

LIFE FORCES

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Dr. Bowen used the term “life forces” in describing the emotional forces driving people in their relationships. What did he mean? Was he referring to moons and tides, gravity, the heart? A lot of emotions are present in interactions. Are some “stronger” than others? Are life forces only present in the individual, or do they become manifested in interactions with others? How does a life force impact on brain functions—perception, memory, mood, cognition, subjectivity, self-definition, and identity? How does it impact on how one manages with what one is dealing? What is the connection between separateness and individuality? Are they the same? When does individuality become a cutoff? Is individuality driven by emotional reactivity? What is fusion?

Dr. Bowen, in a letter of July 1986 to a sponsor of the Midwestern training center, offers some observations and clues to the questions about the processes and the pitfalls of “individuality” and one’s environment.

4903 DeRussey Pkwy
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
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Dear

(First paragraph edited out)

I have devoted a tremendous hunk of my life toward being "an individual" who makes a monumental effort to relate to "individuals" in the places I go. A high percentage of people get too anxious with individuality, and resort to group stuff and the age old litany of my personal shortcomings. I still try to work my way toward individuality, but the task can become too great unless I can find someone who prizes individuality as much as I do. The individuality is priceless in dealing with an extended family. No one except an "individual" will ever find one's way through the conglomerate that is the family, in which groupness and secrets, and common denominators, fill the air. As soon as the individual externalizes private ideas and actions to someone else, (even a trusted ally), it becomes group stuff and the whole effort of "working with the extended family" (I don't know what that means anymore) is permanently lost (except for diagnosing the one who tried something different). The notion of the "extended family" is lost when push comes to shove. I wish the extended family could become all it can become, instead of a mish-mash of stuff.

A letter is no place to go into the fine points between individuality and togetherness. I think your organization has a tremendous potential for and the Midwest, if can get beyond environmental opinions. A mere difference loses its individuality potential, and becomes a confrontation when it is externalized. is more important to me then most places. I shall be watching your individuality and groupiness with great interest.

Sincerely,

Murray Bowen, M.D.