

Interview with Kent Webb

Conducted by Andrea Schara

February 22, 2021

Andrea Schara:

So now we're recording. I have the ultimate pleasure of introducing Kent Webb, whom I've known for many years. Kent, why don't you just go ahead and go in any direction you want? The only thing I have to say is that it's February 22, 2021.

Kent Webb:

Well, at least we're on the right date.

Kent Webb:

I am a licensed clinical social worker, and also a professional certified coach. I talk and describe myself as a person who's solidly had one foot in the mental health world for a number of years, and also as a person who has another solid foot in the business and organizational world. I've worked at applying Bowen Theory to both mental health and the organizational business leadership world. It's been pretty fascinating to work at the application of Bowen Theory to both of them. And then of course, I have myself in the midst of that application process.

Kent Webb:

Currently, I'm doing a lot of coaching, both in mental health as well as leadership and business. Developed some leadership training programs. Really fortunate to get to be vice president of the Murray Bowen Archives Project, which has been a wonderful experience and an organization to be a part of, with a very meaningful vision and mission and purpose. As well as, I'm also recently on the faculty of the Bowen Center, which feels like a real honor to have that privilege.

Andrea Schara:

That's awesome. You've come a long way in a few years. When did you first meet Dr. Bowen?

Kent Webb:

I applied at the training program at the Georgetown Family Center, as it was known then, and it was still a part of Georgetown University Department of Psychiatry. That was in 1982. I was in the training program from 1982 through 1985. And then, one day, I decided that I wanted to do coaching with Dr. Bowen, that I thought if I was going to really learn theory, I ought to talk to the person who developed the theory. So I approached him with a lot of anxiety and trepidation. I was sure he would say, "No way, Jose." But thank goodness, he did. So then I worked with him individually from 1985 right up to two weeks before he died. We had a

coaching session in September of 1990. That was my experience and introduction to Dr. Bowen in a formal capacity.

Andrea Schara:

What did you think of the way he interacted with you and with others? What was that like?

Kent Webb:

It was really interesting to, at the 32,000 foot view, to see the interaction that the... When I was in the training program, he and Dr. Kerr were the two faculty members who ran the post-graduate training program. Dr. Kerr was in the morning, and Dr. Bowen was in the afternoon. And so my first experience with him was in his teacher mode, his professor mode, his trainer mode. And I experienced him as being very direct, to the point, no nonsense.

Kent Webb:

Back in those days, I mean, that was in 1982, so that was a long time ago. I was in my early 30's. I was really anxious. I was less anxious in the morning with Dr. Kerr, but over the course of lunchtime, I became more anxious, and by the time Dr. Bowen got in the room, my anxiety levels had skyrocketed.

Kent Webb:

And I remember, the very first day I was expecting to arrive at the Bowen Center and have a name tag and be greeted with coffee. I envisioned going into the training room with a circle. We'd all introduce ourselves and have Kumbaya moments. That was really quite opposite my experience. We were lined up in classroom style. We all were sitting there. He walks in, sets his books on the desk. He doesn't say hello, he doesn't do anything other than say, "Okay, we're going to start with you, and then we're going to go down the row. I want you to tell me the difference between general systems theory and the Bowen systems theory. I had no idea what either one was.

Andrea Schara:

[laughs] Great.

Kent Webb:

I often tell people that I was certain there was a puddle of water sitting underneath my chair. When I got through with my answer, which I have no idea what I said, he said, "I think you need to go back to the books."

Kent Webb:

But I also saw the human side of Dr. Bowen. When I started the training program, just a couple years after his surgery, I think he was fairly serious at that point in time. And somebody in the class one day referenced Bowen Theory as "Bowenian Theory." He stood up from his desk, he

took the clip microphone off of his collar, and he threw the microphone down, and he yelled, "My name is not Bowenian."

Andrea Schara:

That's evidence you were sweating for a reason.

Kent Webb:

Exactly.

Kent Webb:

But I also saw the human, the personal side. He met with myself and another trainee to hear our requests for another focus of learning after the three years of postgraduate training program. And the research group soon followed. Now, how much that conversation made a difference in terms of the offerings of the Bowen Center made at that point in time, I certainly don't know. But he certainly took time to meet with us and hear us out, ask us some questions.

Kent Webb:

On the coaching side, I experienced him to be quite personable. It seemed to me like he was always guided by theory. He would often say some things like, you know, "If I were in your shoes," or, "If it were up to me," or, "If this were my life." He'd give me his thinking.

Kent Webb:

When I was thinking about doing this interview, I went back to some of my notes of my supervision coaching times with him. I was struck by one. It was probably soon after we started coaching. Prior to my starting the postgraduate training program, I was getting a divorce. About nine months after the divorce had started, my ex-wife, she committed suicide. So he asked me, I was talking with him about the suicide and what I thought my part in it was. I asked him what he thought my part in it was.

Kent Webb:

And my writing was just very blunt on the piece of paper. I was looking at it. He said, "Well, it was your poor level of differentiation, and your level of emotional immaturity played a part in it."

Kent Webb:

So I've been working on both of those ever since.

Andrea Schara:

That's beautiful. Did you know exactly what he meant by that, or was it satisfying just to hear those words?

Kent Webb:

I think I didn't really have a very good idea of what we were talking about at that point in time. It was three years after the training program, so I had some idea. It wasn't anything that I wanted to hear, obviously. Because I recall that my pseudo-self was well in play in a lot of my sessions with him, and I was always fishing for him to approve of whatever it was I wanted, what I was thinking about or planning to do.

Kent Webb:

So I had this business idea, and it actually became a business. But before I went about launching the business, I was trying to get him to approve of the business idea. I said, "Well, what do you think of that?" And he goes, "Well, it's as good as any."

Andrea Schara:

You're on your own, Kent.

Kent Webb:

You're on your own, for better, for worse. He had his betters [inaudible 00:10:02]

Andrea Schara:

It's a good line, though, "It's as good as any." He maintained a sort of emotional neutrality with you, it sounds like, that was really useful. He didn't just ask you questions, or just have one approach.

Kent Webb:

No. Yeah, it was... It was an experience that was invaluable and quite meaningful and impactful to me. It was well worth the time and effort.

Andrea Schara:

Do you ever think about writing this up, the difference that he made in your life and how he went about doing it?

Kent Webb:

Well, I haven't thought about doing it from those particular perspectives. I think I have made an effort to do some writing about homosexuality and Bowen theory and my research, but that's in a bit of a different context, I think, than what you're discussing.

Andrea Schara:

Well, I mean maybe the way that he dealt with you made it easier or less threatening to talk about, to be more open in that day in age, in the '80s. Yeah, I think Bowen theory... might have expanded its viewpoint of homosexuality.

Kent Webb:

The unfortunate thing, in terms of my time with Dr. Bowen, was that I wasn't out then.

Andrea Schara:

Okay.

Kent Webb:

So even though... So I was this guy who came out later in life because I was trying to convince myself to be a heterosexual guy who was going to be married and who was going to have a family. So after the first wife's suicide, then a couple of years later, I remarried, and then I had two children. But I credit my coming to terms with my homosexuality and my being a gay man to Bowen theory and to differentiation of self. Dr. Bowen always said, differentiation of self is a serious business.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Kent Webb:

I am proof to say that it's serious business. You have to be careful what happens when you start the process. [laughs]

Andrea Schara:

So, you kind of start the process with Bowen, even if you're not talking directly about issues, it's almost the becoming of a more mature self, something like that, that leads you more to your true self, I guess. That's what I'm hearing from you about differentiation of self being dangerous.

Kent Webb:

I think the process, obviously, was kicked off in the training program, the postgraduate training program. I had a couple of great coaches and supervisors. Dr. Papero and Dr. Roberta Holt. So the process of focusing and becoming your solid self certainly began there, but then to follow that up with almost five years of one-to-one coaching with Dr. Bowen was an additional catalyst for that process.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Well, he lived Bowen theory in a different way than most people did, I think. Yeah. So he had the dual thing of trying to live theory and explain theory. And he really didn't like explaining. He did like, seemingly, ask a lot of questions with people and get people to explain theory to him. I remember him saying, "I'll learn something about you, and you'll learn something, and that's the way it'll go."

Kent Webb:

Right.

Andrea Schara:

And that was kind of the way he put it. But I was thinking about, at that era in the '80s, when AIDS was a part of everybody's life, really, and it was much more difficult, I think, to come out as a gay person in the '80s with this increasing anxiety about people who were gay.

Kent Webb:

Oh, for sure, I think. There was a lot of prejudice towards gay men during that time. In fact, HIV was known as the gay men's disease initially. That was one of the titles that HIV had prior to HIV. And people were very fearful of gay men, not only because of who they loved and how they engaged in sexual behaviors in relationships, but because of fear of the virus and contracting it.

Andrea Schara:

I think that made it even more difficult for people. And I think that, at that time, there were a lot of people who looked at homosexuality and thought of it as a symptom. So there was the mental health focus on homosexuality, in addition to the paranoia about AIDS.

Kent Webb:

Right. No, I totally agree. It was just emerging from... The DSM-III at that point in time didn't remove it from the diagnostic categories until 1973. So of course it takes people a while to catch up. So even in the early '80s, there was this... the belief that it wasn't a psychiatric diagnosis was just beginning to gain some basis.

Kent Webb:

But there's always been the religious component, which, you know, being gay is a sin. The mental health piece didn't help it, either, and then AIDS. So people who were in the closet prior to the '80s went most likely into the closet further. And then if they contracted AIDS, they were sort of outed, out of the closet, whether they wanted to be or not.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. I did a ten year study on AIDS myself, and found that when the men would go back home and visit their family and tell them, "I'm gay and I have AIDS," that the parents would often break down and get symptoms, and then the T-cell count on the men would go up. So they would get healthier, almost like they unloaded some of the anxiety that they had been carrying, kind of as an outcast in their family. And then when they went back home, the family members took on that anxiety, and the people with AIDS did better. It was fascinating.

Andrea Schara:

I think that might be true in all families.

Kent Webb:

I think so. I think that typically, gay men are very, very, very anxious before they come out, and then after they come out, they're much less anxious, regardless of how it played out.

Kent Webb:

I talk about, when a person comes out, you're bringing your family into the closet.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. I like that.

Kent Webb:

And the anxiety does get spread around the family, then, because it's not encapsulated primarily in one person. And for better or for worse, I do think the family is more anxious, and the person who came out is not as anxious. Again, depending, all things being equal.

Andrea Schara:

I think in Mike Kerr's, in *Family Evaluation*, they still thought more of homosexuality... even in the Bowen world, as a symptom at that time.

Andrea Schara:

So you had to come out also in the Bowen world.

Kent Webb:

Well, I remember... I have a lot to say about all of what you just said.

Andrea Schara:

Okay. Glad about that. Good.

Kent Webb:

I'll see if I can make sense of it all. No, you're absolutely right. I was very anxious and very cautious about my coming out as a gay man at the Bowen Center and how that would be perceived and what the response was. And I know... Priscilla Friesen has been an important person to me during the course of my decision to go to the Bowen Center. Priscilla and I were in graduate school together at the University of Kansas. I got my start in hearing about Bowen theory from a graduate school class in family therapy that was taught by Art Mandelbaum, who was working at the Menninger Foundation at that point in time.

Kent Webb:

Priscilla then left after graduate school. She was in DC, and every once in a while, I'd hear from her, and she would say, "I think you should come and do this postgraduate program." I had no idea what it really was, and so I said, "Okay."

Kent Webb:

But when I decided to come out, I met with Priscilla. And she basically said to me, "You have three choices. You can just go away, you can sit on the sidelines and be an observer, or you can

hop in and be an active participant with this topic and in the application of Bowen theory to homosexuality."

Kent Webb:

So I took the door number three, which was the jump in. So I've been working on Bowen theory and the application of Bowen theory to homosexuality since, and you're absolutely right. I hope that one of my contributions is that I can add another perspective for continued study that would say that homosexuality as it relates to gay men, that's really been my focus, is gay men. I haven't studied the LGBTQs, so I can't speak about the community at large. But I can, I think, talk about gay men.

Kent Webb:

Dr. Bowen did write a letter in 1978. It's at the National Archives of Medicine in which the person writing the letter just inquired, "What's your view of homosexuality?" Dr. Bowen's response in the letter, that people can read for themselves, was basically that homosexuality was the result of a high level of un-differentiation between a mother and a son with a distant father, which was... My understanding was a fairly similar view, that Freudian theory had of homosexuality.

Kent Webb:

Then in Dr. Kerr's book, there was a reference to... Oh, Dr. Bowen also said that the level of fusion between the mother and son is quite extremely high. It's not quite as high as the degree of fusion between a mother and a child who's schizophrenic. So again, that kind of, that, to me spoke that his view at the time was that it was a psychological process, the result of high degrees of fusion that would put it kind of over to the pathological side of things.

Kent Webb:

And Dr. Kerr in his book, *Family Evaluation*, referenced homosexuals as being in a similar category as people who are alcoholic, who have an alcohol diagnosis or an obsessive-compulsive diagnosis.

Kent Webb:

So I don't have either view on homosexuality. And I'm... My experience... My research in the field, in terms of science, genetics, epigenetics, neuro-hormonal theory, evolution, I think Dr. Joan Roughgarden's first book, *Rainbow's Diversity*, that might not quite be the title. But anyway, there's been this surge of science that has occurred since Dr. Bowen wrote that letter in 1978 and since Dr. Kerr's book in the late '80s. I think science has added a huge dimension to the study of homosexuality that's informed my views.

Andrea Schara:

I'm sure if he were around, he would love to get into it with you. He used to say things in the postgraduate course like, "Freud never read Darwin." I would bring in all my Freud books with



all the footnotes of Darwin, and then he'd look at me and say, "He didn't read Darwin the right way." In a way, he was always looking, I thought, for somebody to take things up with him and to expand theory, if you will. But not to let him get away with being the final word if... And he said this many times. "If science points in a different direction, that's the road I'm going to go down. But right now, this is the best of what I know."

Andrea Schara:

And when I did that AIDS project, he did tell me that he thought that the Freudian look, understanding of homosexuality was the best that he had seen. And of course, he hadn't seen all the things that you referenced. But he did reference science as the way.

Kent Webb:

Well, I've hung my hat on those words that Bowen said, "Here's the theory. You all can do what you want with it." Hopefully, it's going to be modified, extended, amended, that it's going to be driven by findings and science that are objective and can be observed and tested over time. That's really what's guided my thinking over the last, it's been over 20 years now, that I've been working and thinking about this.

Kent Webb:

I've written a monograph that I'm hoping to get published soon. If it's not going to get published in the monograph style, I hope I'll either lengthen it into a book, and then I might put some of your earlier ideas, for instance with Dr. Bowen, and maybe have more clinical examples. Or I'll just break it out into a series of articles.

Kent Webb:

But I think that... From evolution, when one can see homosexuality over hundreds of species, and not just sexual behavior, but the formation of pair bonds, even pair bonds who adopt young who have been abandoned, or their parent has been killed. It's really quite amazing that it's... One can see, in my opinion, that it's not something that occurred out of emotional dynamics, and just in the human. It's a variation.

Kent Webb:

Joan Roughgarden really spells out how there's a benefit to the larger, to a species when there's homosexuality present. Male homosexuality would compromise probably about five to six percent of the population. And that's just people who self-identify. The thought, really, is that it's probably closer to ten percent.

Kent Webb:

But then the studies in genetics, all the twin studies, indicate that about, you can account for about 33 percent of homosexuality through the presence of genes. The newer studies around epigenetics and neuro-hormonal theories, which hormones are released during the

development of a fetus in the first trimester and then at the beginning of the second trimester, are probably more influential than even genes at determining sexual orientation for gay men.

Andrea Schara:

That's very interesting. I hadn't heard of that. How did you come to... You just read so much, and you put it all together in a multi-level package.

Kent Webb:

Yeah. But I've also tried to say, this is what I think is the etiology of male homosexuality, that it's in the biological evolution genre, not the result of a family dynamic. And how useful, though, Bowen theory can be in the management of self, having, being a homosexual male and the family system. And if it weren't for Bowen Theory, I might... I literally have said this at times. I might be dead.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Kent Webb:

Right?

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

Kent Webb:

And I have a great partner, and I have good relationships with my children, and I have good relationships with my extended family. I work very hard at how I manage that process. None of which, in my opinion, would have been possible without Bowen theory as my guiding system to manage self, to work at being more objective, and a more solid self. I just don't think it would have happened, it would have played out like this.

Andrea Schara:

I've listened to your presentations on your family, and kind of struck with the difficulty of being able to observe the process in the family itself. Kind of learning from the past. And it seems that you have really learned from the past, the evolutionary past, to make a contribution to Bowen theory. Extremely important in terms of openness to science, I think. If Bowen theory was a religion, we'd all be back in 1978, with whatever Bowen said, that would be the truth and always the truth, and no science could ever interfere with that or expand that knowledge.

Andrea Schara:

But that's also one of the ten questions, is how you think Bowen theory will impact psychiatry or science.

Kent Webb:

Well, I'll answer that question, but I want to comment on the science piece for just a second.

Andrea Schara:

Sure. Your time.

Kent Webb:

My undergraduate degree is in music therapy. So I was spending all of my life on subjectivity and the emotion of music. I wanted to be a band instructor, an orchestra instructor. In fact, I even wanted to be Lawrence Welk or Liberace.

Andrea Schara:

That's something cool.

Kent Webb:

Yeah, right? Neither of those two talked much about science or objectivity.

Kent Webb:

So, when I said I didn't really know what I was getting into when I went to the Bowen Center, I really didn't know what I was getting into when I went to the Bowen Center. I remember somebody telling a story about **Don Schulberg**, one of the people early who used Bowen theory in many years. And he was at the University of Kansas at the counseling center. And he said, "One of the saddest days of my life was when I learned Bowen theory was about science."

Andrea Schara:

That was great. Yeah.

Kent Webb:

I had a similar experience with it. Because I, when I was in graduate school in social work, I loved the classes on Gestalt therapy, sculpting families and all the emotion. So Bowen theory, and being introduced to evolution and rat studies, trying brain, it was way beyond me. I barely knew what the words meant. But, but, but, but, over time, it's paid off.

Andrea Schara:

It's paid off. Yeah. Somehow. Don Schulberg I think introduced Priscilla to Bowen theory, too. So he's had a lot of influence on a number of people who have gone on to, I think, make Bowen theory more of an open system that moves towards science. And I don't think that's always the happiest moment in the lives of the people who are involved in Bowen theory, because differentiation itself, you always get a reaction if you're really going in the right direction. Nobody reacts, Bowen used to say that you didn't do much.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. You have to deal with your own reactivity. And I love the story of music being nice and subjective and what about science? We're tone deaf to science. That's a beautiful one. What other... Do you... I see that your work has had an impact on the Family Center itself, or the group around Bowen theory. I think you've made a real contribution there. You can object, of course, if you don't agree.

Andrea Schara:

But... how do you think society can benefit... This is one of my favorite questions, because it seems Bowen theory's been more or less hidden, and it's been hard for people to maybe write, even, in different journals, than just the Family Center Journal. So I'm always curious how Bowen theory might go further in society, if you've had any thoughts about that.

Kent Webb:

Well, sure. One of my hopes is that I will get things published that gives people a platform to go into some other fields, to go into some other aspects of where this theory can be applied. So there are a number of them.

Kent Webb:

I think one for sure is minority studies and LGBTQ studies. I think Bowen theory is so useful and beneficial to just people. But sometimes, LGBTQ people or other minorities will say, "Well, how does Bowen... Bowen theory's pretty white, and it's pretty non-diverse, and it seems kind of heteronormative, and it seems pretty male-dominated in the past. How does that really relate, then, to minority studies and LGBTQ?"

Kent Webb:

My answer is, Bowen theory is about human functioning and behavior. It's not about a group of people. And if we just look at the group of people, we're missing the bigger picture. I say, "I'm here, I'm kind of living proof that it works."

Andrea Schara:

You're not dead.

Kent Webb:

I'm not dead.

Andrea Schara:

And your family seems to have benefited quite a bit, I would say.

Kent Webb:

I'm still functioning. There's a real component to who I am.

Kent Webb:

So I think those are two spaces that Bowen theory could be, that they would benefit from Bowen theory. Clearly, in the last year or two with the intensity of our political state, I think governments and governance and politics and politicians and political science, Bowen theory could be very useful to that whole group of people and their efforts.

Kent Webb:

I think the spring conference a year ago, application of Bowen theory to global warming. And of course, the continued application of Bowen theory to health. I think Dr. Kerr's disease model makes lots of sense in terms of the application of Bowen theory and the eruption of symptoms within a person related to chronic anxiety and differentiation.

Kent Webb:

So I think just across the board, there are numbers of places Bowen theory could be expanded and applied.

Andrea Schara:

I hope that happens, because I think it would be... I think one of the major things is this ability for people to define a self as different than the rest of the emotional group, and especially what the emotional group wants them to do and be and believe. And differentiation gives you a way through that. And I think Bowen was just such an amazing, neutral person who could see the emotional process in a way that, I don't know anybody else who's come as close as he could to seeing the emotional process and making a comment about it or to it that just took the anxiety down.

Andrea Schara:

It's not an easy thing for people to differentiate a self or to work on that. But it does have a huge pay-off. And it might allow people to have, if I'm listening to you, the ability to tolerate differences without such extreme polarization as we're witnessing today.

Andrea Schara:

So now, differences mean, "I'm going to kill you. You're not on my side, you're dead." And I think Bowen theory has a way through that, if it could become more well-known.

Kent Webb:

Right. One of the major takeaways for me has been the development of a solid self and how that relates to differentiation of self and people having a way to create a way to work on both differentiation of self and solid self.

Kent Webb:

When I discuss solid self with gay men, I compare and contrast solid self with pseudo self, most gay men will say, as it relates to pseudo self, "Oh, you're talking to me."

Andrea Schara:

They learned how to survive.

Kent Webb:

Exactly.

Andrea Schara:

In a not very friendly environment.

Kent Webb:

Right. Every gay man knows what it's like to see, to go along to get along, to sacrifice self for the other. And it takes a while, a good long while, to begin to winnow that out of who a person is. To the degree that they can.

Andrea Schara:

That's a very... Kind of a point that needs to be highlighted is this ability to manage the group and the pressure of the group that most people are blind to. Finally, they get an appointment with you and are able to see this tension between the self and the pseudo self, as you call it, or the "get along" self. And it's very hard for people to see that without an outside person who can be more neutral about the phenomenon that people are stuck in.

Kent Webb:

I'm doing a presentation for the spring conference in 2021 at the Bowen Center. The whole focus of the conference is on the emotional history of the family and family diagrams. Ryan Woods is the guest speaker from the Epidemiological Society.

Kent Webb:

But my presentation is going to be about the fact that I operated with a family diagram that was inaccurate for... Well, until I was 48. So I didn't know that there were any gay men in my family until I was 48 years old. And then my mother disclosed to me that I had two gay cousins on her side of the family. So in the last couple of years, I've gotten to know...

Kent Webb:

One of them died. He was a costume designer in Las Vegas and did a lot of costume design for a lot of the famous people. But he died, I believe, in the '80s. And it could have been of AIDS. I don't know that for sure. My cousin doesn't know that either. But I formed this relationship with my cousin, who I didn't know until two or three years ago.

Kent Webb:

But the point I'm trying to make is that because I didn't have an accurate family diagram, I couldn't understand the emotional process in the family related to the suppression of this

information. My mother said to me when I told her that I am gay, her immediate response was, "Kent, I'm so sorry that I've given you some bad genes."

Andrea Schara:

[laughs] That's...

Kent Webb:

But if the family system could have managed that information, over the generations as whoever in the family is gay, if the family system could have managed that information to have it be public, to have it be accepted, to have it be, "This is who our family is." It doesn't do a lot of good to live in the what-ifs, but I can't help but thinking, what if that had been the case for me? What if the family diagram had been more accurate? What if it had been inclusive of homosexuality as a part of our family system? I think it would have made a difference.

Andrea Schara:

I can remember reading E.O. Wilson in one of his first books. And he talked about homosexuality, saying that the reason for it was that the church needed homosexually-inclined people who were not intent on reproduction, and that's why usually the younger brothers were gay. So you could have, really only one guy is going to inherit the farm, so to speak. And what are the other ones going to do? So if you, let's say, breed for homosexuality, not that anybody does this on purpose, but that it, you reinforce that this is a better way for people to go. It's an interesting thesis that he has, that there's a function, but it's not talked about. But that we're asking some people to give up their reproductive rights in the family and to help others.

Kent Webb:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that kind of fits into the kinship theory.

Andrea Schara:

Yep.

Kent Webb:

But, but today, gay men can marry, and they can have offspring, and they can reproduce, and many want to, now that our role in society can be much broader than just to take care of the family farm.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Kent Webb:

I think evolution might think about it a little differently today as well.

Andrea Schara:

Well, it's how much... I used to say that there were the four evils that took up anxiety, distance and conflict and reciprocity and child focus. So much anxiety in the family had no place to go but child focus, oftentimes.

Kent Webb:

Right.

Andrea Schara:

And now there may be, I don't know how you think of this, but maybe through better functioning, through differentiation of self, the anxiety is taken up by people who are willing to out the emotional process.

Kent Webb:

Exactly.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. And bring more reality into people's lives. That's what I hear from you. Or that's what you made me think about.

Kent Webb:

I know we don't have too much time left. But one of the things I've learned in all the research that I've done and hearing the clinical stories of gay men is that, yeah, there is an intense relationship, often, between gay men and their mothers. But the way most people talk about it is that their mothers were worried for them. Their mothers observed that there was something different about them, and they needed to protect them.

Kent Webb:

And the dads often picked up that there was something, they weren't fitting into the heteronormative aspect of things and would try, with good intent, to engage with their sons. But their effort was to try to get their sons to be normal and straight. And when that failed, they didn't know what to do. So then they moved away.

Kent Webb:

So the whole intense relationship, distant dad isn't an inaccurate observation. I think the cause that would generate out of the observation, the cause given to it I think is mistaken. But I don't think the observation is inaccurate.

Andrea Schara:

That's a good distinction. Yeah.

Kent Webb:



Most of the gay men would describe it that way. Certainly was the case in my family. When I told my mother that I was gay, and I asked her if she was surprised, she said, "No, not really, but I was hoping that you had made it by this point in time."

Andrea Schara:

You had made your decision to be straight and that would take more anxiety away from your mother, who knew that being different was going to be harder.

Kent Webb:

I was different enough already. I was the musician, I always played piano. I was the kid out in eastern Colorado that stuck out like a sore thumb. So she already knew I had my challenges [inaudible 00:48:28].

Andrea Schara:

Well, if she could see you now, what would she say?

Kent Webb:

I don't know.

Andrea Schara:

There's a song like that. You did it your way.

Kent Webb:

Yeah. I did one last thing because there was somebody else in the political world that claimed that song. So I want to stay away.

Kent Webb:

Maybe where to just wrap up is, thank goodness for Dr. Bowen and thank goodness for Bowen theory, because it really has made such a big difference in my life and I think in the life of my family and the people that I work with. There were many years ago I tried to sell myself and go out and get clients. Never worked.

Kent Webb:

But over time, I think my focus on being the best clinician and being the best coach and using theory to guide my way has brought business to me. I keep trying to remind myself of that all of the time.

Andrea Schara:

It's a valuable bit of knowledge you have, using Bowen theory to enable people to have a better life for themselves and the following generations. It often seems backwards that you encourage people to go back and look at their family, and as you say, create a better family diagram. One that's more clear and not so clouded with fear. So thanks-

Kent Webb:

Yeah, you're welcome.

Andrea Schara:

For bringing all this up. I think it's really interesting and very useful and hopefully encouraging to people. Differentiation isn't easy, either.

Kent Webb:

Well, thanks for the opportunity and the invitation. I appreciate it.

Andrea Schara:

All right. Thanks again.

Kent Webb:

You're welcome. Bye.

Andrea Schara:

Bye.