

Why
Normal
Isn't
Healthy

“Wise, witty, wonderful. Bowen White navigates the inner territory in a way that speaks to everyone’s heart. This book is an essential guide to all who are on the path from normal to healthy. It is a very lighthearted but sage look at ourselves. Maybe that is a key message here: to take ourselves lightly while treading on a profoundly meaningful path. Bowen’s work is a great resource for those who seek balance, play, and vitality in a seemingly hectic world.”

—Marty Sullivan, M.D.

Cardiologist and Director

Duke Center for Integrative Medicine

Duke University Medical Center

“A master of innovation, Bowen White gives us the tools and information we need to change ourselves and to move culture. From Bowen we learn how to create an environment more conducive to creativity and growth. We understand the value of being comfortable with ourselves and of allowing others to feel the same. Funny and intelligent, Bowen leads readers on an exciting exploration of the Fourth Pole—a trip you won’t want to miss!”

—Sue Klepac

Inventor of Possibilities, Lucent Technologies

“Stop your drugs, alcohol, and therapy; read this book and *feel better*.”

—Robert Roy Auray Jr.

President and Chief Executive Officer, USCO Logistics

Why Normal Isn't Healthy

How to Find Heart, Meaning,
Passion & Humor on the
Road Most Traveled

BOWEN FAVILLE WHITE, M.D.

STREZZ
technologies



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1. Quality of life. I. Title

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Dedication

To Hope, Alice, Brynn, and Jordan—

Soon after each of you was born, I took you over to a warm-water bath and massaged your little bodies, welcoming you into the world. I gave you your names and told you how much we had been looking forward to your arrival. What a joy it was in that sacred moment to be your dad. That joy has somehow impossibly grown as each of you has grown. This book is dedicated to you—treasures all.



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To my clients and patients, heartfelt gratitude. Whatever has come out of me is there, in good measure, because of you.

Consider the following dialogue:

Doctor: Have you ever considered trying another option?

Patient: I couldn't do that.

Doctor: Why not?

Patient: I'm not like that.

Doctor: How does it feel, being 'not like that'?

Patient: Depressing.

Doctor: Why don't you be different?

Patient: I can't.

Doctor: Why not?

Patient: Because the die is cast.

Doctor: Recast the die.

Patient: I can't.

Doctor: Why not?

Patient: I don't want to risk making a fool of myself.

Doctor: Why not?

Patient: People might think I'm strange. I don't want people to think
I'm not normal.

Doctor: Oh, so it's important to you to be normal?

Patient: Yes.

Doctor: Are you normal?

Patient: Yes.

Doctor: Then why did you come to see me?

Patient: I wanted to get a second opinion. Do you think I'm normal,
Doc?

Doctor: Yes, but . . .

Patient: But what?

Doctor: Normal isn't healthy.

Patient: Shit!

Dear Reader,

I've known for some time that one of my roles on the world stage is to bug people. I've been bugging people for years. I'm a natural. As I always say, I'm an equal opportunity offender. No one is safe. That's the beauty of it. My market is the planet. Infiltrate and corrupt—that's my motto.

Now, don't get me wrong. I mean "to bug" in a good way. If normal isn't healthy, which is the theme here, then things need bugging. We need to corrupt the status quo with suspiciously healthy ideas. We need to infiltrate the normal flow of things with a benign—no, a healthy—contagion of infectious notions that stimulate a new look at the familiar.

The book idea has been pressed upon me as a way to propagate the contagion. I, alone and in person, can disturb only a small portion of humanity. But a book has the potential that I lack. It can do the mischief I am incapable of performing and can do so at a distance from my person. I am delighted at the thought that I can be sleeping and there is trouble afoot elsewhere. People are being bugged as I sleep. Books long outlive their authors. A book allows me to do in absentia what I am incapable of performing once the final curtain is drawn.

People read books. That's right. In this new millennium, people still read books. And it's a much-needed break. We need a break. Twenty-four hours a day, every day, the planet is abuzz with frenetic activity. People of all nations are busy doing important grown-up things and, in the process, replicating the status quo of their culture.

Well, books carry in-breaking possibilities. They can break into a life at work, on a subway, in the park, at a desk, by a campfire, on a couch, in a bed, and just about any place else people can be found. Books are magical time bombs that don't go off until read, and part of the magic is that they can go off again and again. Someone reading right next to you on the bus can explode and you may not even notice—at least at

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first. Then, over time, other people may wonder, “What’s wrong with Bob?” (You see if normal isn’t healthy, people may wonder what’s wrong with us when we begin to be healthier. “What’s up with Jose, Abdul, Sophia, Raul, Krishna, Mohammed, Marie, . . .”)

“What’s up” is that someone got bugged. Someone just had a near life experience, and they got a glimpse of reality. Books can provide a reality check, allowing the reader to see the familiar with new eyes.

Why Normal Isn’t Healthy makes it possible for readers to see that much of our busyness, much of our frenetic activity, and most of our stress are the logical consequence of straining to hide what is obvious but unspoken. We have secrets we share that we don’t discuss. It’s time to speak our secrets, the secrets that we share in our collective human psyche. People who have heard me speak these secrets have asked me to write a book to share them with others. Although I cannot say that their tastes and yours are similar, this book may be the medicine you need, tastes aside. There is only one way to find out. Besides, we don’t always like the way the medicine tastes but, hey, we do want to feel better.

That’s right. We want to feel better. It isn’t just the infirm who want to feel better. It isn’t just those people with some obvious malady that want to feel better. Normal folks—you and me, people walking and running around making a working wage, productive members of the community—want to feel better. Retired people, people who have spent years in the “jungle out there,” want to feel better. Those who have made it to the top of the economic food chain want to feel better. And there is a chance that this book might help.

Help is required. Many people who have had an illness that stopped their world temporarily may not need the help provided here. They had their world rocked and now roll with it differently. Many people who have had significant life trauma may not need what is contained herein. Their suffering may have brought them to seek and find healthy support. For those people who have had the near death

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experience, their return may be with renewed life. The old familiar patterns no longer determine the trajectory of their current journey. They have changed. And what was important no longer is important, or as important, as it once was.

And there are also those who have had the status quo broken yet have not used the experience as a wake-up call. And my profession may have helped. Physician is a word derived from *fisique*, the Old French for medicine. So our training as physicians is as medicators. We provide the “fix” to get folks back the way they were before they came to us. But the way they were may have been *normal but not healthy*. They continue to want to feel better. For them, this book could be useful.

For the rest of the human family, for those of us struggling to survive without an obvious chief complaint, this book may provide a “near life experience.” It may get us near—close enough to our life to see its logic, yet far enough away to see its possibilities. It may also provide some insight into the logic and possibilities of the lives of others.

It’s difficult to see ourselves because what we’re looking for is doing the looking. When we look in the mirror, we’re too close. Like the man who’s so close to the mirror while shaving that his breath fogs up his reflection, our perspective is clouded.

My hope is that this book can be like a mirror or a true friend who gives us a glimpse of ourselves and our lives from nearby; close enough to see with clarity what is distorted by our own hot air. And a true friend doesn’t always tell us what we want to hear. But, because we know they care, and we feel their caring, we let their words come into us. We can use the information in this book as a near life experience so that we don’t have to wait for a near death experience or some other world-stopping event to accept what life has dealt us, to begin to feel better, and then to change ourselves. Of course, that wouldn’t be normal but it would be healthy.

Well, I need to go bug the unsuspecting. Read what follows at your

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own risk. I forgot to tell you that I have a sign on my office door that reads:



ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK

I MAKE MISTAKES EVERY DAY

If you dare enter this book, I hope that what you find herein may be of some use to you. If normal isn't healthy, I encourage you to read what follows and to misbehave yourself.

Bowen Faville White

Here's one of my top ten lists for why normal isn't healthy.

10. We are predictable, and people use our predictability to manipulate us.
9. We use the predictability of others to manipulate them.
8. We can't stand manipulative people.
7. Therefore, we don't like ourselves.
6. We proudly state that we are our own worst enemy.
5. We try to do things well/perfectly so that at least someone else will like us.
4. To be perfect, we have to be constantly vigilant.
3. Well guarded, we are defensive.
2. We can't stand defensive people.
1. We don't enjoy our own company, which is reflected in the unhealthy way we treat ourselves and others.

INTRODUCTION

I was born dependent. Taught to be codependent. Worked hard. Learned to compete. Focused on self-improvement. Learned to live my life being who other people wanted me to be. And I can die without ever knowing who I am. That may be normal, but it certainly isn't healthy.

versus

I was born dependent. Taught to be codependent. Learned self-acceptance. Learned that I am the person I was conditioned to be. Began to change myself. Played more. Grew to be the person I was inspired to become. And will die knowing that in some small way the world is a better place because I was born. That may not be normal, but it is healthy.

Long ago our ancestors lived as hunters and gatherers. Before we domesticated plants and animals, before we came together in cities, the seeds of culture sprouted out of the hunter-gatherer psyche. Those first sprouts grew, flowered, and had progeny. Our current cultural norms are the product of that which began long ago. And in the context of that developmental process, those norms are logical. They make exquisite sense, but that doesn't mean they are healthy.

One way to think about this developmental process, this evolutionary process, is as a movie that began with the appearance of

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Homo sapiens, human beings. If we could watch that movie from then to the present, we could follow the progress of humanity and see why people are the way they are. We could see that physically our brains haven't changed that much from our ancestors. But culturally, the differences are dramatic yet logical in the context of the movie. The differences are the necessary result of people living over time in a particular environment.

Cultural evolution over thousands of years has given us the diversity now evident as we begin the twenty-first century. And each of us carries our local culture like a baton. We pass the baton from generation to generation, parent to child, teacher to pupil, and so on. Mostly, we do so without thinking. We simply do what we learned to do in our local environs on the road to becoming a grown-up. We do what was appropriate as modeled by others. And we turned out all right, didn't we? Of course we did. But while "all right" may be normal, it is not the same as healthy.

We cannot run the movie backward. What a shame. For if we could rewind the film and watch as it replayed the movie, our differences, while abundantly clear, would be exquisitely logical. And with that logic we could better understand our differences and each other. But that movie does not exist.

But we can, through the mind's eye, examine what we have been handed by previous generations. We can see both the healthy and the normal (but not so healthy) deposits previous generations have made into our collective psyche. We can then explore the implications for our relationships, all our relationships, individual and collective.

We can choose what is healthy and keep what we choose. What we then pass on can be done with awareness. In choosing to pass along only what is healthy, and to be healthy ourselves, we push our local culture toward a healthier norm.

If that movie existed, then all of us would be able to understand why people act the way they do in a given circumstance. Our differences

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would no longer be a source of judgmental thinking. Rather, we would be curious to see how other members of the human family lived their lives, handled their responsibilities, worked, and played. And, as we viewed those activities, we would learn from their performance. Encounters with difference inform.

Our focus here, however, will be on those things we share in common regardless of our differences, for we share much more in common than we share in differences. When I say “we,” the reference is to the collective we of the industrialized world. There may still be a few places that haven’t been contaminated by an industrialized culture. They have survived insulated from the pressures of the contemporary, digital, global-marketed, multitasking rest of us. This book is not for them.

I used to be normal. Still can be. But I have made some progress. There are periods when I am remarkably healthy. More than there used to be. Not as often as there will be. I’m a work in process: step forward, make progress; step back, make progress. There is progress. It just isn’t always forward.

What I see initially as a step backward may turn out to be a step out of harm’s way, like stepping back on the curb just before the bus zips by. Or a step forward may be into an emotional abyss, a free fall into some psychic pain that forces unwanted but needed learning. It’s all grist for the evolutionary mill. I am in a developmental process, an evolutionary process, the starts and stops of which all serve the unfolding of my human potential, which ultimately folds into humanity’s potential.

The individual atom of the cultural structure is a single person. And individual humans bonded together in family systems make up cultural molecules. Those family systems joined in local communities form larger cultural structures, and so on.

There are great differences among cultural clusters. Those differences provide a delightful variety in the bouquet of our larger human

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family. That variety provides color that allows us to see those differences more clearly because of the obvious contrast to our own local experience. And we can note those differences, appreciate and learn from them. It is often through the experience of difference that we learn.

But, again, this book is not about learning from our differences. Rather, it is about exploring the things we share in common regardless of our differences. The irony is, by exploring what we share in common, we can better understand our differences. Armed with that understanding, our differences are less likely to become a distraction in our efforts to learn what we can from each other and to make our blue oasis in space a safer place for all cultures to thrive.

If you ask people to free-associate with the concept of evolution and natural selection, they very well might say, "Survival of the fittest." And if you then asked them to say what that means, they might say, "Because of limited resources, there is competition for those resources and only the fittest survive. Competition weans out the weak. Only the strong survive to replicate and pass on their genes." Life evolves through competition.

Let's take another, more long-term view. Survivability is diminished if we continue to destroy others as we compete for limited resources. Why? The tools now available to defeat our competitors are both horrific and indiscriminate. Not only are we capable of eliminating the competition, we are capable of eliminating life as we know it, period. Obviously, that is counter to survival.

Besides, evolution really has to do with variation and adaptation. Stephen Gould in *The Mismeasure of a Man* writes, "Evolution occurs by the conversion of variation within populations into differences between populations." He goes on to say, "*Natural selection works by differentially preserving the variation that confers better adaptation in changing local environments* [emphasis added]." And finally, "variation within a population . . . becomes converted into differences through time."

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So we have evolved to the place where our own evolution becomes instructive and we recognize that our animal sensibilities must be subordinated to our human intellect and highest values. War as a tool for conflict resolution represents an insane take on the “survival of the fittest” notion. We must select out a variation from this old norm that allows for better adaptation to our current global environment. “Think globally, act locally” takes on a new connotation.

Everything is connected to everything else. We have seen the Earth from space. We are all in this together and we recognize the necessary value of collaboration. Our survival depends on it. We are one human family. Every member adds value, although we often question what value we add. That’s part of normal-not-being-healthy. And every member lost diminishes us all. The poet John Donne said it best:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

“No man is an island”: We are all connected together. Therefore, one thing we can all do to serve the common good is to be healthy ourselves. That is what this journey is about. And the definition of health I’ll use is from Ashley Montagu, cultural anthropologist and author. In *Growing Young*, he says that health “is the ability to love, to work, to play, and to think soundly.”

Onward toward health.



CHAPTER I

THE FOURTH POLE

We are going to take a journey together, you and I. You won't find our destination on a map. But it is a terrain that some people have traveled regardless of where else they have been. Where we are going cannot be reached by car. But all roads lead there. There is no train to board to travel these tracks. But all tracks lead there. There is no plane to where we are going. But all flight ends there. There is no ship that sails into these waters. Yet all ships dock there. Going by foot will not get us there. But wherever we walk we end up there. The Internet cannot reach this place, for it cannot be found in cyberspace.

We are going to the Fourth Pole.

There may be some confusion in your mind, for our schooling did not include this pole with the others. We grew up learning about the North Pole and the South Pole. In fact, that was all we studied. The Third Pole was neglected too. And, if studied, was not so named. For it is the highest place on Earth, Mount Everest. In light of the above, you might think that the Fourth Pole would be the lowest spot on the planet. You might think that it is the opposite of the Third Pole and therefore the deepest place in the ocean or the center of the Earth. But that would not be the case. The Fourth Pole is the center, all right, but not of the planet. It is the center of and the deepest place in the human psyche. It is the place that the Sufi poet Jelaluddin Rumi refers to in his poem:

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Keep walking, though there's no place to get to.
Don't try to see through the distances.
That's not for human beings. Move within,
but don't move the way fear makes you move.

Walk to the well.
Turn as the earth and moon turn,
circling what they love.
Whatever circles comes from the center.

The center is our destination. "Move within" indeed. We are going to the center where we all live, regardless of where we live. We are going past our differences to the heart of our essential nature. We are going on a journey to the center of the millennial human.

And, although we travel together, we travel alone. It is a paradox. Why? Why not! After all, we are a paradox. We are there wherever we go. There is no there where we are not. There is no there there. The other poles are inaccessible and only rarely visited. The Fourth Pole is accessible to each of us but consciously entered only rarely. Why? Because normal isn't healthy. When we think of adventure, we think of the outward journey—like Admiral Robert Peary to the North Pole or Sir Edmund Hillary to the top of Everest. The adventure here is inward. No physical travel is required. Your passport is your intention.

Why should we go there? Because "it's there"? No, because we are there. And to be fully ourselves, to complete our understanding of our house of selves, we must know that our center is the core substance that the rest of us circles. To not know it, is to not know ourselves. Socrates said it: "Know thyself." That is our task here, to know ourselves. Hence, the center is the goal.

All our orbital activities spring out of that center; "whatever circles comes from the center." And it is at the center that we are all connected. Paradox again. When we know ourselves at the center, we

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know who is inside everyone else. And that connection allows our differences to be seen in perspective, that is, different expressions of our common humanity and common beauty. No one is more significant, more important than the next, yet all are significant and important. But, because normal isn't healthy, we often feel neither. Why? Stick around. That's what our journey will reveal.

Rumi's poem talks about going within, "but don't move the way fear makes you move." Interesting caveat . . . fear drives the stress response. And the stress response is a survival response. Why does Rumi admonish us to move within fearlessly? Could it be that moving within driven by fear will only allow us to focus on the survivability of our circumstances? If our only concern is survival, our expectations are too low. Survival is important, but it is not enough. Life is a terminal condition. What does that say about survival? Besides, we can survive our whole lives and never live them.

But survival is a beginning, and we are at the beginning. So, let's start there. In this new millennium there is an appreciation of the ever-increasing pace of human endeavor. The rapidity of change that has become the norm is spoken and written about daily. It's as if the velocity of history is increasing and pulling us along in its slipstream. If we don't move with the times, we will be left behind. And all indications are that the quick step, power walk of life will not slow any time soon. In fact, it may speed up.

Just as we heard from Michael Douglas's character in the movie *Wall Street* that "greed is good," speed is good is the order of the day. Faster and faster computers allow faster and faster transactions. Rapid cycle time allows deliverables to appear at the customer's door soon after ordering. Twenty-four-by-seven service, trading, ordering, and complaining allows us to do more in the time we have. And more is better, right? Good question. What do you think?

Because normal isn't healthy, the cultural norm is a resounding YES. Speed is good and more is better. So we want more, faster. Gee, fits

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nicely with greed is good. No wonder we have so much trouble knowing what is enough. *The Wall Street Journal* recently had a front page story about the “haves” wanting more.

Is “enough,” in fact, an antiquarian concept? Better question. What do you think?

But here, right now, let’s slow down a bit. For a brief few moments let us punch out from the hurry of the workaday world. Let us stop contracting our words and our lives to cram more in faster. Then, perhaps we can see some options that might be healthy but not normal. Are you with me on this? I know it is a wacky idea but, hey, we can punch back in whenever we choose.

Slowing everything down, better yet, stopping to reflect on our situation, allows for some introspection. I know that it may feel awkward to be introspecting when you could be prospecting for clients or doing some other important grown-up activity on the road to building wealth. But we are the object of inquiry here. It is hard to hit a moving target. “Halt, who goes there?” says the guard at the treasure-house door. To make an investigation into our center, we have to “halt” to investigate the “who.”

Anthony de Mello in *One Minute Wisdom* tells the following story:

When a disciple came from a far-away country, the Master asked, “What are you seeking?”

“Enlightenment.”

“You have your own treasure house. Why search outside?”

“Where is my treasure house?”

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“This seeking that has come
upon you.”

At that moment the disciple
was enlightened. Years later
he would say to his friends,
“Open your own treasure house
and enjoy your treasures.”

Because normal is not healthy, we look outside for the treasure. Sometimes we refuse to halt and look inside our own treasure-house until we develop an illness or experience some other world-stopping event. Then, as a result, we have the time to reflect. However, we may not use that time productively. The sick role permits us to let go of most of our important, grown-up responsibilities and get well. But what we often do is obsess about something that we should be doing. When we cannot “do,” we feel nonproductive. It is “downtime.” So we obsess.

Why wait for a world-stopping event to examine our lives? Indeed, that is exactly the point. The Fourth Pole awaits any of us willing to accept the challenge and go down. Its location requires going down into our interior.

But this downtime is productive. When we go “to the well,” to our own deep waters, we invest in our own well-being. It is wealth building in the truest sense, for *wealth* originally meant “well-being.”