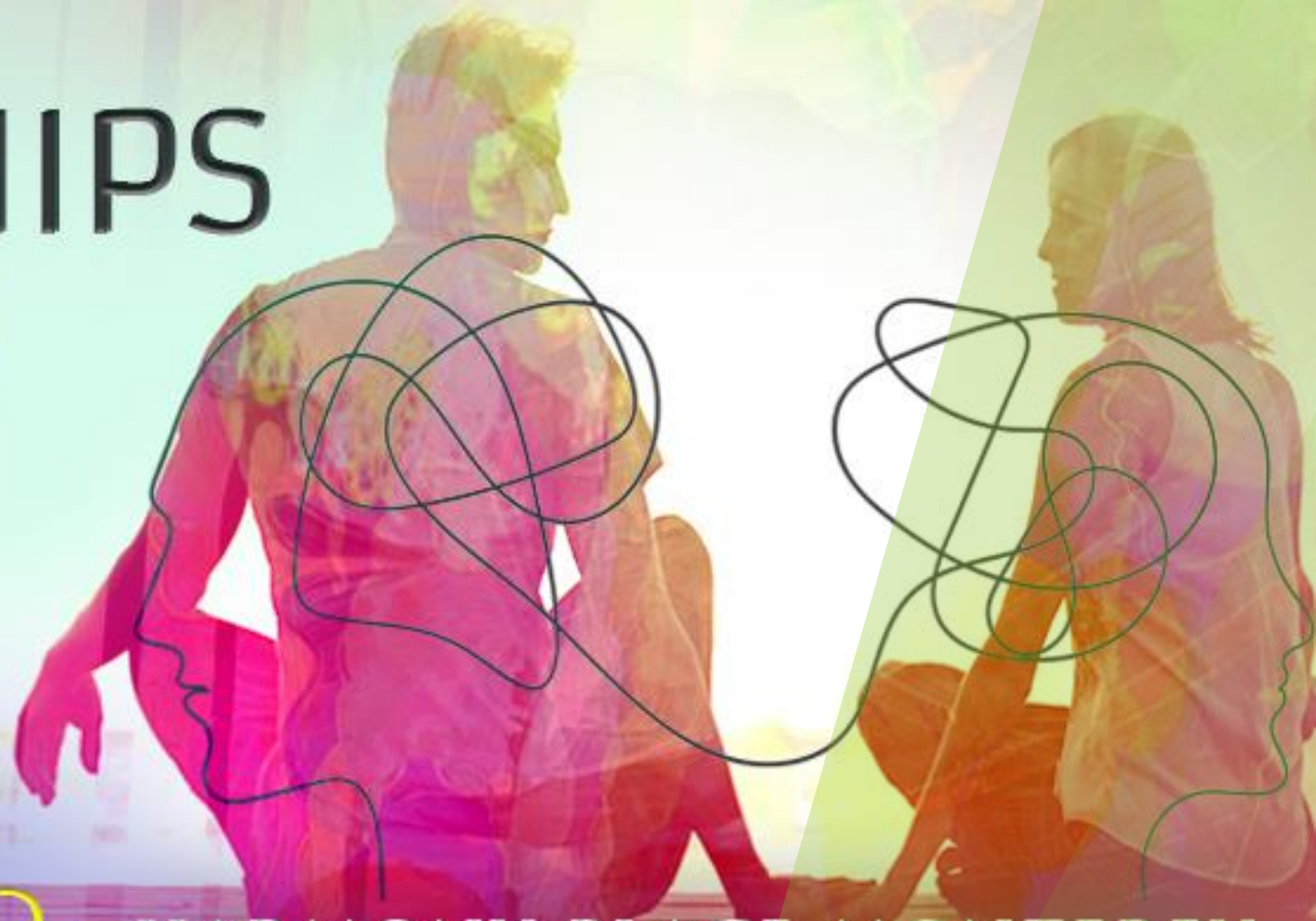


# DESTRUCTIVE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS and REPAIR

FRI OCT 18 2024  
9:00 – 11:00 A.M.  
ONLINE ON ZOOM

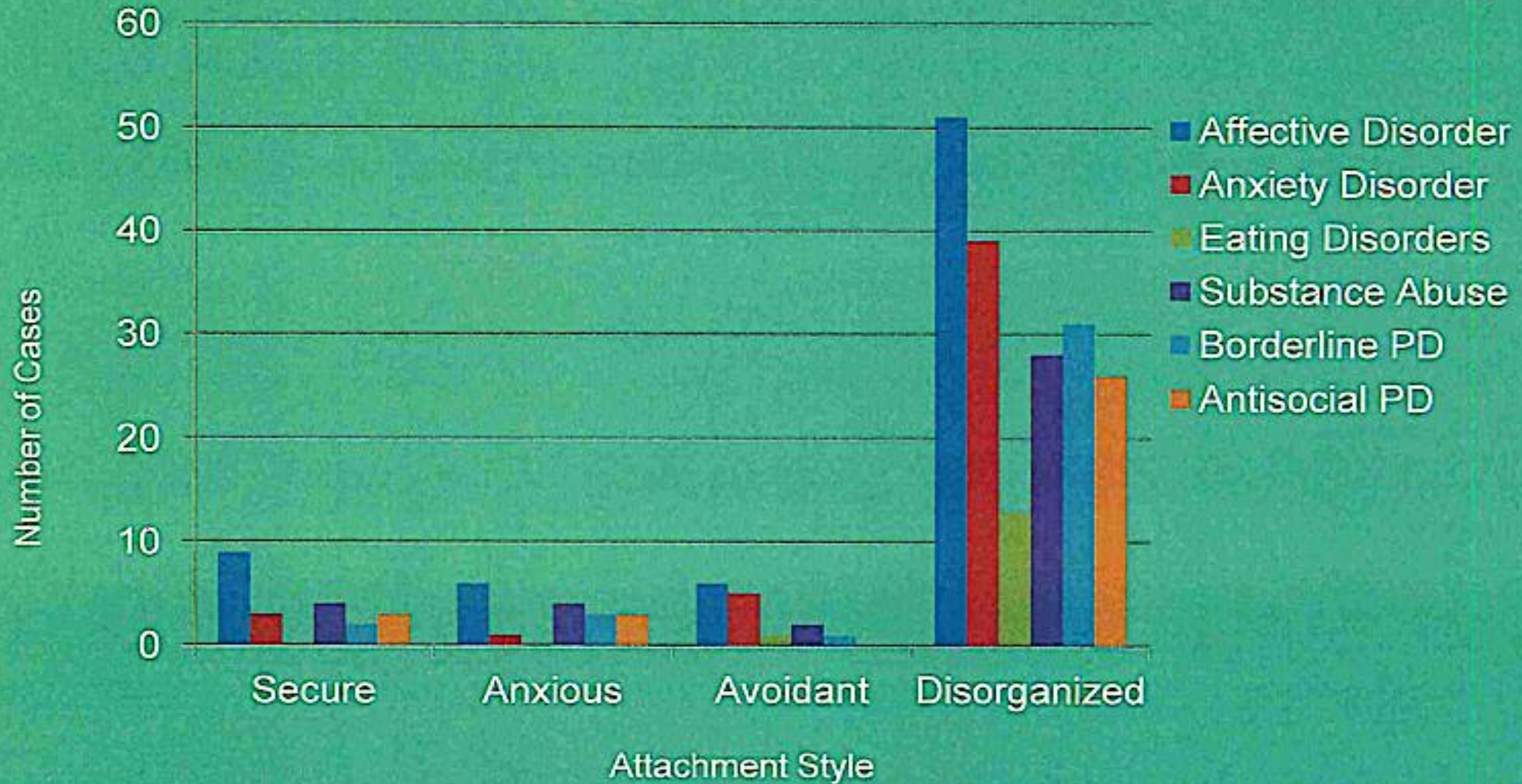
MARK SCHWARTZ, Sc.D. HARMONY PLACE MONTEREY



# Overview

- A. Human development may follow one of two paths: (1) that of love or (2) that of power. The way of power, which is central in most cultures, leads to a self that mirrors the ideology of domination. This is a fragmented, split self that rejects suffering and helplessness as signs of weakness and emphasizes power and control as a means of denying helplessness. The attainment of what passes for success in our world presupposes a self of this nature. Such a situation represents the antithesis of autonomy, which I now propose to discuss.
- B. Although capable of rebellion, such a self is merely a reflection of those types of the constricting, distorting, selfish qualities that parents, school, and society have imprinted within us.
- C. Love is that state of integration in which one lives in full harmony with one's feelings and needs.
- D. In contrast, having access to life-affirming emotions: to feelings of joy, sorrow, pain... In short, access to a sense of being truly alive is essential for the development of autonomy, as I understand it.

# AAI Classification & Psychiatric Diagnoses



# Sense of Coherence

The global orientation that one has a pervasive, enduring-though-dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable. And that there is a high probability things will work out as well as can be expected.

—Aaron Antonovsky



# Disorganized Infants

- ▶ They observe that the mothers of these infants are overwhelmed with their own unresolved abuse or trauma and therefore cannot bear to intersubjectively engage with their infant's distress. Because these mothers are unable to regulate their own distress, they cannot regulate their infant's distress. These mothers are unable to allow themselves to be emotionally affected by their infant's dysregulated state, thus they shut down emotionally—closing their faces, looking away from their infant's face, and failing to coordinate with their infant's emotional state.
- ▶ Specifically, what predicted disorganized attachment was this: "*...not being sensed and known by the mother...and a confusion in sensing and knowing himself.*"
- ▶ Furthermore, all communication modalities were affected, such as "attention, touch, spatial orientation" as well as "facial and vocal affect, and facial-visual engagement."

# Disconnection

Information inconsistent with the attachment figure is disconnected from awareness, so the child keeps a favorable views of parents while knowledge of their bad or disappointing aspects is excluded.

**Injury = badness of the child**

*“I know my mother loved me; she didn’t know how to show it. It was hard for her because I was always in trouble.”*

An abstract, colorful painting of a face, rendered in a style reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh's 'Owl at Night'. The colors are vibrant and varied, including shades of green, blue, red, and yellow. The word 'LOVE' is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the lower left portion of the painting.

# LOVE

Expecting to acknowledge and enjoy other's real self

Deep affection

Committed to growth and happiness of others

Feeling of unity

Selflessness

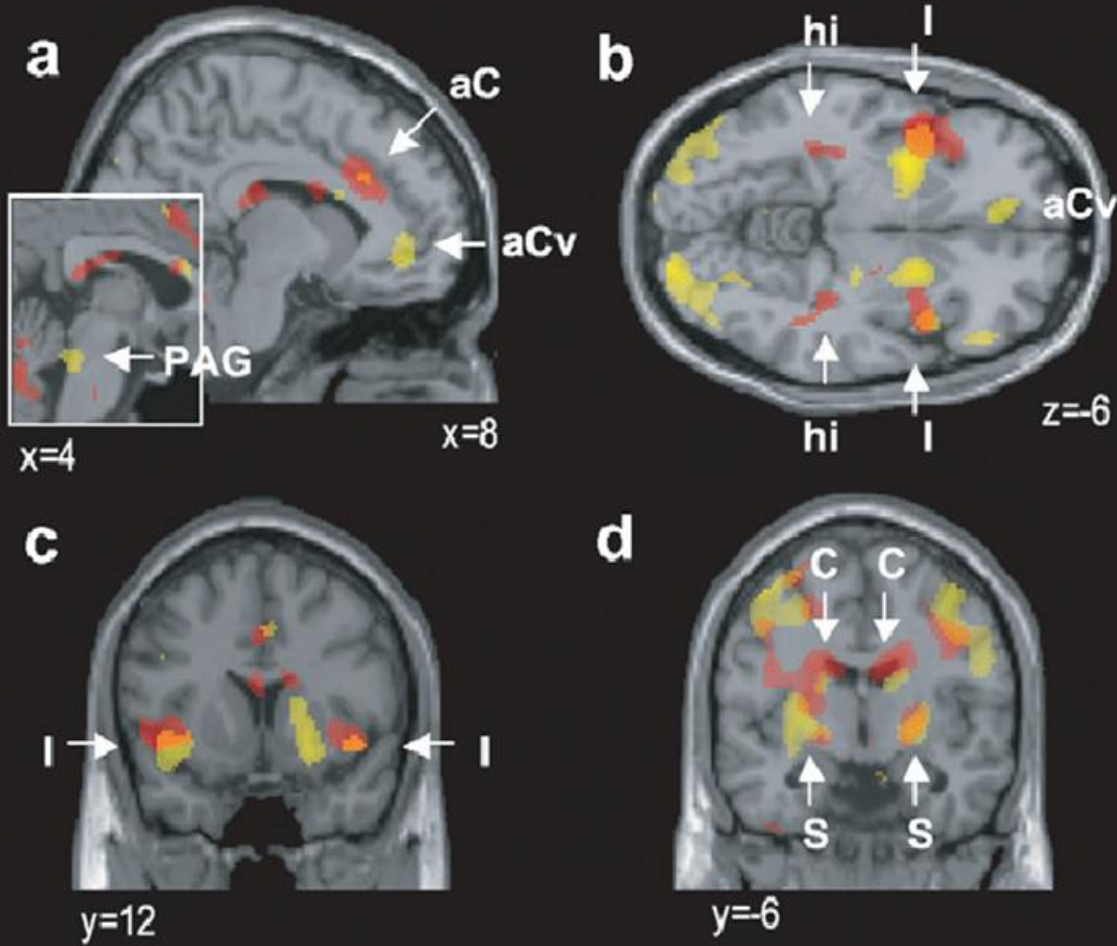
Acceptance of another

Responsive in time of need

Pleasure, caring, desire, trust, affection, security

Activation of attachment system

■ Maternal love ■ Romantic love



Brain activity produced by maternal love (yellow) and romantic love (red) in both males and females depicted. Note: There are considerable areas of overlap, although there are also regions that are activated only by maternal or romantic love.

**Abbreviations:**

- aC: Anterior Cingulate Cortex
- aCv: Ventral
- aC, C: caudate nucleus
- I: Insula
- S: Striatum (consisting of putamen, caudate nucleus, globus pallidus)
- PAG: Periaqueductal (central) Gray
- hi: Hippocampus.



# Authors

Hendrix

Stuart

Jacobson

Gottman

Johnson

Wyle

# Differentiation | Disorders of Self

- ▶ **Differentiation:** It is largely determined by the degree of emotional separation a person achieves from family of origin and multigeneration burdens.
- ▶ **Ability To Function:** People with low differentiation lack beliefs and convictions (values) of their own and adapt or react to prevailing ideology. Highly suggestive, and there's a pressure to imitate to gain acceptance (perfectionism). Some are always looking for other's approval. Others overfocus on intellect and pretending.

## Murray Bowen's Scale of Differentiation (adapted)

100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hypothetical/ideal human? It is not clear whether this is achievable.</li> </ul>
85-95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very well differentiated.</li> <li>Principle-oriented and goal-directed.</li> <li>Inner-directed, internal locus of control, self-sufficient, self-regulating, assertive.</li> <li>Not likely to be emotionally reactive.</li> <li>Not dogmatic or rigid in thinking and in action.</li> <li>Capable of listening to the viewpoints of others with an open mind.</li> <li>Can discard old beliefs in favour of new ones.</li> <li>Can listen without reacting and can communicate without antagonising others — non-adversarial.</li> <li>Secure with self and values time in solitude.</li> <li>Functioning and self-image not affected by praise or criticism. Welcomes and values honest feedback.</li> <li>Not overly responsible for others.</li> <li>Free to enjoy relationships.</li> <li>Does not have a 'need' for others and others do not feel used.</li> <li>Respects and values differences.</li> <li>Not prone to engage in polarised debates.</li> <li>Realistic self-image.</li> <li>Not pre-occupied with his/her place in the hierarchy.</li> <li>Realistic expectations from self — understands self limitations and needs and takes them seriously.</li> <li>Expectations from others are also realistic.</li> <li>Tolerance of intense feelings, has well-developed emotional skill and literacy.</li> <li>Low or no anxiety.</li> <li>Can adapt under stressful situations without developing stress but will avoid such situations where there is a choice.</li> <li>Peaceful. Well-developed spirituality (not necessarily religion).</li> <li>Excellent personal boundaries.</li> </ul>
75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fairly well differentiated.</li> <li>Can be calm in troubled times.</li> <li>Moves between emotional closeness and independent goals.</li> <li>More real — does not seek approval.</li> <li>Less emotionally reactive but if triggered recovers quickly. More choice between feelings and intellect.</li> <li>Good boundaries.</li> </ul>

60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acts more on the basis of reason and intellect than simply reacting to feelings.</li> <li>• Able to consider and choose actions rather than simply react to a feeling.</li> <li>• Able to think for self rather than simply follow the opinions of others.</li> <li>• In relationships hesitates to say what he/she thinks. Can hide true thoughts/feelings/needs.</li> <li>• Boundaries improving.</li> </ul>
50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If triggered or stressed recovers more easily.</li> </ul>
40 (poor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifelong pursuit of ideal closeness.</li> <li>• Relationships tend to be based on mutual dependency or might be avoided altogether.</li> <li>• Low level of real self. Operates a lot out of a pseudo-self/adapted inner child.</li> <li>• Seeks the approval of others a lot. Preoccupied with creating a good impression.</li> <li>• Feels good if approved of, bad if criticised/disapproved of. Self-image depends on outside.</li> <li>• Influenced by feelings — low ability to choose actions rationally.</li> <li>• Poor emotional skill/literacy.</li> <li>• Poor or inconsistent boundaries.</li> <li>• Seeks distractions from self.</li> </ul>
30 (poor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spends a lot of energy on 'loving' or 'being loved'.</li> <li>• Highly suggestible to views/opinions of others and adopts viewpoints of others. Poor boundaries.</li> <li>• Prone to joining sects or adopting extremist or rigid black/white ideologies, philosophies.</li> <li>• Alternatively, consistently rebellious or rigid in beliefs and views.</li> <li>• Successful at work only if praised by superiors.</li> </ul>
0-25 (very poor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lives in a feeling world — but could also be so sensitised to the point of being emotionally numb.</li> <li>• High levels of chronic anxiety — difficult to find situations in which they can be truly comfortable.</li> <li>• Difficulty maintaining long-term relationships — Gives up on relationships.</li> <li>• Emotionally needy and highly reactive to others. Co-dependent. No boundaries.</li> <li>• Most of life energy goes into 'loving' or 'being loved' — most of the person's energy is consumed by reactivity to having failed to get love</li> <li>• Little energy left for goal-directed pursuits — trying to achieve comfort is enough.</li> <li>• Functioning almost entirely governed by emotional reactions to the environment.</li> <li>• Inability to differentiate between thoughts and feelings — isn't aware of alternatives to what he/she feels.</li> <li>• Responses range from automatic compliance to extreme oppositional behaviour.</li> </ul>

\* Differentiation according to Bowen is 'the amount of self you have in you'.

\* We attract, and are attracted to, people with a similar level of differentiation

**Reference:** Kerr M., Bowen M. (1988). *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*. NY: Norton.

# Self

We do not have a self like we have a brain or a heart. Instead, our minds construct a continually evolving story about who we are. This is what we call our “self.”

Patients with dissociative disorders subjectively experience their selves and personalities as fragmented, and often as outside of their voluntary control and awareness.

– K. Steele

# False Self

Children become what parents wish them to be and develop defenses to contain as well as dissociate from feelings—and from the shame of feeling defective.

Defenses include contempt for others, bullying, arrogance, anger, ambition, control routine, denial, minimization, ascetism, judgmentalness, fault-finding, and dependence on technology.

Feel as one felt as a child.

# Real Self *and* Differentiation

- ▶ The first concept is **Differentiation of Self**, or the ability to separate feelings and thoughts. Undifferentiated people cannot separate feelings and thoughts; when asked to think, they are flooded with feelings and have difficulty thinking logically and basing their responses on that.
- ▶ Further, they have difficulty separating their own from other's feelings. They look to family to define how they think about issues, feel about people, and interpret their experiences. Differentiation is the process of freeing oneself from one's family's processes to define oneself.
- ▶ This means, being able to have different opinions and values than one's family members—but being able to stay emotionally connected to them. It means being able to calmly reflect on a conflicted interaction afterwards, realizing one's own role in it, and then choosing a different response for the future.





# Fusion

Fusion generally reaches its greatest intensity in marriage. In the emotional closeness between spouses, two partial selves fuse into a common self.

Sometimes this degree of closeness is only tolerable if the spouses distance themselves from each other rather than operate as a combined self.

The intensity of the resulting fusion largely depends on the spouses' differentiation before marriage.



# Fusion

Searles (16, p. 39) has said that partners equate “...relatedness with a process of engulfment, in which (one) personality is in the process of devouring or being devoured by the personality of the other...” Partners experience the relationship with the feeling of absolute neediness that characterizes a young infant. Their inordinate dependence on one another drives them to be almost exclusively relationship-oriented. Energy goes into seeking love or approval or into attacking the other for not providing it. Little or no energy is devoted to the task of developing self-support.

Because partners see the other as essential for their very survival and because the boundary between self and other is so indistinct—object-loss—that is, the loss of the other is tantamount to ego-loss and is, in fact, experienced in just this way. Because the only mode of relatedness possible at this level is identification and because security is seen as lying in this fusion of identities, any indications of difference, growth, or change are perceived as threatening—not only to the relationship but as suggested above, to the person’s very survival.

One of the hallmarks of fusion is the blurring of boundaries of individual reasonability. Partners share a fantasy of absolute responsibility for the other or for the other’s happiness and pain, faults and failures, life decisions, and his/her very survival.

# Dissociation – (Liotti)

- ▶ Early dyadic processes lead to a “primary breakdown” or lack of integration of a coherent sense of self, i.e. unintegrated internal working models.
- ▶ Part of self is dependent and needy, another part of self uses avoidant strategies. With the break-up, the individual is devastated, as if at war with themselves.



## Inter vs Intra

All individuals have to manage their conflicting needs for connection and autonomy, and all romantic partnerships have to try to manage this tension in a way that works well enough for both partners.

Where one partner is avoidant, he or she is likely to want more space while the other partner wants more closeness.

# Avoidance

- ▶ Avoidance refers to the tendency to evade intimacy with other people, but also to defend against certain feelings, impulses, memories, and needs that rise internally.
- ▶ It is a predisposition to pathology, resulting in increased self-control, work ethic, perfectionism, and self-reliance.

# Avoidance

- ▶ The avoidant person's need for distance from a partner is linked to their need to maintain distance from the self. Because they lack the capacity to regulate emotions, they ban their emotions. They are physically present, but emotionally absent. They “think” they feel.
- ▶ Lower receptivity (problems reading others)
- ▶ Disinterest and distractable
- ▶ Defensive pattern
- ▶ Less involved in others' distress
- ▶ Mechanical caregiving

# Disorganized Attachment

Fear often activates the attachment system, but if the primary attachment figure is the source of fear, the result is the collapse of strategies for dealing with stress, which sets up the capacity to regulate arousal by using others for self-soothing and delays use of self-controlling behaviors.

# Deactivation of Attachment System

- ▶ Distance, emotional and physical
- ▶ Uncomfortable with closeness
- ▶ Self-reliant to extreme
- ▶ Avoidance and anxiety
- ▶ Mental representation doesn't include closeness
- ▶ Emotionless sex, detached

# Avoidance

Wallin (2007) also offers us a way of distinguishing between different styles of avoidance.

He first describes the defensive, devaluing approach where life is managed through an illusion of specialness, like a starving man who says the food isn't worth eating.

Second, it is the idealizing strategy adopted by those who have learned that by making the parent feel special, they could themselves get a bit of that feeling. In therapy, these patients appear more involved, but they are in fact controlling the distance.

Third, a controlling group are often seen as “obsessive.” Like all avoidant people, they cope by keeping feelings at bay. But in addition, this group resists being controlled by others and seek to be the ones in power; hence, in therapy, they may be focused on a power struggle.



# Partner Choice

Finally, as Holmes (2001) commented, a very avoidant individual might possibly form a bond with someone with a disorganized attachment, as they would be equipped to screen out the extreme oscillations in their partner's mood.

And the chaotic, uncontained partner would be carrying the intense feelings that the avoidant person most fears knowing in themselves.

# Collaborative Conversation (Dan Wyle)

- ▶ Solving the Moment
- ▶ Adversarial Cycles
- ▶ Therapist Speaks for Them (Emotions)
- ▶ Doubling
- ▶ Positivity

# Deactivating Strategies for Avoidance

- ▶ Focus on imperfections
- ▶ Ex-girlfriends
- ▶ Flirting
- ▶ Pulls away when all is good
- ▶ Attracted to what's not available
- ▶ Secrets
- ▶ Physical Distance
- ▶ Overdoes self-reliance
- ▶ Minimizes self-disclosure
- ▶ Ignores partner's needs
- ▶ Thinks more than feels
- ▶ Fantasizes about others
- ▶ Overvalues Independence
- ▶ Devalues partner
- ▶ Denial of needs
- ▶ Maximizes distance (emotional or physical)
- ▶ “Independent”
- ▶ Sexually inhibited
- ▶ Detaches when partner is needy



# Fearful Avoidant

The fearful avoidant group are described as having “a sense of unworthiness” (unlovability) combined with an expectation that others will be negatively disposed (untrustworthy and rejecting) (ibid).

Many therapists describe the felt-sense of disconnection they have in the room with clients, while others are not convinced by the dismissing client’s portrayal of having a positive view of self.

# Caregiving and Care-seeking

CAREGIVING and CARE-SEEKING are both vital skills in a couple's relationship and both are difficult for someone with avoidant patterns. Their defenses prompt them to miscue when they need care and to withdraw at the point a partner needs it.

Where a more secure individual has the resources to allow themselves to become involved in the other's distress—to listen, to offer help—a more avoidant individual will tend to be threatened by the partner's distress and the implicit or explicit requirement for caregiving.

# Sexuality

Avoidant people may hyper-activate the sexual system in order to deactivate the need for attachment and intimacy. Some use sex to get external validation of “lovability.” Some use sex as their only form of connection.



They may then find themselves inexplicably turned off to sex if their partner attempts to get close.

## Find Romantic Partner and a “New Self” is Formed

- ▶ Revives infantilized desires and disappointments.
- ▶ Picks partners that are abusive, unavailable, unregulated, jealous, and who reactivates the anxious-attachment.

*or*

- ▶ Picks a secure partner who encourages self-differentiation, nurturance, and healthy boundaries.

# Lack of Pleasure

This lack of pleasure in relationships is significant because it indicates the low reward for avoidant people in relationships, and thus how the defensive pattern becomes reinforced.

In addition, individuals with this pattern will tend to evade conflict and have low expectations of a partner and relationships. These factors may contribute to relationships longevity, if not satisfaction.



# Metacognition

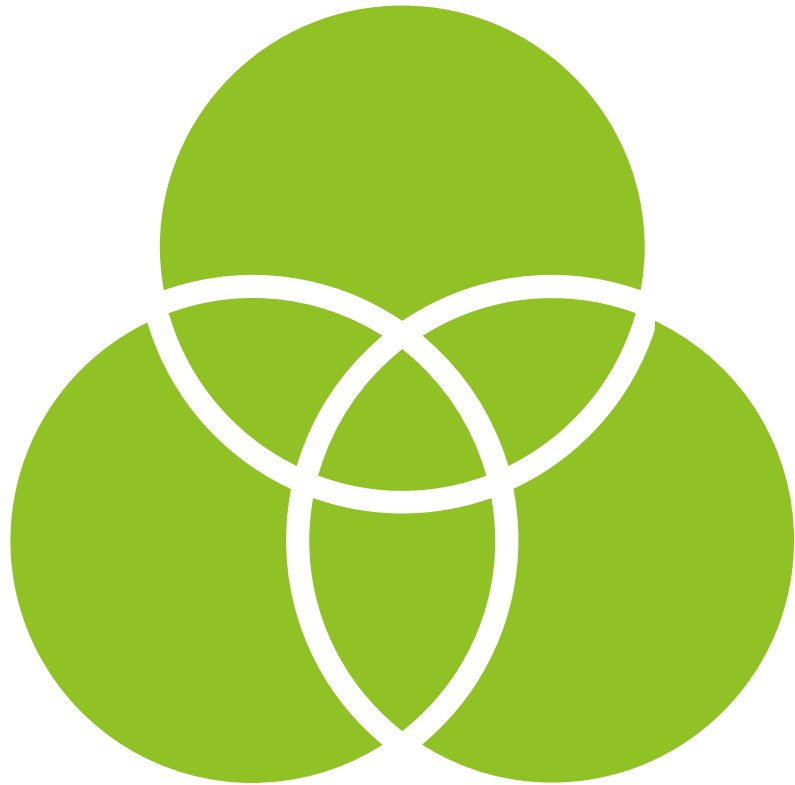
- ▶ **UNDERSTANDING one's own mind:** Self-reflection, self-doubt, emotional state. (thoughts  $\neq$  reality)
- ▶ **UNDERSTANDING others' minds:** Thinking about others' mental states, acknowledging others as separate people, considering others' emotional states, accepting the possibility of being wrong, existing independently.
- ▶ **DECENTRATION:** Other people lead different lives, other people have their own agendas, all exist independently.
- ▶ **MASTERY:** Ability to describe, solve, and cope with problems. Ability to modify beliefs and expectations.

# Stages of Repair

1. **TO FEEL** and to tolerate the full range and intensity of emotions. This requires attunement and therapeutic skill to bring the client into relationship with the realm of emotions, to help him sit with unfamiliar and often painful feelings, to name them, and to learn to be guided by them.
2. “Assistance with experiencing increasing levels of positive and negative affect is a vital component of both parenting and psychotherapy.”
3. **TO RELATE** to relax defensive boundaries between self and other, to risk opening up and make meaningful contact, and to creating moments of intimacy.
4. **TO MENTALIZE:** Adults rated secure-autonomous in the **AAI** have a far greater ability to reflect on, and to make sense of, the minds of other people than do insecure interviewees (Fonagy et al., 1998).

# Repair

5. To create a meaningful self-narrative. Narratives are emotionally informed stories that chart and make sense of the course of one's life.
6. To recognize and mourn losses and deprivations. Mourning has a key role in attachment-based therapy, but denial is the foundation of the avoidant client's defenses. Makes it impossible to grieve for experiences of love and safety that were close or were never available.
7. To find compassion for oneself as a child and accept one's "flaws" as an adult.
8. To challenge one's continued attachment to punitive, critical internal objects and resultant and hidden self-harm. *"The way we were treated as small children is the way we treat ourselves the rest of our life. And we often impose our most agonizing suffering upon ourselves. We can never escape the tormentor within ourselves."* (1987, p. 133).
9. To enjoy warmth, spontaneity, creativity, and connection—to come alive. Gerhardt refers to people with avoidant patterns as "low reactors." Not only do they down-regulate their emotional responses, it seems they also inhibit the absorption of cortisol.



# Dan Siegel, MD

- ▶ Health is integration: The linkage of differentiated parts and systematic wholeness that honors the differences between distinct parts.
- ▶ Utilize the "problem" as a door into the managers protecting injured "selves."
- ▶ It's not just about partners, it's about developmental stack points.

# Trying to Heal...

“Unconsciously we are drawn to people who share characteristics with one or both of our parents—a person who offers us the greatest opportunity to heal our childhood wounds.

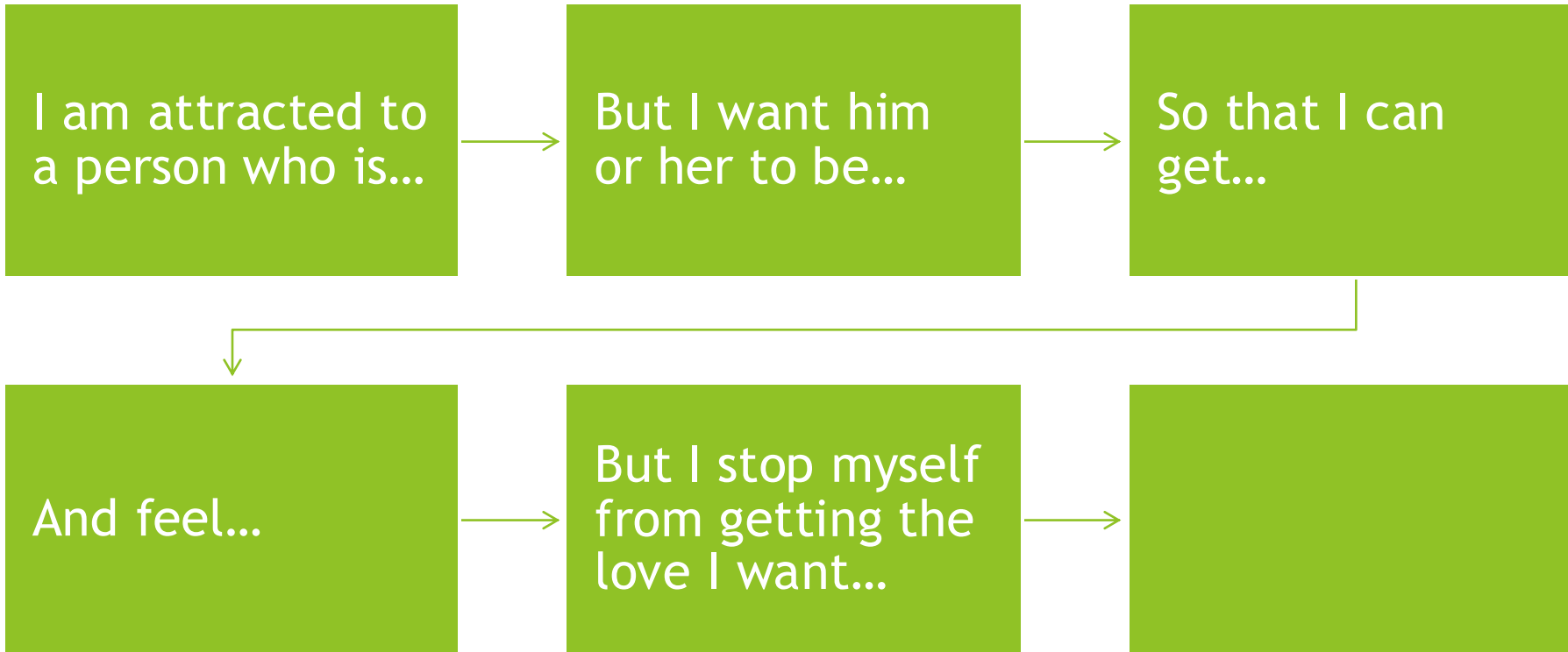
Our behavior is an attempt to fill the emptiness that was once occupied by impulses, talents, interests, attitudes, attributes, inclinations, desires and experiences—all that were cut out of our repertoire.”

– Hendrix and Huntley

# Think of...

- A. Three Negative Characteristics of the people that raised you.
- B. Three Positive Characteristics of the people that raised you.
- C. What you longed for as a child.
- D. How do you want to feel?
- E. How did you respond to childhood Frustrations?

# Insert before the answers to A – E



# Ideal Intimacy *template*

- ▶ Imagine some time in the future when you've found just the right intimate relationship. A relationship characterized by secure intimacy. Soon, a scene will come to mind that best represents your personal vision of secure intimacy.
- ▶ Sustain your focus on this relationship of secure intimacy, and soon, the specific elements of secure intimacy that feel most important to you will become clearer and clearer. See what becomes clear now.
- ▶ Imagine the details of day-to-day life, manifesting the best of a secure intimate relationship. And the more these details become clear, the more you will be able to describe them.
- ▶ See whatever else is important, until it becomes even more clear what feels most right for supporting a secure, intimate relationship. Now, hold your awareness on the total felt-sense of this image of secure intimacy. Fix this vision in your mind. Make a very clear imprint of it.

Your secure intimate partner is so very carefully attuned. They are carefully attentive—but not overly attentive—to everything about you and your new exploratory behaviors in the relationship, including your ways of being and your ways of growing. Especially your internal state of mind.

Develop an image of a relationship with just the right feel for closeness and distance.

As your partner gets closer, you'll find that you like it, and you'll find yourself wanting to get even closer in a way that's comfortable for you.



# Ideal Intimacy *template example*

1. Preparing a special meal for me
2. Bathing me
3. Telling me “I love you”
4. Doing a chore without being asked
5. Asking me to go for a walk
6. Giving me a back rub
7. Giving me a card
8. Giving me flowers
9. Opening the car door for me
10. Looking deeply in my eyes
11. Kissing me
12. Praising me in front of others
13. Giving me a thoughtful, inexpensive gift
14. Giving me an expensive gift
15. Writing me love notes
16. Showing up at work for a surprise visit
17. Taking me out to eat
18. Snuggling in bed
19. Carrying packages for me
20. Listening to music together

# Ideal Intimacy *template example*

21. Calling me endearing names
22. Giving me a surprise birthday party
23. Planning a surprise vacation
24. Giving me romantic clothing
25. Writing me a love letter
26. Writing me a poem
27. Going on a picnic together
28. Taking a shower together
29. Sitting in a hot tub together
30. Putting effort into celebrating our anniversary
31. Putting effort into celebrating my birthday
32. Putting effort into celebrating Valentine's Day
33. Giving me a special gift at Christmas
34. Going away for a weekend together
35. Staying home together with no interruptions
36. Sleeping in together
37. Going to a movie
38. Taking me to a sporting event
39. Cuddling on the couch
40. Holding hands
41. Accompanying me to a cultural event
42. Sitting by the fireplace together
43. Lighting candles
44. Playing games with me

# Bibliography

- ▶ Cundy, Linda. *Attachment and the Defense against Intimacy: Understanding and Working with Avoidant Attachment, Self-Hatred, and Shame*. Routledge, 2019.
- ▶ Hendrix, Harville, and Helen Hunt. *Receiving Love: Transforming Your Relationship by Letting Yourself Be Loved*. Pocket, 2006.
- ▶ Masterson, James F. *The Search for the Real Self: Unmasking the Personality Disorders of Our Age*. Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1990.
- ▶ Peabody, Susan. *Addiction to Love: Overcoming Obsession and Dependency in Relationships*. Celestial Arts, 2005.
- ▶ Schwartz, Mark F., and Fred S. Berlin. *Sexually Compulsive Behavior: Hypersexuality*. Saunders, 2008.
- ▶ Shemmings, David, and Yvonne Shemmings. *Understanding Disorganized Attachment: Theory and Practice for Working with Children and Adults*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011.
- ▶ Stuart, Richard B. *Helping Couples Change: A Social Learning Approach to Marital Therapy*. Guilford, 1980.
- ▶ Wile, Daniel B. *Couples Therapy a Nontraditional Approach*. Wiley, 1981.
- ▶ Yellin, Judy, and Kate White. *Shattered States: Disorganized Attachment and Its Repair*. Karnac, 2012.