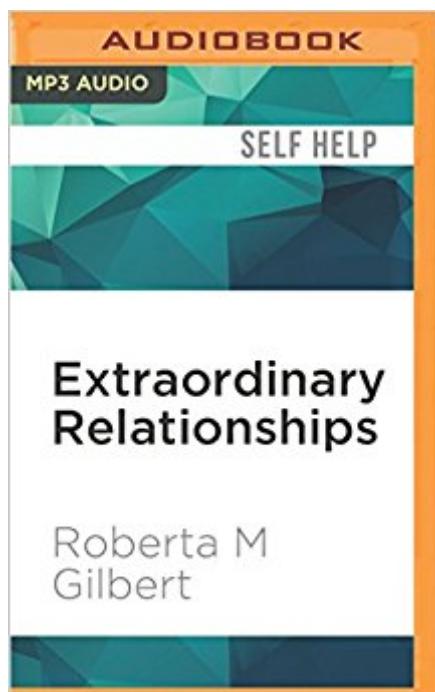


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# Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way Of Thinking About Human Interactions



## **Synopsis**

Relationshipsâ "how people who are important to each other interactâ "may be the most important area for human understanding today. They are of prime importance in determining our quality of life and even health. They have a huge impact on productivity and efficiency in the workplace. They start and stop wars between nations. Extraordinary Relationships, based upon the observations and theory developed by Dr. Murray Bowen, shows us how emotions affect relationships and how to work on our own part of any relationshipâ "the only part we have the power to change. Through this work, the relationship goes on to a higher level, where people report more closeness and cooperation, and a greater degree of relationship success. This important and groundbreaking book, first published in 1992, offers an easily understood explanation of Bowen's ideas that have helped thousands of people. It is a blueprint to better relationships that shows how the principles of family systems theory can be used in all areas of life, including marriage, friendships, extended family relationships, single life, workplace relationships, as well as improving one's own self concept. The accompanying reference guide is included as a PDF on this disc.

## **Book Information**

Audio CD

Publisher: Audible Studios on Brilliance Audio; MP3 Una edition (July 26, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1522686398

ISBN-13: 978-1522686392

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.5 x 6.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 96 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,265,816 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #109 inÂ Books > Books on CD > Parenting & Families > Interpersonal Relations #2203 inÂ Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Abuse #2771 inÂ Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > Personality

## **Customer Reviews**

Turn any Relationship into an Extraordinary Relationship "A refreshing alternative to common self-help approaches." &#151;Michael E. Kerr, M.D., Director, Georgetown Family Center, Washington, D.C. and coauthor with Dr. Murray Bowen of Family Evaluation After food, water, and shelter, relationships are the most important factors in determining your quality of life. At work,

productivity and efficiency depend on relationships. At home, relationships with your spouse, children, and friends are keys to success and happiness. And among nations, relationships start and stop wars. This invaluable guide shows that only by further developing yourself can you further develop your relationships. Based on the innovative family systems theory pioneered by the late Dr. Murray Bowen, this important and penetrating book offers practical and authoritative family therapy advice that has helped thousands of people throughout the last three decades. It's a blueprint to better relationships that tells how the principles of family systems theory can be used in all arenas of your life, including intimate relationships, friendships, family relationships, single life, workplace relationships, international relationships, and your relationship with yourself. "A perfect and unpretentious primer of family relationships — a relief to read." —Dr. Walter Toman, Professor Emeritus, Erlangen-Nürnberg University, Germany, and author of *Family Constellation*

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

JUDITH WEST has amused, informed, thrilled, and otherwise entertained via stage and studio for more than 20 years. A narrator, director, and writer for audiobooks since 1999, she also coaches narrators and has taught performance and directed at leading Chicago universities, and has extensive experience in print publishing as a writer, editor, and researcher. Judith lives with her rescued cats in a vintage Chicago bungalow off Devon Avenue, the nation's most ethnically diverse street. Fittingly, she counts ethnic cooking, travel, and antiques among her pleasures.

Roberta Gilbert's overview of Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory is a thorough introduction on how we build individuality through constant interaction. Although it takes a few chapters to understand the terminology ("anxiety", "differentiation", etc.), Gilbert pieces together the general concepts of Bowen's theory through analytical study and real world interpretation. The idea of triangulating and the importance of original family relationships stand out to me as the overwhelmingly important activities which many people don't think twice about. This isn't to discount other aspects of relationships- such as Overfunctioning/underfunctioning, conflict, distance, and cutoff- but these certainly stand out due to the attention Gilbert gives to them. The one point that I disagree with (although Bowen would say I am in denial) is the urge to put yourself on a different emotional in any and all connections. I understand the benefits to this, but the idea that I would detach and remain coolly above all interactions between those closest to me strikes me as depressing. I feel differentiation and togetherness (which he calls "fusion") do not have to be mutually exclusive. This critique is grounded in pure opinion. My critique from an analytical

perspective centers on her ignorance, which could even be called contempt, of love in a relationship. Her rudimentary overview of love in relationships places it neatly in a box next to cutoff, triangulating, and other day-to-day activities. I don't see myself as a hopeless romantic, but the unique attributes of love is noted near unanimously. Viktor Frankl, a noted psychologist himself, wrote about it in his excellent book "Man's Search for Meaning". Nevertheless, I recommend Extraordinary Relationships for those who really want to dig into ways of improving themselves and the relationships around them. Although the concepts might be a little narrow, the general Bowen Family Theory idea should not be ignored.

This book gives an explanation of Bowen's family system theory. The first half of the book is heavy on the theory, and then the second half gets into a little bit of how to use it in real life. It doesn't read like a self-help book, and Gilbert gets props for not using words like "codependence" and other jingoistic psychobabbly words. She's completely blunt and realistic, and it's all well-written. The basic theory is this: in order to have good relationships, you have to be a well-differentiated, individual self. This means that you have solid boundaries, and you can relate to other people without "lending and borrowing" the self, as Gilbert says. Or in my view, you can be friends with people without trying to become them or making them become you. Ironically, in order to work on being a differentiated self you have to do the work through your relationships. None of us are perfectly differentiated, so we can all improve our basic selves and our relationships. The less differentiated we are, the more anxiety in our relationships (because we get all tense about them), and the more they take on the following five postures, which can relieve anxiety in the short term but only mess things up more over time: conflict, distancing, triangling, under/over-functioning, and cut-off. Probably the most important aspect of this theory is that undifferentiation and relationship postures are carried on from generation to generation. So it's not really your parents fault, but yes you learned it all from them, and they learned it from their parents, etc etc. Also your own level of differentiation and the postures you adopt in relationships are based on how you interacted with your entire family of origin, not just your parents. Gilbert stresses that in order to move up the scale of differentiation and have better relationships, we have to go back to our original families and work on our relationships there. This doesn't involve changing anyone else or acting like a therapist- all it involves is changing ourselves, and the way we relate to everyone else. There is a lot more, I'm only scratching the surface here. I am so glad I found this book, because it is convincing and explains everything clearly. I am motivated to try to work on myself, and I have some idea of how to proceed. Other books I've read on the subject were too barfy and jargony, or they touched on the surface of the issues without

getting to the heart of the matter.

One of my favorite books to recommend to understand family dynamics.

I bought this book wanting to learn more about family systems theory after briefly covering it in one of my classes. The book is accessible and easy to read, and the theory gets you thinking. I definitely recommend it.

Got this for a class I am taking, it is actually not a bad read.

This was my first read on Bowen Family Systems. I was pleasantly surprised at the value and relevance of the ideas. For example, that all intimate relationships produce some anxiety in the partners! We cope with that anxiety using behaviors which may cause excessive 'distancing' from our loved one. (Something of a push-pull going on here). Another simple idea is that keeping some type, any type, of connection (ie. avoiding a 'cut off') with members of our family of origin (brother, sister, parent, child) is vital to having good relationships with our chosen loved ones. I don't recall ever hearing that idea before. Unlike many psychological revelations, this one is fairly simple to assess in our own lives - just look at your family of origin and see what kind of relationships you have! Gilbert is realistic that big changes in ourselves are not likely, but even incremental small steps forward can have profound impact on our relationships. Gilbert is a very good writer, with occasional (rare?) understated humor, which makes the material easy to access for anyone interested enough to try. Highly recommended.

One of the best and easy to read books on understanding Family Systems Theory. I recommend all my clients to obtain a copy; to use as a blueprint for understanding their "self" in relationships. For couples in counseling, I recommend each partner get their own copy so they can highlight their areas of interest. I bought a dozen this past Holiday Season and gave them as gifts to my clients. I reference my copy regularly to help keep me thinking "Systems".

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