

Interview with Warren Brodey
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Part 4

Brodey: ... let's-let's make some just for fun, you know, thinking experiment. Let us say that we had five hundred thousand dollars, and you were asked to evaluate the results of this project. How would you do it? It's the same question.

Rakow: Yes it is. Well, it would

Brodey: That's the thing, let's evaluate it in terms of the success of- the success in therapy not in terms of its theoretical

Rakow: Well, I think I would look at life course and the independence of the life course. The kind of normalcy that I would call, birth, marriage, death, location all of those things I would look at that. And I would look at as many generations as exist. So, that's what I'd look at.

Brodey: Okay. Well, what about the people? You could ask them.

Rakow: Yeah, well, yeah. I would ask them, if they're still living, the ones who participated. What would they say?

Brodey: Yeah, and the children maybe would

Rakow: And what- what would they say or what could the people in the family living after them had been told. I would look at that.

Brodey: And you know the neighbors would be nice to know too.

Rakow: [laughter] Okay, I hadn't thought about them. Okay. [silence]

Brodey: Let's see what else. Had they written anything, had they [silence] - even the ones who are dead had they talked about being in the project to any close friends?

Rakow: But again, it would be more than- it would be more than the words.

Brodey: Well, you know, do the friends have any experiences of them. How did they change after? My son is working with these kinds of problems in the state of Washington. He's evaluating psychiatric care in the state of Washington using questionnaires.

Rakow: And I would be interested in the stability down the generations.

Brodey: Well you could- that's, let's see what you can find out easily. That's the next question. Do you have any way of investigating where they are?

Rakow: No, I have no way of doing it.

Brodey: Well, is there any way of tracing public records where they are.

Rakow: I wouldn't even know how to begin to do that, I mean, that's a common name. So, I mean I could look at where-

Brodey: Well, you know their address.

Rakow: What their address was. I don't know all the addresses, I'm not even sure I know their address. I may know the state. I may know the referring physician. But I don't always know.

Brodey: Well the question I have is what, how much about them is public knowledge? Now, did she go to a hospital? The mother?

Rakow: I don't know-

Brodey: Well, are there hospital records?

Rakow: I haven't found any that say where she went on discharge. [tape cut] I mean, my thinking is, if I really wanted to do this then I would begin to advertise.

Brodey: Okay, but my, my question is really behind it all lies... Could you get a student from one of the universities to take this as a project?

Rakow: That's a nice thought. No one has stepped forward and said they're interested! [laughter]

Brodey: That's, what I mean, they don't know it exists so how could they

Rakow: Oh, well I've had a lot of people say, "Boy, this is such an interesting project, you know, I'd like to help you" and they never come back. So I need someone who would stay with it, who could do this. So, I mean I've talked with, I have spent endless hours, discussing this project and its possibilities with people and they go away. Now, I have to say this, all the people that I have done that with personally knew Dr. Bowen. They were students here. So that -that may be what interferes with it.

Brodey: Yeah, well I think you-you know, he's- Then let's say that the student is looking for a project, and you find a student who you like.

Rakow: Okay. So, let's say we- I have someone. Now, what are- what are we going to look for? (tape cut)

Brodey: When- what can you find on public record about this particular family? So, so the first part of the, the sort of not taking the project, but sort of,

Rakow: I think the family owned a department store in Florida.

Brodey: They did.

Rakow: Okay. So, there is a little bit of information.

Brodey: And- yeah, and we must- we must know where they came from, somehow or another. What town.

Rakow: Possibly.

Brodey: But- I'm sure some records have-

Rakow: Oh, it may be. I mean I-I don't know right off the top of my head but it may be. But, but what're- but what would we be looking for? Let's say we get all what we need, to find them

Brodey: Well, you would start out, you'd start out with the public record, and see what you could find on the public record. And, that would be where did -did she go back to hospital? Did she stay out of hospital for a while? What was her recovery like?

Rakow: Well, I'd also like to know, because that father had depression, I think you could look, you could ask about the primary threesome and how their life went in the future.

Brodey: Yeah, you could.

Rakow: Because he came to the project from a hospital. He was hospitalized for depression.

Brodey: Maybe go through that father to get to the family. So here's a project for a student, a student at first, maybe you get two levels in this project. One, a student who tries to locate the family, and two, another student together with you trying to evaluate

Rakow: trying what, what was the gain if any for this family? I know what their contribution is. They contributed to a whole body of knowledge that's useful. to millions of people.

Brodey: Okay, but now, let's think about what the project's contribution to them was, and if we could

Rakow: That's what I want to know.

Brodey: Well, then I'm trying to think of- the first student probably should be someone who just finds the family. And that needn't be a student, it could be, just-just-just to play with it a little bit that could be a detective bureau.

Rakow: Good as any! [laughter]

Brodey: You know, cause they- they're the ones who are very good at finding things like that.

Rakow: Right, right [laughter]

Brodey: Ah, it could be consultation with Salvation Army.

Rakow: Right.

Brodey: Cause they're also- they have all these records, on, on- Ah, so for each of the family, sort of an exercise in finding people.

Rakow: And when I said advertise, I meant what it is possible to say, I'm a researcher looking to talk with families who were part of this project.

Brodey: Well it, you sort of have to advertise in particular places then.

Rakow: Right, I mean if I knew cities, [tape cut] but again, what are you using as the indicators of that? And that's really, that's the important piece.

Brodey: Okay, then- then we can talk about that, because, if what we're saying is true, we're really interested in does this extern- this-this theater go on in the next generation again? Or does it skip a generation?

Rakow: Yeah, did, did your work, did these years, did this in-depth work [silence] make any differen- in which these people participated and have contributed to a body of knowledge that's useful. Certainly useful to me. It's useful to everybody who comes through here. And it's useful at all these centers around the world. The ideas are being applied everywhere. What about for them? Was it useful?

Brodey: There's no way of getting any money to- to struggle with this question.

Rakow: Oh, I'm sure of that. I'm sure there's not. I mean, who would fund that? [silence]

Brodey: Who's funding it now?

Rakow: Nobody! [laughter] Me, I fund myself. [laughter]

Brodey: Would it be possible for you to get some funds now?

Rakow: Oh, Warren, I've looked. I've gone through the whole directory of foundations. Nobody funds an individual. Nobody funds an individual.

Brodey: But if you- if you were part of the Bowen [silence]

Rakow: Well,

Brodey: Or you, you can, you can, you don't need to be an individual if you don't want to be. You can always attach yourself to some institution.

Rakow: You know that then it gets- it gets into a whole lot of other things, where I'm putting my energy into things that are less interesting to me.

Brodey: I understand, I know, I mean, I have kept away from governmental things because I think it takes more energy to deal with the government than it does to do the

Rakow: I have managed to cover my expenses in doing this and I owe- I don't have, I'm not obliged to anybody. If I want to stop tomorrow, I can.

Brodey: So then, ok, the next question comes, well there's two questions in my mind, one question, have you set a date for writing a book or some report?

Rakow: No.

Brodey: Do you intend to do that?

Rakow: I do. And I should start.

Brodey: Well, the only way to start is to set a date. Quite arbitrary.

Rakow: Okay

Brodey: And then, you can put the date in the future, you know, a year or something if you want, or two, or whatever you like. But you must set a date. Mark it on a calendar and mark it in your head. And then at this time it will be done. The first one at least. The first- the first book will come out. Maybe there'll be others.

Rakow: Okay. I've avoided it.

Brodey: I know, but it comes a time when you can't avoid it anymore. You must, you must do that, because otherwise you won't come to certain conclusions, which you need to come to. You know, it's again, the openness is necessary for a period of time. And

then you have to make closures. And then you can open again and make closures again. But if you just go open, then after a while it comes and goes, the information comes

Rakow: Probably, you're right, yeah.

Brodey: Let me think about this. [silence] [tape noises] [silence] I guess you should do this in three years time.

Rakow: Three years, oh.

Brodey: Take yourself three years, and- and so then, then you have to adjust how long you figure you need for it. The writing, how much to pull it together, how much to finish your investigations and what you need to pull together. What direction do you want to write because you can't write about everything, it's not possible.

Rakow: No, and, and I realize that. You know, there are two things. One, I could chronicle the project because it's not been written about. So there's that possibility. Which is, you know, would be a labor to do that. The other piece which interests me, which is going to require, one that I finish this thing that I am doing here for, that I finish this inventory, that I've made a commitment to do because that's

Brodey: Yeah. How long does that take you do you think?

Rakow: [sigh] I've been doing this eight years. I come here once a month.

Brodey: I know but how long

Rakow: Maybe, probably eighteen months to two more years of work to do here. But mining the material for what connect, what this can contribute. So I think, you know, just being in some way to do the chronicle which would include this idea of the family as a unit, if there were a way to convey that to people so they understood it the way you do on the inside. You know that. That would be tremendous. I'm interested in what was there that hasn't yet been put, pulled together.

Brodey: Well then, this, now we have to distinguish between your sense of obligation and your sense of, of fascination.

Rakow: Right! [laughter] You know I will do this inventory as I have committed to do it. Then I want to make use of these materials for myself. I want to go through those nurses notes and see, you know, where I could lay out - I saw these patterns. Where I saw the group, in a contained environment, an established group, with new people coming in and people finding a place, now you could say, "It's psychotic to go in somebody else's room but I'm saying it was a hierarchy forming there. There's a hierarchy existing on the wards.

Brodey: Sure.

Rakow: I want to talk about those things. Those are not

Brodey: Those are the things you want to talk about. (inaudible)

Rakow: Yeah. And whatever else. I can come up with.

Brodey: That's what I think. I mean, I think in order to do this, in three years' time you have to be doing the chronicling in such a way that you're picking up those things. In other words what you have to focus on, in three years' time I have to have this book finished. And that you're, sort of, pulling out of the materials, trying to pull out of the material now, what it is you want to write about, making your own notes. And-and sort of feeling those notes, sort as, ah, what's really important to you and what's not important. Following your own fascination.

Rakow: Well, I've done a piece of that with the termination. I think I'm coming to the end of that. I think I understand pretty clearly this project within the broader system. I mean, not that I couldn't talk to other people and fill it in more, but I think I'm pretty clear on it, what you were doing and how it looked were worlds apart. You know, and that's just the nature of, I think, revolutions, perhaps. Call this a revolution in thinking, and that's just the nature of it, that they're not seen.

Brodey: Yeah.

Rakow: When-when it's right in front of people. So, we're pretty clear, on that, you know, Bowen's personality, but also the work that he was doing, and the unformedness of it, conceptually, that didn't come until the sixties is all part of that. And I'm pretty clear on that. I might go a little further with that, but- So that piece I-, in terms of the chronicling, I could probably write that chapter right now. I think I have a good understanding of that.

Brodey: Why don't you do that?

Rakow: So I should, I really should do that. Simply, I mean, I keep bouncing these things off of you and there's nothing that I'm hearing back that's off-track. [laughter] You know. So I mean, I-I

Brodey: No. I don't - I think you're very much on-track.

Rakow: I'm pulling it together enough, that- I think I'm satisfied with my own sense of it. So that one I might- maybe that's what I should do next.

Brodey: Write your chronicle.

Rakow: Right. And then, if I- I have not read all the nurses notes, but that's where I've

gotten these ideas of these patterns of the hierarchy, you know, if I would go through all the nurses notes maybe then something would come out. Then I could come back and ask you about it, or Betty, or something.

Brodey: Remember, we're, we're historians too, (cough) we're no longer there. We make it up as we go along.

Rakow: [laughter]

Brodey: I'm serious, memory is that way.

Rakow: Yes, I know! I know! [laughter] I'm clear on that! [laughter] I mean, I could say to you is this is how the family meeting worked, where there was one therapist and one family, and you (could) [laughter] you know, [laughter] I know! [laughter]

Brodey: At least I'm willing to say I don't know.

Rakow: And then I can say, well, if I look at these notes here, for, you know, October 10th, 1957, (tape cut) it's one family. Then I can look for October 12 and it's a different family. So, it seems to support what's said here! [laughter]

Brodey: Okay, so I mean, now I think we have to ask another question. Which is always important for an author. That is, what do you think would be most valuable for your audience? And which audience are you addressing? Cause that, you know, it's good to write for yourself but it also, it's good if you can write for yourself and also keep in mind there are particular people who, who need the information and other people who're fascinated by it and other people who -who will find that this applies and is meaningful to them. So, who

Rakow: Well the audience is really people who've been

Brodey: the readership?

Rakow: who will take the ideas and go further with them.

Brodey: And that's people in these family centers?

Rakow: Yeah, I think that's an audience but I also think anyone who's interested in human behavior. The individual who wants to understand their own family. I mean, that's the audience that I would see would be probably more academic than the general public, but you know, it would be those people in the general public who would be interested- be- plus, even more I have met so many people who would know, know exactly and could tell me what was going on in the family. But had no support or base of that. [background conversations] Didn't know how to use that information. Didn't know how to operate out of that information. They knew it clearly. You know I remember this

woman came in, described, saw her one time only. She'd been discharged after two back-to-back psychiatric hospitalizations, a woman in her fifties. So it wasn't - she wasn't you know, hospitalized in her twenties, who said to me, "I never got enough unconditional love. And, it was always my brother - my brother - my brother. And my aunt lived there, but it was my mother, my aunt, my brother, It was almost as if I didn't exist. And then my mother got sick, my aunt died, my mother needed me. And I moved in and I said, 'Here's my chance. Here's my chance to get all that I didn't get.'" Moved in, took care of her, did all this, "and then mother died." And this woman had two psychiatric hospitalizations. She said to me, "I know what's wrong with me. I gave all of myself to my mother, I need to get it back now. There is nothing wrong with me. I just- I keep taking these drugs, they're making me sick, I know what I did!" This woman knew it! I mean, she knew it! Absolutely knew it. You know, she had a husband who wouldn't let her come by herself, who-who was so worried she was going to crack up again. She said, "My family's hovering over me, my children are hovering over me, 'Did you take your medicine, did you take your medicine?'" She said, "I can get over this. I know what it is, I just need some space." And I said, "I think it works like that. I hear what you're saying." I said, "You need to work this out with a psychiatrist to get yourself off the medicine. And somehow, you know, go on and take what you know you need to do and do it." This woman left my office like a different woman. And she went out she said to her husband, "Oh! I'm going shopping." [laughter] I never saw her again. She was never hospitalized again because I used to get the daily admission records. She was never hospitalized again. She got herself off the meds. So this woman knew within herself but she didn't have any body of knowledge or a way to operate out of that.

Brodey: Okay, so one thing you're saying is that this might be -what you write could be of help to- to people.

Rakow: I think that there- there will be people will say, "Oh, yes, I can use this!"

Brodey: Well then, the question- the question I ask, is- it's- if you're going to write to the professionals, do you want to write it to professionals in professional language? Or do you want to write it in folksy language so people can read it.

Rakow: I-I want to bridge that somehow.

Brodey: Okay. Then-then you have to be disciplined, you have to have discipline but at the same time you want to make it fun to read.

Rakow: Right. But I-I

Brodey: And you also have- you want to account for things but you also want to make it so that it's rich in personal content and stories.

Rakow: And I want the professionals to be able to know what they're seeing. That what they see and what was here, I want them to make the connection and build on it. And then I want the people with no, they're not professionally oriented, to be able to

recognize it and make use of it. So, I don't want it folksy but I don't want it so academic that nobody else can, I want to bridge those two.

Brodey: I'm sure you can bridge it, it's just cause you're - you have this manner, which is I think, is quite communicative so that's-that's not a problem. So it's just a matter of -of making up your mind you're going to do it in three years' time and-and organize it.

Rakow: And organize it. And put it-and find it, I think there're new things here. You tell me, I mean, this is your work!

Brodey: And put it out.

Rakow: What-what didn't get developed, that's here? What-what did you think "Ah hah, look at that," that you- but then didn't go on? I mean, I can read in the Epilogue, of Bowen's book and find unsupported statements. You know, such as, "It's in the person's ability to hear comes out of their early relationship with their caretaker." That's an unsupported statement. I know where that comes from. That comes from his work at Menninger's when he engaged in this symbiotic relationship and what he could see when the relationship was not disturbed and when it got disturbed. To me, that's research somebody could follow up on. But there has to be- there had to have been those things for you too,

Brodey: Well, for me, the peak thing I picked up on was the fact that there is no description of, of relationships other than mechanistic descriptions. So, I was always interested in the how.

Rakow: You mean like triangles, or- what do you mean mechanistic?

Brodey: No- Well I-I think I said it best in this paper on family operations and information exchange model and (inaudible)

Brodey: I mean, I'm interested in the simultaneous communication between people. And the fact that we have no language for that, but nonetheless exists as the most powerful force we have. It's one of the most powerful things that exists- that-that several things are happening instant – simultaneously. We have no language for simultaneous events, complex simultaneous events. In which, you and I look in each other's' eyes, we look at each other, all this is going on at once. It's not-it's not, you know, I say something, click you say something, it's- I'm changing what I'm saying according to how you receive it. And you're doing the same back again. So this is to me, the fact that we lack language, we lack, we lack concepts. One of these things, you know, I mean you've seen- I don't know if I showed you my card, my latest card you can have it. It's somewhere in this box, I don't know where it disappeared to. [silence] See if it's [noise of boxes moving]

Rakow: [laughter] [silence] Oh that's great.

Brodey: Telling fish about water. Because that's the title of a movie that was made about me and my colleagues on the German television. So, I thought it was very appropriate, and [silence] it's in a sense a task that I like to do, it isn't necessarily something that you would like to do. Cause one has to invent language and somehow find a way to express it. Ah, but a lot of these, if you take the family unit, I think the task, a task that you could do would be to try and take the story and really express to people the difference between the idea of individual, multiple individual therapy and family unit therapy or family system therapy. The contrast between the two of them. And that's a big one, a big task too.

Rakow: Yes, it is.

Brodey: And if you could even write- let's say you wrote that you're writing in such a way as you make it clear that Bowen was ahead of his time and that basically he was talking about a family organism as a unit. And that was, that was something that was difficult for people to conceptualize at the time he did it. And certainly difficult to express in a linear way. But that may be too difficult too. I mean not too typical, but too- but not in your, not in

Rakow: Well I'm not- I'm not ruling it out. I'm just

Brodey: So I mean, it's a question of how

Rakow: The part- the difficulty for me, has always been, when things are said so well already, how do you then say them-

Brodey: Well they're not getting to people, it's-

Rakow: [laughter] now how do you say them, without quoting- I don't want to quote, I want to [tape cut] I want to know it myself, so I can say it.

Brodey: I understand. I'm the same way, I don't like to quote anyone.

Rakow: so that- and that's, again,

Brodey: But look, if you were to combine your background as a historian with plucking out the stories which allow you to express this as related to the times. In other words, related to the conceptual epoch that it's in. Here's- here's an effort to- to talk holistically about families in a time when holism is just beginning. And then, if you take- if you take it and you sort of, take threads from out there in the world history and this, this- they, beginnings, of, of the new way of thinking, a new, what do you call it, what's the common word, anyway, the-the new-

Rakow: Paradigm.

Brodey: the new paradigm. Here's the beginning of the new paradigm. And you can document that, you can quote other people for that if you want. And then you connect this up and in relation to a new paradigm. And then- try and tell your story in such a way that you're connecting- you're showing that this is the old paradigm and new paradigm, and - and here's this project which is a link between the two. And the struggle of these people, to go from one place to - from the old paradigm to the new paradigm in relation to describing the human behavior of a family.

Rakow: I think how I could come to my own words, one would be to read all the nurses notes, there's like 30 months of them. I haven't read them all. But also, perhaps to talk to the families. And to - to see it for myself. To see the units myself. Not that I can't use a lot of other families to do that with. [laughter] But to see these families, actually.

Brodey: That's great.

Rakow: And to get the other side of it. I hear what you were attempting to do. It's kind of like hearing what people outside of this project were looking at this project and what- what is it they were seeing. Somehow, it-it makes this clearer to me. So,

Brodey: Yeah. Well, that's the great progress you've made since last year. You've detached,

Rakow: I don't think the- I don't have this sense that people knew, had a clue what you were doing.

Brodey: Yeah, well I think you're right. I think you- they didn't have a clue. And they still don't.

Rakow: Right! [laughter] That's right, they don't! I'm clear on that!

Brodey: They don't!

Rakow: [laughter] That's right. [laughter]

Brodey: And- and they're all - they're all sort of, you know, muddling along trying to get there but taking their belief system so strongly that they don't really see what's in front of them. And you know what I said many times is that when you deal with schizophrenia, it's contagious. You know,

Rakow: (laughter)

Brodey: it gets- you start to think this way yourself. Now, I'm going to take - go to the bathroom for a little minute, and then I hope to come back and work some more.

Rakow: That-that-that came from observations. You weren't pulling that out of the air. That you were seeing anxiety show up. So what makes it take one form or another? [silence] How come it's physical illness here and acting out there? Is there a way to understand that?

Brodey: The only way I know is that some people find it easier to be, to act out and some people find it easier to ah, -some- they have preferred mechanisms.