

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-DIFFERENTIATION
(Definition of Self Within Relationships)

SELF-DEFINITION:

1. A Sense of My Own Limits, And The Limits of Others
 - * A clear understanding of where I end and someone else begins
 - * Respect for the right of others to be the way they are, but refusing to allow others to intrude upon one's own rights
 - * Defined from *within*, rather than adapting to please others or defining self over or against others

2. CLARITY About What I Believe
 - * What would I die for...and what's not worth it?
 - * Of what am I certain, and of what am I not so certain?
 - * Convictions, values, beliefs

3. COURAGE To Take Stands
 - * Defining where I stand, what I believe, in the face of disapproval
 - * Refusing to give in to another when it is a matter of principle
 - * Capacity to stand firm in the face of *strong reactions!* ("You can't think, act, feel that way and be part of this community!")

SELF-REGULATION:

4. The Ability To STAY ON COURSE
 - * Resolve to follow through in spite of sabotage
 - * Emotional and spiritual stamina to follow a vision and not let others' reactions change you course

5. STAYING CONNECTED In Spite Of It All
 - * Maintaining a *relatively* non-reactive presence with those who are reacting to you
 - * Resisting the impulse to attack or cut off from those who are most reactive to you, or to adapt to them to avoid their displeasure
 - * Managing one's own anxiety, not others' anxiety

SELF DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiation is the lifelong process of striving to keep one's being in balance through the reciprocal external and internal processes of self-definition and self-regulation.

Differentiation as used by Bowen refers more to a process than to a goal that can ever be achieved. It refers to a direction in life rather than a state of being, to the capacity to take a stand in an intense emotional system, to saying "I" when others are demanding "we", to containing one's reactivity to the reactivity of others (which includes the ability to avoid being polarized), to maintaining a nonanxious presence in the face of anxious others. It refers, as well, to knowing where one ends and another begins, to being able to cease automatically being one of the system's emotional dominoes, to being clear about one's own personal values and goals, to taking maximum responsibility for one's own emotional being and destiny rather than blaming others or the context: culture, gender, or environmental forces.

Ed Friedman in the Handbook of Family Therapy, Chapter 5 "Bowen Theory and Therapy", pages 140-41.

SOME NOTES ON SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

-If each person would stop focusing on the other and begin focusing on SELF and the contribution of SELF to the problem, the first step to resolving the problem would be behind them.

-If one person in a relationship could learn to remain relatively calm and thoughtful in the face of the anxiety of the other, there would be less conflict.

-Differentiation of self has everything to do with improving one's own emotional functioning. It has nothing to do with changing the other. Working toward differentiation means finding new ways of thinking about self and calming one's own anxiety because, in the spectrum of possible responses, we often discover that our own responses are less mature, less thoughtful, and more emotionally reactive than we had thought.