Selected Readings

in

Family of Origin

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Family in Group (FIG) and Family of Origin (FOO)

Timothy Weber, Ph.D. and Brenda J. Kerr

Introduction

A core belief in the LIOS program is that our experiences in our families of origin have a significant and continuing impact in shaping our experiences as adults. Our family of origin was the first organization we were a member of, the first group to which we belonged. Our first experience of authority figures happened in the family, and for some of us it was our earliest experience being an authority figure. Our perceptions, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, choices, and values—dimensions that constitute the SELF—were all initially formed in our family of origin. Although we have had many other experiences that have influenced and shaped us, our prior experiences *and* our continuing experiences with our original family members exert powerful forces on how we experience ourselves and interact with others.

Sometimes we are aware of this connection between the "then and there" and the "here and now." All of a sudden, in a moment, there is an "Ah-ha!" illumination. You see that the way you are interacting with someone is reminiscent of a pattern initially experienced in your family of origin. You may discover this connection days later, after spending fretful and disturbing hours with a "funny feeling" that something's familiar with what you have experienced with another person. This vague feeling of the familiar often points to experiences in the family of origin.

The conscious connection between the "then and there" in the family of origin and the "here and now" of current experiences is called the **synapse.** The synapse is the "spark" that links the energy from one system with the energy from another system. Synapses are those moments of illumination, those "Ah-ha!" insights, when you see the link between the "then and there" and the "here and now."

For example, in your work setting, you may distance yourself from a colleague who is down or depressed. You may find yourself repeating this pattern in your work place: whenever someone is feeling down and distressed, you may emotionally distance yourself, disengage, find yourself less available to this person. This pattern may be familiar to you. In your family of origin, whenever your mother was distressed, she asked you to help, but the demands were far beyond your capacities. You felt afraid, incompetent and angry. But you still carried on as best you could.

Now, as an adult, you want to avoid those experiences in which you had to take over, when you were pulled in by a distressed parent with unspoken feelings of fear, ineptness, and anger. So you find yourself repeatedly distancing from colleagues who **appear** distressed and depressed. You don't want to repeat the pattern of the familiar. To make this kind of connection between patterns in the family of origin and your current relationships is to make this synaptic connection. It is the beginning point, this conscious awareness, for change and growth.

Most of the time, we are unconscious of these connections. People do not necessarily need to be aware of the synapses in order to make productive and effective changes in their lives. However, we believe that the richness of learning and change can be significantly enhanced as you work on linking current experiences with family of origin experiences. Often, irritating conflicts with others that seem to be intractable can be much better understood and changed when this family of origin

perspective is taken into account. The energy from these tense kinds of interpersonal reactions can get released on FOO reflection.

We believe that many experiences in our families of origin have served us well over our life span. We have received many gifts and strengths from those in our families. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate these gifts and legacies. Even some of the difficult events that we had to deal with in early life build strengths and emotional muscle that we may not have had otherwise.

In the following worksheet, we want you to be thinking about the myriad of experiences in your family of origin—both benevolent and bothersome—that have impacted you and have significantly shaped who you are and how you interact with others. We will give primary attention to helping you identify current impasses and conflicts with others and how these current experiences connect with your family of origin experiences.

Growth of self and more effective relationships with others can be enhanced if you are able to recognize and understand these connections and then find new ways of responding in the present that are more functional and effective. The first goal is recognition of the **synapse.**

You carry your family of origin experiences within you. These original experiences and patterns are *most* influential when you are with others and these three characteristics are present:

1. **Time**: Your relationship is ongoing and extensive.

2. **Intensity**: There are many opportunities for emotional expression including anger, hurt, sadness, excitement, affection, frustration, etc.

3. **Tasks**: The tasks of the relationships have a significant bearing on the identity and future of the participants.

Whenever you are in the kind of relationship that is ongoing, emotional, or directed to significant tasks, your FOO experiences are likely to be significant in influencing how you perceive and interact.

The Family In Group (FIG) is one such setting where Family of Origin (FOO) experiences are likely to surface and significantly shape interactions. Other such settings include couple relationships, the workplace, and friendships. Thus, the FIG is an excellent opportunity to learn about synapses and to experiment with changes. As you learn about synapses in the FIG, you will become more aware of how your FOO experiences become manifest through you in other settings. FIG is a learning laboratory. The following worksheet is intended to assist you in this learning.

Family in Group (FIG) and Family of Origin (FOO) Worksheet
Timothy Weber, Ph.D. and Brenda J. Kerr

1. Who in your (FIG) reminds you of someone in your FOO (including the extended family system)? Try to identify the physical or behavioral features of the FIG members that "trigger" you in connecting the FIG member with a FOO member (i.e., expressions, gestures, facial features, a look, behavioral style, tone or voice).

2. How are you reacting (internally and externally) to the FIG member? How is this pattern of reacting and relating similar to or different from your pattern of relating with the FOO member? Are you in a similar struggle or are you making some headway?

3. What roles(s) did you play in your FOO? What roles(s) are you playing, beginning to play out, in your FIG? Some typical roles include: clown, lost one, scapegoat, mediator, organizer, lightning rod, switchboard, placater, confronter, soother, troublemaker/agitator, analytical one, sacrificial lamb/doormat. How are the roles you are playing in your FIG similar to or different from your FOO roles? Some people, for example, may not replicate FOO roles, but may play out new roles. The obedient daughter in her FOO may become the troublemaker in her FIG and in other settings to "make-up" for what she was entitled to as a child, but never acted out. She is likely to over-correct for her deprivation as a child and overdo the troublemaker role.

4. All families have "rules" which usually are covert and unspoken, and which regulate interactions between family members. Examples of such rules include the following: "Only men can get angry," "Don't talk about money," "Conflicts are never resolved," "If you want to be heard, go to mother." Think of "rules" in your FOO related to the following dimensions:

Dimensions	Example
Authority	"Authority is weak and inept. Children must take charge."
Inclusiveness	"Only males are included as 'real' family members. Females find affiliation outside the family."
Conflict	"Conflict is resolved when the one who is the most angry intimidates the other one into giving up."
Affection	"Don't feel affectionate. You may get hurt."
Decision-Making	"All decisions in the home are made by mother. Children's opinions were never requested."
Closeness	"You can get close to Dad only when he is relaxed. Don't get close to him when he is working."
Taboo	"Don't be angry. You must stay happy."

How are your FOO rules influencing your perceptions, feelings and choices in your FIG? What FIG rules or norms are similar to your FOO rules or clashing with your FOO rules? Often when you are experiencing frustration in a group internally there is a clash between FOO rules and FIG rules. To be "loyal" to a new rule means to be disloyal to a FOO rule.

5. Notice your behavior in the FIG. When two people are in conflict in the group, what is your experience? Do you flee? Do you take the side of the one you perceive as weaker? Do you distance? Do you mediate? Do you feel sick? Do you become quiet? Are you relieved that you are not in the conflict or side with one or the other?

Recall how you reacted to conflict between two members in your FOO. Your FOO behavior in conflict will influence your behavior in the FIG. These patterns are examples of how you participate in triangles where you are part of a three-person system. What were the key triangles in your FOO that you participated in (e.g., always mediating between parents who were in conflict)? How has your participation in your FOO triangles influenced your participation in potential/actual FIG triangles?

6. Think of someone in your FIG with whom you are now in a conflict that seems to be stuck. You are at an impasse. Does this relationship remind you of any relationships in your FOO? Do any patterns of stuck-ness in your FIG seem familiar to repetitive and frustrating patterns in your FOO?

Making Family Visits

Brenda J. Kerr

One of the first steps in working on your family of origin is to make family visits. The purpose of these visits is to increase your understanding of the family. Sometimes these visits may be prepared for with letters and phone calls, but face-to-face meetings offer the most valuable experiences. One thing you could do, in preparation for a face-to-face session, would be to send a copy of your genogram to family members asking them to fill in all the missing names and dates and relations. You can say something like, "I'm trying to understand myself better, and you could really help me do this by giving me whatever information you have about our family." The idea is that knowing something about yourself involves knowing about the history of your family; getting in touch with the roots.

It is pretty common for people to fear the reaction of parents and relatives to this request, but the evidence is that this fear is hardly ever borne out. If the person makes it clear that the family members can be a help to him or her, and that the help is appreciated, people become eager to share a lot of what they know about the family. This will happen easily if you follow some basic guidelines.

The most basic rule is never to challenge or disagree or condemn family members for what they share or say. Try to remember that they are sharing their perception of family life and, of course, that is going to be different from your or other family members' perceptions. You need to try to have the attitude of an objective researcher who is interested in discovering the family members' perceptions. The researcher has no interest in debating, or questioning, or criticizing that perception. It is simply accepted as the way that person sees it. Even if you think the person is lying, you are not to challenge them and confront them on this. For whatever reasons, they feel the need to lie about that issue, and that in itself is significant and of interest.

You have asked them to share with you, not debate with you. At the most, you can say something like, "Isn't it interesting that you see it that way. I (or x family member) said or saw it this way. How do you account for that difference in perception?" But even this statement could be unhelpful if you don't watch the tone of your voice. If there is any sense of accusation on your part, it will be communicated and the person will either close up or get defensive, and you will lose them as a resource to you. If your tone of voice reflects a genuine interest in how they account for the discrepancy, you may discover some very interesting information.

Asking questions should be the basic format of your talking with family members in this early stage of visits. The more questions the better. For every answer think of five more questions to ask. You should never run out of questions to ask. A researcher is always ready to learn more. Family members have a lot of information about the family to share, and they will if they trust your intentions. They can be a huge resource to you in learning about yourself. Treat them like your personal gold mine, and respect their "nuggets."

It is essential that you not become emotionally reactive in asking these questions; that you don't become defensive, or attacking, or in any way step out of the researcher role. As long as you keep thinking about your interest in their perception of things you are in that role. If you run out of questions, you probably have gotten caught in the emotional system and are wanting to challenge, or evaluate, or express your own point of view. If you can't get out of that reactive place to begin asking more questions of genuine interest in them and their thoughts, then change the subject or

take a bathroom break or end the talking for the time being, at least until you can get out of your reactiveness.

Another issue in asking questions is to make sure they are real questions. Many of the questions we ask in daily life are in fact disguised statements. For example, "Wouldn't you like to go to a movie?" usually means "I'd like to go to a movie." "Don't you think such and such," usually means "I think such and such," and "You agree, don't you? And if you don't, you should!" These are not real questions, they are more attempts to get a person to agree with what you want and think without ever saying directly what you want and think.

- Be clear in your own mind about what you want from the visit and what information you are looking for. Identify what problems might arise in getting it, and develop some strategies for coping with the problem.

- Try to make the visits without the presence of your spouse or partner. Spouses will complicate the emotional system for you with their own reactions to you and your family. If your spouse must go with you, get an agreement ahead of time that he or she will not interfere with or comment on this process, and will simply let you work it out with your family. Generally, spouses are not the best consultants for doing family of origin work. They have their own biases.

- As you meet with various relatives, try to clarify for yourself to what extent your picture of them has been shaped by your own experience with them, or by what you have been told by others about them. For example, if the family believes that a particular uncle of yours is a lush, and has communicated that to you, does that affect how you relate to and deal with this uncle?

- Times of crises like illness, death, or divorce are good times to make a visit. Also, times of family celebration—weddings, baptisms, anniversaries, etc., and also holidays.

- An appropriate use of humor can lighten up a conversation that has become too stressful and difficult. On the other hand, if things are continually light and joking, feel free to make serious comments or questions.

- If questions are asked of you, respond with what are called "I statements." Refer only to yourself, and your own thoughts and feelings. Do not evaluate other's motives, intentions, or actions. Do not attack or defend. Work at being open about your own point of view with as little comment as possible about what you think of the point of view of others.

Family of Origin Interviews

Brenda J. Kerr

Instructions: *First Interview Questions:* It is important that the parent be alone with you at the time of taping. Request that the first parent interviewed not discuss the questions with his/her spouse. It is important that you not get emotionally hooked by what a parent might say. Avoid over-explaining the questions. Allow whatever emotions arise to have their own life. Do not rescue. Do show empathy. Use your best Carkhuff helping skills. Be Dr. Livingstone, i.e., "tell me more." Maximum taping time per session: 30 minutes.

Note: It is of singular importance that you have a clear contract with each person to conduct the interview before beginning. This contract should be made ideally a few days before the interview. Before commencing the interview, check in again with the person.

Interview Questions

- Who was around when they were children—3-4 years old?

- Earliest memories, i.e., grandparents, toy, event, etc.

- Early playmates.

- Early school memories—did they like school; their parents' attitude toward school.

- Memories of their house(s) and neighborhood.

- What they did for fun—family fun activities.

- What chores did they do around the house?

- Who of their parents was the disciplinarian?

- Who listened to their feelings when they were sad, happy, angry, etc.?

- Early memories of relationships with siblings.

- Favorite ways to get into trouble.

- Who among parents gave permission to go anywhere?

- What did you have to do, or how did you have to be, in order to be on Mom's or Dad's "good" list?

- Who lined up with whom in family squabbles.

- Anyone from whom they were always on opposite sides.

- Where did you go to be alone?

- Is there any discomfort in talking about these things?

- Any family mottos or rules frequently repeated by parents.

- What was it like for you as a teenager?

- Who was your first girl/boyfriend?

- How, where, and when did they meet their spouse?

- What was their attraction—what did they like most about them?

Before conducting a second interview, I would suggest reviewing your first tape for any specific areas or issues you may wish to focus on in more detail with an individual parent. Once you get into the marriage years, you can speak to your parents together.

The Marriage Years

- What do you recall of the events leading up to the decision to get married?

- What were your parents' feelings around your decision to marry—also siblings' reactions?

- How long had you known each other before making the decision?

- Who asked whom to get married? Where did it occur? What were the circumstances?

- Memories of that first year of marriage—activities, friends, living together.

- Memories of the first house and neighborhood.

- What did you do together and apart for fun?

- In your new relationship, how did you deal with conflict, sadness, anger, happy feelings—did you feel loved and listened to?

- How did you divide up the work around the house—who took on what jobs and roles? How did you feel about the division of labor?

- What was it like during pregnancy (expectancy period)—health, feelings, concerns, fears?

- What were the circumstances (events) around the arrival of the first-born child?

- What was it like for you being a mother/father—feelings, concerns, anxieties, happinesses—new role and responsibilities?

- Memories of first-born and your developing relationship—things you did with child, attitudes, hopes, expectations.

- How did your marriage relationship change with arrival of child?

- What expectations did you have of each other—new awarenesses, understandings, appreciations, surprises, disappointments?

- How did you deal with conflict, disagreements over new roles, money, raising children, wants, needs, likes, dislikes?

- What happened when you could not agree on something—did someone always give in or could you agree to disagree?

- Where did you go to be alone?

- Is there any discomfort in talking about these things?

- What was going on in your life outside of the home?

- Did you have any friends you could talk to about personal things and feelings?

- What was happening around the arrival of the next born—circumstances, events of note—feelings?

- How did this addition to the family change your relationship with your first child, husband/wife?

- Memories of second born and your developing relationship—things you did with child, attitudes, hopes, expectations, feelings, awarenesses of differences between first and second child.

- Memories of siblings' relationship as children and teenagers—how did they get along—how did you deal with sibling conflict, resentment, jealousy?

- What things did you do for fun as a couple (without kids) and as a family?

- Sum up your views of married life and personal life: joys, disappointments, feelings. Generally, how were things for you after 10 years of marriage?

- Recollections of major events that occurred during those 10 years, and how they influenced you.

Note

- Repeat appropriate questions around arrival of other children.

- Before conducting third interview, review tape #2 for specific areas or issues to be focused on in future individual interviews.

- Interview individuals about out-of-home activities, relationships and experiences, e.g., work (career); volunteer activities; school; their parent, sibling and friend interactions; sports; social, etc. Ask about personal growth and change.

- You may use the same processes for conducting interviews with siblings and other relatives. Each person in the family has a different vantage point (and thus a different experience), and perhaps very different feelings and perceptions than other family members. In order to get the full picture, it is important that you honor and respect these perhaps differing experiences. Use your best interviewing and listening skills and monitor your own "reactivity" (arguing or being defensive).

Changing Self with Family of Origin
A Checklist
Diane Schachter

The following is a checklist of strategies for changing oneself in one's family of origin.

I. Become an astute observer of your family:

A. Learn all the facts you can:

1. Emphasize who, what, when, where and HOW, not why.

2. Ask yourself questions, such as:

a. Do you know and relate to all members in all branches of your family?

b. Are you equally fair to all, including self?

c. Do you accept all members, although not necessarily approving of what those members do?

B. Become aware of:

1. Your family process: the traumas, myths, patterns, rules, and binds.

2. The part you play in the process—the myths you believe and the rules you follow—and decide, of those rules you follow, which ones you like and want to continue following and which ones you want to change.

II. Make a plan which can be implemented slowly in an ongoing campaign:

A. Contacting members:

1. Contact family members on a one-to-one basis. When you spend time with your family in a group in its usual setting there is a patterned way of relating which keeps a homeostatic balance. When you meet with each member alone, you are less likely to become stuck in the patterns.

2. It is often easier to contact peripheral members first to gather more information and gain a richer perspective on your origins, before making contact with central figures, especially if there are long-term cutoffs. It is most important, however, to develop a person-to-person relationship with each parent and sibling.

3. Any cutoff member in the extended family is very important, well worth getting to know and forming your own opinion about. A cutoff member is often one who broke the family rules, and knowing this person gives you important information. Also, it shakes up the rest of the system when you contact a cutoff member.

B. Letters, phone calls, visits:

1. Writing letters can open up emotional issues from a distance. If you predict the response you expect in a letter, it may diffuse some of the intensity.

2. Writing to one parent at a time about one emotional issue can focus your effort. Then you can follow up in a visit.

3. Take responsibility for writing or calling, asking yourself if you are following the checklist.

4. Initiate both the beginning and ending of phone calls.

5. Plan each visit, determining how long you will be able to relate without getting sucked back into destructive patterns.

III. Beginning of Change:

A. Take an "I" position in the family:

1. Take responsibility for and make clear statements about your own feelings, thoughts, and actions without blaming the other for the way you are.

2. Control your own emotional reactiveness. Stay between serious and humorous so that you can move either way, like the zoom lens on a video camera that moves in for a close-up and out to observe the whole group.

3. Humor, fantasy, and the recognition of the absurd can be valuable allies in detoxifying tense situations.

4. Keep yourself detriangled in the family:

   a. Insist on one-to-one communication.

   b. Avoid taking sides.

   c. Avoid listening to negatives about a third person.

5. If you become locked into an emotional triangle with your parents:

   a. Move laterally and focus on others who are emotionally important to your parents in their generation—aunts and uncles.

   b. Move vertically and focus on those in the generations above and below your parents (i.e., your grandparents, your great uncles and aunts, or your siblings or cousins.)

6. Find ways to communicate clearly and openly about matters which are barely or never referred to, making the covert overt. Secrets are often withheld or differentially shared,

forming a boundary between the secret holder and the unaware family member, which can perpetuate mystification and foster cutoffs.

7. Use your feelings as signals to yourself that you are getting sucked in when old feelings, such as anxiety, hurt, and anger, surface.

8. Take advantage of birth, marriage, divorce, illness, and death as prime times for family contact. It is easier to change one's actions in the family when the family is in crisis or transition.

9. Be aware of the realignment of emotional forces following death, and how the family balance shifts to fill the void. This is a time when new emotional alliances can form or members may cut off, or those who have cut off can rejoin the family.

B. Differentiation is a three-step process:

1. You make a differentiating move.

2. You expect opposition from the family togetherness forces.

3. You know what you will do in response to the opposition forces in the family so you are not taken by surprise.

   If you keep on your own calm course, eventually the family members will give up their struggle and accept that "that's the way you are." At that point, another family member, following your example, may make a differentiating move.

C. Bowen's three rules for communication with family of origin:

1. Avoid counterattacking when provoked.

2. Do not become defensive.

3. Maintain an active relationship with other key members without withdrawing or becoming silent.

Toward the Differentiation of a Self in One's Own Family

Anonymous[1]

Dr. Framo: This is the second day of the conference on Systematic Research on Family Interaction. Yesterday, in our attempts to organize the existing knowledge of the field, we made the first tentative steps at trying to communicate with each other and showed the kind of healthy confusion that accompanies the birth of any new field. Most of the confusion, I feel, is a function of the inherent complexities of the subject matter. I, personally, was not unhappy that sparks began to fly. As in every group process—whether conference, therapist, or research group—each of us had to be heard and recognized, and then we could begin to get down to business. All in all, I think it was an excellent beginning.

The discussion yesterday had to be somewhat general and abstract because we were dealing with basic conceptual matters. Today we begin to deal with specifics and will start putting some flesh on the structure and concepts.

May I now present Dr. Paul Watzlawick, who will chair this morning s session.

Chairman Watzlawick: Since we are running a bit late, I would like to turn over the meeting, without further ado, to Dr._____ and ask him to present his paper, "A Method of Categorizing Some Meaningful Clinical Variables."

The original presentation that the author made at the conference consisted essentially of the last part of this paper entitled, "The Family Experience." The author had originally been requested to discuss the details of his scale of differentiation at this research conference, and when he started speaking the editor was as surprised as everyone else that he departed from his assigned topic and described instead the work he had been doing with his own family. The present paper, based on the extemporaneous talk given at the conference, is considerably longer than the original presentation, and was written long after the conference was over. The author was given this latitude in order to give him the opportunity to expand on the theoretical basis of his presentation. Because of the unusual circumstances that produced it, the paper follows a different format from those in the rest of the book. First, the author explains how and why he decided to present as he did, then the body of the rewritten paper is presented, and finally he presents a version of "The Family Experience" that was originally presented at the conference.

Dr. _____: In the months before this Family Research Conference, I had wondered how to do an effective, brief presentation about my family theory and method of family psychotherapy that would be "heard" by more people. My past experience has been that many in my audiences hear the words that go with the theory without really grasping the concepts, and that frequently they perceive the psychotherapy as an intuitive method that goes with my personality rather than as a method

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[1] **Editor's Note**: Because the following paper involves personal information about its author's family, the editor and publisher sought legal advice about publication. The conclusion reached was that legal and ethical considerations require that the paper be published anonymously.

determined by theory. In training family therapists I have found that some trainees quickly grasp the theory and go on to duplicate the psychotherapy. Others are slower to grasp the theory, and some never really "know" the theory even after extended periods. I believe a major part of this problem has to do with the theoretical orientation and emotional functioning of the therapists. My theory is best understood if the therapist can listen and, observe and function from a position at least partially "outside" the emotional field of the family. Conventional theory and psychotherapy teaches and trains therapists to operate "inside" the emotional field with the patient or the family. In this paper I hope to communicate more clearly my version of what it means to be "inside" or "outside" an emotional system. The Family Research Conference, composed of people important in the family field, was sufficient motivation for me to work at finding a more effective way of presenting my ideas.

In the months preceding the conference, I had been working intensively in a new phase of a long-term effort to differentiate my own "self" from my parental extended family. That effort reached a dramatic breakthrough only a month before the conference. The following week I considered, and then quickly rejected, a presentation about my own family. As the days passed, the factors that favored such a presentation began to outweigh the factors that opposed. The presentation would contain a practical application of the major concepts in my theoretical and therapeutic systems, and, since I know more about my own family than any other family, I decided to use it as an example. I believe and teach that the family therapist usually has the very same problems in his own family that are present in families he sees professionally, and that he has a responsibility to define himself in his own family if he is to function adequately in his professional work. Also, this presentation would be a good example of "family psychotherapy with a single family member." Previous presentations about this subject had only seldom been heard. Another aspect of this enterprise became more appealing as the days passed. For some years I had been aware of the "undifferentiated family ego mass" that exists among the prominent family therapists. The same emotional system exists in the "family" of family therapists that operates in the "sick" families they describe at meetings. In a conference room, talking about relationship patterns in "sick" families, therapists do the same things to each other that members of "sick" families do. They even do the same things to each other while talking about what they do to each other. The final determination of this form of presentation, then, was based on my continuing effort to differentiate my "self" from the "family" of family therapists. I knew, parenthetically, that I would get some of the same reactions from the participants of the conference as I had gotten from my own family members.

In planning the presentation, I had two main goals. The first was to present the clinical material without explanation of theory or the step-by-step planning that went into it. There was reality to support the plan for this goal. The thirty minutes allowed for the presentation would not permit a review of theory. Though not many participants really "knew" my theory or method of family psychotherapy, I could with good conscience assume they had heard or read my previous papers. Also, I was hoping that clinical material without explanation might bring more indirect awareness of theory than another paper on theory. The second goal was the element of surprise that is essential if a differentiating step is to be successful. Rather than trying to explain that here, I will leave it to the reader to remember as he goes along. The plan was not discussed, even with trusted friends. A routine didactic paper about family theory was prepared and the required copies mailed to discussants before the meeting. The stage was set to do either the formal paper or the experience with my own family. I was anxious and sleepless the night before the presentation. Intellect favored the family presentation but feelings demanded that I give up this silly notion and do it the easy way

by reading the formal paper. My anxiety would have sufficed to have me abandon the project had I not remembered similar anxiety before each differentiating effort in my own family. Impulses to read the formal paper continued to the very moment of presentation. Even during the presentation I was more anxious than I had anticipated I would be. From past experience, this anxiety was related to the "secret" action move with other family therapists rather than to reporting "secrets" about my own family.

There have been special problems in preparing this report for publication. This final version is being written in 1970, three years after the conference. The emotional forces that operate at any stage of differentiation have operated in this final step toward publication. These forces will be described in detail later in the paper. On one side has been the anxiety of the editor and publisher about publishing personal material, and their understandable defensive posture. The emotional courage necessary for differentiation is nullified by a defensive posture and over concern about danger. A positive posture that can facilitate further differentiation in me is more important than publication. The anonymous authorship has helped to resolve the issues. Each version of the paper has been a new emotional hurdle for me, because I had to respect the realities of publication and at the same time maintain an essential posture for myself. There was a special purpose in presenting the clinical material to the conference without explanation. To publish it as it was presented, to be read by people without knowledge of the special situation, with no awareness of the theory which guided the years of work with my own family, and with a variety of theoretical orientations, would result in the inevitable interpretations and misinterpretations based on each reader's own theoretical bias. The purpose of this written report is to present the theory and the method of psychotherapy based on the theory, and then use the example with my own family to illustrate the clinical application of the theory.

The Theoretical Background

Overall Description

The total theory is made up of six interrelated concepts, only one of which, the "triangle," will be discussed at this point. One of the basic concepts considers the "triangle" (three-person system) the "molecule" of any emotional system, whether it exists in the family or in a larger social system. The term "triangle" was chosen instead of the more familiar term "triad" which has come to have fixed connotations that do not apply to this concept. The triangle is the smallest stable relationship system. A two person system is an unstable system that forms a triangle under stress. More than three people form themselves into a series of interlocking triangles. The emotional forces within a triangle are in constant motion, from minute to minute and hour to hour, in a series of chain reaction moves as automatic as emotional reflexes. Knowledge about the functioning of triangles makes it possible to modify the triangle by changing the function of one person in the triangle. The therapeutic system is directed at modifying the functioning of the most important triangle in the family system. If the central triangle changes, and it stays in contact with others, the entire system will automatically change. Actually, the entire system can change in relation to change in *any* triangle, but it is easier for the system to ignore a more peripheral or less important triangle. The relationship patterns, based on triangles which function through the years in the total family system, are described by other concepts in the theory. Since the clinical example, described in the latter part of this paper, will not be understandable without knowledge of triangles, a later part of this theoretical section will be devoted further to triangles.

Background Principles

Some of the basic principles that went into the development of this theory and method of family psychotherapy will help in understanding the theory. My primary effort has gone into making psychotherapy as scientific and predictable as possible. Early in psychiatry I was bothered when "intuition" and "clinical judgment" were used to change the course of a plan of psychotherapy or other forms of psychiatric treatment. Gross examples occur at times of crisis when the staff, reacting emotionally, meets to plan a change in treatment that is based more on "feeling" and "clinical hunches" than on scientific knowledge and theoretical principles. It is commonplace for psychotherapists to make changes based more on feeling perceptions and subjectivity than on clinical fact and objectivity.

The theory was developed in the course of family research. The original focus was on the symbiotic relationship between the mother and the schizophrenic patient. The first research hypothesis, based on the previous years of clinical experience, *knew* the origin and development of schizophrenia as a product of the two-person mother-patient relationship. The hypothesis was elaborated in such detail that it anticipated every relationship problem and every clinical situation that could develop. Psychotherapeutic principles and techniques were developed for each clinical situation. The hypothesis also predicted the changes that would occur with the psychotherapy. When research observations were not consistent with the hypothesis, the hypothesis was modified to fit the new facts, the psychotherapy was modified to fit the hypothesis, and new predictions were made about the results of the psychotherapy. When an unexpected clinical crisis arose, it was handled on an interim "clinical judgment" basis, but the hypothesis was considered at fault for not "knowing" about the situation ahead of time, and not having a predetermined therapeutic principle. The therapy was never changed to fit the situation except in emergencies. The goal was to change the hypothesis to account for the unexpected crisis, to change the therapy to fit the hypothesis, and to make new predictions about the therapy. Any failure to change in psychotherapy was as much a reason to reexamine and change the hypothesis as any other unpredicted change. Strict adherence to this principle resulted in a theoretical-therapeutic system that was developed as an integrated unit, with psychotherapy determined by the theory. A major advantage was the systematic utilization of change in psychotherapy as a criterion of hypothesis formation. A major disadvantage was that it required a more consistent and higher grade of psychotherapy than is generally available. However, the discipline of the research improved the skill of the therapists. Similar hypotheses and observations were made on the functioning of staff and therapists to the families.

The research plan was designed to fit as closely as possible to other structured research in science. An example would be the principle used in developing the national space program. The first space probe was based on the best scientific knowledge available at that time. The probe brought new scientific facts to be incorporated into the body of knowledge for making the next space probe. This is an example in which science and technology advance in a team like manner.

Our original hypothesis about the mother-patient relationship proved to be amazingly accurate in predicting the details of the relationship within this twosome, but it had completely omitted the observations about the way the twosome related to others. An extended hypothesis was developed to include fathers; new families with fathers were admitted to the research, and a method of family psychotherapy was devised to fit the hypothesis. The relationship patterns observed in families with schizophrenia had been hypothesized to be specific for schizophrenia. Once it was possible to finally "see" the patterns in families with schizophrenia, it was possible to see the same patterns in a

less intense form in all levels of people with less emotional impairment. We could see the patterns even in "normal" families, and in the staff, and in ourselves. This development constituted a major change in the research, which was then directed away from schizophrenia to all levels of lesser problems and to people without clinical problems. New vistas were opened up for new hypotheses. Since people with lesser problems change more rapidly in family psychotherapy, new observations and further changes in the hypotheses were accelerated. The theory presented here is thus a presentation of the original research hypothesis, modified and extended hundreds of times, with each modification checked many times in and out of the clinical situation. When a body of theoretical thinking is sufficiently accurate so that it no longer requires significant modification, is accurate in describing and predicting the human phenomenon, and can explain discrepancies as well as consistencies, it is called a "concept." The term theory has not been used loosely. After there are several consistent concepts, the term "theory" is used for the total theoretical system.

The Theoretical Concepts

This family theory is made up of six essential interlocking concepts. All will be described sufficiently so that they can be understood as parts of the total theory. Those that are most important to this presentation will be described in the most detail. The discussion of triangles will be listed last.

Differentiation of Self Scale

This scale is an effort to classify all levels of human functioning, from the lowest possible levels to the highest potential level, on a single dimension. In broad terms it would be similar to an emotional maturity scale, but it deals with factors that are different from "maturity" concepts. The scale eliminates the need for the concept "normal." It has nothing to do with emotional health or illness or pathology. There are people low on the scale who keep their lives in emotional equilibrium without psychological symptoms, and there are some higher on the scale who develop symptoms under severe stress. However, lower scale people are more vulnerable to stress and, for them, recovery from symptoms can be slow or impossible while higher scale people tend to recover rapidly. The scale has no direct correlation with intelligence or socio-economic levels. There are intellectually brilliant people far down the scale and less bright ones far up the scale. A majority of the lower socio-economic group are far down the scale but there are those in the lower social groups who are well up the scale and those from high social groups who are far down the scale.

This is a scale for evaluating the level of "differentiation of self" from the lowest possible level of "Undifferentiation," which is at O on the scale, to the highest theoretical level of "differentiation," which is at 100 on the scale. The greater the degree of undifferentiation (no self), the greater the emotional fusion into a common self with others (undifferentiated ego mass). Fusion occurs in the context of a personal or shared relationship with others and it reaches its greatest intensity in the emotional interdependency of a marriage. The life style and thinking and emotional patterns of people at one level of the scale are so different from people at other levels that people choose spouses or close personal friends from those with equal levels of differentiation. In the emotional closeness of marriage the two partial "selfs" fuse into a common "self;" the degree of fusion depends on the basic level of differentiation before the marriage. Both partners want the emotional bliss of fusion but it is extremely difficult to maintain this equilibrium. One of the self's in the common self becomes dominant and the other submissive or adaptive. Said in another way, the dominant one gains a higher level of functional self and appears "stronger," at the expense of the adaptive one who gave up self and who is functionally "weaker." There is a spectrum of mechanisms that spouses use in adapting to the fusion. These mechanisms will be discussed in the concept that

deals with the dynamics of the nuclear family system. The lower the level of differentiation or "basic self" in the spouses the more difficult it is to maintain reasonable emotional equilibrium and the more chronic the disability when adaptive mechanisms fail.

The differentiation of self scale is an effort to assess the basic level of self in a person. The basic self is a definite quantity illustrated by such "I" position stances as: "These are my beliefs and convictions. This is what I am, and who I am, and what I will do, or not do." The basic self may be changed from *within* self on the basis of new knowledge and experience. The basic self is *not negotiable in the relationship system* in that it is not changed by coercion or pressure, or to gain approval, or enhance one's stand with others. There is another fluid, shifting level of self, which I call the "pseudo-self," which makes it difficult to assign fixed values to the basic self, and which is best understood with functional concepts. The pseudo-self is made up of a mass of heterogeneous facts, beliefs, and principles acquired through the relationship system in the prevailing emotion. These include facts learned because one is supposed to know them, and beliefs borrowed from others or accepted in order to enhance one's position in relationship to others. *The pseudo-self acquired under the influence of the relationship system, is negotiable in the relationship system.* The pseudo-self can accept a plausible sounding philosophy under the emotional influence of the moment, or it can just as easily adopt an opposite philosophy to oppose the relationship system. It is the pseudo-self that fuses with others in an intense emotional field. There is so much borrowing and trading of pseudo-self among those in the lower half of the scale that definite scale values can be estimated only from observations that cover months or years, or from a life-time pattern.

People in the lower half of the scale live in a "feeling" controlled world in which feelings and subjectivity are dominant over the objective reasoning process most of the time. They do not distinguish feeling from fact, and major life decisions are based on what "feels" right. Primary life goals are oriented around love, happiness, comfort, and security; these goals come closest to fulfillment when relationships with others are in equilibrium. So much life energy goes into seeking love and approval, or attacking the other for not providing it, that there is little energy left for self-determined, goal-directed activity. They do not distinguish between "truth" and "fact" and the inner feeling state is the most accurate possible expression of truth. A sincere person is regarded as one who freely communicates the feeling process. An important life principle is "giving and receiving" love, attention, and approval. Life can stay in symptom-free adjustment as long as the relationship system is in comfortable equilibrium. Discomfort and anxiety occur with events that disrupt or threaten the relationship equilibrium. Chronic disruption of the relationship system results in dysfunction and a high incidence of human problems, including physical and emotional illness and social dysfunction. People in the upper half of the scale have an increasingly defined level of basic self and less pseudo-self. Each person is more of an autonomous self: there is less emotional fusion in close relationships, less energy- is needed to maintain self in the fusion's, more energy is available for goal-directed activity, and more satisfaction is derived from directed activity. Moving into the upper half of the scale one finds people who have an increasing capacity to differentiate between feelings and objective reality. For instance, people in the 50 to 75 range of the scale have increasingly defined convictions and opinions on most essential issues but they are still sensitive to opinions of those about them and some decisions are based on feelings in order not to risk the disapproval of important others.

According to this theory, there is some degree of fusion in close relationships, and some degree of an "undifferentiated family ego mass" at every scale level below 100. When the scale was first devised, the 100 level was reserved for the being who was perfect in all levels of emotional, cellular,

and physiological functioning. I expected there might be some unusual figures in history, or possibly some living persons who would fit into the mid-90 range. Increasing experience with the scale indicates that all people have areas of good functioning and essential areas in which life functioning is poor. It has not yet been possible to check the scale on extremely high-level people, but my impression is that 75 is a very high level person and that those above 60 constitute a small percentage of society.

The characteristics of high-scale people convey an important aspect of the concept. They are operationally clear about the difference between feeling and thinking, and it is as routine for them to make decisions on the basis of thinking as it is for low level people to operate on feelings. The relative separation of feelings and thinking brings life much more under the control of deliberate thoughts, in contrast to low-scale people whose life is a pawn of the ebb and flow of the emotional process. In relationships with others, high-scale people are free to engage in goal-directed activity, or to lose "self" in the intimacy of a close relationship, in contrast to low scale people who either have to avoid relationships lest they slip automatically into an uncomfortable fusion, or have no choice but continued pursuit of a close relationship for gratification of emotional "needs." The high-scale person is less reactive to praise or criticism and he has a more realistic evaluation of his own self in contrast to the lower-level person whose evaluation is either far above or far below reality.

The scale is most important as a theoretical concept for understanding the total human phenomenon and as a reliable instrument for making an overall evaluation of the course of a life, and accurate predictions about the possible future life directions of a person. It is not possible to do day-today or week-to-week evaluations of scale levels because of the wide shifts in the functional level of pseudo-self in low-scale people. A compliment can raise the functioning level of self and criticism can lower it. It is possible to do reasonably accurate general estimations from information that covers months or years. For instance, a detailed history of functional shifts within a family over a period of years can convey a fairly accurate pattern of the family members in relation to each other. The scale makes it possible to define numerous differences between people at various scale levels. The life style of a person at one level is so different from someone only a few points removed on the scale they do not choose each other for personal relationships. There are many life experiences that can raise or lower the *functioning* levels of self, but few that can change the basic level of differentiation acquired while people are still with their parental families. Unless there is some unusual circumstance, the basic level from their parental family is consolidated in a marriage, following which the only shift is a functional shift. The functional shifts can be striking. For example, a wife who had a functional level at marriage equal to her husband's may become de-selfed to the point of chronic alcoholism. She then functions far below her original level while the husband functions equally far above his original level. Many of these functional levels are sufficiently consolidated so that they can appear much like basic levels to the inexperienced.

Nuclear Family Emotional System

This developmental concept deals with the emotional patterns that begin with plans for marriage and then follow through the marriage, the types of relationships with families of origin, the adjustment of the spouses to each other before children, the addition of the first child, their adjustment as a three-person relationship, and then the addition of subsequent children. The level of differentiation of self of the spouses plays a major part in the intensity of the patterns. I originally used the term "undifferentiated family ego mass" to describe the emotional "stuck togetherness" or

fusion in the nuclear family. The term is still accurate when applied to the nuclear family, but the term is less apt in referring to the same phenomenon in the extended families, and the term is awkward when applied to the same phenomenon in emotional systems at work, or in social systems. More recently the term "emotional system" has been used to designate the same triangular emotional patterns that operate in all close relationships, with an additional term to designate the location of the system, such as a nuclear family emotional system.

The level of differentiation of self determines the degree of emotional fusion in spouses. The way the spouses handle the fusion governs the areas in which the undifferentiation will be absorbed and the areas in which symptoms will be expressed under stress. There are three areas within the nuclear family in which symptoms are expressed. These areas are l) marital conflict, 2) dysfunction in a spouse, and 3) projection to one or more children. There is a quantitative amount of undifferentiation, determined by the level of differentiation in the spouses, to be absorbed by one, or by a combination of the three areas. There are marriages in which a major amount goes to one area, with other areas absorbing the "spill" from the primary area. Most families use a combination of the three areas. Marital conflict occurs when neither spouse will "give in" to the other in the fusion, or when the one who has been giving in or adapting refuses to continue. Conflict absorbs large quantities of the undifferentiation.

One of the commonest mechanisms is one in which the two pseudo-self fuse into a common self, one giving up pseudo-self to the merger and the other gaining a higher level of functioning self from the merger. This avoids conflict and permits more closeness. The dominant one who gains self is often not aware of the problems of the adaptive one who gives in. The adaptive one is a candidate for dysfunction, which can be physical or emotional illness, or social dysfunction such as drinking or irresponsible behavior. Dysfunction which serves to absorb undifferentiation is difficult to reverse. Dysfunction routinely occurs in one spouse, the other gaining strength in the emotional exchange. Dysfunction in a spouse can absorb large quantities of the undifferentiation, which protects other areas from symptoms.

The third area is the mechanism by which parental undifferentiation is projected to one or more children. I believe this exists in all families to some degree. This mechanism is so important that it is described in the following separate concept. The overall concept being described here is that of a specific amount of immaturity or undifferentiation to be absorbed within the nuclear family, which is fluid and shifting to some degree, and which increases to a symptomatic level during stress. The borrowing and trading of pseudo-self which goes on with other people at this level of undifferentiation is the point to be emphasized here.

Family Projection Process

This is the process by which parents project part of their immaturity to one or more children. The most frequent pattern is one which operates through the mother with the mechanism which enables the mother to become less anxious by focusing on the child. The life style of parents, fortuitous circumstances such as traumatic events that disrupt the family during the pregnancy or about the time of birth, and special relationships with sons or daughters are among factors that help determine the "selection" of the child for this process. The most common pattern is one in which one child is the recipient of a major portion of the projection, while other children are relatively less involved. The child who is the object of the projection is the one most emotionally attached to the parents, and the one who ends up with a lower level of differentiation of self. A child who grows up

relatively outside the family projection process can emerge with a higher basic level of differentiation than the parents.

Multigenerational Transmission Process

This concept describes the pattern that develops over multiple generations as children emerge from the parental family with higher, equal, or lower basic levels of differentiation than the parents. When a child emerges with a lower level of self than the parents and marries a spouse with equal differentiation of self, and this marriage produces a child with a lower level who marries another with an equal level, and this next marriage produces one with a lower level who marries at that level, there is a process moving, generation by generation, to lower and lower levels of undifferentiation. According to this theory, the most severe emotional problems, such as hard-core schizophrenia, are the product of a process that has been working to lower and lower levels of self over multiple generations. Along with those who fall lower on the differentiation of self scale are those who remain at about the same level and those who progress up the scale.

Sibling Position Profiles

The personality profiles of each sibling position, as described by Toman (l960, 1969), have added an important dimension to this theoretical orientation and the therapeutic system. I have found Toman's profiles to be remarkably consistent with my own observations of "normal" siblings. In his initial work, he did not study the "abnormal" sibling who is the recipient of the family projection process. The more intense the projection process, the more like an infantile youngest child this one becomes, no matter which the sibling position of birth. In evaluating a family, a note about the sibling position of each parent and whether or not the profile of each parent was reasonably typical, conveys invaluable information about the way this family will adapt itself to life, to the emotional forces in the family, and to working on its problem in family psychotherapy. For instance a "fusion of self's" mix made up of an oldest daughter and youngest son automatically conveys a wealth of information about the family, "all things being equal." In addition, this mix behaves differently in conflict, in the dysfunction of one spouse, and in the family projection process. The many details of this concept are of peripheral interest to this presentation.

Triangles

The concept of triangles provides a theoretical framework for understanding the microscopic functioning of all emotional systems. Most important, the step-by-step understanding of triangles provides an immediate working answer that can be used by the therapist, or by any family member, for predictably changing the functioning of an emotional system. The pattern of triangle functioning is the same in all emotional systems. The lower the level of differentiation, the more intense the patterns, and the more important the relationship, the more intense the patterns. The very same patterns are less intense at higher levels of differentiation and in relationships that are more peripheral.

A two-person emotional system is unstable in that it forms itself into a three-person system or triangle under stress. A system larger than three persons becomes a series of interlocking triangles. The following are some of the characteristics of functioning of a single triangle. As tension mounts in a two-person system, it is usual for one to be more uncomfortable than the other, and for the uncomfortable one to "triangle in" a third person by telling the second person a story about the triangle one. This relieves the tension between the first two, and shifts the tension between the second and third. A triangle in a state of calm consists of a comfortable twosome and an outsider.

The favored position is to be a member of the twosome. If tension arises in the outsider, his next predictable move is to form a twosome with one of the original members of the twosome, leaving the other one as outsider. So the forces within the triangle shift and move from moment to moment and over longer periods. When the triangle is in a state of tension, the outside position is the preferred position, in a posture that says, "You two fight and leave me out of it." Add this extra dimension of gaining closeness, or escaping tension, and it provides an even more graphic notion of the shifting forces, each one constantly moving to gain a little more close comfort or to withdraw from tension, with each move by one requiring a compensatory move by another. In a state of tension, when it is not possible for the triangle to conveniently shift the forces within the triangle, two members of the original twosome will find another convenient third person (triangle in another person) and now the emotional forces will run the circuits in this new triangle. The circuits in the former triangle are then quiet but available for re-use at any time. In periods of very high tension, a system will triangle in more and more outsiders. A common example is a family in great stress that uses the triangle system to involve neighbors, schools, police, clinics, and a spectrum of outside people as participants in the family problem. The family thus reduces the tension within the inner family, and it can actually create the situation in which the family tension is being fought out by outside people.

Over long periods of time, a triangle will come to have long-term postures and functioning positions to each other. A common pattern is one in which the mother and child form the close twosome and the father is the outsider. In this triangle, the minute-to-minute process of emotional forces shifts around the triangle, but when forces come to rest, it is always with each in the same position. A triangle characteristically has two positive sides and one negative side. For instance, one member of the close twosome has a positive feeling orientation to the outsider while the other member may feel negative about him. The triangle concept is remarkably more fluid for understanding a three-person system than the more conventional Oedipal Complex concepts. For instance, conflict between siblings consists almost universally of a triangle between mother and two children in which mother has a positive relationship to each child and the conflict is fought out between the children. The triangle concept provides many more clues about what to do to modify the sibling rivalry situation than is provided by Oedipal theory. In even the most "fixed" triangle, the positive and negative forces shift back and forth constantly. The term "fixed" refers to the most characteristic position. A three-person system is one triangle, a four-person system is four primary triangles, a five-person system is nine primary triangles, etc. This progression multiplies rapidly as systems get larger. In addition there are a variety of secondary triangles when two or more may band together for one corner of a triangle for one emotional issue, while the configuration shifts on another issue.

There are characteristics of the triangle that lend themselves specifically to psychotherapy, or to any other efforts to modify the triangle. The emotional forces within a triangle operate as predictably as an emotional reflex. The reactiveness operates in a chain reaction fashion, one reaction following another in predictable sequence. The therapeutic system is based on being able to observe accurately to see the part that self plays, and to consciously control this programmed emotional reactiveness. The observation and the control are equally difficult. Observation is not possible until one can control one's reactions sufficiently to be able to observe. The process of observation allows for more control, which in turn, in a series of slow steps, allows for better observation. This process of being able to observe is the slow beginning toward moving one small step toward getting one's self "outside" an emotional system. It is only when one can get a little outside that it is possible to begin to observe and to begin to modify an emotional system. When there is finally one who can control his emotional responsiveness and not take sides with either of the other two, and stay

constantly in contact with the other two, the emotional intensity within the twosome will decrease and both will move to a higher level of differentiation. Unless the triangled person can remain in emotional contact, the twosome will triangle in someone else.

The Therapeutic System

A very brief review of the therapeutic system is presented to provide an overall view of the place of the forthcoming clinical presentation in the total theoretical and therapeutic systems. The theoretical system conceives of an undifferentiated family ego mass and the therapeutic system is designed to help one or more family members toward a higher level of differentiation. The concepts of triangles provides another theoretical dimension, which says an emotional system is made up of a series of interlocking triangles. The most important therapeutic principle, which is repeatable in an orderly predictable way, says that when the triangular emotional pattern is modified in a single important triangle in the family, and the members of the triangle remain in emotional contact with the rest of the family, other triangles will automatically change in relation to the first.

Family Psychotherapy with Both Parents or Both Spouses

This is the main family configuration for family psychotherapy with any family. The therapeutic method employs the concept of differentiation of self, and of the triangle emotional system that operates in the family. The goal is to work toward modification of the most important triangle in the family, and from experience this has been found to stem from the two parents or the two spouses. I have found that the quickest way to modify the central triangle is to constitute a new triangle with the two primary members of the family and the therapist. When the family triangle includes three or more from the natural family, the emotional system runs its own built-in emotional circuits and it requires much more time for the family to observe or modify the triangle patterns. If the family configuration permits, the family psychotherapy is routinely with both spouses or both parents, whether the initial problem be marital conflict, a dysfunction in a spouse, or a problem in a child. If it is possible to modify the emotional patterns in this central triangle, then all other family members automatically change.

The one basic principle in this method of psychotherapy involves the therapist keeping himself "detriangled" or emotionally outside the emotional field that involves the marital twosome. These two people automatically use mechanisms with the therapist that they use in dealing with any third person. If the therapist can remain outside the emotional field and not respond as others do to the emotional twosome, then patterns between them come to be more quickly modified. I believe this method would work no matter what the subject of discussion, as long as the therapist remained relatively "detriangled," and as long as the twosome dealt with issues that revealed critical triangles.

There are four main things I do in a situation with two spouses or both parents. The first is to keep the emotional system between them sufficiently alive to be meaningful and sufficiently toned down for them to deal with it objectively without undue emotional reactiveness. The therapist is active with constant questions, first to one spouse, and then the other, getting the thoughts of one in reaction to what the other had communicated to the therapist. This prevents emotional exchanges between the spouses and enables each to "hear" the other without the automatic emotional bind that develops in exchanges between them. A second function is to keep self "detriangled" from the emotional process between the two family members. There are many details to this function. The third function is to establish what I have called an "I Position," which is part of the differentiation of a self. The therapist takes action stands in relation to them, which then permits them to begin to

do the same to each other. The fourth function is to teach them how emotional systems operate and to encourage them each to work toward the differentiation of self in relation to their families of origin. This step has many important details. It is necessary that the psychotherapy be done in a way that does not involve the therapist in the emotional system between the spouses. With this method, each can differentiate a self from the other as long as the therapist does not get involved in the process and as long as he can keep the process between them active.

Family Psychotherapy with One Spouse in Preparation for Family Therapy with Both Spouses

This method is designed for families in which one spouse is negative and unwilling to be involved in the family psychotherapy. The first part is similar to what will be described in the next section on family psychotherapy with one family member. The goal with this method is to help the motivated spouse to understand the part that self plays in the family system, until the unmotivated spouse is willing to join the therapy as a cooperative effort.

Family Psychotherapy with One Motivated Family Member

This method has been in regular use some eight years. It was designed for unmarried young adults who lived at a distance from parents, or whose parents refused to be a part of the therapy effort. This method is so similar to what will be described with my own family that it will be mentioned only briefly. The initial sessions are spent teaching the characteristics of family systems. Then sessions are devoted to making postulations about the part this single member plays in the total system. Then time is devoted to learning to observe patterns in one's own family, and finally to developing ways to modify one's own emotional reactions in the parental system. This plan involves relatively frequent contact with families of origin to check postulations, to seek new observations that will confirm or refute postulations, and to develop ways to modify reactions. It works best with oldest children who usually feel more responsibility for their families and who are more motivated for such an effort. It requires that the single members be self-supporting, else they never develop the emotional courage for change that might threaten the family attitude about them. An optimum distance from extended families is about 200 to 300 miles, which is close enough for frequent contact and far enough away to be outside the immediate emotional sphere of the family. Appointments are spaced farther apart when distance from family does not permit frequent visits. It is also possible to use work and social relationship systems for learning the properties of emotional systems. The average well motivated young person will spend about 100 hours spread over a period of four or five years at such an effort. More frequent appointments do not increase the capacity to observe and to control emotional responsiveness. The average result with this method has been far superior to results with conventional psychotherapy.

The Clinical Report

The object of this report is a clinical experience that covered a period of a few months in which I achieved a major breakthrough in differentiating a self from my family of origin. That experience was preceded by a twelve-year effort to understand my family within the framework of family theory. There had been an active effort to modify my self in relation to my family during the last seven or eight years of that period. This slow trial and error effort was intertwined with the stages of my professional work in family research, family theory, and family psychotherapy. Since reaching this evolutionary stage with my own family, I have been able to "coach" motivated family therapists toward significant differentiation in their parental families in as little as two or three years. This goal

is achieved by helping them focus on the productive areas and avoiding the time-consuming pitfalls. In an effort to help the reader understand the rationale for this effort, the material will be presented in its evolutionary steps, with each step explained in terms of the theory which has already been presented.

Personal Background Information

There was very little from my conventional psychiatric training that provided a workable understanding of my own family. Most of the useful concepts came from my experience with family research. However, I had some early experiences that may have played a part in the development of my thinking; these will be summarized briefly. Since many ask questions about motivation for working on one's own family, I will begin with some very early trends in my life. During my childhood I possessed two assets that played a part in future choices. One was an unusual ability for solving difficult puzzles and in devising working solutions for insoluble appearing problems. Another asset was skill in the use of my hands. By the age of twelve I had decided to go into a profession and the choice was equal between law and medicine. After twelve the choice went more toward medicine. At fifteen an incident occurred which resulted in my making a firm decision for medicine. I was an ambulance helper and had to take an unconscious teen-age girl to a university hospital. The girl lay unconscious all afternoon and by early evening she was dead. The vivid memory of the emergency room and the doctors who seemed bewildered, unsure, and fumbling incited me to help medicine find better answers. In medical school, my interest automatically gravitated to areas with the most pressing unsolved problems. First there was neurology, than neurosurgery, and then the challenge of differential diagnosis in medicine. The intellectual challenge of the skilled techniques of surgery did not fascinate me until internship. A series of surgical deaths led to my building a crude artificial heart and being accepted for a fellowship in surgery, and, following this, I was in the military service for five years. The extent of psychiatric dysfunction that I observed in Army personnel and the lack of adequate solutions for these problems led to a decision to undertake psychiatric training. I got involved immediately with schizophrenia, and then explored every known theory and treatment of schizophrenia until my interest settled on the family. Hypotheses about the family led to my devoting myself full-time to psychiatric research on the family a few years later.

I was relatively unaware of psychological or psychoanalytic concepts when I went into psychiatry. Superficial knowledge about these concepts had been compartmentalized as applying to those who were "sick." My close, congenial family had been free of conflict, marital problems, drinking problems, or any diagnosable neurotic or behavior problem for every generation of which I had knowledge. My parental family relationships and my marriage relationship were considered happy, normal, and ideal. My first year or two in psychiatry was a period of near exhilaration as I heard those logical-sounding explanations of human behavior. The exhilaration began to disappear with awareness of logical discrepancies in theory that the experts could not explain. Most psychiatrists did not seem bothered by the contradictions which formed the core of my later research.

In essence, those early years in psychiatry, and my own psychoanalysis, helped me to become aware of a fascinating new world of hidden motivation and conflict. I learned the concepts and became adept at applying them to self, staff, friends, family, and even to prominent people in the news I had never met. Everyone was "pathological," and those who denied it were even more "pathological." Thinking about members of my family took the form of analyzing their psychodynamics and diagnosing them. This stance tended to intensify my previous posture to my family of origin. As an

oldest son and physician I had long been the wise expert preaching to the unenlightened, even when it was done under the guise of expressing an opinion or giving advice. The family would listen politely and put it aside as "just psychiatry." During my psychoanalysis there was enough emotional pressure to engage my parents in an angry confrontation about childhood grievances that had come to light in the snug harbor of transference. At the time I considered these confrontations to be emotional emancipation. There may have been some short-term gain from knowing my feelings a little better and learning to "sound off" at my parents, but the long-term result was an intensification of previous patterns. The net result was my conviction that my parents had their problems, and I had mine, that **they would never change,** and nothing more could be done. I felt justified in maintaining a formal distance and keeping relationships superficial. I did not attempt to work on relationships in my family of origin until after the development of my new concepts in family research.

One emotional phenomenon from a system outside the family is of special importance to this family concept. I worked in a large, well-known psychiatric clinic where the emotional system in the "family" of staff and employees was identical to the emotional system in any family. The patterns of all emotional-systems are the same whether they be family systems, work systems, or social systems, the only difference being one of intensity. The emotional system where I worked provided valuable observations. I noticed that when I was away on trips I was much clearer and more objective about work relationships, and that the objectivity was lost on returning to work. After it was first noticed, I made more careful observations of the phenomenon. The objectivity could come by the time the plane was an hour away. On return, the objectivity would be lost as I went through the front door returning to work. It was as if the emotional system "closed in" as I entered the building. This is the emotional phenomenon I later came to call the "undifferentiated family ego mass." I wondered what it would take to keep emotional objectivity in the midst of the emotional system. A "differentiated self" is one who can maintain emotional objectivity while in the midst of an emotional system in turmoil, yet at the same time actively relate to key people in the system. I made other observations about the emotional system at work. After a trip, when I returned to the city on Saturday, objectivity would hold until returning to work Monday morning. There was one occasion when the objectivity was lost during a telephone conversation with a staff member before returning to work. On other occasions the objectivity would be lost when greeting a staff member in the parking lot before entering the building. This "fusion" into the emotional system operated most intensely with those most involved in the gossip system at work. Gossip is one of the principal mechanisms for "triangling" another into the emotional field between two people. The details of this phenomenon will be discussed elsewhere in this presentation. In that work system much "triangling" took place at coffee breaks, social gatherings, and bull sessions in which the "understanding" ones would "analyze" and talk about those who were not present. This mechanism conveys, "We understand each other perfectly (the togetherness side of the triangle). We are in agreement about that pathological third person." At social gatherings people would clump in small groups, each talking about someone outside that clump, and each apparently unaware that all the clumps were doing the same "triangling" gossip about them.

I consider involvement in that work emotional system to have been one of the fortunate experiences in my life. It just happened to have been of sufficient intensity to afford observations. After having observed the phenomenon there, it was then easier to see the same phenomenon in all other work systems. It provided a kind of "control" for the very same phenomenon in my family of origin. During the years I worked hardest to "differentiate a self" in my family of origin, I would return occasionally to the old work system for a visit. Some of my best friends are still there. On the

average visit, though I had been away for two or three years, it would take no more than thirty minutes to meet someone important to the system, and immediately "fuse" into taking sides in the emotional issues of the system. Finally, after I had mastered the experience with my own family that is reported here, I returned to the old work system for a long visit and was able to relate intimately to those important to the system without a single episode of "fusion."

The Family History

My own family of origin is the clinical example of this presentation. I am the oldest of five children of a cohesive, congenial family that has lived in the same small town for several generations. My parents, now quite elderly, are active in community life and both work in the family business. My personality profile is that of an over-responsible oldest son. I am married to the second of three daughters, who functions more as an oldest. We have four children, ranging from age 14 to 20. My first brother, two years younger than myself, is an outgoing, energetic businessman who established himself in another state immediately after college. He married a college classmate who is a socially active only child. They have one daughter. The third child, my second brother, three years younger than my first brother, is head of the family business and functions as head of the clan at home. He married a second child and oldest daughter while he was in the military service. They have two sons and a daughter. The fourth child in my family of origin, an oldest daughter, is two years younger than the third child. She is the one most emotionally triangled into the family system, the only one who did not go to college, and the one who has made the poorest life adjustment. She married an employee of the family business and they have a daughter and a son. The fifth child is a daughter four years younger than the fourth. After college she worked in another town where she married; she has one daughter. After several years her husband sold his business and they returned to the family hometown where he works in the family business. There have never been any disabling illnesses, accidents, or injuries in any of the five children, in their spouses, or their children.

The step-by-step sequence of events in this family emotional field covers a period of over fifty years. My father was an only child who has functioned as a responsible oldest. His father died when he was an infant. He was reared by his mother until he was twelve, when she remarried and had other children. He was self-supporting from childhood. My mother was a responsible oldest daughter, seven years older than her brother. Her mother died when she was one year old, following which she and her father returned to live with his parents until she was six, when her father remarried. She lived the next 17 years with her father, her stepmother, and a half brother born one year later. My parents first knew each other well when they both worked in town. They were married when he was a station agent for the railroad and she worked with her father in the family business, a department store founded by his father. After marriage, my parents lived in their own home in town for the next five years. I was born a year and a half after the marriage and my first brother was born two years later.

A sequence of events which profoundly influenced the future of the family began shortly after the birth of my brother. My mother's brother was in college several hundred miles away. Her father's health began to fail and my father began spending more and more time in the business, in addition to his regular full-time work. My grandfather had been a responsible oldest son in a large family. His death, when my first brother was two years old, was a nodal point in the family history. My father resigned from his previous job, my mother's brother stayed home from college, and my father and uncle became partners in the family business. My parents moved into my mother's parental home where the household consisted of my parents, then in their late 20's, my brother and myself,

my grandmother, then in her 50's, and my uncle, then in his early 20's. The personality profiles of the household will convey something of the family emotional field. My father is an action-oriented oldest son and my mother a responsible "doing" oldest daughter. They are among that percentage of "Oldest" who make marriage into a smooth-functioning partnership. My grandfather, as an oldest, had married two adaptive young daughters. My grandmother, his second wife, was quiet and supportive. My uncle, a functional only child by virtue of the seven years between him and my mother, was his mother's only child. He emerged with a profile of a bright youngest son. These particular personality profiles made for a congenial household with a low level of conflict.

About five months after the death of her father, my mother became pregnant with her third child, my second brother. A few months later, my uncle was among the first to be drafted for the war, and my father assumed responsibility for the business. My second brother was conceived within months after my grandfather's death, the reorganization of the business, and the merger into a single household. My second brother was born within the month after my uncle left. It was as if he was born to take over the family business. I and my first brother had been born while my parents had their own home, and we are the only two who moved away and who have no connection with the business. There was no particular pressure on anyone to leave or stay. It just evolved that I and my first brother left. My uncle returned from the war almost two years later, about the time mother became pregnant with her fourth child and oldest daughter. Mother had long wanted a daughter and this child became "special" and overprotected, the one most involved in the family emotional process, and the one who was impaired by it. There is one such child in almost every family. Though the impairment in my first sister did not go beyond overall poor functioning in her life course, the emotional pattern is the same as other families in which the most involved child is severely impaired. With less basic differentiation in my parents and more stress in the family emotional system, this daughter could have later developed severe disabling emotional or physical problems. Why did the emotional patterns involve a daughter instead of a son, and why this child? I believe this pattern is predictable in families and, implicit in Toman's work, are suggestions about whether the involved one is likely to be a son or daughter. In my family, there were reality factors that played into the emotional process. My father was the active responsible one in the family business and my mother assumed responsibility for the family operation at home. There were always chores and need for extra help in the home and business and the children all worked as a matter of course. Clear distinctions between men's work and women's work helped keep my sister in a special category. My older sister has remained emotionally dependent on my parents. School was difficult for her and she was the only one who did not go to college. She has the personality profile or a dependent youngest child, which happens with the one most involved in the family emotional process. The fifth child, another daughter, was born four years after the fourth. She grew up more outside the family emotional system and she has the profile of a responsible oldest daughter.

The period after the last child is born, when the family composition is relatively stable, usually provides the best overview of family functioning. The three boys had about equal levels of adjustment. We spent considerable time with my father in work and recreation while my mother provided more of the reminders about hard work, fair play, helping others, and success. My mother was the active, responsible one in the home. My grandmother helped with fixed chores, and she devoted special attention to my uncle. The major triangle in this combination of home and business involved my father, mother, and uncle. Any member of a relatively fixed triangle perceives his self as "caught." My father was caught between his wife and her brother, my uncle between his sister and her husband, and my mother between her husband and her brother. My father was the one most

active in the business and also in civic and community activity. In the business he represented expansion and "progress." My uncle represented caution, and he functioned as the loyal opposition that questioned "progress." ==In calm periods, a triangle functions as a comfortable twosome and an outsider.== My uncle was the outside one, which caused no problems for him since he had the close relationship with his mother who was relatively uninvolved in business issues. ==In stressful periods, a triangle has two positive sides and a negative side.== The negative side in this triangle was between my father and uncle in the business, usually expressed as discontent communicated through my mother. The stress rarely reached a point of overt anger between my father and uncle. The general subject of discontent communicated to my mother was that my uncle was not doing his fair share of the work or that he was obstructing progress, or that my father was getting more than his fair share of business proceeds (he had a larger family to support), or that the business expansions were too costly.

The family triangle illustrates an important difference between family theory and certain conventional psychiatric concepts. There are those who would say that the differences between my father and uncle represented deeply buried hostility controlled by maladaptive suppression, and that healthier adaptation would result from searching out and openly expressing the hostility. Family theory would say that the negative side of the triangle is merely a symptomatic expression of a total family problem and to focus on issues in one relationship is to misidentify the problem, to convey the impression that the problem is in this one relationship, and to make the triangle more fixed and less reversible. There may be transient anxiety relief from direct expression of anger, but to focus on this dimension makes the family. The mild symptom expressed only under stress is evidence of a good level of emotional compensation.

The next major shift in the family came as I and my brothers left for college. My grandmother died suddenly a few months before my second brother left for the Army. In the following five years there were several changes. My uncle married and established his own home, my parents and two sisters moved to a house in town, and the old family home was rented. My first brother, who was established away from home, married shortly before entering the Army. During the war my second brother, and then I, were married while in the Army. A few months later my older sister married and joined her husband who was away in war industry. My younger sister was in college during the war. My parents were alone at home. It was difficult to find employees during the war, so my mother devoted full time to helping my father and uncle run the business. There developed a different version of the family triangle, a familiar one in family systems. My uncle and his wife constituted one corner of the triangle; she tended to verbalize her discontent outside the family, and she was seen as the cause of problems in periods of stress.

After the war there was need for young ideas and energy to rebuild the business, which had been merely maintained during the war. My second brother returned with his family to start as an employee with an understanding that he would ultimately have his share of the business. Also, my older sister and her husband returned, and he resumed his employment in the business. A few years later my younger sister and her husband moved back to help in the business. My second brother, as energetic in business and civic activity as our father, was the motivating force in the successful growth of the business. Emotional forces were operating for this brother to become the "head of the clan" and for my younger sister to succeed my mother as the responsible woman in the next generation. Within the family there were a variety of triangles and shifting emotional alignments on lesser issues, but the original triangle pattern continued on major issues. Now the triangle consisted of my father and brother at one corner, my mother and younger sister at another, and my uncle and

his wife at the other. During periods of stress the negative issues were expressed between my father and brother on one side and my uncle and his wife on the other. Stress occurred around the issue of expansion of the business and when my brother pressed for his share of the business. Since the family lived in five separate households, there was more of a tendency for family issues to be confided to friends outside the family. With each period of stress there would be discussion about dividing the business, some new recognition of my brother's contribution, and a new period of calm. This sequence continued until the time came when, in a new period of stress, my uncle sold his half to my second brother and retired. The business was reorganized as a corporation, with my brother holding half of the stock and my father and mother each holding one fourth. The family, which had regarded my uncle as the bad guy who stood in the way of progress, tended to see the new arrangement as the final solution. This is another predictable characteristic of emotional systems: When the focus of the symptom is removed from the system, the system acts as if the problem is solved. If the system could think instead of react, it would know that it would be only a matter of time until the symptom surfaced elsewhere. This event in my family occurred after I learned much about families from research but before I had begun my active effort to use the knowledge in my family of origin. However, I made some postulations about the next area in which symptoms would develop. The next part of the clinical presentation will deal with the course of events for the ten years after the reorganizations of the business.

My posture to my family of origin during this period was one of kidding myself that this stance is the most common misperceptions that people have when they first begin to become better observers and to be less emotionally reactive in their own families. Actually, I was almost as emotionally involved as ever, and I was using emotional distance and silence to create an illusion of nonreponsiveness. Distance and silence do not fool an emotional system.

Concepts Important in the Differentiation of a Self

New concepts from family research and family psychotherapy provided exciting new ways for understanding my own family that had never been possible with individual concepts. The new ideas were applied to by own family, and other immediate emotional systems, by the time they were fairly well formulated. Observations and experience from my own living situation also made contributions to the family research. Most of the effort went to my own nuclear family (my wife and children), which is a story all in itself. I considered my family of origin as important in understanding my nuclear family, but less important in helping the nuclear family resolve its problems. Very early in clinical work with families, I tried to correlate each pattern in my nuclear family with similar patterns in family of origin. This effort was followed by a short period of precise focus on my nuclear family, with the premise that focus on the family of origin avoided the most important issues in my nuclear family. Gradually I focused more and more on my family of origin, culminating in the present effort being described here. The following is a series of concepts that were important in the effort to differentiate a self in my own family of origin.

Multigenerational Family History

My initial effort in this area was motivated by a research interest. Early in family research I began structured studies to trace the transmission of family characteristics from one generation to another. This was part of the effort to define the "Multigenerational Transmission Process," one of the concepts in the theory. Then I developed a special interest in the transmission of illness patterns from generation to generation. Each facet of the study provided interesting new leads to follow. Thousands of hours went into a microscopic study of a few families, in which I went back as far as

200 or 300 years, and I traced the histories of numerous families back 100 years or more. All families seemed to have the same basic patterns. This work was so time-consuming that I decided it was more sensible to study my own family. My goal was to get factual information in order to understand the emotional forces in each nuclear family, and I went back as many generations as it was possible to go. Until this time I had no special interest in family history or genealogy. In less than ten years, working a few hours a week, I have acquired family tree knowledge about twenty-four families of origin, including detailed knowledge about one that I traced back 300 years, another 250 years, and several that were traced back 150 to 200 years. The effort brought me into contact with genealogist who were surprised that I was as interested in family members who did poorly as those who did well. This is tedious work in the beginning, but a surprising amount of detail can be obtained once the effort is underway.

It is difficult to estimate the direct contribution of family historical information to the understanding of one's family in the present. I believe the indirect contributions are great enough to warrant the effort by anyone who aspires to become a serious student of the family. In only 150 to 200 years an individual is the descendent of 64 to 128 families of origin, each of which has contributed something to one's self. With all the myths and pretense and emotionally biased reports and opinions, is difficult to ever really know ''self'' or to know family members in the present or recent past. As one reconstructs facts of a century or two ago, it is easier to get beyond myths and to be factual. To follow a nuclear family of 200 years ago from marriage through the addition of each new child, and then to follow the life course of each child, can provide one with a different view of the human phenomenon than is possible form examining the urgency of the present. It is easier to see the same emotional patterns as they operated then, and one can get a sense of continuity, history, and identity that is not otherwise possible. More knowledge of one's distant families of origin can help one become aware that there are no angles or devils in a family; they were human beings, each with his own strengths and weaknesses, each reacting predictably to the emotional issue of the moment, and each doing the best he could with his life course. My work on multigenerational family history was in progress during most of the period of this report.

Undifferentiated Ego Mass in Family of Origin

I have already mentioned early observations about the emotional phenomenon where I worked, which I came to call the undifferentiated family ego mass. The same mechanism operated on visits to my family of origin. I made increasing observations about the phenomenon but had no clues about effective action for maintaining objectivity while still in contact with the family. I had long since tried the conventional things for dealing with family emotional situations, such as talking openly to family members about problems, both individually and in groups. The model for this method came from the early experience with family psychotherapy in which open discussion about problems seemed to help. Discussions about family issues seemed to make the family system calmer, but they made the fusion's more intense and it was more difficult to get back to objectivity later. When the family was calm it was possible to go several hours or a day before fusing into taking sides on emotional issues. If the family was tense, the fusion could occur on first contact with a key person in the family system. Objectivity would usually return within an hour or two after the visit while enroute home. Then came the theoretical notion of the "undifferentiated family ego mass" and some early principles about "differentiating a self." These principles will be discussed further later. From experience I had learned that the effort to define or differentiate a self is most effective if one is "outside" the emotional system, or before one becomes fused into the system. Since trips home were infrequent, the goal was to maintain objectivity as long as possible and to find

ways to extricate myself from the fusion, all during the same visit. One effort was to leave my wife and children at home while I visited among extended family in town. When I became "fused" into the system I would return home and relate intensively to my nuclear family, hoping this would extricate me from the fusion and permit another periods of objectivity with the extended family. This plan never worked. In discussions, my wife would communicate some terrible something a sister or my sister-in-law had said or done, indicating that my nuclear family had also "fused into the family system," even though it was relatively isolated from the larger family system. Usually I regained objectivity within an hour or two after the visit had ended. Based on this experience, I tried another technique to extricate myself. I planned two-day visits with the extended family, following which I would "leave" with my wife and children for a two-day subvacation 100 miles or so away; this technique was designed to extricate myself from the "fusion" and to permit another period of objectivity for a second visit. This plan also never worked. It was as if I could not extricate myself until that visit was over and I was an hour or so enroute home. I made one final effort using this technique. This one was based on the experience that it was easier that it was easier for me to do it alone than with wife and children. When professional trips permitted, I would visit a day or so with my parental family before the meeting in some distant state, and then would make a brief visit after the meeting. This worked somewhat better than the subvacation plan with my wife and children, but I never really regained objectivity until an hour or two after the second visit had ended. During the years that I tried these various techniques, I was also working at "defining a self" by letter and telephone calls with my family of origin, while I also worked at "defining a self" in other emotional systems, such as the effort with the "family" of family therapists. A partial success in a more peripheral emotional system would contribute something to the effort with my family of origin, but significant success had to wait until I obtained a better mastery of the concept of triangles.

My own experience with fusion into the undifferentiated ego mass of my family of origin is remarkable consistent with what I have observed in a broad spectrum of reasonably well-integrated families with whom I have worked in my teaching and practice. I have never seen a family in which the "emotional fusion" phenomenon is not present. Theoretically, emotional fusion is universal in all except the completely differentiated person, who has not been born. Usually, most people are not aware of the phenomenon. There are those who can become aware if they can learn to observe more and react less to their families. There are others so intensely "fused" they probably can never know the world of emotional objectivity with their parents. Few people can be objective about their parents, see and think about them as people, without either downgrading or upgrading them. Some people are "comfortably" fused and others so "uncomfortably" fused they use hate or a covert negative attitude (either is evidence of fusion) to avoid contact with parents. There are those of "positive fusion" who remain so attached they never leave home. There are relationship with parents and who make a brief formal visits home without personal communication; they use as evidence of maturity that they do not see their parents. In my work with families, the effort is to help people become aware of the phenomenon and then to make brief frequent trips home to observe and work at differentiation. Frequent short visits are many times more effective than infrequent long visits.

The Differentiation of a Self

Each small step toward the "differentiation" of a self is opposed by emotional forces for "togetherness," which keeps the emotional system in check. The togetherness forces define the family members as alike in terms of important beliefs, philosophies, life principles, and feelings. The

forces constantly emphasize the togetherness by using "We" to define what "We think or feel," or the forces use the indefinite "It" to define common values, as in, "It is wrong" or "It is the thing to do." The togetherness amalgam is bound together by assigning positive value on thinking about the other before self, living for the other, sacrifice for others, love and devotion and compassion for others, and feeling responsible for the comfort and well being of others. If the other is unhappy or uncomfortable, the togetherness force feels guilty and asks, "What have I done to cause this?" and it blames the other for lack of happiness or failure in self.

The differentiating force places emphasis on "I" in defining the foregoing characteristics. The "I" position defines principle and action in terms of, "This is what I think, or believe" and, "This is what I will do or will not do," without impinging one's own values or beliefs on others. It is the "responsible I" avoids the "irresponsible I" which makes demands on others with, "I want, or I deserve, or this is my right, or my privilege." A reasonable differentiated person is capable of genuine concern for others without expecting something in return, but the togetherness forces treat differentiation as selfish and hostile.

A family system in emotional equilibrium is symptom free at any level of differentiation. The system is disturbed when any family member moves toward regression. The system will then operate to restore that former symptom-free level of equilibrium, if that is possible. The family system is also disturbed when any family member moves toward a slightly higher level of differentiation, and it will move as automatically to restore the family system to its former equilibrium. Thus, any small step toward differentiation is accompanied by a small emotional upheaval in the family system. This pattern is so predictable that absence of an emotional reaction is good evidence that the differentiating effort was not successful. There are three predictable steps in the family reaction to differentiation. They are: (1) "You are wrong," or some version of that, 2) "Change back," which can be communicated in many different ways, and 3) "If you do not, these are the consequences." If the differentiating one can stay on course without defending self or counterattacking, the emotional reaction is usually brief and other than expresses appreciation. The clearest examples of the steps in differentiation occur in family psychotherapy with husband and wife. The following is a typical example: One couple in family therapy spent several months on issues about the togetherness in the marriage. They discussed meeting the needs of each other, attaining a warm, loving relationship, the ways each disappointed the other, and the making of joint decisions. They discovered new differences in opinion as the process continued. Then the husband spent a few weeks thinking about himself, his career, and where he stood on some central issues between him and his wife. His focus on himself stirred an emotional reaction in the wife. Her anxiety episode lasted about a week as she begged him to return to the togetherness, and then went into a tearful, angry, emotional attack in which she accused him of being selfish, self-centered, incapable of loving anyone, and an inadequate husband. She was sure the only answer was divorce. He maintained his clam and was able to stay close to her. The following day the relationship was calm. At the next therapy session she said to her husband, "I liked what you were doing but it made me mad. I wanted to control what I was saying but it had to come out. All the time I was watching you, hoping you would not give in. I am so glad you did not let that change you." They were on a new an less intense level of togetherness which was followed by the starting on a self-determined course, with the husband then reacting emotionally to her efforts at differentiation.

In this example, the husband's effort represented a small step toward a better level of differentiation. Had he yielded to her demand, or attacked, he would have slipped back to her level. When he held his position, her emotional reaction represented a pull-up to his level. This theoretical orientation

considers this sequence a basic increase in bilateral differentiation which can never return to the former level. On the new level they both have different attitudes about togetherness and individuality. They say things like, "We are much more separate but we are closer. The old love is gone. I miss it sometimes but the new love is calmer and better. I know it sounds crazy but that's how it is."

The course of differentiation is not as smooth and orderly when one person attempts it alone in his family of origin. One reason has to do with the diversity of issues about which each can take an "I position." Differentiation cannot take place in a vacuum. It has to take place in relation to others, around issues important to both people. A marriage contains an endless supply of issues important to both people. A marriage contains an endless supply of issues important to both spouses if they can disentangle self from the emotional system in order to define the issues. Differentiation also has to be in the context of a meaningful relationship in which the other has to respect the belief and actions stand that affirms it. One who affirms a "self" around issues that can be ignored is quickly labeled a fool. It is more difficult to find meaningful issues in a family of origin when one has little or no contact with its members.

The long-term efforts to define my own self in my family of origin have had significant effects, but the year-to-year results have been disappointing. All too often the family would ignore the effort. However, my attempts did result in principles applied successfully in professional practice that were later used with my family of origin in the clinical example to be discussed later. A family system in quiet emotional equilibrium is less amenable to the discussion of emotional issues, or change, than a family system in tension or stress. My most meaningful visits have been during an illness or hospitalization of a significant family member. In coaching others with their families, I encourage visits when the system is emotionally fluid or during family upsets such as deaths, serious illness, reunions, weddings, or other stressful or significant family events.

The Parental We-ness

Until I had experience in family research, I subscribed to the principle that parents should "present a united front to their children." This belief is so common that it has come to be regarded as a basic psychological principle. Certainly I heard this often enough in my own professional training and it is commonly presented as a sound principle in the literature on child rearing. The reasoning states that the united front is necessary to "prevent the child from playing off one parent against the other." Before family research I believed that parents tended to become divided in their approach to children and it was necessary to remind them to discuss differences about the children in private and to present a united front in dealing with the child. With family research I developed the conviction that this dictum is one of the most unsound psychological principles.

All families with whom I have had experience have arrived at the principle of the united parental front on their own. Most sophisticated families tend to present this dictum as a modern principle of child rearing and less sophisticated families present it as a culture-bound principle about children obeying their parents. There is evidence that parents automatically invoke this principle because it makes the parents more comfortable and not because it is good for the child. There are numerous variations of this principle in the triangle between parents and child, but the most frequent pattern is the one in which mother becomes unsure of herself in relation to the child and seeks the father's approval and support. Observation of families in family psychotherapy indicates that parents tend to develop more individual relationship with the child as the family improves.

This phenomenon can be considered from several different levels. On a clinical level, the "parental we-ness" presents the child with a parental amalgam which is neither masculine nor feminine and it deprives the child of knowing men by having an individual relationship with his father, and knowing women from the relationship with his mother. From the standpoint of triangles, the "parental we-ness: presents the child with a locked-in "two against one" situation which provides no emotional flexibility unless he can somehow manage to force a rift in the other side of the triangle. From a theoretical standpoint, the poorly defined self's of the parents fuse into a common self and it is this that becomes the "parental we-ness." Early in family psychotherapy I began working toward developing an individual relationship between each parent and the child. Nothing but good things have come from this principle. Once the effort goes toward developing an individual relationship between each parent and the child, it is possible to see the intensity of the parental effort to re-establish the "parental we-ness." There are some situations in which the parents fuse into a common self so automatically that it is difficult to establish individual relationships. When it is possible to separate the parental we-ness early, the change in the child is usually rapid and dramatic. Even a very young child is capable of managing a relationship to either parent.

Very soon after working out the principle of each parent having an individual relationship with each child, I began to apply it in my nuclear family. The full implications of this principle, however, were not realized until I knew about the "person-to-person" relationship principle and had more awareness about triangles. The results of these efforts in my family or origin will be presented in another section.

The Person-to-Person Relationship and Related Principles

The person-to-person relationship will be discussed in conjunction with other principles from which it was derived. Early in family research I observed the striking calm and the rapid change in families when one family member could begin to "differentiate a self" in chaotic, disturbed families. This phenomenon would occur after the anxious family had been submerged in symptoms and paralyzed by the inability to arrive at a joint decision for action. Eventually one member, unable to speak of the whole family, would begin to define where he stood on a issue and what he intended to do and not do. Almost immediately the entire family would become calmer. Then another family member would begin a version of the same process. Those families were too impaired for any member to maintain this operating position over long periods of time, but the observations provided ideas for theory and clinical experimentation in less impaired families. In the midst of these observations on families, I noted chaotic upsets within the research staff; staff members complained about each other and efforts to resolve differences in group discussions were unsuccessful. Using a principle developed from the research, I, the director, set out to define my role, and stated my long-term plans and intentions as clearly as possible. The "togetherness" group meetings were terminated. In the course of this rather exacting self-imposed assignment, I realized the degree to which I had infantilized the staff members by instructing them and even functioning for them, while I had been irresponsible in failing to do other things that came within my own area. Almost immediately the staff tension subsided and then another and another of the staff members began to define their responsibilities. Thereafter there were few staff upsets that could not be settled within hours instead of days. This same principle has been used frequently since than in all kinds of clinical, work, and family situations.

The principle of defining a self was later used in a modified form within my entire extended family network. The various nuclear families in the extended family system tend to group themselves into

emotional clumps and the communication is often from "clump to clump" rather than from individual to individual. It was common for letters to be addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. and Family," or to "Mr. and Mrs.," and often each nuclear family had one letter writer who would write for the entire family, I had used carbon copy letters to disseminate family information to multiple family members. This method was used during the period I was working on the multigenerational family history and I had more occasion to write than usual. The new plan was to define myself as a person as much as possible and to communicate individually to a wide spectrum of extended family members; I tried to establish as many individual relationships within the family as possible. Every possible opportunity was used to write personal letters to every niece and nephew. The less differentiated family segments still tended to reply with letters to my entire family, but more and more some began to write personal letters addressed to my office, and since they were addressed to me personally, my family never saw them. The return on this endeavor is like a long-term dividend; it has modified my image within the entire family.

Another project was the development of a "person-to-person" relationship with each of my parents and also with as many people as possible in the extended family. A "person-to-person" relationship is conceived as an ideal in which two people can communicate freely about the full range of personal issues between them. Most people cannot tolerate more than a few minutes on a personal level. When either party becomes anxious, he begins talking about a third person (triangles in another person), or the communication becomes impersonal and they talk about things. My immediate goal was to work toward a person-to-person relationship with each parent. Although I made some effort to develop this type of relationship with extended family members by writing letters to individuals, my effort with my parents was more intensive. In such an effort, one encounters every rejection, alliance, and resistance that are present in emotional systems everywhere. In disciplining the self to do this, one develops versatility and emotional courage in all relationships, one learns more about people than in most endeavors, and the family profits too. In some family situations the positive results are sweeping, both for the family and the one who initiated the effort. These experiences were used in clinical practice, which in turn made contributions to the effort with my own family. Most of the patterns in my family are present in all families to some degree. In practice, for instance, a nuclear family out of meaningful emotional contact with families of origin is more vulnerable to intense symptoms, and the problems tend to be more chronic than in families that maintain contact with parental families. The nuclear family is usually reluctant to face the emotional forces that led to isolation, but if they can know that successful establishment of meaningful emotional contact (an infrequent duty visit is not meaningful contact) usually decreases tension in the nuclear family, they are more motivated to make the effort. Progress is several times faster in the nuclear family that is in contact with families of origin than in the nuclear family that is isolated.

Person-to-Person Relationships in the Parental Triangle

In clinical work with other families, I discovered that the pattern in my own family is the most common one in all families. My mother was the most active parent on most issues that had to do with her children. She made it her business to know what went on everywhere with the children. My father played a more peripheral role except on certain issues that came within his sphere of activity. He had to do with money issues, though it was within the rules of the system to speak to my mother before speaking to my father. He always made himself part of the action when anxiety issues developed between my mother and the children, and he made effective comments and actions to allay my mothers' anxiety. From early childhood I participated in special activities with my father that did not include my mother. Much was oriented around work chores, but there were also

frequent hunting and fishing trips, and in my teen years I took frequent business trips by car with him. We had long conversations about issues of special interest, but a smaller amount of time was spent on personal issues. He had boundless knowledge about nature and observations about wildlife, too little of which has been remembered in my years of urban living. Mother was the letter writer. My father's letters were usually brief and to the point, usually centered around money matters while I was in college. After I left college his letters to me were less frequent. My mother usually wrote for the family and signed her name, and my letters to my parents were addressed to "Mr. and Mrs."

It was a theoretical idea, rather than personal experience, that directed my effort over many years to differentiate myself from my family of origin, and to use the person-to-person relationship for a central part of the effort. At that time I knew a little about "triangles" but I did not have many techniques for using the knowledge to extricate myself from the emotional system. It took much more than the person-to-person relationship to get free of the emotional binds of the triangle, but that will be described later. My first effort with my parents consisted of writing individual letters to each of them. This method did not change the basic pattern. My mother still wrote for both even though her letters became a bit more personal. Then I made an effort utilizing telephone calls. When I telephoned, the usual sequence was one in which my father would answer and within seconds he would call my mother who would do most of the talking from an extension. My goal was to engage him in conversation longer, but this never worked. I rehearsed dialogue designed to talk straight to him but very soon he would either refer the issue to her for comment, or she would cut in and talk for him. If I asked him to silence her so we could talk, she would cut in and talk for him. If I asked him to silence her so we could talk, she would start a dialogue about that. I have never been effective in using the telephone for this effort. There was always the problem others on extensions and I could not develop effective feedback.

Time with each parent alone is essential for establishing an individual relationship, but mere private talk with a single parent can accomplish little. One has to be aware that one was "programmed" into the system long ago and it is automatic for both parties to fall back on familiar patterns. An optimum condition for such a relationship is to find a subject of interest to both that does not in-volve the rest of the family. Each person has his own built-in resistance to working at such a relationship. I have sent people on special missions to parental families and have then had them report that is was impossible to get parents separated, or that there was not an "ideal time" for talking, or that they had postponed the effort until the last few hours, when the effort turned out to be inept. The experience with my parents paralleled that of many. With my father, it was hard to find personal subjects and difficult to keep a conversation alive. When I did introduce a personal subject, he would invoke the parental we-ness and respond with, "Mother thinks..." With my mother it was easy to keep conversations alive, but she would invoke triangles by talking about other people and it was just as difficult to keep the discussion on a person-to-person level. My overall aim was to keep the conversation alive with my father, and to eliminate the triangles with my mother. With my father, I tried to prepare long lists of subjects ahead of time, but this was not the answer. To many issues he would respond with minimal comment, the list would be exhausted, and again there would be the uncomfortable silence.

There were some special occasions when I made more progress on the person-to-person relationships than all other times together. Two of these occurred at times of sickness. The first occasion occurred when my father was in the hospital after a moderately severe heart attack. This occasion provided the opportunity to talk about his fears of death, his philosophy of life, and the life

goals and aspirations he may not have expressed otherwise. Another occasion occurred when my mother had major elective surgery. There were days with her in the hospital and evenings with my father at home alone. It was there also that I discovered the value of past history as a subject for personal communication. Most people are eager to talk about their own early life experiences to those interested in listening. I was working on the multigenerational family history at that time and I was eager for all that could be remembered. The next opportunity came a year or two later with my mother. In my work on past generations I had discovered a whole segment of her side of the family that she did not know existed. It covered a period from 1720 to 1850 when this segment had moved west. The family name was well-recorded in the area and there were cemeteries where they were buried, churches where they worshipped, lands they had owned, houses they had built, and other items of personal and family interest. I arranged a week-long automobile trip with her to visit all these places. That was a solid week of intense person-to-person contact with very little talking about others. This trip with my mother will be mentioned in the personal experience to be reported later.

In addition to the effort to develop a person-to-person relationship with my parents, I had also continued the effort to "detriangle" myself from the parental triangle. Since the "detriangling" was much more prominent in later family events, the description of that process will be only briefly described. The process of "differentiating a self" from a parental family involves two major steps. The first step is to develop the person-to-person relationships. This step helps to bring relationships more alive, it helps one to recognize old patterns that may have faded from view, and most of all, it results in livelier family response to the effort to "detriangle" or change the old patterns. A parental family can ignore such detriangling moves if relationships are distant. In this report, I have put more emphasis on the person-to-person relationship in relation to triangles than I do in my current work in "coaching" others with their families. There are two reasons for this emphasis. The first is the importance of the person-to-person relationship as a part of the total scheme. The second is that the person-to-person relationship method was in use before the detriangling process was well understood.

Up to this point in my family effort, I had incorrectly assumed that I could differentiate a self from my family of origin by differentiating a self from my parents. I believed that if I accomplished this step well I would not have to bother with all the other triangles in which my parents were imbedded. The notion about interlocking triangles had been in use almost ten years but I had not integrated this aspect of the theory into the work with my own family. As I developed increasing family with triangles, and as the expected result had not been achieved, it became clear that some kind of a different effort was in order.

The original observation about the undifferentiated ego mass of my family of origin was always an overall guide. My overall goal, it will be recalled, was to be able to have an entire visit with the family without becoming fused into the emotional system. Though the result from all my various efforts with the family had been satisfying, especially the effort at developing person-to-person relationships, I still had not significantly increased the length of time before I would become "fused" into the family system when I visited, nor had I found a way to extricate myself before the visit had ended. The remainder of this report represents a new era in the family effort.

The Family History—Continued

After the reorganization of the family business, there was no obvious disharmony in the primary triangle of my father, mothers, and second brother. My original postulations was that the negative side of the triangle would have to occur between my brother and mother, but this prediction was based entirely on theory and knowledge about triangles and not on experience from the past nor anything observed in the family. The relationship between my father, mother, and second brother had always been such a congenial one that it would be hard to conceive of friction between them. Even though I had become enough of a specialist to be a part-time consultant in organizational problems in business, and even with my relatively close contact with the family and my prediction about the next area of disharmony, it was not possible to get definite evidence to confirm my postulation nor to suggest an alternative one. There were superficial discontents expressed here and there between the children and their spouses, or between cousins, but there was no definite pattern and these problems seemed to belong more to everyday minor issues than to basic issues in the central family triangle. I even looked for a common pattern that emerged from my multigenerational studies: it had been predicted that conflict between siblings would be perpetuated by the descendants of these siblings far into future generations. It took some time for a definite pattern to emerge in my family. There are several factors which affect the emergence of the pattern, including the basic adaptability of the family (conflict does not occur between people if the adaptability is good), the absence of stress of sufficient degree to cause symptoms to surface, and number of subtriangles to absorb minor levels of disharmony.

This pattern in my family is identical to many that exist in businesses and staffs of institutions in which the basic problem which exists on the highest administrative level is triangled and retriangles again and again until the conflict surfaces between two employees low in the administrative hierarchy. The three areas in which "undifferentiation" are absorbed in a nuclear family are marital conflict, sickness or dysfunction in a spouse, and projections to one or more children. The total amount of undifferentiation, determined by the basic level of differentiation in the family, is distributed primarily to one area, or any combination of the three areas. In my parental family the level of conflict is very low, the primary mechanism is projection to a child (lower life adjustment of oldest sister), and the other mechanism is physical illness, usually brief medical or surgical illnesses. These areas provide clues about symptoms when family stress mounted.

Aside from the little subsystems of anxiety and concern in each nuclear family, the prevailing stress in my total family was connected with the business. Early in this period, my second brother developed a brief symptom slightly suggestive of a malignancy. Since the "go power" for the family rested with him, anxiety went very high for a week until the possibility of malignancy was ruled out. Thereafter, the stress was related more to health issues in my parents and disposition of the business in case of their deaths. My parents were getting quite old and each serious-appearing illness in either sent out some kind of an alarm, and precipitated some kind of family reaction. The basic reaction in the central family triangle included my father at one corner, my mother, youngest sister, and sister's husband at another, and my second brother and his nuclear family at the other. One of the first changes in the post organizational period (from my standpoint) was a cool distance between by second brother and me, initiated by him. He and I had always been close, and this I realized in retrospect, continued until the business was reorganized. After that, he was congenial enough in our brief exchanges, but his business and civic activities were demanding. During the period I was working on person-to-person relationships, he was the one important family member with whom it was not possible to develop a relationship. Time planned to see him alone would be converted into

a social event. When it became evident that he was avoiding me, I became more persistent in my effort to see him, and he became equally persistent in avoiding me. When I made a summer trip home, and he and his wife took a vacation away during the entire period of my visit. Here was a situation where two of the most important figures in my family system could not get together! He was important at home and I was important because of my position as "oldest" and because I had made myself important through my various efforts. As the distance between my second brother and me increase, the stories about him increased. I was hearing all about him and he was probably hearing all about me from the family network, but I could not see him. He rarely wrote letters, so that communication was cut off. One summer I made a concerted effort to meet with my second brother. Expecting that he might again leave during my visit. He and his wife left on a trip the following day and returned a few hours before my family was scheduled to leave, just long enough to exchange greetings and superficial comments. The trend of events that are the subject of this presentation began about six weeks later.

An important triangle at work at this time was the one between my mother, my second brother, and me. I had worked very hard on the triangle with my parents and me, assuming that my problem would be solved. Now a new version of the problem had been displaced onto the new triangle. When conflict arose in the business, my mother would communicate by some means, if not directly, that I was on her side, and my brother would react as if this was reality. I began to perceive some of this development on trips. The process would emerge in the form of gossip-type stories which in an emotional system communicate, "We two are together on this issue. We are in agreement about the other third person." One of the better ways to disengage from such a triangling "secret" communication is to go the third person and report the message in a neutral way. I was out of effective contact with my second brother then and the only move I could make was to tell my mother that I was neutral. She would say that she respected my position and I would assume she was acting neutral about me with others. I would leave town and the family would react as if I was on her side.

Action is required when words fail to detriangle in emotional systems. My mother has always used "secret" communications to facilitate her position in the emotional system. One of my early responses to her communication was to listen, and I thought I could listen without taking sides. In retrospect, this maneuver was one of the key triggers for my early fusion's into the emotional system. Listening to such communications without response, pretending that one is not involved, does not fool an emotional system. When I was aware that "no response" was not effective, I began using comments such as, "That's one of the better stories." This method was a little more effective. In retrospect, I undoubtedly was responding while I kidded myself that I was neutral. I had worked much more actively on the triangle with my family, mother, and myself and I had been more effective in detriangling from that. There had been several exchanges about "secrets" that turned the tide in that area. The first one was a letter in which mother communicated some negative story about my father. In the next mail I wrote to my father to say that his wife had just told me this story about him, and I wondered why she told me instead of telling him. He showed the letter to her, and she fussed about not being able to trust me. Several letters such as this, plus similar exchanges when I was with both parents, had been reasonably effective at detriangling me from them. During that period, mother made comments about my reading too much between the lines, and I made comments about her writing to much between the lines.

The triangling pattern in my family of origin, which is the usual one in all emotional systems, was most intense during stress periods. Various family members were grouped on the corners of the

primary triangle, except that the grouping would be somewhat different, depending on the emotional issues. The two on the togetherness side of a triangle would talk about the outsider. With various versions of different issues being discussed in four separate households, and with me in reasonable good contact with them all, it was possible to keep a good reading of the family emotional tension. My first brother has hardly been mentioned in this report. His lifelong position in the family has been one of moderate involvement and acting uninvolved, with statements that he would be willing to help anytime if he was needed but that he did not want to "just talk."

The Family Experience

Prologue

The important sequence of events began when my second brother's wife's brother died suddenly of a heart attack. He, like my second brother, was a vigorous business man who was "head of the clan" for his family in another state. His death left my brother's wife as the next most responsible member of her family of origin. The death of such an important family member can "shake" a family system for months. This was the "shock wave" phenomenon I had investigated in some early research, in which a death can be followed by a series of apparently unrelated human problems throughout the family system. This present situation had the characteristics of one in which there could be such a reaction. I reasoned that, sequentially, this death would "shake" my second brother's wife, that my second brother would help her assume responsibility in her family, that he would become involved in her deep anxiety, that my family would react to his anxiety, and the anxiety could amplify minor problems into major ones at vulnerable points in my family. My first thought was to observe carefully and possibly to lend some help if such did occur. About two weeks later that was an indirect report from friends that my older sister was in an anxious, upset state. She is so attuned to emotional forces in the family that a symptom in her is often an early indication of tension in the family system. There were indications that she was probably responding to the pressure in the larger family system rather than to her own nuclear family. the event was noted. About two weeks after that, there was an episode of overt disagreement in the central family triangle of sufficient intensity that it became an "alive" issue for discussion throughout the family. My second brother was pressing my parents for a small block of stock which would give him control of the family business. My father, in the togetherness side of the triangle with my second brother, was agreeable, but my mother was opposed. I had expected the "anxiety wave" issues that autumn to be expressed more as illness, and I was wondering how to deal with that kind of anxiety should the need arise. It is easier to deal with overt conflict than with internalized symptoms, and overt conflict is relatively rare in our family. My thoughts began spinning about ways I could utilize this conflictual episode to interrupt this anxiety wave for the family, and also to utilize it as a way to further my "differentiation of self." In such an anxiety wave period, the person with the most vulnerable heart can have a heart attack, a chronic illness can flare up, a teen-aged child can wreck a car or break a bone, or any of numerous other symptoms could develop in any member of the family. The overt conflict presented new ideas and challenges, but I did not have a clearly defined plan. I was scheduled for a trip home in about two months, so I had time to think the problem through and to devise a working plan. This is the wonderful thing about triangles. One can construct an amazingly accurate hypothesis from which it is possible to plan a predictable result if the differentiating one can contain his own emotional functioning enough to carry through. About three weeks after the conflictual issue, my second brother was immobilized for several weeks with symptoms of a herniated vertebral disc.

The Plan

People treat families with great caution, lest the equilibrium be upset. There are situations that automatically disturb a lake, but if one is trying purposely to disturb the surface of a lake, one finds how difficult it is. The carefully worked out specific plans for my visit to the family were some eight weeks in preparation. In my years of family research and therapy, I had diagrammed and successfully blueprinted my way through triangle webs for many other families and I wanted especially to make this effort work for my own family. The overall goal was to focus on the triangle involving my mother, second brother, and myself, and preferable, also to include my father. With this configuration there would be the original triangle on which I had done most work, my parents and myself, plus the new triangle in which the conflict developed. My second brother and mother were central figures.

For some years my brother had been avoiding me. The issue of making contact with a family member who retreats and who refused to relate to issues, had long been a special interest of mine. An immediate goal for this project, then, was to create a situation in which my brother would seek contact with me. It was the development of conflict between my mother and second brother that first motivated this plan; it is far easier to deal with conflict than other mechanisms in such an effort. My aim was to have a conflictual issue around which to work. The recent conflict over the business would still be sufficiently alive during the visit, but to focus on that would make that issue into a reality issue rather than a manifestation of an emotional system. In addition, I would be more vulnerable to being triangled with that issue. So, I devised the plan to stir up the family emotional system, using old issues from the past around which to work. Said in another way, the goal was to stir up a "tempest in a teapot" from issues of the past that would highlight the emotional patterns among the principal family members. One other item in the planning was a primary focus. In the past I had done fairly well in detriangling myself from one triangle, only to have the tension slip into another triangle; this pattern had been my undoing. In preparation for the potential peripheral triangles that could align themselves with issues and prove difficult, I worked out a plan that permitted no "allies" in my effort. In other words, it was an effort to keep the entire family in one big emotional clump, and to detriangle any ally who tried to come over to my side for this project. I had used this rationale before on smaller emotional systems in my practice and I knew the principle was workable. A final part of the plan was to involve my first brother. He is an important part of the family and I wanted to find a way to include him too. Very early in my planning I called to tell him about the "awful conflict" in the family; that his help was needed; that I was going to be home on a specific date; and I urged that he return home to be part of this family effort. I was sure he would follow his usual pattern of treating the stock transfer as the reality issue, but I was prepared to deal with his introducing the topic of lawyers and determining which side was right.

My greatest effort went into preparing a long letter to my second brother. First I made a list of old emotional issues that focused on my relationship to him and his to me, the family system's relationship to him and to me, and relationships within his nuclear family. It was my purpose to have an issue for all key family members, especially issues that would touch each relationship cleanly. The letter was written and rewritten in order to eliminate hostile or derogatory comments. If the differentiating one becomes hostile or angry he is vulnerable to losing objectivity and either defending or counterattacking when the issues are hurled back at him. I played and replayed these issues so many times that I could be rather objective about each one. The more I did this, the more it was impossible for me to be angry with anyone. In fact, I had only heightened respect for my second brother who had functioned so well as "head of the clan" at home. I developed a special

technique that avoided criticizing him. This technique was to relate "stories" I had heard about him, to tell him that everyone knew these stories but him, state that the family kept warning everyone not to tell him lest he get upset, and to ask why he had not bothered to know what people were saying about him. The sequence is present in every family system—the system talks about the absent one and the system has definite rules about keeping the gossiping "secret." In my letter, my posture to the "stories" was to say they had been going on for years, that some were interesting but most were boring, that the stories seemed to be embellished more during upset periods, that I had long since given up trying to separate fact from fiction in such stories, that I was tired of being admonished about what to tell him and what to avoid telling him and that this letter represented my right to communicate what I wanted to say directly to him without regard for what the system thought was good for him to hear. This technique, designed to present material in terms of "stories" proved so effective I have since employed it routinely in my practice. One always has an adequate supply of appropriate stories to be used for particular situations.

I started the letter by saying that I had wanted to talk to him for a long time but, since he had been away during my recent trips, I had to resort to putting my ideas onto paper. I mentioned that people were saying things about him in connection with the business that were similar to the stories they used to tell about our uncle. I said I did not understand how this had happened, but there it was. In order to touch on his nuclear family, I said there was a "story" about him and his wife being worried about a problem their son had, and that I had been warned to never say a word about it because he and his wife were so sensitive about it. In one paragraph I emphasized that I had no interest in who controlled the family business but that I recognized his contribution to the business and to the entire family. Then I wrote a full paragraph of "reversals," which is a psychotherapeutic principle I have long used of making a point by saying the opposite. This technique works predictably if the therapist is "outside" the emotional system and can be sufficiently casual and detached. Here was my brother who was working a 16-hour day for himself, his nuclear family, his parents, the whole extended family system, and all connected with it. He was doing a wonderful job, except that in periods of anxiety he became overly serious and emotionally "uptight." If I were to tell him to slow down and take it easy and not get so overly responsible for everyone, it would merely be what he has been telling himself and trying unsuccessfully to do. Therefore, the "reversals." I wrote him that I was "shifting gears from my previous posture," and would do something I did not ordinarily do—namely, I was going to give him some good sound advice. I implored him to be more responsible. I said that he had the responsibility for his parents and they were not appreciative enough. Maybe he had not worked hard enough to take care of them, or maybe the problem was in not forcing them to appreciate him better. In any case, he should limber up his back and give it the good old college try. I said that he had all the problems to solve in the business, he had to straighten things out with his parents, his wife and children needed more attention, he had additional problems in his wife's family, and there was an immediate problem with his sister's despondency. I ended the letter by saying that I would be home on a specific date, but since I had already said all that was necessary in the letter, it would not be necessary to see him unless he had something to say to me. I signed it, "Your Meddlesome Brother."

By calculation, this letter was mailed exactly two weeks before my trip home. In the same mail I wrote my first brother to tell him the exact date I would be home and I implied that if he cared about his family he would manage to get home on this date to help clear up this terrible situation. In all these letters, I used words such as terrible, awful, pressing, and horrible to describe the family plight. These words were all designed to stir up the "tempest in the teapot" for the purpose of the visit, I also wrote my oldest sister to say I had heard about her distressing upset and I had written

her brother to help her out until I got there. I signed that letter, "Your Worried Brother." Then I waited exactly one week to call my parents under the guise of finding out who might meet the plane when I arrived one week later. Actually, I wanted a reading on the results of the letter. My mother said my brother was furious about "that" letter I had written him. I pretended I did not know what letter that could be, saying he had not written me in a long time and that I did not owe him a letter. She said he had several pages I had signed, that he was showing it to people, he was going to have it Xeroxed, and that he would take care of me when I arrived. I said I was distressed to hear that something had upset him but I would be glad to see him when I arrived. With this new information, I wrote several other letters within the next hour. One was to my younger sister, who lives near my parents and who functions as the responsible woman in the second generation. I wrote that I had just talked with our mother and had found that my second brother was upset about something I had said in a letter. I said that I found this hard to understand because all I had done was write some of my thoughts on paper and send them to him. I wrote that it was a mystery to me how thoughts that came out of my head could upset him. If he was upset, I said, I was deeply grieved because that could upset the whole family, and as "Big Mother: she had a responsibility to do whatever was necessary to soothe him with whatever Big Mothers do to calm people. I asked her to please treat my letter as confidential because I did not want to upset mother too, and to please advise me immediately what I could do to make amends to Little Brother. I said that if my thoughts were upsetting my second brother, maybe I could think different or "right" thoughts. I signed that letter, "Your Anxious Brother." In the same mail, within the hour, I wrote an exactly opposite message to my mother. I told her that I had known about the letter all the time but I was afraid to let her know because she might tell Little Brother and it would ruin may plan, which was going nicely thus far. I said that since I knew I could trust her (she had pledged me to thousands of secrets in the past), I would let her in on the strategy. I said that my plan was to get Little Brother really angry at me in order to draw the fire off the family situation at home. I told her that I had used a few little personal issues to warm him up, but that I had some big issues to fire him up if he cooled off during the week. I ended the letter by saying that this was all very confidential and that one "leak" would ruin the entire strategy—when one is planning strategy it is not advisable to invite the "enemy" to the briefing sessions. That letter was signed, "Your Strategic Son." Later I heard about my mother's reaction to this letter, which was to say, "I got the craziest letter. I do not know what to do with it, so I burned it." The day before the trip, I received a letter from my younger sister saying that my second brother had spent over two hours with my parents after he received the letter, that they thought it was horrible, and that he had apparently won them over to his side. She said that maybe this was one time Little Brother would not leave town when Big brother came home—that he was mad enough to stay. She reported that he was really going to have it out with me when I arrived and that my older sister's husband was going to "back me into a corner to prove the lies I had been telling about his wife." Then she added that I had really stirred up the family and she hoped that my strategy worked. She ended up with, "I am back of you if I can be of help. I am really looking forward to your visit this time. It should be very interesting."

I hope the reader is clear about the purpose of these efforts. The conflicting messages were designed to prevent any one segment of the family from getting on my "side." Messages run back and forth in such a family system as if by telepathy. The only letter that was not shown to a circle of others was the "Strategic Son" letter to my mother. My younger sister was the only one reasonably outside the seriousness of the family emotional system, as was conveyed by her comment about looking forward to the "interesting" visit. A red flag had gone up from her comment about "I am back of you," which I handled by telling her that I was going to tell the family she had invited me

home to help her with her Big Mother role. She retreated from taking sides with me by acting as if the issues I had raised were all very serious.

My younger sister and her husband and daughter met my wife and me at the airport. The trip was planned so that I would spend two days with my family, then three days at a medical meeting at which my wife's presence was desirable, and then two days back again with my family. My wife had no direct knowledge of what I was doing. From long experience, I have found that a differentiating effort routinely fails if anyone else knows anything about it. To be effective, each action and move must come from within the person who makes the effort. These decisions and actions often have to be made instantaneously and, for better or worse, the **individual** has the responsibility. To discuss the plan with another person **who is part of the system** invites certain failure. The first my wife knew of what was going on was when my younger sister began to discuss bits and pieces of the family events after our arrival at the airport. My wife did not ask a single question nor make positive or negative comments about my family at any time during the trip. This had never happened before. It was Saturday midnight when we arrived at my parents' home. The only comment my mother made about the family occurred Sunday morning when she said she hoped things could work out without hard feelings. I said I was glad she was still a good mother who worried about her children. There was not a word from any segment of the family on Sunday morning. Early Sunday afternoon we were invited to my younger sister's home for an early afternoon meal included; were both of my parents, my wife and myself and my sister and her husband and daughter. Just as we finished desert and coffee, my second brother telephoned to say he had been checking around town to find me and he would be there in a few minutes. My brother was now seeking me out instead of me chasing him. The inclusion of him and his wife made this into the perfect group for this long-anticipated and rehearsed meeting. Every important triangle in the family system was represented. I had purposely stayed close to my parents all morning, hoping to facilitate a meeting of most of these people, but good fortune was with me when it worked out this way. My immediate goal was to avoid defending anything, or attacking any issues, to be able to avoid getting angry even with provocation and to have an instant casual response to any comment.

My second brother exchanged pleasantries, but after a minute or two he took out "the letter" and said he was there to discuss the epistle I had written when I was drunk. I said that was an advantage in living where booze was cheap and that if his supply was low, I could get some good prices for him. The meeting went on for two hours and was all personal. The principals in the center were my brother, his wife, and me. My wife and my father were slightly out of the group. My mother moved around just back of the main group. Most of the conversation was between my brother and me and mother, with a few comments from my brother's wife. My brother had reacted most severely to a "story" about him that was similar to a story that had been told about our uncle. He threatened a libel suit against me. I agreed that it was awful to start such stories and I thought he should find out who started that story and prosecute the person to the full extent of the law. There was more talk about stories, and I expressed surprise he did not know what others said about him. I hoped he would pay more attention to the stories in the future, since he lived there all the time and I only heard them when I visited. His wife reacted most to the story about their son, to which she said, "I always say nice things about your children." I responded, " I have heard nice stories about all of you too. There was just not time to remember all of them." Then my brother and his wife began to report negative stories about me, to which I responded with some version of, "That was a fairly amusing one, but there have been some really good ones about me if you had just paid attention and listened better." Mother was pacing back and forth in the back, with comments such as, "I hope I do not die and leave a divided family." At one point toward the end of the meeting, my brother

accused me of being in league with mother, and that the whole thing started when she and I took that trip together to see the land of her ancestors. I said, "You are really intuitive about some things! How did you know about that? Mother responded vigorously with, "That's the biggest lie I ever heard! I will never tell you anything else again." I turned to my brother and said, "Now you see how she tries to wangle out of things when she is caught with the truth." At the end of the meeting, as my brother and his wife were leaving, his wife said, "I never saw such a family in all my life. I think we should do more talking to each other and less talking *about* each other."

The end of that Sunday afternoon was one of the most satisfying periods of my entire life. I had actively participated in the most intense family emotions possible and I stayed completely out of the "ego mass" of my very own family! I had gone through the entire visit without being "triangled" or without being fused into the family emotional system. About two-thirds through the meeting I knew I had been successful for I noted that the family system had lost its emotions punch, and I knew that, if there was not some completely unanticipated event, I would go through the entire meeting without fusing into the system. Even if I had been slightly or moderately triangled, I would have more than achieved my primary mission for the visit, which was to interrupt the anxiety wave in the family. I knew that had been accomplished even by the time the family meeting was well underway. I also knew that my postulations about interlocking triangles were accurate by the time the family meeting started. To have completed the meeting without becoming triangled was additional theoretical system work. It was the total success of the operation that was surprising, exhilarating, and exhausting. I had spent a dozen years pondering the structure and function of this "undifferentiated family ego mass" and I was so accustomed to each new effort being a partial success that I was hardly prepared for total success. It was equivalent to having finally mastered the secret of the system and having gone all the way to the goal line in one try. Since I believe that one's own life adjustment is dependent on working out a "self" in one's own family of origin, it was equivalent to having reached the summit after a hundred unsuccessful tries. To me the most important long-term accomplishment was the proof that an emotional system has a knowable structure and function, and that one can work out the predictable answers to its problems on a drawing board.

I knew there was follow-up work to be done on Monday, the day after the meeting. To make a differentiating process work, one has to continue in relationship with the family system. Said in another way, it is necessary to keep talking to the system. This is the point where the feeling system dictates withdrawal and comfortable distance, which will result in the system "tightening up" again. On Monday, I knew my brother was still angry and reactive and I would have to seek him out. I didn't want to go see him, but I knew I had to; responsibility overcame the feelings. For the first time in years, I found him alone and willing to talk. There was an exchange of superficial pleasantry and then, after sufficient time to assure myself that he would not mention the family issue about the business I asked, "Are you still mad at me?" He responded with a detached, "Hell, No!" Then I said that on my way to town I head heard some new stories about him and would he be interested in what others were saying about him? He responded with, "I do not want to hear any more stories." I expressed surprise that a man in his position would not want to know what people said about him, and that to keep him informed I would be willing to write the stories on a piece of paper and send the paper in the mail. He said he would return my mail unopened and unclaimed. I said I found his attitude hard to understand, but I would respect it, and instead I would tell him a compliment I heard about him as I crossed the street. I had heard someone say that his intentions were good most of the time. He broke into a wide smile, the first of his old "friends winning" smile I had seen in months. After that I had the first person-to-person talk I had had with him in years. He talked

about his effort with the larger family system, his own family, and the business. During the course of this discourse he talked about our oldest sister and how he had been trying to help her, and how she seemed to defeat every effort. At one point he said, Sometimes I think she is retarded." Immediately after this long talk with him, I drove down to see my older sister, and said, Hey, Sis, I have been talking to your brother about your problems and he said you refuse to listen to him. What in the world have you been doing to him to make him talk like that?" In previous years my "detriangling" efforts had been awkward and forced.

Now they flowed smoothly and automatically, and I no longer had to discipline myself to do them. I made several more smooth "detraining" efforts with my parents. That same Monday I wrote a special letter to my first brother, who had not come for the weekend. I chided him about his delinquency and irresponsibility toward the family and reported that I had been home all weekend trying to restore peace and harmony to the family, but that the harder I tried the more I seemed to upset them. I said, "I have been trying to establish free and open communications to calm them down. All I did was tell them some of the stories you have been telling me about them, and this seems to upset them instead of calm them. This weekend has been a complete failure and I do not know where I failed. Since I have failed, it is now up to you to get home immediately to deal with this emergency situation." I later discovered he had been within 65 miles of home that weekend on a business trip, but that the pressure of business had made it impossible for him to get there.

My wife and I were away from home early Tuesday until late Thursday that week. Then we returned home until Saturday noon. For the first time in my life, I had been completely outside the family ego mass all week. There was no major effort on my part those last days, but merely a casual detriangling of each new situation that presented itself. My younger sister and her husband were even more casual and detached than before. They spoke of how "interesting" and "enjoyable" they found the sequence of events. My parents still voiced concern, but they were calmer than the had been in a long time. My brother's wife sought me out, and I had the first serious person-to-person talk with her in many years. Just before my departure, my second bother's younger son came to say good-bye to me, which was unusual for him. He said, "Thank you very much for coming home this week." A week after the trip, my first brother called to talk for an hour. I did much detriangling with him but it was clear that he and his wife were also relatively casual and "outside" the seriousness of the family issues. His wife later wrote me several letters to ask about my "'plan and strategy." In the past I had been "undone" by partners and I was not about to get serious with her and risk spoiling my success. I told her I was hurt by her implications of deviousness on my part when I had spent so much time thinking good things about people and doing good things for them. I assured her that my only goal was to restore the basic love and togetherness in the family. Two weeks after the visit I received a long letter from my mother in which she included on concise para-graph about the visit. In it she said, "With all its ups and downs, your last trip home was the greatest ever." Immediately after the visit, I had written to my older sister again, chiding her about my continuing efforts to get various members of her family to "take care of her and her problems." She responded by kidding me for telling everyone else to take care of her while I did nothing to help take care of her. Then she said she was perfectly capable of taking care of herself, that she did not know where she had been for the last 40 years, but she had a new outlook and a new lease on life. The issue between my parents and brother about stock and control of the family business completely faded after that "family experience" weekend.

In the almost three-year interim since the family experience, the family has been on the best overall level of adaptation in many years. There have been anxieties and small crises, but they have been

less intense than formerly. I have come to have a new role in the family which I call the role of "the differentiating one." I have had increasing experience with this phenomenon with others and the usual pattern is similar to that in my family. The one who achieves some success at differentiation has a kind of appeal for the entire family. It is as if any member of the family can approach this one and have the advantage of an emotionally detached viewpoint which in turn helps him or her develop a different perspective. It is more a matter of action than words because words often are negative while the action closeness is markedly better. The family sort of comes to expect the differentiating one always to function well in this position. For instance, there have been other periods of mild emotional "uptightness" in the family in which someone would invite me to get involved or return for a visit and would then administer a stern admonition, "But be sure you do not do or say anything to upset the family." This message is a subtle demand for another miracle performance, but differentiation is a self-motivated, self-energized effort and it cannot succeed with outside stimulus.

An interesting event occurred two years after "the experience." In my continuing multigenerational family history effort, I discovered in a nearby county, a whole segment of my father's family that he had never known about. I arranged two trips to go with him alone to see the land they had owned and the houses where they had lived. Although I thought I had achieved a good person-to-person relationship with him from the former years, the time spent with him on those long drives was so enjoyable there was not time to talk about all the issues that came up automatically. At this time it was possible to talk about the full range of important subjects without avoidance or defensiveness, and we developed a far better relationship than we had ever had. This experience brought a new awareness that I simply did not know what constitutes a really solid person-to-person relationship. The day after those trips, my second brother asked if I had time for a drink before dinner. He and I spent another period going into issues important to both of us. During the talk he thanked me for what I had done for our father, and for all the effort that had gone into finding that segment of Dad's family. He said, "Dad is ten years younger now than he was when you started this effort." My view of the situation was slightly different. I believe that I had done something to change my relationship with my father, which in turn changed his relationship to all he contacted. I do think, however, that the work on his family was the issue around which the relationship changed.

Finally, there is the family perception of a "differentiating step" such as was described here. No two people who were present at that "family experience" or who participated from a distance would have the same view of what happened. A differentiating step has two sides. Only the differentiating one knows the logical, orderly thinking and planning that has to go into such an effort. If anyone else knows about it, then it is doubtful if any differentiation will result from the effort. The other side is the feeling, emotional response, and if this reaction does not occur there is strong doubt that any differentiation will take place. The initial family reaction is negative and takes the form of surprise, anger, and a "you must be crazy" attitude. When one person is doing a differentiation step the others react emotionally, and people do not think while they react. Immediately after the nodal point breakthrough, there will be certain family members who will offer a spontaneous "Thank you." If the differentiating one request or demands an elaboration on the initial expression of appreciation, the response is automatically the opposite of what was expected. At this point there will be comments in the direction to the "togetherness" laws that govern the felling side of the operation. The comments are likely to consist of devaluing or denying the importance of the event, or may even express a critical opinion if a complaint response is desired. A differentiation effort that is successful had to be for "self" alone. If it is done for self alone and the effort is successful, the system automatically benefits also. If it is done primarily to help others or with the expectation

that others will approve and express appreciation, then the effort was for togetherness an not for differentiation; an emotional system does not appreciate such stressful nefarious maneuvers in the service of togetherness.

Post-Conference Clinical Experience

In the years before the breakthroughs with my own family, I had been using the theory, principles, and techniques involved in the differentiation of self on a method I called Family Psychotherapy With a Single Family Member. This method involved my "coaching" others as they attempted versions of what I have described with my own family. The result were good, but I still considered formal psychotherapy with husband and wife together to be the most effective of all methods. I urged members of the mental health professions to have formal family psychotherapy themselves as the best possible preparation for the practice of family psychotherapy. A good percentage of my private practice has been devoted to doing family psychotherapy with members of the mental health professions and their spouses; I considered this therapy also as training for the practice of family psychotherapy.

After the breakthrough with my own family of origin, I included my new knowledge about differentiation, illustrated with examples from my own family experience, in formal teaching sessions with psychiatric residents and others in training to learn family psychotherapy. On their own initiative, some of the trainees began to try some of the principles and techniques with their own families of origin. I would first hear about their efforts when they ran into the predictable emotional impasses and then asked for consultation about what had happened and for "coaching" to get themselves free. This coaching was done in the same didactic meetings in which the teaching was done. Over the next months, those who had been most successful with their families developed unusual skill and flexibility as family psychotherapists. They were adept at avoiding intense emotional entanglements with families in their practice, and they could work comfortably with upset and distraught families. They ascribed this ability as being related to their work with their own families, and a new perspective on what it meant to get "outside the family emotional system." The issue of family psychotherapy for these trainees and their spouses had not been considered. They were doing unusually well in their clinical work, and since my focus was on their efficiency as therapists, I paid little attentions to their emotional functioning with their spouses and children. After a year or two I realized that the trainees who had devoted primary attention to their families of origin had automatically made as much, or even more progress, with their spouses and children as similar trainees who had been in formal family psychotherapy with their spouses for the same period of time. The experience with this new method provides strong indications that psychotherapy as we have known it in the past may one day be considered superfluous.

There are some tentative speculations I could make about the efficiency of defining a self in one's parental family. One speculation is that it is easier to make valid observations of emotional forces in the more removed, but equally important, parental family, than in the nuclear family in which one's needs are more intimately imbedded. It is also easier to take an action stand in the parental family than in the nuclear family. Another speculation is that the parental family effort requires that the trainee more quickly accept responsibility for his own life, and requires him to accept the notion that he through his own effort can modify his own family system. A trainee is more on his own resources when he deals with the emotional reaction in his own family than when he sees his therapist with his spouse.

This approach to training family therapists is too new for there to be m ore than early clinical impressions. The method is certainly not for everyone. It requires hard work and dedication. It is not possible for a trainee to make progress until he can contain his own emotional functioning sufficiently to know the difference between being inside or outside of an emotional system. Until the trainee is partially outside the system, a differentiating technique is either hollow meaningless words or a hostile assault on the system, and emotional system knows the difference and reacts accordingly. With trainees partially outside the system, it has been possible to help them avoid time consuming pitfalls, to focus on productive areas, and to achieve a reasonably good beginning process of differentiation in a fraction of the time that my effort required. At the time of my own breakthrough in differentiation, I considered it one of the most significant events in my personal life to that point. It is now proving to be a significant turning point in my professional life.

The presentation to the Family Research Conference included about fifteen minutes of my family history and a few background principles, followed by about fifteen minutes of the clinical experience. For listeners who did not have a reasonably firm grasp of my theoretical system, the brief presentation was mostly an emotional experience. From my standpoint, the goal for me and my family in this presentation was a reasonable success. It was not the success within the "family" of family therapists that the original experience had been with my own family, but the family therapists are not as important to me as my own family, and I was not motivated to work on them in such detail. It is my opinion that most of the participants reacted emotionally to the presentation (it had been planned that way), and that most had no background to regard it as other than a bold, imaginative approach conceived and executed by an intuition that somehow knew what to do at the right time. I hope this present presentation has conveyed sufficient additional data for most to know that it was carefully thought through as a conceptual system and that the ability to execute the theoretical assumptions was developed after years of constant practice and modification of techniques to fit the theory. Most of the conference participants reacted as possibly to the presentation as my family did. There were those who reacted emotionally to the extent that they considered the presentation to be selfish and hostile and hurtful, but even they were mostly positive in reserving an overall opinion. Were it not so, then differentiation would not be possible.

Since the 1967 conference that have been concerns from some quarters about my making public this personal report about my family. In the belief that my family is pretty much the same as all families, and that my family is basically grateful for all the dividends that developed from my assumed role as "troublemaker," and in the deep belief that each is his own way, and each with a different reservations, would be basically pleased to have me do a public report about "us all," I had little reservations about this public report. As families move from the compartmentalized, less mature world of secrets and foibles which they assume they are keeping under cover, and into the world of permitting their private lives to be more open and a possible example for others to follow, they grow up a little each day.

References

Toman, W. *Family constellation*. New York: Springer, 1960, 2nd ed., 1969.

> *Editors' Note:* The reader is reminded that the Conference participants heard only the final section of the former paper labeled "The Family Experience." This discussion following the original speech has been retained in its original form, even though it refers to a slightly different version of the presentation, inasmuch as the points made

and reactions expressed still fit with the revised version. In particular it is hoped that the comments betray the freshness and surprise of the material and its impact on an audience which had been expecting a very different kind of presentation. The effect of this presentation on the Conference itself, elaborated further in the concluding chapter, was considerable.

Discussion

Chairman Watzlawick: I believe I am speaking for everyone present in this room when I say that we are most thankful to Dr._____ for a most enlightening and also entertaining lecture—the two adjectives usually don't go together.

Personally, I admire him for his ability to stay out of such emotional systems for twenty-four hours. With me, it is only fifteen minutes. It bears out the old saying that you can't be too careful in the choice of your family. It also reminds me of something that someone said, that if people define a situation as real, then for all intents and purposes it becomes real.

Dr. Rubinstein: I would like to start by saying to _____ that now I understand why he has delayed writing to me.

I am fascinated because I was triangled throughout your talk, and I found myself writing and writing notes, trying to detriangle myself. I think the concept of the triangle, which has some continuity with what we were talking about yesterday about triads and dyads, is a fascinating one because it brings our clinical experience into the discussion. I have also operated out of the idea that the dyad is an abstract construct and I have wondered many times, in clinical practice, if such a thing as a dyad really exists. For example, in a mother-child schizophrenic relationship, one wonders if there is not always a third part present. It is difficult to conceive that two people can related so intensely in a symbiotic way without having a differentiate themselves as a unit from a third party. The third part operates as a differentiating factor which solidifies and reassures the existence of the dyad. I agree fully with you, therefore, that probably the building block in human relationships is the triangle, the triad.

In working with couples, I came across some of Norman Paul's ideas about the mourning process, and they influenced by thinking about the techniques we use in clinical practice in marriage therapy. Aside from changing the rules of the game in the relationship between both marital figures, one useful technique has been to open up the emotional system in which each operated in the triangles with their parents, in the presence of the other mate. By opening up these outside emotional systems, some kind of empathic response is created in the other mate. Hopefully, the empathic relationship between both mates is than going to establish a new sort of triangle on a different level. This is why I would like to qualify your term "detriangling." Are we destroying the triangle, are we detriangling, or are we changing the triangles to a different level of functioning?

I wonder to what extent traingling is really necessary to bring empathy into the relationship between both mates. The therapist who becomes part of the triangle has to prepare himself to work through the separation process. How can he get out of the triangle or change his triangular function to a different level? I hope we will have a chance to talk more about this.

Chairman Watzlawick: Thank you very much, David. John Weakland is going to be the next discussant.

Mr. Weakland: Dr. _____ began by saying two true things. He said he was going to depart from his prepared paper and he was going to provide an experience. I think that listening to _____ is always an experience, but today was even more so.

I'm going to be very brief, because I don't want to take anything away from the direct impact of the experience which he had provided for us. I think enlightenment in this area comes a the level of experience and not just at the level of ideas, so I will take only one or two minutes, reversing his shift, to return to his prepared paper slightly and to make a couple of general points.

Certainly, the paper he gave me to read, and also the outline which I think was sent around generally, spoke at length about the differentiated ego mass and triangles. I must say that I didn't really understand what he was talking about until today—but now I think I do, because he has illustrated it so vividly.

In my opinion, the most important thing he said today, that he did not say in the prepared paper, was to emphasize the importance of getting out of the family ego mass but still keeping one's relationship to it. This sort of going in both directions runs through everything he was telling us today. I think this is very significant, not only for relationships within the families we study but for relationships within our own families. Anybody working in the family field inescapably draws on his own family experience, using this experience in one way or another to inform this work. This is not the kind of work, really, that can ever be put so far away from you that your own life is not involved in it.

So I think that both getting some distance from your own family involvement and yet maintaining some connection is very important to us all. This idea relates to a couple of sentences in he prepared paper that I would like quote here. He said he believes that, "The laws that govern man's emotional function are as orderly as those that govern other natural systems, and our difficulty in understanding the system is not so much in the complexity of the system as in man's denial of the system." He has a very basic point there. I think such denial often relates to our troubles with our own family involvement. he seems to ask more than we are capable of when he says," Get with it," and at the same time says, "Get some distance from it." If we do both, we will be better off both in our therapeutic work and I might say, in our conceptual work. For example, we might be able to look at systems and not dismiss their properties as alien, as we do over and over again with concepts like "mental disorder" or "family disorganization." All our work has been shown more and more that ever the most "disorganized" families are highly organized and systematic. If we use such terms and concepts as "disorganization's," we don't do anything except obscure the very order that we are looking for.

Chairman Waltzlawick: Thank you very much, John. May I now ask Dr. Weiner to comment?

Dr. Oscar R. Weiner: I was really fascinated by _____ 's talk. I copied down his blueprint and I couldn't help thinking about what this meant to me personally. I found myself kind of wandering a little bit and thinking about going right home and trying it in my own family. Perhaps he has given me something that I might find useful with my own family.

I hope that _____ can respond a little later on as to how he really sees himself in this whole family system. The thought that came to my mind, which was kind of verified by what his mother finally told him a the end about what the weekend meant to her, was that perhaps he was being the family healer. I am not quite sure, in terms of the family projection process, what he had seen himself as being before this.

In terms of his discussion of the individual who tries to differentiate himself yet should keep relating to his family, I have found this concept very useful in my own practice. You have spelled out for me what I have already been doing. I have found this procedure very useful in dealing with individual patients who are struggling to differentiate and at the same time continue to show a great deal of resistance to it. I have also begun to send patients back to their families to relate to their families, and I feel that, in a sense, this gets me out of this triangle that exists between the patient, myself, and the patient's family. I arrived at this procedure because I found myself becoming more and more uncomfortable with the burden that I felt patients were placing on me. They were binding me, resisting growth, development, progress, or whatever you want to call it, and I have found that sending them back to their own families somehow placed me in a better position to deal with them. In the long run it is a much more gratifying experience for the patient because we both get detriangled and he has a different relationship with his own family.

Chairman Watzlawick: Dr. Whitaker, would you care to comment?

Dr. Whitaker: Would I care to comment? Boy, what a question! _____, I wish you were my brother!

Dr. _____: Ackerman is.

Dr. Whitaker: When you said you were boring, it was very clear what you meant. You were boring the hell into me. This is the other end of that probe we were talking about yesterday, which is the one I would like to study.

I think one of the other things you said that nobody has had guts enough to say before is that those people who go into family therapy are really master manipulators. All this cotton-pickin' talk we give out about, "We are going to be sincere and we are just playing from ourselves," has the other side of it, that we are also related to the system. It is very intriguing to me to think about the struggle I have had in terms of trying to differentiate myself as a "separate," as though I was trying to make believe that I wasn't relating to this whole. I wonder if there aren't two groups of us: those who try to separate out from the family or leave home and never come back, and those who stay home and never go away, and each of us is trying to solve the possible of this paradoxical situation in which we go back and forth.

One of the other things that is very inspiring to me is that this thinking helps explain to me the significance of my functioning with co-therapists. I don't have to struggle with working with two's, which you do. To me, working with a cotherapist is a joy. I have the feeling that psychotherapy ought to be originally taught by working with spouses. It occurred to me that what happens when I do cotherapy is that I detriangle by a process of the two of us functioning at one point as a unit and at another point as two separates. Thus, we are constantly free to detriangulate from moment to moment.

This business you talk about of getting thrown into a panic at home is the thing I am more and more sensitive to as a focus for what is going on in the therapy. I picked up the idea first from the newspaper report of the American Chess master playing with the Russian who won, and he said he knew that at the moment when he was confused that he had lost. When this happens to me in the therapeutic situation, I reach over and get hold of my cotherapist. I have always felt in terms of Lyman Wynnes's concept of the rubber fence, that the process of family therapy consists of standing astraddle this family fence. The problem is, it isn't always rubber. Sometimes the damned thing is of steel and it keeps getting higher and I keep getting worried about what is going to cut. If I have a cotherapist, I can go in with both feet and hang onto his hand so that I can jump back over and get out; or I can stay out and let him go in and then pull him out when he gets entangled with it.

Chairman Watzlawick: Thank you very much. Dr. _____, do you want to respond to any of these comments?

Dr. _____: If any of you wonder why I wasn't writing to you, I have just spent a few thousand hours on my own family. I have a folder full of material, the only other copies of those letters about which I spoke. I have spent months on this project and I wanted to utilize this family upset to the full.

I agree with many things all of you say. I don't know about that empathy thing. I don't deal too much in empathy.

Who gets out of a triangle? There is one person who is motivated to do this, if you can find one. In the average family, if I can get the couple to cooperate, then I do it with them, and if I can't, than I work with the motivated one.

On the question of how do I see myself in my own family, well, it changes from year to year. I used to be myself and go my own way, and I used to sort of stay away and not go back. I think that is one of the biggest delusions that anybody had. I believe it is one of the biggest delusions of psychoanalysis that people have worked things out about their families in their analysis and that they don't have to be involved with them anymore.

You talk about resistance to this—it is tremendous. I mean, to force myself to do this was one of the hardest forcing jobs I ever did. It makes you understand a little bit more the resistance of the family member to do it. After I had had this session with my brother, I knew that I had to go back to him the next day. I wished I didn't have to, you know, but I knew I had to go, and that I would go.

Those are all the comments I have at this time. Incidentally, I have had more reports about the way the family situation has settle down. For instance, my oldest sister is on a diet and losing weight. I have never seen my parents act so alive. They are alive and going like anything. The whole family is.As for my own emotional part in it, if a person working on a triangle can stay less involved than the others, I think that is to be desired. I other words, I was able pretty much to laugh at my brother while he was shaking his finger at me. But I still get emotional. I get emotional talking about it here. I didn't find a way to get around this last one.

Dr. Whitaker: I hope you won't.

Chairman Watzlawick: Thank you very much, Dr. _____. May I invite brief comments from several of the more research than therapy-minded participants?

Dr. Bell: There was a very interesting book review back in 1916, the heyday of psychoanalysis. Somebody wrote a review that pointed out that no matter what Euclid did, whether he took a square or rectangle, a parallelogram, a circle, the damned thing always came back to triangles. You take two points on a circle and end up with a third point and you have got a triangle. You take a square and you divide that and it comes out a triangle, as was the fashion in the days of the lovely "demonstration" of the universality of the Oedipus Complex. But two triangles don't make a rectangle, and a circle is something more than a set of triangles.

I guess my question for Dr. ___ is not really a challenging of the usefulness of conceptualizing these phenomena as triangles, but what strikes me is that there is not triangle that you can triangulate here without taking into account a much broader context. Another possible strategy would be to talk in terms of larger patterns than triangles—a certain cluster analysis or pattern analysis. But these thoughts are from the top of my head. Further down in the more feeling part, I grasp and appreciate this kind of triangular representation, but I always have this problem as a researcher of wanting to organize things a little bit and then try to put them into a classification, preferably into a classification that might allow for some kind of operational statement and testing out.

What came to my mind was the extensive work done by Caplow and others, drawing on the investigations of Georg Simmel on the different processes that occur in sets of relationships. Caplow had done an elegant piece on the theory of coalitions in the triad.

The challenge to me here is whether one can identify a number of variables, power, and so on, and show that what is going on here is essentially what has been called the "mores" of triangles. These are not merely personal relationships; they are sets of power relationships that are also affective relationships. Maybe we could sort them out and describe them in a much more orderly way and perhaps even find some way of testing them.

Dr. Minuchin: I am not a researcher but I still want to comment. I also was impressed that, actually, Dr. _____ was not talking about a triangle, because he was not dealing with geometry. He is so fast on his feet that, simultaneously, at the point at which he was working with one triangle he was using another triangle to superimpose on the first one. So he was working not only with a rectangle that are the seven members of his family, but with fifteen hundred members in the town.

I didn't understand why, in order to give us an image of what he was doing, he used a geometric metaphor. What he was doing, really, was working continuously with all the members of the family, using them, manipulating them actively in the process of helping. He was almost like a sculptor that is working with wax; sometimes the sculptor is caught so that when he is modeling, he is also destroying or creating something anew.

The family that he describes I would call an enmeshed family. He is working with this enmeshed family in the process of separating and detriangulating, but his style is an inclusive style that is the style of the family. In the work that we have been doing, we differentiate two types of family. Evidently all the families of therapists are enmeshed families. This is why we immediately resound to this presentation, but that is also the disengaged family in which the process is not one of detriangulation, of differentiation, of getting out, but a process of reestablishing and creating units.

Dr. Levinger: I will make my comment quickly, and not discuss my delight at hearing the paper. I do want to add that the concept of a triangle can be related very much to the triangular work of a number of prominent social psychologists—for example, Newcomb's ABX, Heider's POX, Osgood's work on understanding communication and attitude change. If A and B are two people and X is any third object—it could be an attitude, object or any abstraction, or it could be the person of the therapist, or a brother or whoever—this X then is some object to which A and B both relate. And the feelings of A and B toward X, and the balancing of these different feelings, constitute a topic on which there is already a large amount of research.

I seems to me that when Dr. Whitaker talked about "detriangluation," he talked about offering alternative X's to A and B. If A and B get hung up on a particular X where their conflict is maybe at an impasse, then alternatives can be provided. This would be one way one could relate these concepts to existing theory in social psychology.

Chairman Watzlawick: Thank you very much. We will now proceed directly to the next point on our program, a film presentation by Dr. Ackerman.

Dr. Ackerman is going to say a few words and then we will directly start with the projection of the film.

Dr. Ackerman: I have never seen_____as great as he was this morning. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed that exquisite family tome of his. I am going to talk to him privately about that, especially as he pointed me out as his brother. (Laughter)

I might mention that there was one person present at the conference who sensed that part of the presentation was aimed a the "family" of family therapists. Carl Whitaker, whom I consider one of the most gifted and versatile of all family therapists, made the initial "triangling" move in the meeting with his comment about wishing that he was my brother (the great togetherness), which I dealt with (detriangled) by saying that he could not be my brother since Nathan Ackerman was already my brother. This resulted in some playful by play on the same subject. My impression is that the emotional impact of the presentation did "one up" the others so well that few but Whitaker would have had a ready response.

Conversations of Love and Truth:

Developing Intimacy and Real Talk Within the Family of Origin

Timothy Weber, Ph.D.

As we live out our lives, we often live at a distance from one another. Relationships of "realness," relationships of authenticity where there is trustworthiness and a commitment to conversations of "love and troth" are rare, but deeply yearned for as we journey through life. Within our family of origin over the years, we have evolved relationships and stories that are powerful and continue to shape and influence who we are and who we might become. Relationships within this family do not disappear, regardless of the emotional or geographical distance that separates family members. Even death may end a life, but it does not end a relationship that we continue to carry in our heads and hearts. Because of the power of the family of origin and its deep roots in previous generations, these relationships are not only worth thinking about, but merit attention and discovery. What might happen as we engage in live encounters of direct address about our relationships with other family members in the past, present, and future? What possibilities might emerge as we commit ourselves to conversations of "love and truth"—speaking our truth or experience, hearing the troth/experience of the other person, doing all this with respect and care, with a commitment to learn from our conversations with each other?

The following questions are intended to help spark these kinds of conversations. The questions are intended to be "doorways" to further questions, discoveries, and explorations. Use these questions to stimulate your **thinking,** to help you clarify your own sense of your history and relationships, and to help you begin and deepen your learning with other family members. The family of origin is a very rich, usually untapped resource for discovery and learning. Authentic conversations are often avoided because of one fear or the other. You may need time to "set the stage," to begin to seed opportunities for deeper conversations. I do encourage you, however, to move forward with intention and good will, with a spirit of curiosity and discovery. This kind of spirit mixed with courage can open many possibilities and, surprisingly, may impact other parts of our lives in ways we never imagined.

The Yearning

We show up only partially,

But we yearn to be known more completely.

Faint our frail voices speak,

To be sought, to be found, to be heard

We seek, we seek.

And in that unexpected moment

Of the unexpected gift

T. Weber, LIOS, April 2001

From Parents to Sons and Daughters

Note: These questions are intended to stimulate parents in giving feedback to their sons and daughters. The questions focus on the parents' view of their sons' and daughters' history and especially the relationship with the parent. These questions are intended to open up a richer conversation of "love and truth" between parents, sons, and daughters that may lead to new discoveries and learnings.

1. What gifts to do see in your daughter/son? What particular talents, attributes, personality traits are you particularly pleased with and, more so, do you believe your daughter/son is gifted with so that these gifts may be used to serve, help, contribute, bring life to others and the world?

2. How has your daughter/son helped you, led you to learn more about yourself, helped you grow into a more complete person? Give some specific examples of how your daughter/son has challenged you to grow.

3. How do you wish your daughter/son could be different and why? What characteristics, personality traits, and habits do you believe could benefit your daughter/son?

4. How do you believe you have contributed to your daughter's/ son's development? What do you believe you have added to their lives?

5. How do you believe you have contributed to your daughter's/son's difficulties in living? What habits, personality characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors do you regret having modeled for your daughter/son? What do you need to apologize for and how do you wish you could have been different? How do you need to be forgiven and what do you want to do differently?

6. How do you want things to change with your daughter/son? What are you prepared to do differently in order to correct for your regrets and create a relationship of greater well-being? What do you think your daughter/son would like you to do differently? Are you prepared to possibly modify your behavior based on feedback from your daughter/son?

7. What changes would you like to see from your daughter/son in relationship with you? How would you like your daughter/son to change their relationship with you? What might you do differently to help that change take place?

8. How open are you to feedback from your daughter/son without having to explain or defend your behavior? Are you open to inquiry and possible influence?

Between Parents, Sons and Daughters

Note: These questions are for the son and daughter as they engage in conversations with their parents. These questions are intended to start and stimulate conversations in a more free-wheeling manner. The overall goal is one of deepening "love and truth"—the core dynamics of intimacy and integrity in human relationships--and learning that leads to life and well-being.

1. What credits would you give to each parent and to both of them as parents? What gifts have they shown? What are their strengths? How have they contributed to your life?

2. What do you want to "take away" from each parent into your own character and life? What traits from each parent do you want to embody and develop in your life?

3. What are the core struggles or "pinches" you have had with each parent? What traits or personality habits of each parent have distressed you over the years?

4. What do you want to "take away" from each parent? What traits do you want to "leave behind" as you develop your own life, or at least to modify significantly as you live out your life?

5. What apologies or regrets do you have about how you have treated and responded to each parent over the years?

6. Ask each parent: "What is your feedback for me about how I have evolved my life? What do you like about how I have developed? What don't you like? What do you wish I would change about my life? What are you most concerned about? What are you most proud of as you review my life?

7. Ask parents questions about their lives using the attached document on "life review." What questions do you have for each parent about his or her life?

8. How would you like to change your relationship with each parent? What do you want to maintain? What do you like? What do you want to be different and how? What are you willing to do to change your relationship with each parent? What do you want your parent to do differently?

9. If this were your last conversation and you were never to see each other again, what would you want to say so that you would have said the most important things to each parent?

Between Siblings

Note: These questions are intended to stimulate siblings in conversations of love and truth as they review their past, present, and future together. These questions are intended as "doorways" to richer and deeper conversations of authenticity and learning. What might you learn about yourself as you think about these questions, discover your thoughts and feelings about these ideas, and listen to feedback from your sibling? If you stay open to learning, if you are dedicated to speaking the truth, hearing the truth, engaging in live encounters with respect and care, and learning, then you will increase the possibilities for evolving something new, not that it will be finished, but that you and your relationship will be more real than before.

1. What gifts and strengths do you perceive in each other? How have you appreciated the other's gifts over the years? What are the ways you believe the other has contributed to the lives of others over the years?

2. How do you think your sibling has used his/her gifts on behalf of your family of origin? How do you believe you have brought your gifts and talents into the family to support and strengthen the family?

3. What values, ways of living, and rituals from your family of origin have been most important to you as you have evolved your life? What have you kept and expanded?

4. What particular habit patterns, values, and ways of living have you worked to discard and leave behind? Why?

5. Are there any experiences, events, and/or incidents that occurred during the course of your history with each other (including your early years before leaving home) that have been particularly distressing, confusing, unclear, or unfinished that you want to talk about? What questions do you have? What statements do you want to make? What do you want to say that might not be clear? What needs to happen differently for you to be able to move on from those distressing or difficult memories?

6. What particular behaviors in the other have been most bothersome to you over the years? How have you been irritated at the other, perhaps even angry with the other? Why? What would you like to be different?

7. Do you have any regrets about how you have treated or related to your sibling over the years? What are your regrets?

8. How do you think you have helped and supported each other (and other members of your family of origin) over the years? What do you want from each other? What are you willing to give?

9. Do you think you have shared fairly in the burdens and benefits of being in this family through the years? Why or why not? How have things been fair in the family? Where have there been areas of unfairness in your relationship? How do you want things to change?

10. How satisfied are you with how the other has responded to critical issues, illness, and other crises within the family?

11. What are your thoughts and feelings about how each of you has related to your parents? How do you think each of you was treated by your parents or other extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles)? Did either of you seem to get more benefits and privileges than the other, or more burdens and responsibilities than the other? How were your treated alike and differently?

12. How much do you know about your parents' will and inheritance? Do you want to know more and from whom? Do you care? Do you believe all the issues regarding inheritance and the distribution of assets has been and will be managed fairly? Do you have any concerns? If so, what are they?

13. What are your thoughts about how each of you celebrates family holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, graduations, family vacations, and other family of origin gatherings and rituals? What works for you, what doesn't work, and do you want to make any changes?

14. Do you call each other just to "check in" and inquire about each other's life? Who takes the initiative to do this? Do you want more or less of this? Do you believe the other has an interest in knowing about your life? How much of the important dreams, aspirations, desires, and happenings in your life is your sibling aware of? Do you have any interest in knowing the other more and being known by the other more? If so, how do you believe this could happen?

15. What do you want the other to know about you that you think is not known or is misunderstood?

16. Do you want any feedback from your sibling about how you have evolved your life-your work, relationships, the way you use money, choices in life, future goals, etc.? How open are you to this feedback without having to defend yourself?

17. If you could change any one thing in your relationship with each other to make it more satisfactory to you within the next couple of months, what would that be? What are you willing to do to help that change happen?

The Top Questions for Life Review

As you think about your life and all that has happened to you and all of the decisions you have made, these are some of the questions that we hope will help you reflect on what has been most important, influential, and meaningful in your life.

1. What are you most proud of having done or contributed to the lives of others? What do you believe have been your most important gifts as you have lived your life?

2. Who have been the most important people who have shaped and influenced your life inside and outside the family? How have they been important to you in shaping the kind of person you have become?

3. What have been the three most important decisions in your life and why?

4. What decisions have you regretted or wished that you could have taken back and redone? Why?

5. Which of your personality characteristics or values do you most cherish and are you most happy about? Why?

6. What habits or personality characteristics have you struggled with the most and wish you could have changed?

7. What have you been most disappointed about in life? More specifically, what dreams did you have that you have not accomplished or realized?

8. If you could go back to the age of 19 and make new decisions about your life based on what you know now, what different decisions would you make and what decisions would you keep the same?

9. What has most pleased you about *my* life, how I have developed, the choices I've made, the values I hold, etc.? And what regrets do you have about how you parented me? If you could change anything about my life, what would you have changed? What would you change now?

10. Concerning your life now, what gives you most meaning? What do you look forward to when you get up in the morning or think about the week ahead?

11. Regarding our relationship now and in the future: Do you want anything to be different between us, to be different about how we relate and how we interact? If so, what?

12. If I take anything from your life and live it out in my life as a legacy or memory of you, what would you want me to live out? What values, commitments, and goals in my life best represent what is most important to you?