

WHAT MAKES IT SO HARD?

What Makes It So Hard?

The majority of people seeking consultation and therapy focus on their unrest, discomfort, unhappiness, and attribute these feelings as a result of something coming at them from their environment—often another person, often a family members. Rare is the experience of a person wondering about how one makes oneself miserable.

There is a biological layer to this, in that when one's anxiety is rising the automatic focus is to look for and see the danger in the environment. Survival, in the evolutionary framework, is dependent on this capacity.

Another difficulty in trying to move the therapy toward a self-focus is one's subjectivity and negative editorials about self—"If things are not going well, it's my fault, something is wrong with me", "you're doing (the therapist) the same thing my mother did, blaming me for what my father did to me." Often the anxiety is so high that any expectation that the patient be more responsible (e.g., canceling appointments) is heard as "criticism."

Perhaps a first step is being able to focus on one's reactivity process. The person can still hang on to the "blame" for survival and begin a process to manage one's reactivity to the emotional intensity that is seen as originating from the environment. Perhaps this step will offer some calming and anxiety reduction. However, it is a major leap to go from managing one's anxiety to examining how one contributes, or looking at what part one is playing in the troublesome emotional turmoil.

Very few people can concisely focus on Dr. Bowen's observation (in the context of the NIMH project) "so I began thinking that if problems are not decreasing, I must be playing a part in it. I was being over responsible for the administrative functioning of the entire unit. I was excusing acting out behavior."*

* I have given couples this quote; some have put it up on their refrigerator. But when their miserableness begins to resurface, it's all forgotten and it's back to "you are making me miserable."

This is a letter from November 12, 1976 responding to a patient's question about "confronting" a family member, and his effort to put the focus back on self.

11-12-76

The answer is NO-NO-NO!!!!!! After you have grown up enough to stop blaming her for your miserable misfortunes, then its okay.

Instead of focusing on what your grandmother has done to people, why not focus on what a miserable, inappropriate, helpless wretch you are (only the helpless have to blame others), get over the urge to rescue your poor mother (I have an idea you have about the same basic "fused" opinion of your gr-mother that your mother has), and become enough of an observer to find out how your family really operates.

If you have to blame someone, then go out in the field alone and blame either Gerald Ford or Jimmie Carter.

For now,