postpone gratification for long term gain, but he has to learn it well. Otherwise, he's responding to his automatic tendency to relieve the anxiety with short-term gains.

Anyway, there's a long lag time between when the old competes with the new, when the new finally displaces the old, and the new becomes the way of thinking. This has been particularly true of theory. In life this is just civilization. A lag time has been as much as multiple centuries, or as little as a few decades. There're numerous variables that go into this. Most social things having to do with social forces that keeps the individual from recognizing the new. I think the best example of that was back in the early days of the Greek islands, when man had a pretty good notion of systems thinking that interfered with his religious beliefs, and the systems thinking was put off for 15 centuries before it became important again. That was the longest lag time.

But there's a lag time in everything, so how do you go about accounting for it? When you think of lag times, how do you apply this to the subhuman world? You can think in terms of instinct. The salmon would be a form of life that is born in fresh water. It goes thousands of miles to live its life and returns predictably to lay its eggs, and spawn in the place where he was born. I've no idea about why it took him so long to learn to do that. Did he have to learn it? Was this all instinct? Can we correlate instinct in learning? I don't know. Or, if you took the other side of that, how long did it take the salmon to learn to go thousands of miles out to sea, and spend his adult life there? Does learning get into this? Is this all instinct?

As an aside, and I'll put this in as part of this presentation. A differentiated person does better at learning to postpone immediate gratification than an undifferentiated person. An undifferentiated person is more likely to always respond to the need of the moment, and a differentiated person is able to postpone that need.

The lag time in the acceptance of Freudian theory has been absolutely fascinating, by the way it's ebbed and flowed for over a century now. Freudian theory was very important. It was probably the first clear theory to say that human problems were absolutely predictable when linked with the early life experiences of the individual, rather than linking human problems with a structural deficit in the nervous system. In a way this was a functional thing.

Early in the 20th century--by 1910-15, 1920--there were manifestations that the total of society had learned about Freudian theory. It was being represented in plays, books, poems and was being accepted by society.

By the mid-20th century, Freudian theory had displaced other theories, as if there were other theories. You know, that's an important point, because there was no theory of human behavior before Freud. That was the first clear theory that hooked human behavior to life experiences of the individual. Maybe that is something to say about the longevity of the theory.

Anyway, it was the middle of the 20th century when Freudian theory reached its height of acceptance, and it was so intense then, that anybody who even thought about a better theory, was considered far-out and off-his-rocker. You know, almost as if this can't be changed. This is written in granite for all time, and that was the attitude in about the 1950s.

Personally, I've been against vignette reporting. In other words, using personal experience to report theory. I have violated that in some important ways. Number one: I talked about my own family. The first time anybody ever did that in a professional meeting. So, I've done more than my share of it, but overall I've tried to do papers in the third person. In other words, without describing my own experience, I've attempted to report in the third person. I think there's a great value to it, because I think when you report it as a personal experience, it is heard as personal. The other person responds to it as personal. When the other person responds to it as personal, it makes it much harder for the therapist to detach

himself from the emotional arena. The therapist has a lot to do with that, and I've had a lot to do with it. I don't like that, and I try not to do it. I put it in today because I simply cannot go back over this without putting in some personal things, so I'm going to do that today, being aware of the problems it causes.

In the 1940s, the notion of the scientific method came in about Freudian theory. That was a kind of an awareness that Freudian theory was not quite scientific. If it was scientific, why would we have to do the scientific method? The scientific method simply said that if we take subjected data, and we use the research rigor in evaluating the subjective data, we will eventually make a science out of it. That is mostly impossible.

Anyway, I came aboard in this back in the period of the scientific method. I was wondering and wondering, thinking about: Would it ever be possible to get beyond subjectivity, and to create a theory out of pure facts that did not include subjectivity? That was an effort too, -- replace the subjectivity of Freud -- and build a theory on verifiable, predictable, quantified facts alone. Could we build a theory on pure facts, without putting in subjectivity?

That never got nowhere until I got into family research. But, anyway, that was an effort to add evolution, systems theory to it--would be one way. The other--the important way--was the notion of family. Now, I got into family sort of automatically, and suddenly, here in front of my eyes, was a way to change the individual as a person, the patient, or the client was a single person. The way Freudian theory had conceptualized it. And here was a total family, a group of people who acted like a single individual. So, the family became the patient.

Now, instead of relating to one individual with an ego and an id and a superego, it was a group of people who went through all kinds of things in relation to each other. Suddenly, there was the awareness that if we took this milling, changing group of people that were combining and growing apart in all kinds of configurations, and we just picked out what was facts about it, we could do a theory about that that was quite different from ego, id, superego.

Well, at that time I became completely convinced that maybe this wouldn't be a theory that embraced science. I thought it wouldn't, but with this notion of a multi-person changing organism, the family, it re-conceptualized one end of this therapeutic two-some. That was the basis for what I called a different theory, and I still stick to that, except the professional world and society still sees family systems theory as an extension of Freudian theory. In one small way it is, but in important ways, it is not.

Now, let me go back to the general acceptance of Freudian theory. It was that period back in the '30s and '40s when we talked about the scientific method. As far as I know, I was the only one who didn't like that, and I thought there must be a better way than that. I never heard of anybody else interested in it.

By 1950s, Freudian theory was accepted as the only way. During the 1950s I began to hear complaints from scientists that Freudian theory was not scientific, and it could never be. Largely because of the subjectivity in it. It could not be repeated, nor quantified. That was the little rumblings that came from the scientific community.

By around 1960-70, there were rumblings from psychiatry that Freudian theory wasn't quite as good as we thought it was. We have to think of Freudian theory being connected with Freudian therapy, too. Family was replacing Freudian theory as a method of treatment.

By 1970, there was even more negative comments about Freudian theory, and you know what psychiatry did? Psychiatry began discarding Freudian theory, and going back to an old theory which says, "Human dysfunction is a product of some kind of structural or physiological change within the brain." They'd taken out the functional thing, except psychiatry began teaching that, but the whole of society was looking on.

All the human problems are a product of one's early life experiences in one's own family. You know, it's as if part of the professional community picked this up, while the professional community was saying, "Freud is not scientific." Still everybody was thinking about the behavior of the individual as a product of his early life experiences. So, the courts pick it up, writings pick it up, everybody picks it up. All these people hiding in mental health centers pick it up. We can know all about people if we just know what their early life experiences were. So, that has become bigger, and bigger, and bigger. In spite of the fact that family systems theory says this world can go on to science, the general public doesn't want man to be a science.

I'll put that statement in, and then sign it "Bowen". Let it stand there. We don't have to argue about that. Just let that be my statement that the general public does not want a scientific theory. The general public does not want to accept the fact that its own life course is determined by science.

Man likes to keep the notion that his life is determined by himself, and that his life's been, you know, there's all kinds of ways. In other words, his life is not determined by the environment or by science. It's determined by himself, which is one way of thinking about why mankind has a hard time accepting the notion that the human being is a part of science.

Now, there's another one that gets into ... let me go on with this. In 1985, there was a psychotherapy conference in Phoenix attended by 6,000 people, which was all about the 100th anniversary of Freudian theory, and the general opinion from that conference was that Freudian theory is still as strong as it ever was, and it's now going its second century.

Now, let me put in another one that gets into this. This has to do ... back when I went into this theory business back in the 1950s, I was guessing then from the lag

time that had happened with other theories, and human behavior's eventually going to be a science, but it's going to take us 200 years. That was a guess, pure guess. That was a guess based on the notion that Freudian theory is written in granite, and not going to be changed. Don't mess with it. I got that message over and over and over--don't mess with it.

Well, what the hell. I did mess with it for my own gratification, if nothing else, but I get that message over--"Don't mess with it. Don't. Keep your hands off." And there's a way to make it into the science. Well, then here's another way of thinking about it: About the use of the term "theory." That extends from one extreme to the other extreme. There are four or five definitions of theory, all the way from a very loose one, to a very strict one. A very loose one explains the why of simple things. "I have a theory about why you were late today." "I have a theory about why you do it this way, I mean, why it happened this way." In other words, that is a very loose ... People use that all the time, "I have a theory that ..." On the other end, people are real strict about theory, and use it more in terms of the scientific research sense and what is a theory.

Now, I'd always considered theory ... I wondered back where I came to my notion about theory. I had never found anything in early life before I got to medical school. Then I learned a lot about theory in medical school. That would be theories about medicine. The bacterial theory of problems. All kinds of theories. Then when I got to psychiatry, I wondered why isn't this a theory, which had to do with a strict interpretation of theory. So, I was thinking that a theory, to be worth anything, it had to somehow connect human behavior with the earth, the universe, the sun, the season, tides, with natural phenomena. Was that strict?

Then, as this gets interpreted, it's interpreted by all kinds of people that think of theory in loose terms. I remember one time in one of our courses here a trainee says, "Well, what do you mean by 'theory'?" The instructor said, "Look it up in the dictionary." Well, there are all these different things in dictionaries--go all the way from the loose to the real strict, which would mean to me that the faculty member was sort of loose in thinking about it.

Anyway, so there are these people that are very loose in their thinking, and these people that are very strict in their thinking, and all gradations in between. So, when you say "theory," you say you're thinking a certain theory, your audience is hearing it in all these ways on the spectrum. There's this big bunch of people at this end that are hearing it in very loose terms. In my own thinking--and this is general, it's not specific--I think of the people who think loosely as being undifferentiated people. The people who are more strict in their thinking as being more differentiated. I believe that will hold up. I believe these people are more inclined to act on feelings, and these people more inclined to act on thinking; would be the difference between them.

Anyway, this has to do with when you start talking about theory, who are you talking to. You're talking to this vast spectrum of people. Would be one way of understanding why it takes so long for thinking to change.

I remember one time back about 15 years ago, we had a person connected with the Family Center. It was a lobbyist on Capital Hill. He was talking about the length of time it takes for a good idea to be introduced in legislation on Capital Hill, and how long before it becomes a law. He was saying then it took about five years for a good, solid, theoretical idea to become a law, which would be a lag time. As the lag time in Congress, or as a lag time in the people who control Congress. I think probably it's in terms of the people.

There's another one in this in terms of what people believe. I believe that all of us are influenced to a pretty good degree to the teaching we had as infants by our caretakers. If a caretaker was a fairly differentiated person, they could somehow give the child permission to think what they wanted to think. Any less differentiated person did not give the child that permission. They had to think what the caretaker thought. That child did not have the flexibility to weigh the new. In other words, they were stuck in it, is one way to think about it.

However we think about it, there is one heck of a lag time in people being able to accept theory. I've been caught up in the middle of that darn thing. You know, in some ways, I'm gratified, because 30 years ago I set out on the notion that the world is not going to change for 200 years. Now, I think it's going to change in less time than that. I was real gratified recently at a professional meeting when somebody said, "Oh, I know you. You're interested in theory." I've continued that over the years this fact I am, but the whole profession is becoming a little more interested in it, I think.

Still, what I'm trying to communicate today is that when we talk theory in the training course, and we talk to a bunch of trainees, there's all the spectrum. There're all these people who are embedded in this end, and then a few I can get out in this end. Can't we communicate better to them? I still don't have an answer to it. Can we communicate better to them without getting mad at them, accepting it as a fact in life? It is a fact.

I went on to define a lot of concepts that belong to family systems theory, which could not have been developed without that as a way of thinking.

You know, I got off on, what is a theory? Here's a way of thinking. It is a blueprint. It is a map. It is a way of thinking in your head that guides you when the seas are rough. It guides you when you can't see where you're going. It guides you when your windshield is fogged over. You know where you're going. Theory tells you where you're going. You're much less likely to govern your course by what feels right, governed by the demands of the moment, rather than what you know to be right. So, theory is a blueprint to guide you. I think it's all important. If people set out on an exploration without a blueprint, they're going to go where the feelings tell them to go.

But anyway, let me stop, Mike. I've talked too long. Get some ideas from you.

Michael Kerr: Well, one, idea is the reference to the trainee. I've thought about this before, but I was thinking about it while you were talking, that we often--I say "we" the various faculty here--present family systems theory as the faculty person that's come to know it and understand it in the training program. And for a percentage of trainees--I don't know what percentage. I don't think it's a big percentage--that seems to work pretty good. That by hearing ideas that are new to them, they can somehow take off, and seem to do rather well. It seems like, for the majority though, that's not near enough.

I was thinking of that, but the other end of the spectrum would be ... Each of us--and I'm not saying anything different I don't think than you've been saying--each person comes in with a lot of basic assumptions about the way things are that are treated as fact within the person. Not recognized as assumptions but treated as fact. You can sit through three years of a training program and never address that. That some people I think do, but I think a lot of people don't. We don't seem to have a very good way to help people define what their assumptions are, if you know what I mean. Without getting into whether they're right or wrong, but just get defined. "These are the assumptions I make about the way things are," and to let go of the idea that those are facts. I think it's been tried in different ways.

Anyway, the other thought I had, was just the point about science and behavior, and when we were down at the zoo a couple of weeks ago to hear E.O. Wilson--see him accept his award and give the talk--and the director of the National Zoo, in introducing him, that seemed to be his objection, that if you follow Ed Wilson, at least this man's interpretation, then human behavior is--I think he used the term--"immutable." He said, "A lot of us would like to think that the human has more control over his destiny than that." Or something, I don't know that Wilson actually says that, but that does seem to be one implication when you bring up science is that when you're just sort of an automaton, you have no control, or something. Life is fatalistic, you can't change much, which I don't think is built into your theory. I don't think it's build into Wilson's ideas either. I think it's more the reaction to the ideas.

Certainly in your theory, differentiation of self leaves a lot of room for change, seems like. Choice. Ed Wilson has his own way of addressing that, too.

Murray Bowen: You know, there's one we can get into today I sort of hesitate to doing, about what it means to be detached from it. To get a distance from the phenomenon. To not respond to the subjectivity in it. To evaluate it. To be objective. What it means to do that.

Michael Kerr: I don't think you can do that without a theory. Do you?

Murray Bowen: No, I don't either. Otherwise, you are cold, and you have one way of responding, and that's with feelings. You have no more choice. So, it's when I hear people say, "You're cold and unfeeling," it means I'm doing a pretty good job of staying back from them. The person who's talking is caught up in responding to the

emotion, to the subjectivity of the family. When they respond to the subjectivity, they are a part of the family.

Then in that therapy, they are emotionally attached to the family, and they are part of this conglomerate whole family. They are forever bound by whatever can happen by them adding their person to the family, which is okay, but that is what they do. If you can be detached from the family, emotionally outside the family, that is too complex for this tape.

Michael Kerr: Well, I don't know if you'd go with this, but I was expressing this to somebody recently--sort of, but related I think. Is it possible to be rejected, and not feel rejected? I was thinking if you have a theory that you're reasonable convinced is on target that that would be possible.

A lot of people are rejected, feel rejected, and try not to act rejected, or ... But to get beyond, into a realm that--I don't know. What is it?--not taking it personally. Beyond that, I guess. But we were trying to define what emotional neutrality really meant--or detachment. Which I'd always thought of as a way of thinking.

Murray Bowen: If you can stay outside the emotional system, that family has a theoretical potential that is unlimited. When you get in it, you limit their ability. If you can stay outside it, that family might be able to go farther than you ever went. If you get into it, that family can go no farther than you went. You're part of it.

So, the people who say that you should be emotionally involved-- okay, that's a different way of thinking. When you work hard to stay outside it and permit the family to go as far as they can go, the future is much more unlimited in terms of freedom to express feelings, to be themselves, to be a self other than the feelings, to go back and forth from feelings to objectivity, rather than being forever a captive audience being caught up in feelings and can't get out.

Michael Kerr: Well, maybe, but I think related to what you've been saying, the way I've put it is: To learn to tolerate more emotional separateness--from the family, from important others, whatever--requires some ability to delay instant gratification. To not blend in with the other. It seems like the force to blend in is so strong, that without a theory again that can say, "If you can tolerate this for an extended period of time, the long-term result will be probably more in everybody's best interest." Without a theory like that, it would seem to be hard to change that. To tolerate emotional separateness and stay outside when the pull to get in is so intense.

Murray Bowen: If the therapist can stay always outside the family, and what happens within the family is one you can watch, observe, make comments about, give them ideas about what might work better, the potential is unlimited.

Anyway, now the people who get in on the side of calling me cold and indifferent, I would hear that as togetherness-oriented people. In other words, I don't fit the protocol of what they would like me to fit. When I get into this with a

family, I just go along. They're telling me they would like it. You know, like the family that come in and say, "It's okay if you can call me by my first name." I say, "Well, in therapy, I don't do that, Mr. So-n-so." In other words, I don't get into that kind of togetherness, which is ... There are all kinds of ways of picking up that kind of togetherness, and if the therapist can control himself to the point that he can do it, then the family members can do it with each other.

Michael Kerr: As you pointed out, there seems to be so much in society these days that supports that, that holding hands is a cure, and if you don't go along with that, you have to tolerate--another one you've said many times--the ability to be alone. Or what I was calling emotionally separate, alone, whatever it is.

Murray Bowen: Well, we started off today about why is it difficult for people to hear theory? I don't think it'll always be. I believe that some version of family systems theory will eventually replace Freudian theory. I think it's already gone far in that direction. That having the family present will replace conventional Freudian theory.

Michael Kerr: Now, if you agree with this one but--I think you've been saying things like this, but--in the mental health field, the name "theory" in some ways has had a kind of ... almost as if that's a secondary activity in that nobody takes a theory all that seriously maybe. That lots of theories are out there, and lots of them work in certain situations, and to present having something that goes beyond that, seems to me, does go against the grain of a lot of people's thinking, whereas Freudian theory seems to be so ingrained, and so integrated into the fiber of society. People almost don't even necessarily think of it as a theory.

Murray Bowen: They are not aware.

Michael Kerr: Yeah. It's just a part of the way it is, and anything else is almost laughed at in some respects.

Murray Bowen: It is impossible to have a court case or any kind of a human problem that comes to attention that reporters, newscasters, don't immediately go into what was the early childhood experiences of this person? What was it in the early childhood that caused this to be? And you know, I think society is wrong as much as it is right, because there're a lot of people who had the same experiences who do not end up with a problem. Differentiation of self has a lot to say about that, but society assumes that because this person has this problem, that that existed, and if that existed, then it means they're going to have a problem.

I heard one yesterday on a TV show in which the guy was saying that a child who is abused as a child will be a child abuser as an adult. I don't believe that. I believe that a child that's abused has a deficit to be overcome, but I don't think that condemns him to that kind of a future. I'm not going to lie.

But it is automatic for the entire society--newscasters people, newspaper people--to assume here is a problem, now we've got to go back and find out what

happened to them as a child. He had one little lick of child abuse back then, now, that caused it. I don't believe it.

Michael Kerr: You know, in terms of the overall subject for the tape, you mentioned personal experience in the beginning, and I've been trying to avoid personal experience. I can't seem to do it.

Murray Bowen: I can't either.

Michael Kerr: I'd still go back to mid-1969, when I first listened to you. For me the main thing was recognizing that Freudian theory was not a fact. That to me made other things possible, that Freudian theory could be treated as another set of assumptions, not a proven fact. I think, up to that point, I was definitely treating it as a fact. I had some inklings that there was a lot in Freudian theory that didn't quite fit. I don't think that's changed. I think you have a good point. In spite of academic psychiatry going in a different direction, Freudian theory still seems to have as firm a hold as it ever did. Do you see much change?

Murray Bowen: No. I think academic psychiatry has gone as far as it has because it is anti-Freud, and it doesn't know where to go. I think if academic psychiatry could see a way other than Freud, it would go that way.

Michael Kerr: Yeah, biological psychiatry there's just too much it can't cover, I mean, it needs to be something a lot more than that. That's a good way to say it. There's a lot of anti ...

Murray Bowen: I made a statement earlier, and I believe this one that mankind does not want to hear that his life is governed by science. I don't think he wants to hear it. I think if I could get off of that thing ... and say, "This is another way of looking at it," and get off of that science. That science thing makes people mad.

Michael Kerr: Yeah. What do you think? It goes that old split between the human is a unique form of life, and science implies otherwise.

Murray Bowen: Mike, again, I'd give that one up. I can not give up the notion that the human is a form of life on planet earth. He might be the most superior form of life, I'll go with that one, but he is still a form of life.

Michael Kerr: You're going to have a hard time convincing a lot of animals that he's all that superior, the way things are going. They're losing out real fast.

Murray Bowen: I was thinking about the cicadas, I can be, you know, you get all involved in them.

Michael Kerr: Yeah.

Murray Bowen: And you hear them out there making noises in them trees, and the life of a cicada, how long is it?

Michael Kerr: I think it's five or six weeks that they live.

Murray Bowen: Five or six weeks by the time they come out of the ground until the time they're dead?

Michael Kerr: Yeah, yeah. Live underground 17 years.

Murray Bowen: And then they go in the ground 15 years ... 17 ...

Michael Kerr: 17.

Murray Bowen: 17 years. Underground 17 years, and then they come out and do it again. Over and over and over and over again.

Michael Kerr: I think a lot of the mating gets done pretty quickly and then just kind of lay around, then die, except the young ones.

Murray Bowen: Is that any different from the human?

Michael Kerr: The time sequences are a little varied, but ...

Murray Bowen: Time sequence is a little different. He's born, grows up, he dies. Has a new way of born, grow up, and dying.

Cicada does it every 17 years, and the human does it every 70-75 years.

Michael Kerr: Yeah. ... I don't know it seems like a lot of people in the life sciences, but maybe they're not. I don't know. I was thinking a lot of people are comfortable with the notion of human behavior being linked to subhuman behavior. Then again, a lot of the people in the life sciences have been highly critical of that. Biologists and zoologists ...

Murray Bowen: They've been highly critical of what?

Michael Kerr: Well, that at once it's okay to say the human's a product of evolution and all that, but when you get right down to human behavior, I think a lot are real sensitive about pushing too hard on the notion. Still want to emphasize culture and psychology in that the unique features that make man and his behavior different from the other forms. I don't think Wilson here. I think Wilson is close to you in terms of putting human behavior, giving it a base in the biological world, natural systems, or whatever.

I'm just sitting here thinking if people could get a friendlier attitude toward behavior in the subhuman forms maybe it'd be easier to accept the science of human behavior, but I don't think that's true either.

Murray Bowen: Well, man was able to live as long as he's lived. He's done a lot with that. He's prolonged his life. In other words, he's ... medicine has done that. I don't know that medicine, how far it can go. The fact is that man's going to die. He's born, he grows up, and he dies, and it's a cycle. Then, you know, on and on and on.

Michael Kerr: You know a good one I think brings this right into focus for you is the concept of the multi-generational family emotional process. I mean, you have said in your theory, you put that five-, six-generation, eight-generation diagram up there. I think you said, in essence, your life is strongly governed by that, and a lot of people will recoil at that and say, "My life is not governed by that. I have a free will and I can make it different, if I so choose." Which is a little bit similar to linking human behavior to science. It seems to come back to this fatalistic immutable notion again that not a lot of people want to buy that they're constrained by their multi-generational past.

Murray Bowen: Man can make it different to a degree, by his own effort. He can avoid all kinds of things. He can avoid all kinds of pitfalls. He can live longer. He can be more comfortable. He can have fewer problems. Man can escape from being that segment of society, which is 75 or 85% of human problems--you know, one little segment of society has most of the problems--and up here we don't have many problems. This whole spectrum will have 5 or 10% of problems, and these people have 80. We can escape that. We can escape that, and move up into this area. There's all kinds of ways we can do that. There's all kinds of ways we can avoid symptoms.

Man has all kinds of controls that other people didn't have. Man has a brain that makes that possible.

Michael Kerr: It seems that getting comfortable in the mid-ground there. People accuse you, as you say, of being cold, detached, or fatalistic, pessimistic, that kind of thing--which I think is a bit of an overreaction to the theory--and who want to hold on to the other side again that they have control over their destiny. Both sides are true.

Murray Bowen: You know it would be an interesting one if we took the people who've been in our training program here, and brought their life courses--how many problems they had, and how long did they live-- and compare them with other life courses, and I'll bet you they live longer and have fewer problems.

Michael Kerr: I think, at the very least, what people learn here is a little more ability to keep their tail out of the crack. All that differentiation, or not ...

Murray Bowen: I'll bet you one. Differentiation is one of the worst, baddest words in the theory. It's the one about which people make the most jokes, and it's the one that I present the strongest when I go out on these trips, because a differentiated person

is anybody that gets a little better. You don't go big step, you go a little bit in your lifetime. You go a little bit and you're above symptoms, or stay down and you're in symptoms. ... It's the overall that makes people say that it's fatalistic. I would see it as far more hopeful. It has a specified list of things that the human can do to make life better.

Michael Kerr: Yeah, and the things you may see in the limitations, see in the constraints, gives people more flexibility, not less. They have more idea what they're dealing with.

Murray Bowen: You know, before today I hadn't thought about this one of I don't know how we'd do that. How do you go back and get a sample of people who've been here? We couldn't get a sample here very easy. But now, how can you compare it to other places? One to think about ... I'll bet you our people do better.

What are we going to do on the next time around? ... I've got a whole bunch of things I could take up. The others were more symptom-oriented, that's why I avoided that today. Stayed out of symptoms.

Michael Kerr: It's a tough subject, I think. It's one worth thinking about. It hits at the heart of how do you ... well, like the training I was mentioning earlier ...

Murray Bowen: Symptoms get into other things, and then when you get into symptoms, you get into this business of increased anxiety, and increased anxiety becomes reactivity, and reactivity becomes stress. Then you get into all that subjective words, the subjected words that go with biofeedback. One of the problems with biofeedback is they get into subjective words, which are difficult for the human to handle, without getting caught up in it.

Michael Kerr: Yeah, like stress. What you call stress is subject toward ...

Murray Bowen: That's stress.

Michael Kerr: Yeah.

Murray Bowen: That's subjective ...

Michael Kerr: Sure is.

Murray Bowen: ... because it's something that's interpreted in all kinds of different ways. Nobody can define stress, any more than you can define anxiety.

Michael Kerr: I saw somebody recently with a fairly serious physical illness that had come on, and he kept using the word "stress," "I haven't been under any stress." Honestly, I don't know what was in his mind, about what stress is. It added up to a lot of something with regards to what you want to call it. The people have a lot of notions about what stress is, I guess. I have a difficult job. It's very demanding and "stressful."

Murray Bowen: That's your stress.

Michael Kerr: Yeah, right. To not have that job could be stress.

Murray Bowen: I think family systems theory does a better job of pointing out anxiety, and the concept of the emotional system does a better job, rather than the automatic notion that people are under stress. I think the emotional system does a pretty good job of pointing out who is in reasonable harmony with the relationship system, and who's not. And when he's in harmony with it, the stress is down.

Michael Kerr: Yeah.

Murray Bowen: Well, why don't we stop today, and come back later?

Michael Kerr: Okay.