

Interview with Peter Titelman
Conducted by Andrea Schara

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For the Murray Bowen Archives Project of Leaders for Tomorrow at History of Science Division of the National Library of Medicine

Andrea: So it looks pretty good to me. Let's see. Alright, so Peter Titelman, I'd like to know who are you, and how did you come to know Dr. Bowen?

Peter: Well, Andrea, I was learning in Pennsylvania, getting a PhD, at Duquesne University, in Psychology, and I actually started out being interested in humanistic psychology, and had a psychoanalysis background but I was working at the state hospital, and- from '66, for about seven years, and working with schizophrenics, and other folks, and I learned about this family therapy group, that was led by Paulina McCullough, who's a social worker who'd been working with Bowen, as you know.

Starting in 1960. And I got into that group, and I think maybe I'd read the article from 1967, his first theoretical article. I read it at AAHA, in that program. And that program was not pure Bowen, unfortunately, but Paulina was the one really attracted to it, several faculty, and we read the '67 article and it was just- I was so amazed, that what I saw, in the hospital, with schizophrenics, other folks, what I thought -what I could perceive of them and the theory seemed so brilliant, because other theories you're interpreting. This group got me going and Paulina McCullough was the right dynamic. She knew Bowen well, so next year, 1972, was my first symposium at Georgetown.

And, Paulina introduced me as, whatever, young student or whatever, and that was the beginning, of dialogues with Bowen. I went to all the symposia starting in '72, except two, as of now. And all the clinical days. It was amazing. Bowen was so open, to people who had questions, and I had plenty of questions. And, you know, I'd go over to him at break, and he just was very, very open. And, one of the things I'd always have questions like, I can't remember which- if it was the first or the second or the third year, I'd have questions like, a book by- called *Effective Psychotherapy*, by Hellmuth Kaiser, and he was a psychoanalyst who had left Germany, during the Nazi time, went to Spain, was doing carving, he got invited to go to Menninger's, and he had this book in which the concepts- I read this in graduate school - his concepts were something like, the fusion of delusion and certain concepts that really wasn't the same as Bowen, but there was something in them.

I thought, "Wow, he's there at the same time as Bowen," as this is pretty typical, I said to Bowen, "So, did you have any contact with Kaiser, or was there influence, because his concepts have a little similar style. He didn't collect the writeups of his ideas, didn't come until he left Menninger's," and Bowen said "No, I knew some Hellmuth Kaiser, his wife was a nursery school teacher for my kids, but I developed my own theory." This is something I heard from Bowen a lot. If you ever wanted to see if there's a connection in thinking, or a relationship, you know, he acknowledged it in a way, but he wanted to be very clear, that of course, this is a theory

that he developed, maybe he dreamed it, but I think a lot of things went into his theory, but anyway.

From that time on, I used to talk to him at the meetings, somewhat, and then in 1977, I submitted an abstract for the symposium and I would do that for many years. I only got to be at one, but they were always very gracious. "We have too many good people," or, "Your think might be too controversial," or whatever, and but Bowen would write me back, some very interesting letters, he said, you know, he wanted to communicate his reactions to my abstracts. And, he says, "If I perceive your premise, you have accurately picked up the degree the extent to which I failed to find biological models to the concepts."

And he says, "I'm reaching towards accepted sciences in the hope it may lead out of the closed systems thinking and dogmas, religions, and philosophies," and all those kinds of things, that he said. But, yeah, so he began to get into this kind of conversation, because I had a social science background, because the program that I was in was very phenomenological. Very qualitatively oriented. And, so, Bowen says to me, "It gets interesting when there's one with enough knowledge to debate."

"The philosophy of science, which holds that it has the firm foundation, more than the accepted sciences which were moth-eaten with assumption- untenable premises." I thought that was an interesting thing that he said. To say that, the accepted sciences themselves are moth-eaten with assumptions, and untenable premises, but naturally he was a natural systems science-oriented person, below the clinical theory.

But he's saying, what I was saying when I was critiquing the natural systems is that position has facts to it, and so on. But, yeah we would go on and then you know, we would -I'd write this paper, called "Bowen Family Systems Theory, Natural Science and Human Science", 1978. And, he says, "I've always- I've always been grateful for gifted people." I'm not sure I was that gifted, we could debate forever, about each individual point about science and the nature of man, about aging that provides a polarity.

He's talking about being polarizing, and he goes on to say, "One of the most productive debates was a gifted philosopher with good points to prove that, quote, 'science is mushy and inexact.' And a good philosophy is more scientific than real science." And then he writes, a line, he says, "He was on target as long as he could find the target. Not too many people are interested in this kind of subject matter. I think the profession will profit from your kind of thinking."

So, you know, he's sort of joshing with me, and saying you know, "You're too philosophical and social science," but yet he takes the time, you know, to talk with me, and to think about these things. And so, like in 1981, I -this oracle that I -was just describing was accomplished in the general family, from the Center for Family Learning. And I didn't get to go, that was one of the two meetings I didn't go to the symposium. But, my- Jim Smith sent me a tape, and you know, it was a critique of- at that time, I still didn't buy in to the biological underpinnings, which were so central, to Bowen Theory. Eventually I did, about 1983 or 4. I was critiquing the biological underpinnings of Bowen Theory. And, so I didn't go to that meeting but I heard he had a comment about the- have to see where that is, but anyway, at that time he was going to do a

training program, sort of a group I had in Northampton, Massachusetts, on November 15th, 1981.

And, so my friend gave me the heads up that Bowen had mentioned my paper with critical humor, as “dark” at the symposium. And what he said was, "He was going to keep his position, he's never going to give it up, and I'm not going to give up mine, so he sharpens my thinking by being Peter, he's got his ideas, and I've got mine." I just thought that was so great. You know, he completely disagreed with me, but he took me seriously, at least I like to hear it that way. I think he most would say, I wouldn't come around to the right theory. But on the other hand, I took it as you know, he saw me taking my position, and eventually I came to agree with Bowen that the natural systems evolutionary perspective is a necessary, valuable underpinning to the theory.

And it took place, you know, by hearing nature presentations and sciences and so on. Then, 1983, I invited Bowen to do a training day. On family of origin at Northampton, and he came up, it was great. And he said, before he came up, he wrote and he said, "Well you know, I have a day on family of origin," he says, "I have a little time for the subject. People tend to hear the family of origin and think it's simple, technique, and graft it onto antique psychological theory." And he says, "Look, the family of origin runs into problems when people operate on technique alone. But I'll work as hard as I can, on my day, to make it a good day for you and your group." And so that was his letter.

And the training day turned out really great. And it was always two days that he came up to Northampton were real pluses and he enjoyed them as well. Unfortunately, I think it was in mid-1984, we took Bowen out to dinner, my partner, Jack LaForte and I, we would join his dinner, and Bowen was like falling asleep, he's kind of tired, all of a sudden, I look at my watch, it's like I've got to get him to the airport. And I rush him down there, and I kind of drive up on the sidewalk, and he gets up and he says, "Oh thanks, for your, for getting me here on time."

Of course, I almost didn't get him here, but anyway, it was a very interesting man, and got to know him a different, ah, beings. One time, earlier, he had gone to a meeting in Portland, or Portland- State Hospital, in fact, I heard he was going to be there, and it was quite an interesting event, because they had set him up- it was like a setup- almost the hardest kind of patient he would interview. And that was a schizophrenic young man in his twenties, and we come into the meeting, and Bowen's in a sort of a dining area with the family. And sort of talking with them, mapping out a little bit of knowledge about them I guess. Then he gets onstage, and this young man who is schizophrenic is just like, word salad, and I'm thinking that the staff is saying, "Well, we'll see what Bowen can do with him."

And he goes on for awhile, and Bowen just kind of talks with the family, and he's managing, but finally he gets out of hand, and two aides come in, drag this guy off, but Bowen just you know, goes on, working with that family. It was kind of amazing. But, then I -in about 1984, I decided I wanted to put together, you know, a book on Bowen Theory and training and application, or whatever. But, the publisher, Jason Aronson said, "Oh, why don't you just focus on therapists of family." So, that's what I started to do. That began-

Andrea: So that was his idea, to do the -that part, that was Jason's. Oh, okay. Jason Aronson.

Peter: Not Bowen's, but Aronson's. Aronson's. Aronson loved- I had a bunch of articles that were already written, like -what's her name, Margaret Hall, you know, a few people from Pittsburgh. So I was able to give Aronson a bunch of things I wanted to use, plus there would be some other new ones. And Aronson read the book in one night. I was pretty happy with that. It really- what he loved was the stories of the therapists.

So, I was excited about that. And that led to what was really you know, a very interesting time with Bowen and me, because it provided the unintended opportunity for me to find myself in relation to him, because I was first of all very excited about this, and then -and Aronson accepted the proposal in one week or something, and then I made this mistake. That I thought- just sort of assumed that Bowen would be interested, you know, in having a chapter -his chapter be printed, his Anonymous paper. Was a pretty silly assumption.

And, I had actually sent that paper, you know, as one of the ones to Aronson. Without really talking with Bowen. Very stupid. And, so when I contacted Bowen, he was understandably very upset with me. And, that I had not checked it out with him. That kind of thing. And, before I put together the contents -table of contents. I was of course going to ask him if he wanted to be in it. So, over the course of about a year, maybe it was longer really—two years. Oh, Bowen and I corresponded about the proposed project.

And you know, the gist of what Bowen told me was that the book of stories of therapists and their own family efforts was too subjective and narcissistic and he wanted no part of it. So, he didn't want to get involved, but also, because he didn't like Jason Aronson. And, one of the things I learned just years after he died even, was and this is really kind of a side point, because you know, he didn't want this book to be done, but Jason Aronson had owed him a lot of money, that he finally paid years later, like \$40,000 of royalties. And that's what Mrs. Bowen told me. But I didn't know anything about that.

At the same time, he's taking a lot of flak, which I realized later, from other family therapists and people who didn't understand the extended family work, and the therapist's own family. In fact, I don't know if you know about this book, (hard to hear on recording) Andrew Lee, green book, edited by a social worker, in which Mike has the key chapter on differentiation of self. So you think he would be positive, I'm blocking right now, I don't have it in front of me, it's a little book of -on family from different points of views, and Mike has one of these key, large chapters. And meanwhile, the editor writes this terrible thing where he says some people that Bowen -were using the Bowen approach with their own family, were just going out and, you know, screwing it up, and you know. So I think that Bowen was hearing a lot of things, from the environment, and that Aronson made him gun-shy, and made him think, "Well, I don't need to stick- you know, this is not -this stuff is getting perverted on me." So, those were things that were going on in the background, but that's the point in a sense, he just did- he didn't think it was a good way to deal with- it wasn't- it was too subjective.

And then, you know, I -I just kept working along, thinking about it, and two faculty members decided to drop out, they expressed anger, that I might publish a book that betrayed Bowen in some way. And, another faculty member spoke very calmly with me, said that while he liked the

idea of being, you know, part of the book, it was so much pressure on him, in regards to his relationship with his mentor. So I appreciated that.

Cause I thought that was, you know, he- he had a reason why. But at least he could say it. It turned out that one of the two people that was very angry with me, later was basically asked to leave. He was a psychiatrist, with some relationship issues, so he had a lot to defend. He certainly didn't need any more, you know, problems with Bowen. So anyway, I removed the chapters and I had to weigh, basically, I had some sleepless nights, you know. If I write this book, and it's not a good idea, that's just kind of a narcissistic thing. And it's very undifferentiated. But, if I don't do the book, and I really believe it's a good book, it's undifferentiated. Well, I came out and decided to do it. Any, so on, but -and then Bowen wrote sort of a last letter, before the -about a year before the book came out or something. You know, he said, "I'm just writing you a quick letter after receiving your letter, and" and he just- he, you know, he continued to say he didn't agree with it, and so on.

And I had written too, "I think these are still good ideas, so I'm going to go ahead." And then when we met -oh, he came before the book came out. The next time -you know, we just talked, and my idea was not to go off with him. I felt, this is important man in my life, this is a theory I believe in, and I'm not going to be offensive and retaliatory. I know other people, I think even, in the Bowen movement did books, and were unhappy when Bowen didn't like those books. Like, Ed Friedman. I think it was pretty painful for him. When he did his *Generation to Generation*, and sent it to Bowen, Friedman must have had a big you know, original thing. Wasn't in book form yet, and he'd never heard anything about it.

So, I took that as an exercise, and I thought, you know, "I'm going to send Bowen my book, when it's done, but I don't expect him to write anything back. So, yeah, you know, and he didn't. But, yeah, when I went into the meeting, the next year or whatever it was, I just went up to him and you know, talked, and then I said, "Well, I'm wondering what you think about this, I'm going to do a project, I'm working on incest."

And partly saying that, you know, I have other things, irons in the fire, you know. That'll help you deal with the book. Because it's something you don't want to talk about. So he asked me this question, he says, "Peter, are you for incest, or are you against it?" And I said, "Oh, neither one." I was pretty neutral. With that issue, incest, which I guess was kind of hot to a lot of people. And we just went on, and -and continued to relate. And, you know, of course I had- I had apologized, for the way I'd gone about starting the book and so on. But, yeah so I think I was- yeah, I remember now what he said after '85, he said, "Your recent letter stimulates us. I'm not inclined to take much time for such, but maybe you can quote here, a little -or have do a book that is theoretical rather than personal." But that's what he said. "In my opinion, the main contributions were-" and he goes on to talk about his concept, differentiation of self, and triangles and so on. And he says, you know, "and they say a critical decision was to keep going-" and has several appendages, including family of origin. He said, "There were a number of pro and con controversies went into the 1966-7 decisions about presenting the family of origin ideas." And he said, "There was a hope that focus on "own" quote-unquote, would reduce the hearing lag time for the theory." "But the initial response was fairly good," he said, "but the "own" thing stimulated such activity, almost totally obscured the theoretical base that made it all possible."

And, so he goes on like this. I think that a lot of people would, yeah, there were a lot of distortions.

Of that kind of work. And I think at the center, you know, there was much less presenting on our own family, and the focus became more on the natural sciences. Which Bowen always wanted to do anyway. But, it's a complicated one. When I was there to come back, a part of training, a major part, along with theory and natural systems theory, and recently see people presenting their own family on the road, like Mike and Kathy, and other people, so there's a time that I don't think it was, you know, focused as heavily. But anyway, he says, "I played my own part in the distortion.

When the Georgetown Symposium presented a few own family papers, he said, "The symposia resembled carnivals or religious camp meetings." I remember that whole long with Mary, Margaret Hall, I always remember- I don't know if you were there, and she described going back to England, and meeting with her father, and so on. And then he has a heart attack. And the audiences is like, "Aaaaaah!" And whatever, and then Bowen said it was the only interesting thing- so, "You think you were going to- You killed your dad, or you're going to kill your dad, or?" It was just him loosening up the audience, but you know, they were giant crowds of people at those meetings.

"We were popular," Bowen says, "but the professional community was lost in a sea of subjectivity." He would sell this too, in many ways. And then he says, "When own family papers were curtailed, the semblance of professionalism returned. There were dozens of requests to reprint Anonymous Paper, and so on, but I refused. Never published." So, so, what else happened. And then, one of the things that was nice, that helped with in '8-, the book came out in '87, and then in '89 I went to the- was invited to do a Third Thursday meeting on incest. And I think it went quite well, I was quite anxious. And as soon as Bowen had that meeting- he came back, from his house and he was really kind of frail, but he came back be part of the meeting. He sat down with me in the front row, and I felt you know, very supported. He sort of put a little umbrella there, or whatever. It's nice to have around, when you're doing something like that.

And, so that was interesting. So but, he was a person who if he disagreed with you, you know, that's the way it was. But, it's not like- he was more upset with the ideas than being against me as a person. I didn't take it personally. And it worked out to be a good relationship. At the end, I told him something that was happening in my family. And I said, "You know, I just wanted to let you know, I'm getting divorced." And he said, "Oh, that's accounts for why you were -you were really quiet, I probably didn't account for that." Cause it wasn't easy for me to stand up, and to do that hour, which, it was in the medical school that oh, about three hundred people, family people, but anyway it was interesting. And then, Andrea Schara took a nice picture of Bowen and me, at- as we left.

Peter: But you probably don't remember that.

Andrea: Yeah, I do. I remember the whole meeting, actually.

Peter: Yeah, yeah, and but this doesn't have to do with Bowen or Roberta Gilbert writing a review. It's pleasant to get, but she thought- she thought I was being psychoanalytic, because I had a long piece by one of the cases I was doing that was way too long, about her experience. And I was also describing that she learned about- she strained to remember that incest was in dreams, first maybe blocked, she thought it was outside her uncle's door, but I wasn't using listening to those dreams to give us psychoanalytic interpretation. But too, that was accessible, one piece besides her brain.

The father had eventually -so, I'm really working through some things. Anyway, but then that was kind of the more at the end of his life. It was '89, and I didn't really have contact with him after the next year. But, that's how I got to know him and you know, the so many of the clinical conferences, and all those symposiums. And, one of the things that was interesting, was that I had written a couple of books, on Bowen Theory, and I was always interested in history. Of how his ideas developed. And one of the books is on triangles, and one was on cutoff, and there's two sections in it that were historical. So I would do things like ask to look at the archive material that was in the- at the Center. At the Bowen Center. And that was kind of exciting.

And then, you know, I started looking through files that were not necessarily as germane. And I saw that, oh, he -his correspondence with Gerry Aronson. And that was my cousin, who had at that time, I don't think I had met Gerry even. Let's see. Let me remember- yeah, I had already met Gerry. Out in Los Angeles. He was a cousin that I didn't know very well, and he had been at Menninger's, with Bowen. And, so when I got together with Gerry and communicated and so on, he had very interesting things. He said Bowen was so respected. As, he was somewhat older than some of the other residents. Bowen was the chief resident. And Aronson and his wife Jenn knew him, and really like him, and -and wrote letters, and that was kind of interesting, that I had a family connection that went way back. I also -this is something I kept out of one of my books that's talking about the history, when he was in Menninger's.

I ran into a psychologist named Robert Holt, a famous psychoanalytic psychologist at NYU, a researcher and does a lot of assessment. But he was at Menninger's at the same time. I ran into him at a funeral at Cape Cod, and there's a whole story, that I won't tell, but had more to do with me when I was younger, where he thought I shouldn't become a psychologist. I should just become an educational psychologist, because I was too interested in therapy. I was asking him about graduate school, so anyway, going to this funeral I meet him, and I said, "You were at Menninger's, with Bowen." And he said, "Yeah. You know what we were doing? We were giving psychological assessments, to all the incoming residents. And this was a big period of increase in psychiatry, and some had been in the Army, and so on," and he said, "What we were doing was psychological thing- with Rorschach's, and et cetera." Vendors and all that. And he says, "Bowen was -some of the psychologists..., he's not going to make a good psychologist, he's kind of sly, and-" I don't have those materials in front of me, but it was so- I thought it was so humorous, because I thought probably the Rorschach showed that he wasn't a very reactive person. And, it was just fascinating to hear this about someone I think is a genius. And, it was interesting that- that he would actually reveal that because you know, years and years, you know, forty years later or whatever. And I thought, well, I thought it was funny, and I put it in my introduction as part of the Menninger's thing, because of course he was very friendly with the Menninger's, Bowen was, the Menninger brothers, and when he went back later he had gotten

awards and that whole letter that many of us have seen, that was published about how I forgot which Menninger wrote this, maybe you'll know this Andrea, it said-

Andrea: Karl.

Peter: "I'm so glad you did what you did," that sort of replies, "not necessarily my theory, but I'd rather have people learn your human way of dealing and..." Now, he was honestly very loved and I think there were triangles probably between psychologists and psychiatrists there, as they were in earlier days, around the hierarchy you know, and that Holt, although he may have been representing some of the psychiatrists' view of Bowen, who was a real individual, a person who could come up with his way of thinking, and not you know, reduct to psychoanalysis. But I think there may have been -Joanne Bowen mentioned that too, that you know, maybe that was a psychologist negativity coming in there. Vis-a-vis the psychiatrists. But, so in this research I would do, for these kind of background parts of the concepts, for triangles, whatever I was working on, I got a chance to talk to some -I talked with a man- I think this was true- the one who -Bowen says that he started thinking about where he should go for his residency, and he went down to Menninger's and one other, or something.

And there was a man that he thought highly of, a psychiatrist who ran not Menninger's, but another place. And, I'm blocking, I have to pull my notes up to see this, but -and Bowen thought so highly of him. So, but when I reached him, he so hardly -he knew who Bowen was, but it was so interesting to hear how Bowen's excitement about some people, or the readers of his- of Bowen's work thought that he must be quite involved with him. When it was not necessarily so. And Bowen was the younger man there, and he was looking towards this person, and -and another contact I had was with Howard Searles, I wanted to point out about a review Bowen did, of Searles'- of article about driving the other crazy. Schizophrenics driving each other crazy. I don't know if you've seen that article, it's a chapter in Searles' collected papers. Was a very dynamic, very active psychoanalytic psychiatrist in terms of working with schizophrenia. And I finally reached Searles'- his business, took a long time, he's very old, and he's in Bakersfield, and you know, he doesn't really remember that time. For him that was just that, you know, some group of psychiatrists sharing the paper, but he became very famous and Bowen wrote this interesting response to it.

Andrea: What was the name of the paper again?

Peter: I don't have it in front of me but it's in a collection of Howard Searles', it's

Andrea: Is it "How to Drive the Other Crazy," or-

Peter: I -yeah,

Andrea: something like-

Peter: Driving the Other Crazy. Yeah, it's a very famous paper, I can-

Andrea: Oh, Driving the Other Crazy.

Peter: come up with it, and share it with you. And, Searles'- you know, he wrote a lot, actually, on family, from a very outside position. And he was an interesting man, and I assumed he would -of course, he was elderly, too. That he would remember Bowen, because everything Bowen did, is really exciting to me. And yeah, he didn't. But in the final thing it was very odd, not odd, but he finally said, "You know, it's- the medications are all important." He'd done so much work in psychotherapy, this guy. You know, a lot of subjectivity in it too. A lot of being a self, and you know, working with people, and I was seeing it.

So, this 88 or 90 year-old guy, living in Bakersfield, California, and psychiatrists are just going the other way, let's say. So, you know, I -these are interests that I had going to Searles, find out who he was, and -and I think the idea I always give, you know, Bowen says in a light way, you know, he dreamed theory. And I think "Well, everyone has influences." And I'm trying to write an introductory chapter for a book on differentiation of self, where I'm thinking, "So what went into this concept of differentiation of self, from Bowen's point of view? And I think, you know, there are a lot of very personal things. Like, I mean you grow up, in a very differentiated family, I think there are a lot of stories and writings about what his family life was like, that was very organized in a family where the father and mother were well-known, and were very responsible and so on and so on.

Obviously, that doesn't- you don't get the concept from that, but that was one thing, and then, in a world where you're dealing with animals and the natural world, as he did, and there's one great letter which I can't remember [laughter], in the book of letters, that he wrote, you probably have that book.

I have to dig up, and he's writing to the psychiatrist, saying, basically, really putting him down. "If you don't know the ins and outs of reproduction and the natural world, and about you know, food sources and everything, you don't get it. He didn't quite say it like that though. But all those kinds of experiences, went into it, and then of course there's leadership, the way when he got to Menninger's, as a leader, of a team, and having to assign the direction and to find himself. And he talks about that kind of thing.

What I'm going to do, what I'm not going to do. And, and how to deal with one's own over-responsibility by pulling back into where -what part you can and can't do. And then he talks about that also at the Georgetown Center, in another paper. And so there are many things that went in, personally, interested again in the natural sciences. The reading, all the readings that he did there in the natural sciences, while he was in the psychoanalytic program, he was just a person who has their own direction. And, so, you know, he's a fascinating man certainly. As I said in the beginning when I was working at a state hospital, and I began reading Searles, I said, "Wow, this -this is this kind of amazing."

And this goes- moves me to -moves, maybe jumps, out of order, in the questions. You said, one of the questions that you were interested in, was "What were the main characteristics of his approach to research, and what did he mean by research?" And, I think maybe I didn't appreciate this enough, that he was -he wanted to look at the human phenomena as it was, not with a pre-

suppositions of psychoanalysis, or anything else. Or even of traditional science. Which could be very reductionistic. Cause and effect, you know, this kind of thing.

You know, like he said you can't chi-square a you know- whatever. A feeling, or anything else. And get to the heart. He looked at people, and he could see the system. Not just the individual. And, he could- and he would use language, of everyday life, instead of jargon. I think that's what he really brought to research, is that he could look with an open mind, at what was out there, and in a way it's a dichotomy. In one way, he had a natural science presupposed baseline. Evolutionary biology. And on the other hand, while looking at the humans in a relationship system, for example, and tying it in to the biological, he had an- he was an amazing observer.

And his stories, and even his colloquial language, just incredible. But I don't think people really understand, at NIMH, just how this w- being in a hospital is not a naturalistic setting, but to bring the family in, and to observe the interaction and flow and triangles and I think of this Barbara- what's the woman that does

Andrea: The Gorillas in the Mist?

Peter: the gorillas, or who- the- the woman in, talks to-. No, the, not gorillas, but the -the little, natural scientist who does primates, what's her name, from Michigan?

Andrea: Barbara Smuts.

Peter: Barbara- Yeah, Barbara Smuts. And you know, for instance, she was working on her species and she had a video, an escape response, and one is like, all sad and carrying around, and there's another one, she said "You know, but we can't see that they're out in the woods." And she said, "I wish we could." How difficult it is, to study the interaction, of animals and humans, because it's complex. And, so much of science has moved- doesn't move towards things that are too complex.

Because they're hard to study. And Bowen did, and he found a good way, to observe families, and he had a language that was very much one that he certainly took terms like differentiation and so on, but was very, very descriptive and could take into account a phenomenon that was not inside the individual.

So I think, he's way ahead. Obviously, there's research that's longitudinal, you know, we could do more of it, and so on and so. And there are some research out there, but so much that's reductionistic in science, is something that Bowen didn't do. To come up with his theory. And, while everyone's excited that he used language of everyday life, they don't think of that as science. But I do. Perhaps, coming from a phenomenological- how do you describe what you see, without predetermined, scientific kind of terms. And yet, he had a deep view of evolutionary biology. So he had the best of both worlds. The connection of the human to all the species and to observe, and to research, you know, what he really saw.

And, the other thing of course, was not only evolution, but working with a primary triangle and so on, and extending to the extended family, and the family of origin, and just was part of his

widening of research. It's not easy to define. Bowen's terms are not -I've been thinking more that they -they're descriptions, doesn't limit them to you know, teeny, specific definitions as well as some people like. Parsing reactivity, or versus anxiety, versus stress, versus stressor, versus, you know, whatever. He had different ways, sometimes, of using a word, he was so descriptive, and he was a- at his time, but the science is descriptive as well, if you go away from description, the system of multiple people, you don't have anything. And, surely there's a place for further research. But, I think his research was very sophisticated, and you know, there should be more studies of families in hospitals and non-hospitals. It's not -some might say it's the pro domina, like the introduction.

By describing your phenomena. And then you can measure it and everything else. Well, sure, yeah, getting some measurement eventually, but if it reduces the phenomena you don't have anything, and he didn't reduce. And he was a tremendous researcher. And, long before we used to do research. But, so I think that describes somewhat what I think the characteristics of his approach to research, and there were approaches at some point, you've got content. Contact, and content. Content and method. These three things, that most people don't really look at their approach.

And he wasn't perpetuating that approach that I described, so much. For this prescriptive approach, but that was an approach to- and to look exactly at what the phenomena is, and he was a great observer. And, I think that something about the ideas fueling his research, both in the natural world, how, how did - you know, I just think that's the kind of person he was. He wasn't going to take theories or gimmicks, he wanted to look at the phenomena. And of course if you go to the family and have a system it's completely different. On the individual.

So, that's really what I wanted to say, about Christian. Three, four, and five -What was the main contribution that Bowen made to the Western scientific view? I don't know. I think that the Western scientific view is in many ways limited. -but I do think, that Bowen, without having a knowledge of specifics, the locations and so on, many of the things. He- oh, his contact with Paul MacLean, and Pochak Cajond, I think they were important, but I think he came looking for those guys with contacts. He naively came into and he learned from them, they learned from him, and he learned from them.

Cause he already came with this natural science background. But it's so interesting, I think- I can't remember where this is in the Bowen book, but he- he doesn't -he said the location of the emotional and intellectual- he didn't want to say was it any one place, because he didn't know at that time, and he knew it would be changing. That was brilliant. Andrea, do you know where he says the functions of it. Instead of locating it, he used a bit more general term, for the emotional and intellectual - and let scientists locate it more. Paul MacLean had a lot to say, but I think the relationship between mind, and body, and I think there is a self, but that's a hard thing to talk about—was gained in from Bowen's work.

And people who've come after, that emotions move thinking, thinking, move, they interlock- the mind, the body, something I think Bowen sort of understood, but not in a sophisticated way. As it's getting to be now. So, there are people that tend to go one side, you know, still kind of go way into breaking down, in the more smaller details, which is important, and others that work

more off on the bigger conceptual level. But, let's see- then the other question here, was there anything about your family that spawned your interest in Bowen theory? In my family. So let's -I came from a family that from my mother was very interested in psychology, and the psychological, so she started a school. They have a consultant who was a child analyst, and they're just in the emotional side and the social side. It was an aggressive school that still exists in Los Angeles and I think part of her interest came from the fact that her father committed suicide. When he was 44. And, it led her, I think, to be interested in education, being on the board of a mental health center, and then she got interested in Erikson, and sort of the social side of psychoanalysis, so she wasn't a reductionist person.

I was pretty influenced by my mother and then I think also, there are a lot of people, who get interested in Bowen Theory, who have more feeling for a larger system thinking than symptomatic change, or you know, the little pieces of psychology, psychiatry. Even if they come from a philosophical background, or they come from a medical background. And they're in it their whole lives, they -I think I was, anyway, before I lived with people who are interested in sort of symptomatic change per se, but about everyday life, the things that people have to work on their whole life. Like dealing with their mother, or father, or -things that to some people don't seem like mental health problems, what -"therapy's not for this" or "coaching is not for this."

And so if you have a bigger idea and that this is just part of life, and how are you going to work on it, then you ought to be interested in theory and it's attractive, Bowen Theory.

Let's see, "have you developed ideas that would extend or refine theory?" Not really, no, I haven't really done anything but sometimes there are different ways to say things, and I think I'm interested in primary and secondary triangles, and primary and secondary cutoff, but those are in a way, about interlocks, they interlock in cutoffs and they interlock in triangles, but as far as I'm concerned, my clinical work just to focus on a subsystem how it interlocks with the others, and I think that -It's a hard thing about, you know, are there going to be new theoretical concepts.

One of the things is that there's a saying, I'm trying to think, about- in the book, you know, "What's -which- this deep theoretical concepts, but then there are these kind of subconcepts, and there's something like anxiety get brought in, and then there's a whole idea of a system. The emotional system, and the -the little terms. Functioning position. What do you call that? That could be like, you know, -if you get too close into that, it's a sort of reductionism. You're missing the point of Bowen Theory. On the other hand, the outside world wants to know, "well what's the difference between anxiety and reactivity?" They both involve some behavior and some inside experience, you know, and so on and so on. But, I don't know, I think Bowen had a pretty great theory, it's problem is that it's a very difficult thing to work on, so people are not attracted. They want something simpler and because we live in a world of reductionism and measurement people can ignore it. Because they don't see its exact definitions. Or whatever. That they don't see. So it's hard, and I must say they- can you have a new concept -if Bowen Theory is made up by what Bowen did, and then you add another concept, is that Bowen Theory, or you know, someone else's addition, or you know, subtheory, or interlocked theory.

So I don't know, and yet you don't want a closed system, certainly. It's nice to know when things are supported by evidence within the theory. But I think there's a lot of misunderstandings about what science is even, and sort of many of us are social scientists or therapists, and so on. It's easy

for people to get totally excited with you know, natural science but even less, you know, psychology research and all that, this is going to prove this or that, and if you don't have the right approach to a phenomenon you're going to go down the wrong trail and Bowen didn't go down the wrong trail, that's for sure. Let's see, that's about -is there something else you want to corral me into-

Andrea: Well, you put a lot in for which I'm very grateful, Peter, it's an excellent interview and a good overview of your relationship with him. And the tussle that you had between subjectivity and objectivity. And I was thinking that Bowen used to talk a lot about functional facts, things that could be seen to repeat over and over, that when you -you're a therapist or a coach for somebody, that's more or less the things that over time, you begin to see these things appearing in a system.

Peter: Right.

Andrea: And you're pretty sure that these -that these

Peter: Exactly, right.

Andrea: ways of being, or functional states,

Peter: are pretty typical of what-

Andrea: you know, are going to exist unless you interrupt them.

Peter: Right, and also they -this is interesting, I did a little paper on territorial - Territoriality and the- what's it called?- and the Spirit of Place, it was about objectivity and subjectivity. We're not going to get rid of subjectivity, and I have a quote here from Bowen, and I don't think it was out of context. He knew that subjectivity was there and was part of the human, and if you don't know how to deal with it you avoid dealing with it, and you're missing a lot. But the idea is to help people be more objective about the subjectivity. I mean, consciousness, the human being, whatever the self is, the sense of who you are over time, in a singularity, you can't- subjectivity is part of the human. And, the kind of consciousness we have is a little different than animals.

We're mostly animal, but- and it's just a matter of not getting caught in subjectivity. I think Bowen -I'd like to find some more data on that, I have one quote, it came from one of the symposiums, where he's talking about how important subjectivity is. See he's the type of guy, who you know, at one meeting, or many meetings, will say, "This is the most important thing, the only thing I want to note, if I could only have one fact it's sibling position, or the next time he'd be talking the other side.

Because he never wants to have polarity, polarization but he'll take a position on something. But he always knows, or goes to the next point he's making, and then he gives you the other side. And that's what makes him so hard. He's not only sort of -he's not a dialectical thinker, but he's sort of sees every side.

Andrea: [laughter] He's not a Hegelian.

Peter: It's a little different. You know, any he wants to make a point very strongly for it, and he doesn't want to get attracted, then he goes to the other side. You know, so the subjectivity -is it really - imagine if all people were dealing with was their subjectivity in their, you know, in their theory, their- what they're looking for, what they're measuring, and what they're living. I mean, if the idea is that they work on helping people, right, to get a little more objective or they become a lot more objective.

Andrea: And maybe to see these functional stages, that have a lot of kind of evolutionary or biological influence and make it difficult for people to observe them.

Peter: Yeah, yeah.

Andrea: Their automatic states. But, you can- you can learn about

Peter: It's much harder to do that.

Andrea: them. You can learn about them and then you can manage yourself in them a bit better.

Peter: Yeah, and then Bowen says, something, let me remember, like you know, you don't have to be differentiating all the time, you can be loose and light and playful, and sexual and whatever. There's many things that are you know, where objectivity doesn't -and humor, obviously. It's not objective, but it has a place that leads you to objectivity by getting you neutral. So anyway, I'm kind of interested in that. And Bob Williams and his belief papers, are very interesting.

Andrea: No, I'm not familiar with those. He's

Peter: -yeah, the ones that are Victoria's, you ever get together -?

Andrea: Ok yeah, okay, yeah.

Peter: but you know, because there's so much importance

Andrea: Now it's making a connection, yeah.

Peter: Part of differentiation, what are your be- what do you believe, where do you stand, and we haven't done as much as say, Bob's done, partly because that would seem like a narrative or story. But in a human, that your- beliefs, and where you stand and how you got your beliefs, I think that's a whole beautiful thing Bob's doing. Anyway, it was great to talk to you Andrea, have a- to see a person, have to deal with a human [laughter]. And have to get a little calmer before I go out there and anyway. I'm excited about this material and the opportunity, thank you. So much, for-

Andrea: Oh, you're so welcome. It's great to collect these oral histories, and yours was fascinating, just thank you Peter. I'll talk to you later.

Peter: How many have you done?

Andrea: Ooh, I don't know. Maybe twelve?

Peter: Wow, that'll be great.

Andrea: Yeah, there are probably four or five of them up on my website, but I haven't had time to put them all up, because it requires a lot of transcribing.

Peter: Hey, I saw two or three of your things, like in the last year, but for six months I found out it's not on my- I'm really enjoying your writing. So can you get me back on, because I don't know when you last wrote-

Andrea: Oh, sure.

Peter: there were two or three, I was telling you about, that I haven't seen one, and -

Andrea: Alright, I'll send that to you. Okay.

Peter: for six months. Great, okay, thanks Andrea. Yeah, bye.

Andrea: Okay, talk to later. See you soon, bye.