

# Observations of Change in Physiology and Functioning Associated with Working on Differentiation in One's Family

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for

## FOR SELF **AND** FOR FAMILY: THE PROCESS OF DIFFERENTIATION



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# Purpose

**To investigate changes that can be observed in physiology and in functioning for an individual and his or her family that accompany working on differentiation of self in the family, the basis for applications of Bowen family systems theory in psychotherapy.**

# Hypotheses

◆ **That steps involved in working on differentiation of self will be associated with**

Increased ability to observe & manage anxiety

Increased awareness of patterns of reactivity in triangles

Increased ability to function and think for self in relation to others

Decreased anxiety & symptoms with increased functioning in self & other family members

and

◆ **That changes will vary based in part on**

level of differentiation of self

degree of chronic anxiety

cutoff in the family

*“The human is the first form of life that has been able to observe the feeling process with his intellect. Thus far there are definite characteristics of those who can do this readily, and those who are a few years slower. The name of that is differentiation of self. Everyone can do that when they are more motivated to do it for themselves than they are to depend on others.”*

Murray Bowen, Odyssey Toward Science, the Epilogue in Family Evaluation by Michael Kerr. P. 385-386



# Design of Research Project

Volunteers from the Bowen Center Postgraduate Program

1. Obtained measures of physiological reactivity(EMG, DST, EDR and cortisol) & EEG & Salivary Cortisol: 4 X a year
2. Maintained daily observations of metabolic activity (Blood sugar, peak flow oxygen, heart rate) & medical blood work
3. Recorded observations of nodal events in the family, symptoms that occur in self & family, contact with family, & steps related to differentiation of self
4. Completed the Skowron Differentiation of Self Inventory periodically

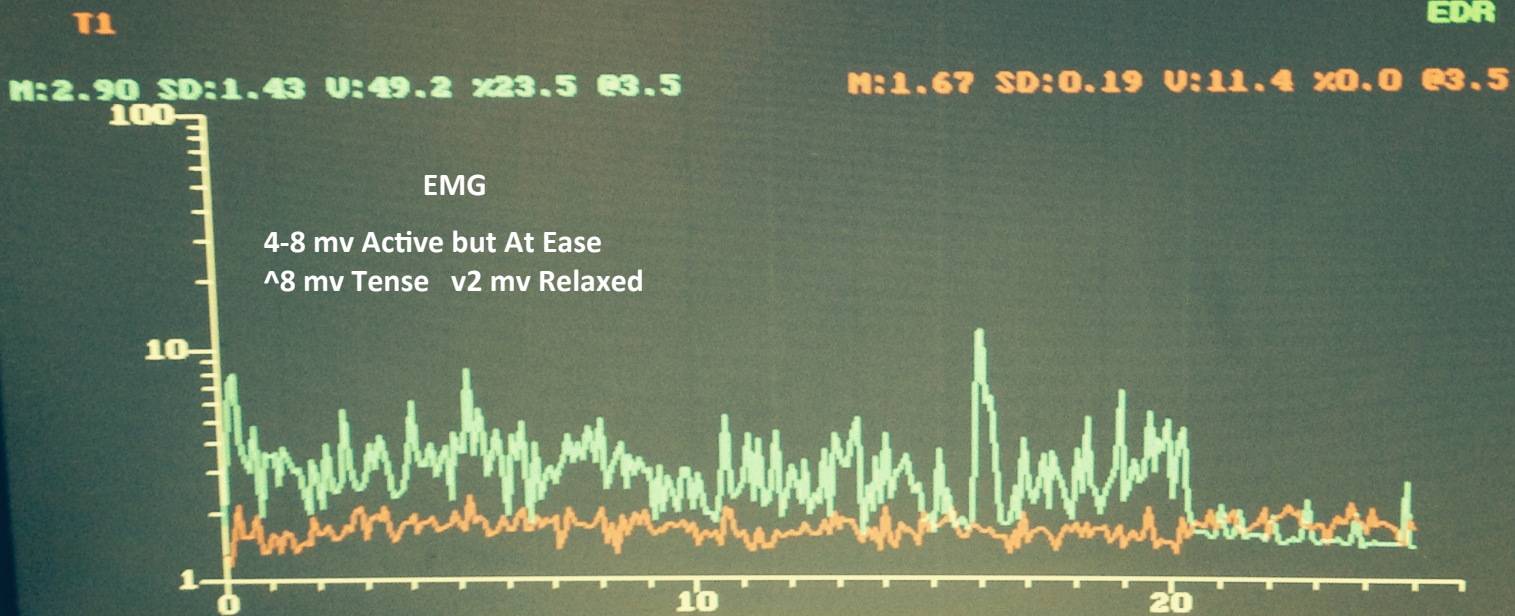
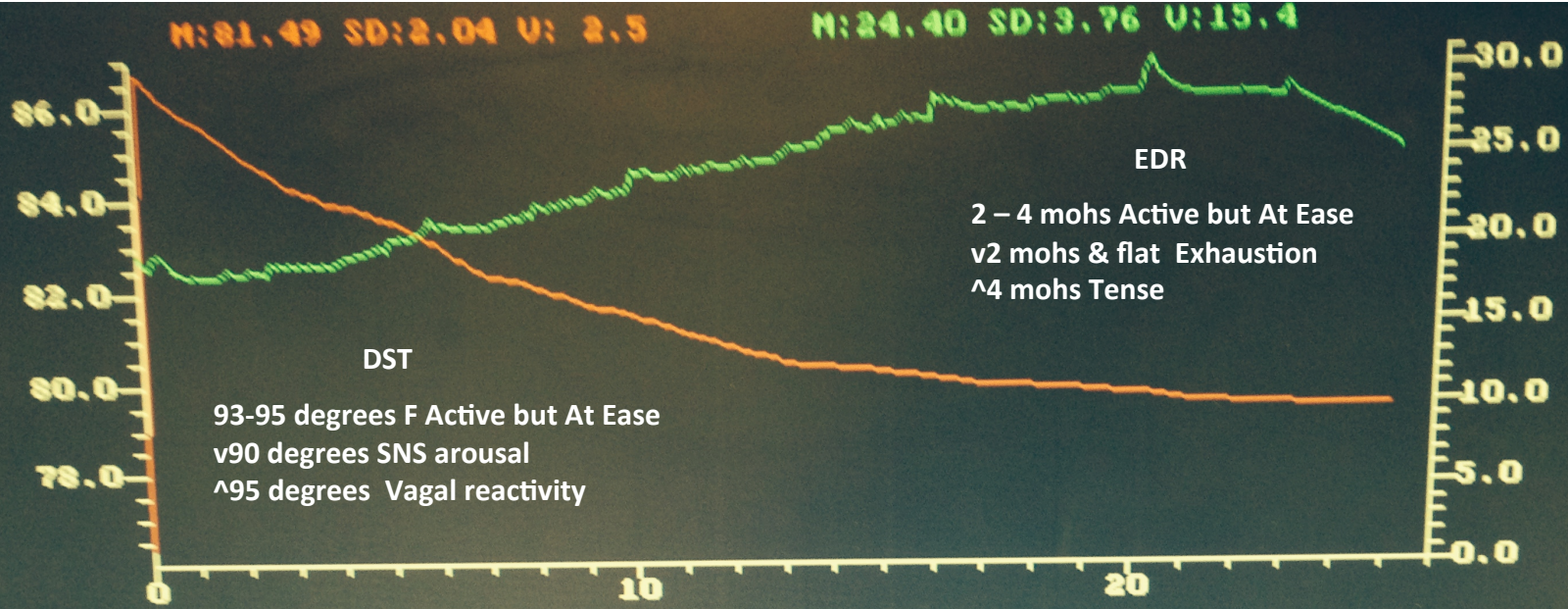
## Steps Toward Differentiation of Self as the Basis for Change

*“Therapy is designed to help one or more family members to become aware of the part self plays in the automatic emotional responsiveness, to control the part self plays, and to avoid participation in the triangle moves. ....Therapy also involves a slow process of differentiation between emotional and intellectual functioning and slowly increasing intellectual control over automatic emotional processes.”* Bowen, 307

- ✓ Increasing contact with more members of the family
- ✓ Developing individual, person-to-person relationships with each member of the family
- ✓ Becoming a more accurate observer of self and the family
- ✓ Increasing ability to control one’s emotional reactivity in family triangles
- ✓ Defining one’s principles, life goals, and beliefs
- ✓ Being more of a Self in relationship to others







Filt A    Filt B    Minutes

1 9/2013





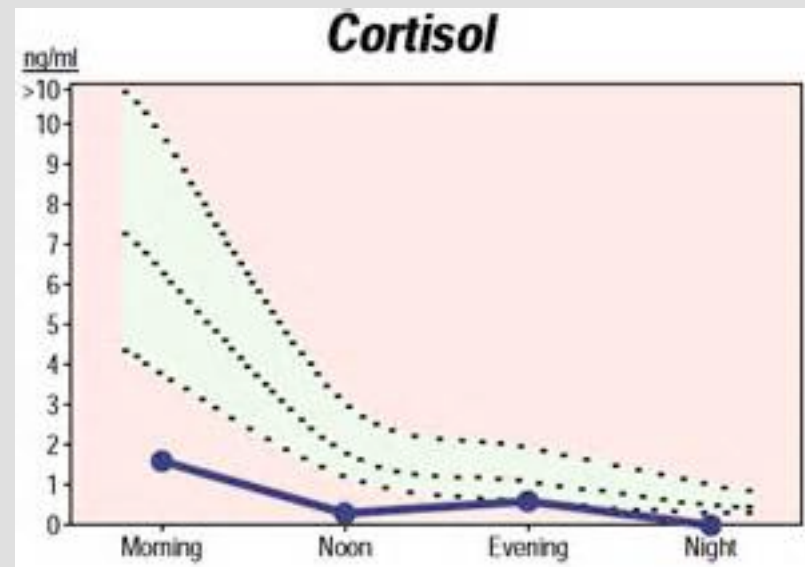
# Salivary Cortisol Samples



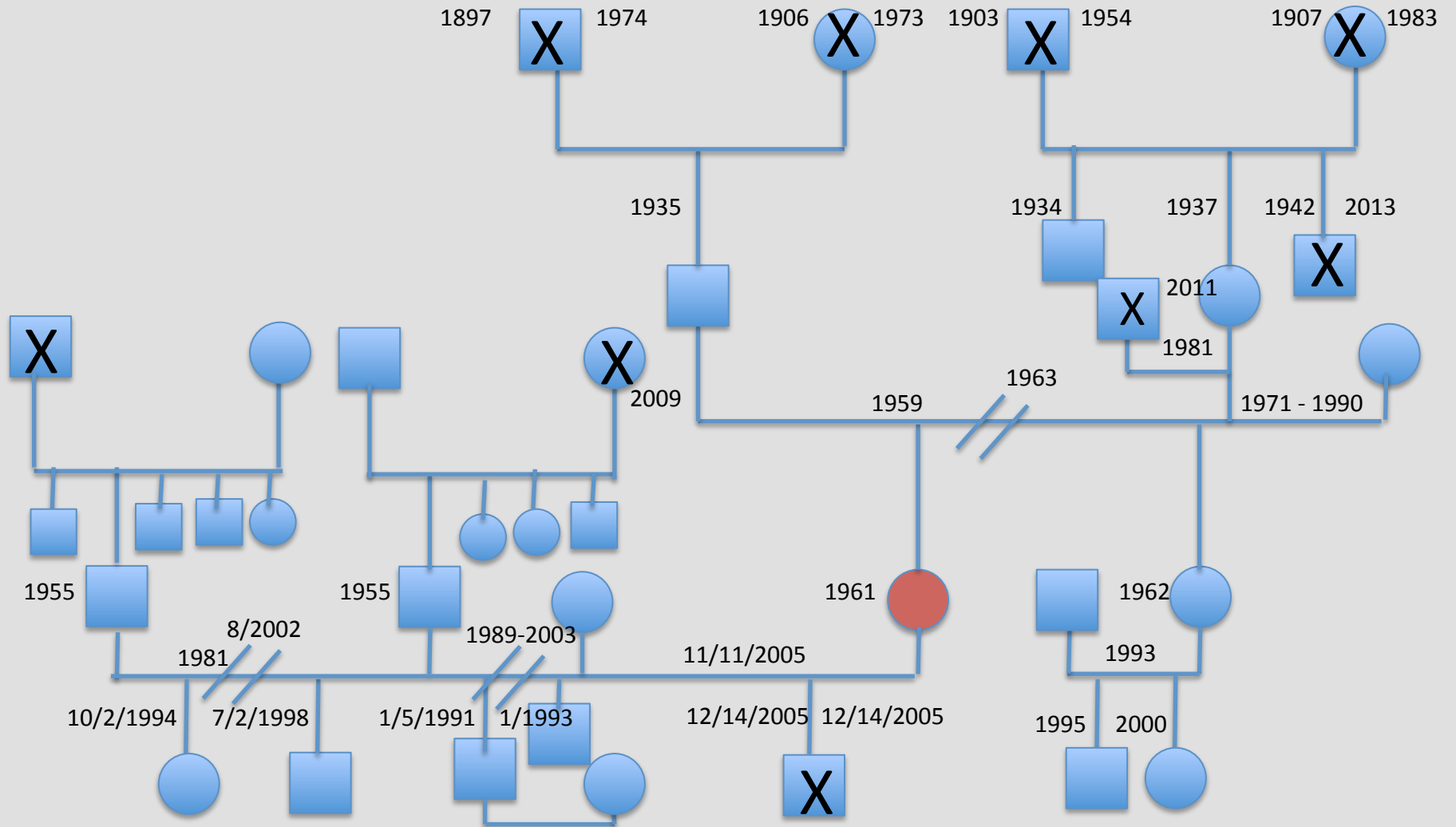
## Criteria for Cortisol Level

7:30 – 11AM: .04-.56

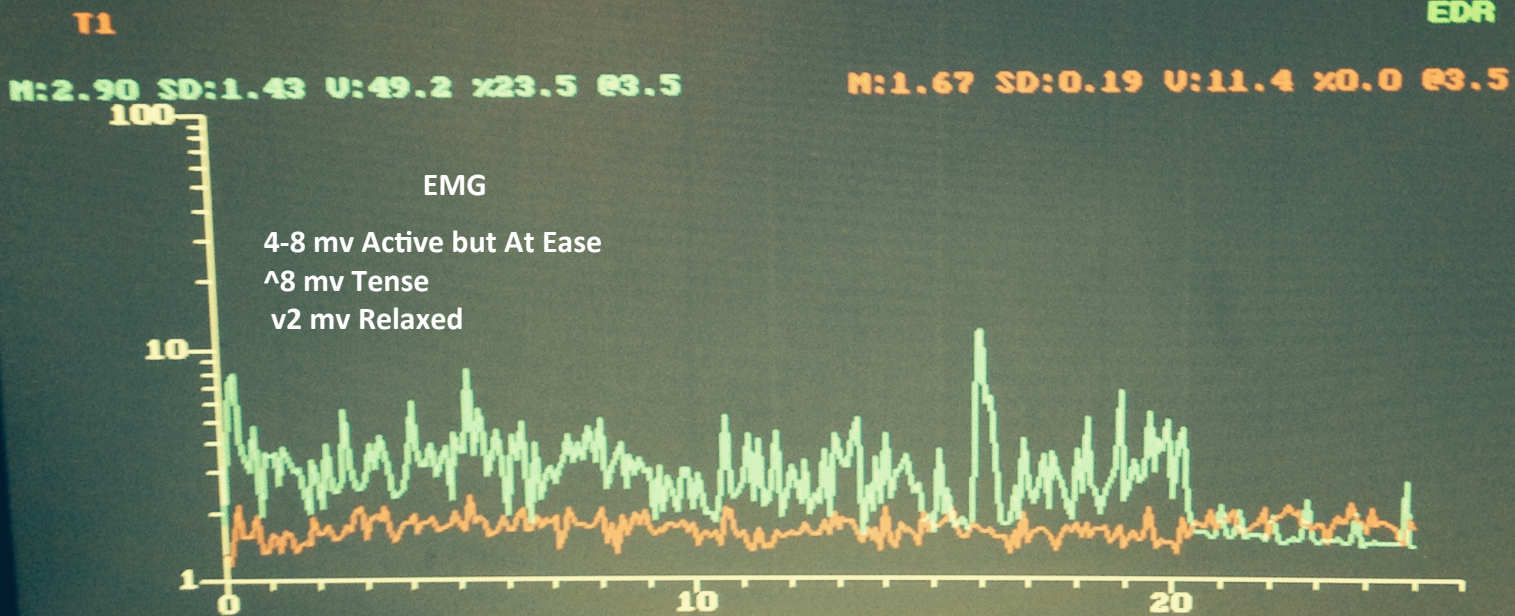
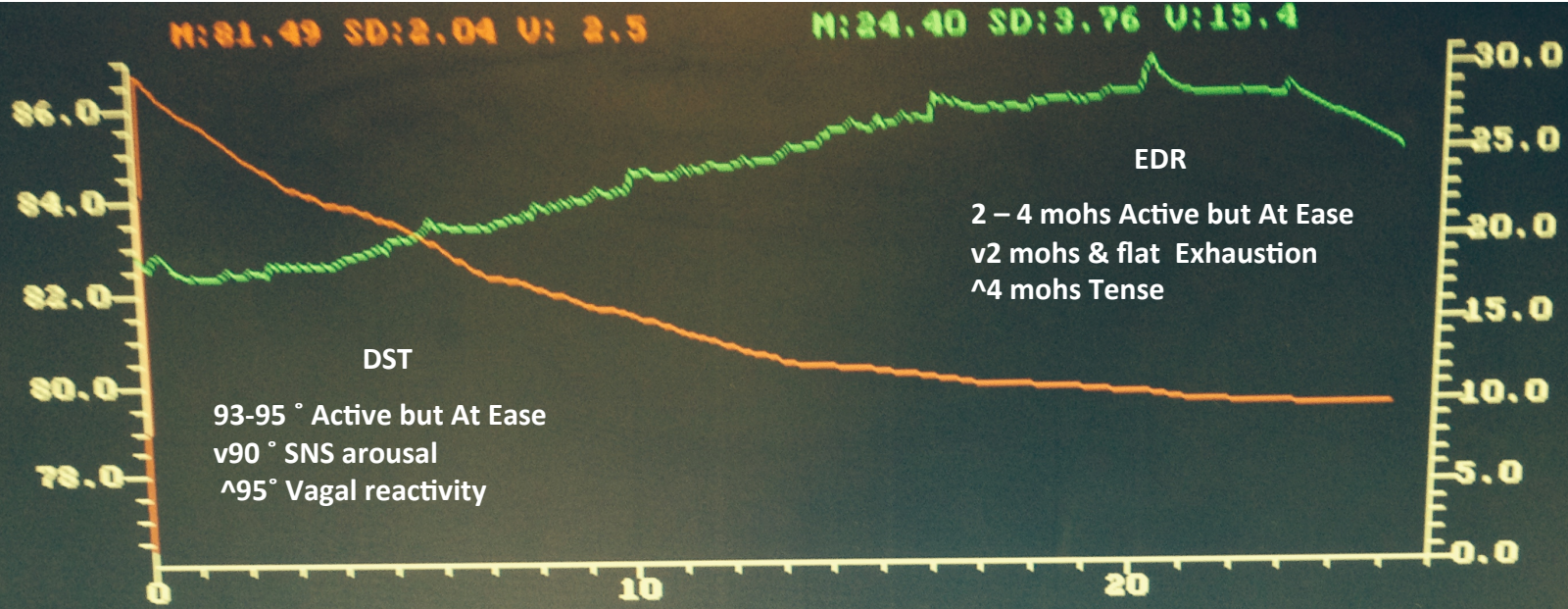
2PM – 6PM: .04-.15



# #1





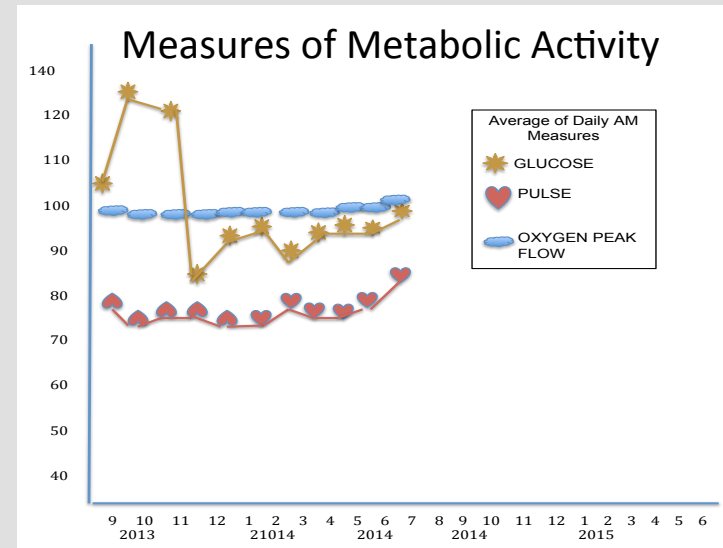
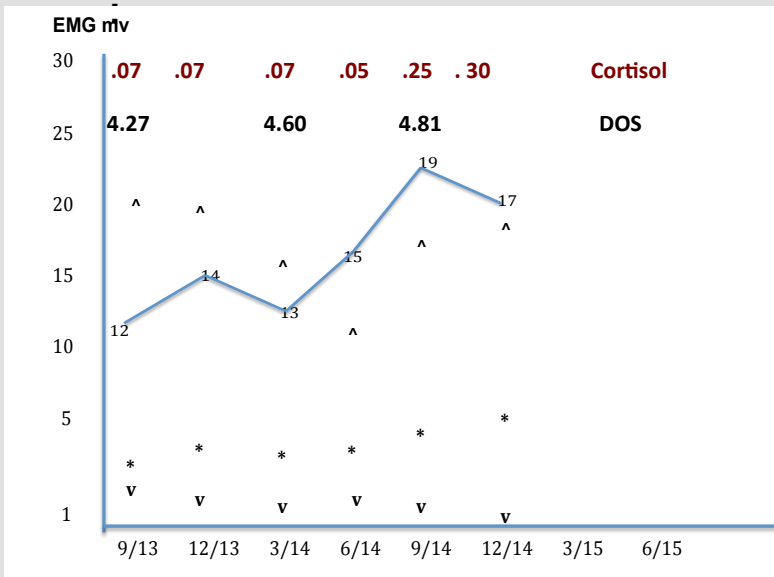
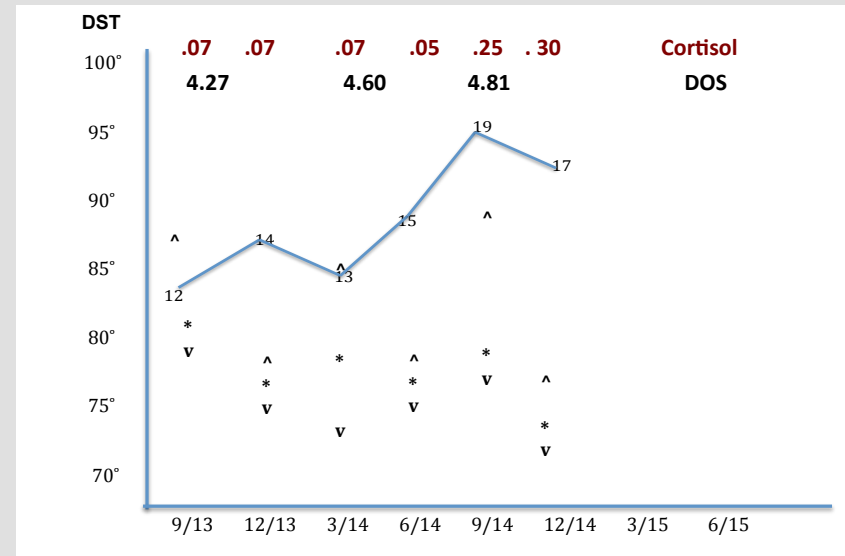
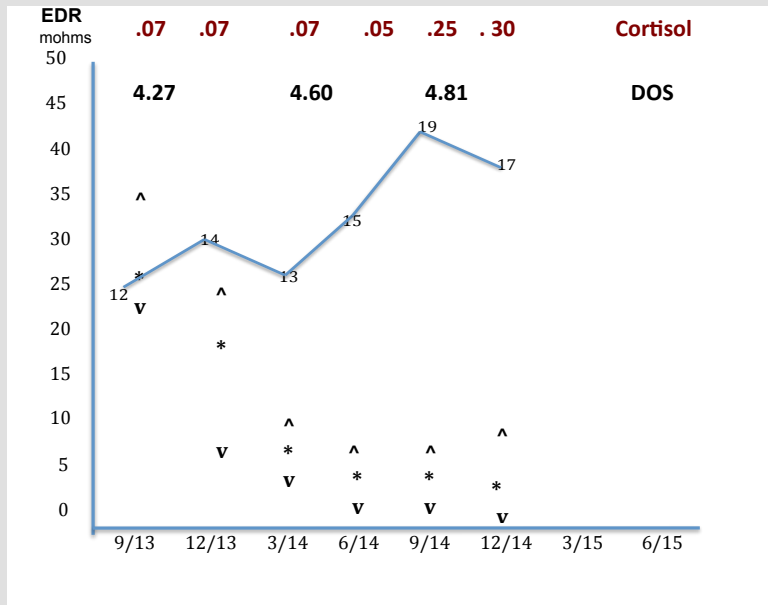


Filt A    Filt B    Minutes

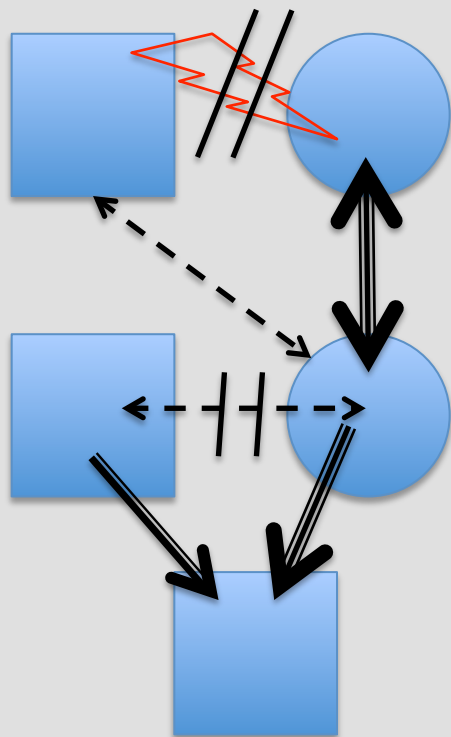
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# Physiological Reactivity, DOS & Contact with Family #1



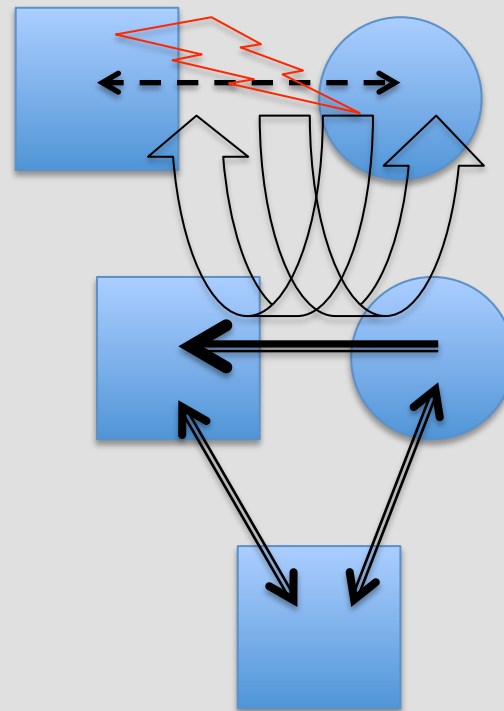




Problems at school  
Drugs & Alcohol

9/2013

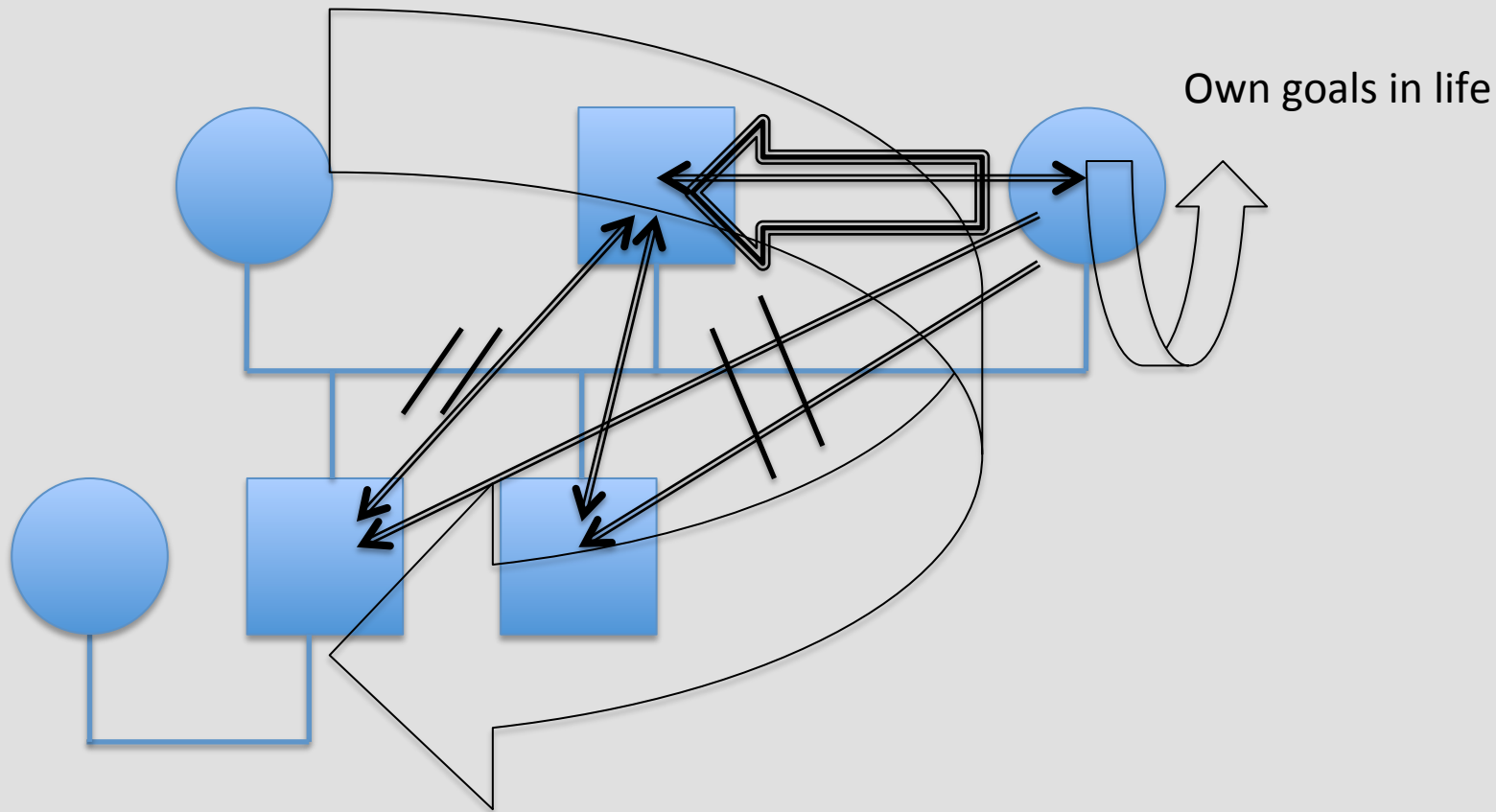
11/2013



Stopped drugs Grades ^d  
More interaction with parents

12/2013

9/2014



1/14 Wedding plans

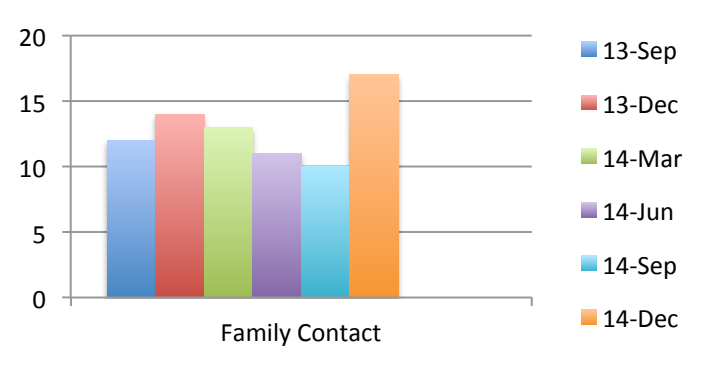
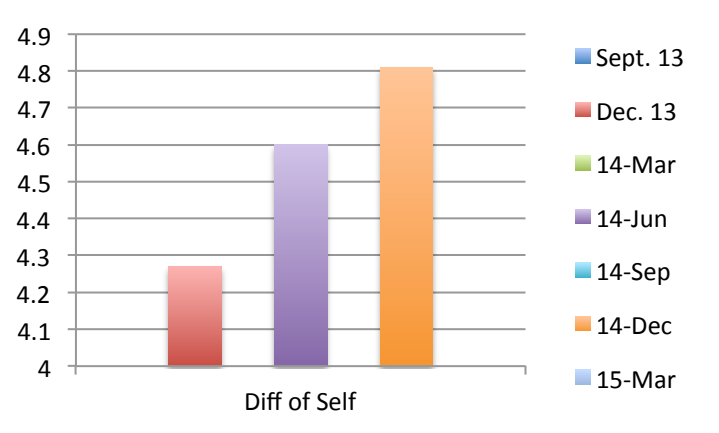
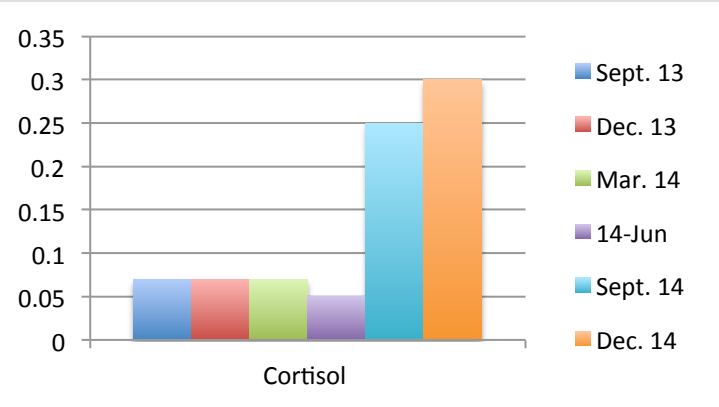
2/14 Leave w/husband

7/14 Wedding

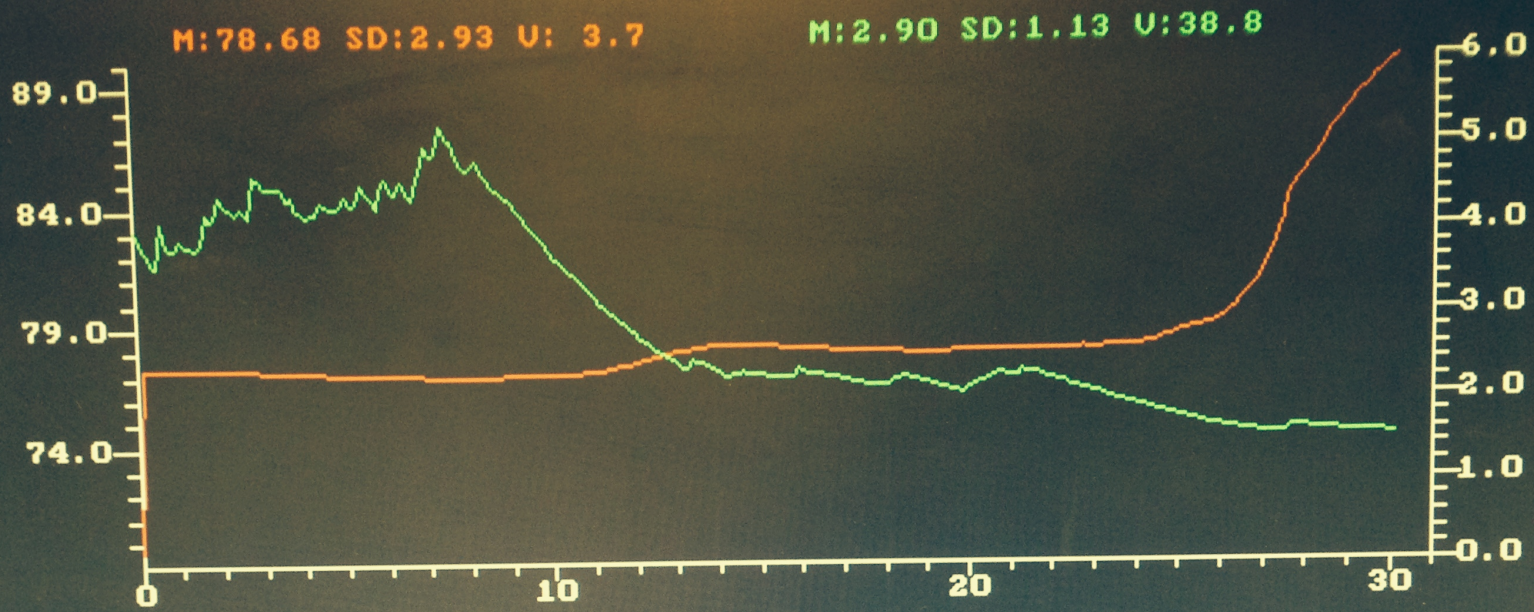
12/14 Increased contact between son and father

1/15 Increased focus on husband & marriage

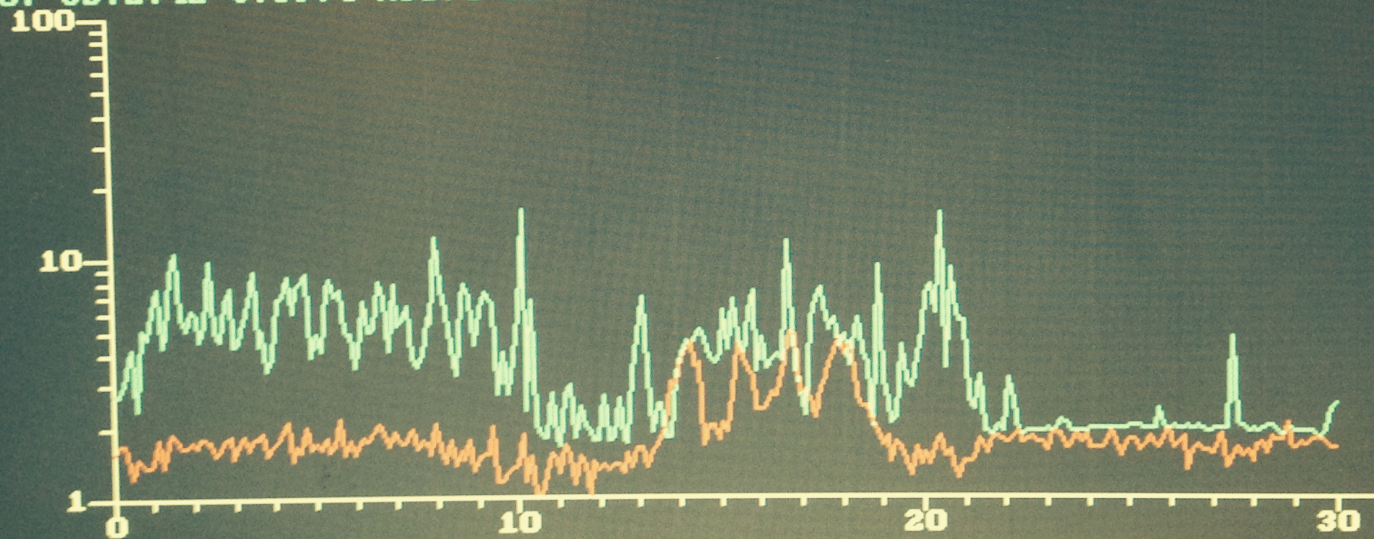
3/15 Shift to focus on self







**T1**      **EDR**  
**M:4.07 SD:2.42 U:59.4 %50.4 @3.5**      **M:1.86 SD:0.69 U:37.4 %5.5 @3.5**



**Filt A**    **Filt B**    **Minutes**



# Observations and Questions

1. These observations suggest that anxiety in one family member reflects her functioning in family triangles and that changes in her anxious functioning play a part in changes for others in those triangles.

**What makes the difference in where symptoms occur and for whom?**

**The anxious focus on another**

**Inability to recognize & manage one's own anxiety**

**Family history and patterns in triangles**

**What changes for others when one family member recognizes and manages anxiety differently?**



3. Anxiety reactions do not change in a uniform trajectory but vary in which systems change more readily and which change more slowly or not at all.

**How do these differences function in recovery from symptoms?**

**How are differences associated with increased functioning?**

**What difference does increased thinking in the presence of anxiety reactions make?**

4. Anxiety increases during nodal events in the family (such as marriage or a death) related to the challenges in relating to others and anxiety also occurs during steps toward differentiation of self.

**What distinguishes anxiety around progress in differentiation of self?**

# Sneak Preview

1. Investigate each participant as a single case study
2. Look at changes in 14 Hz EEG to see if that reflects steps in differentiation of self and the difference they make.
3. Compare differences between participants to see what can be learned about factors that contribute toward those differences, ie. functioning of family system, cutoff/contact with family, nodal events during study, particular steps toward dos that are taken.
4. Look at Differentiation of Self Inventory scores more closely.

# Thanks

To participants in Observations of Change Year 1 & Year 2

To The Bowen Center for hosting this project

To Jessica Chen and Kimberly Capehart for assisting with cortisol assay logistics, a process that required many details

To Bowen Center Director and Faculty for thinking that helped define the project & make use of the observations in supervision consultation with participants

Especially to Priscilla Friesen for her collaboration and to Donna Toisi for her help with Cortisol Assay, DoS Inventory procedures and for Statistical Analysis



Thank you, Dr. Bowen

*“Vicki, you can do better.”*