

The Self under Siege: A New Model of Differentiation

with Dr. Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.





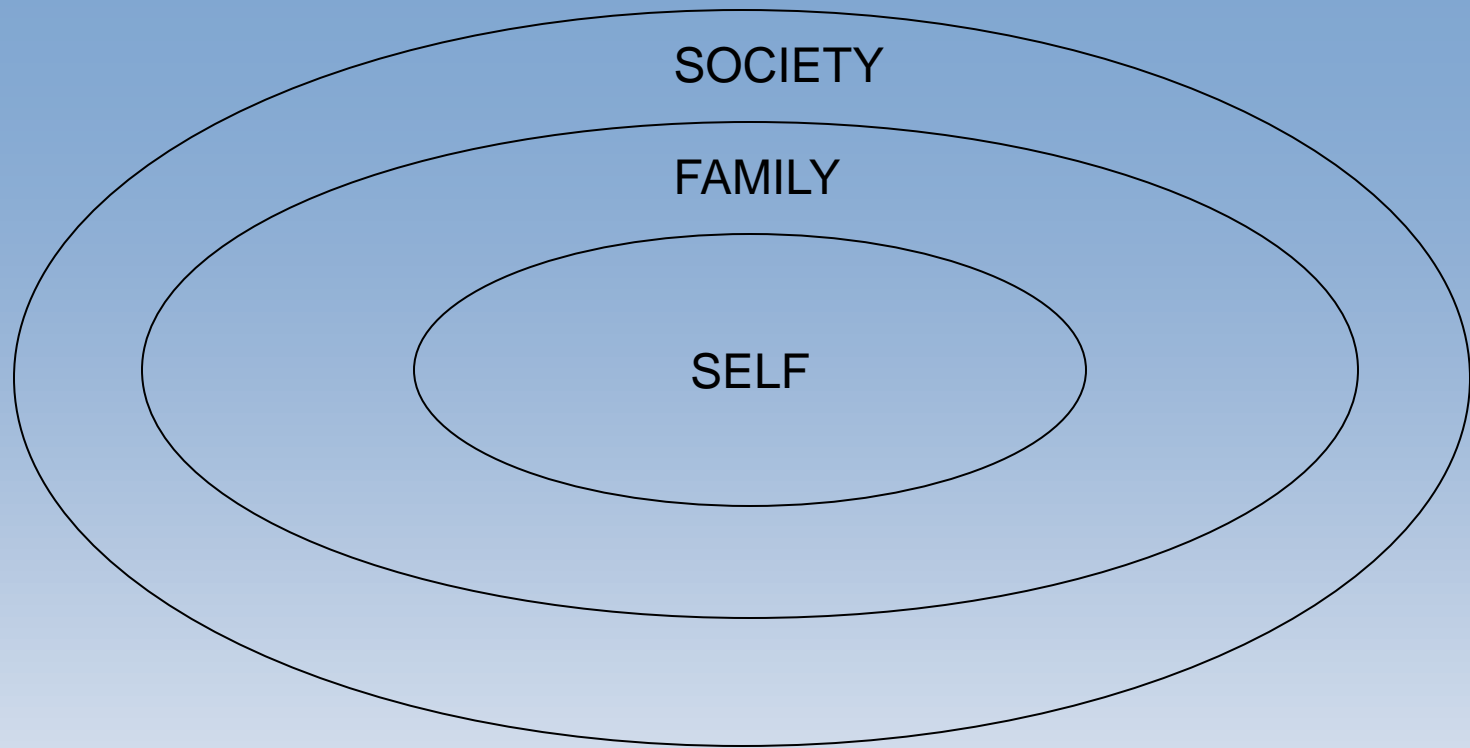
“To-be-nobody but yourself-- in a world that is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else -- means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.”

e.e. cummings



“How much of our identity or “self” is truly representative of our own wants and goals in life and how much does it reflect the wants and priorities of someone else? Are we following our own destiny or are we unconsciously repeating the lives of our parents and automatically living according to their values, ideals and beliefs?”

Robert Firestone, Ph.D.





Carl Rogers

With regard to development, he described principles rather than stages. The main issue is the development of a self concept and the progress from an undifferentiated self to being fully differentiated.

Self Concept...the organized consistent gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of 'I' or 'me' and the perceptions of the relationships of the 'I' or 'me' to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions. It is a gestalt which is available to awareness though not necessarily in awareness. I



From Dr. Dan Siegel's book *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*

Self: A term signifying an internal sense of identity, sometimes including one's body, personality, or membership in relationships or groups. There are many "selves" of a healthy individual. The self is often seem as a singular noun, whereas it may be better considered a "plural verb". Includes functions of the self, such as a somatic, linguistic, emotional, reflective, and social self.



“...thinking about self and identity. In my conceptualization, the self system, in contrast to the anti-self system, is composed of the unique wants, desires, goals, and values that hold special meaning for the individual as well as the specific manner and means that he/she utilizes to fulfill these goals.”

-Dr. Robert Firestone, *The Self Under Siege*



What is Differentiation?

“A person with a well-differentiated "self" recognizes his realistic dependence on others, but he can stay calm and clear headed enough in the face of conflict... Thoughtfully acquired principles help guide decision-making about important family and social issues... What he decides and what he says matches what he does.”

Murray Bowen, M.D.





Murray Bowen

Differentiation of self refers to one's ability to separate one's own intellectual and emotional functioning from that of the family...Individuals with "low differentiation" are more likely to become fused with predominant family emotions....Those with "low differentiation" depend on others' approval and acceptance. They either conform themselves to others in order to please them, or they attempt to force others to conform to themselves. They are thus more vulnerable to stress...and theirs is a greater than average challenge to adjust/adapt to life changes and contrary beliefs...



Becoming Differentiated



“To lead a free life, a person must separate him/herself from negative imprinting and remain open and vulnerable... As children, people not only identify with the defenses of their parents but also tend to incorporate into themselves the critical or hostile attitudes that were directed toward them. These destructive personal attacks become part of the child’s developing personality, forming an alien system, the anti-self, distinguishable from the self system, which interferes with and opposes the ongoing manifestation of the true personality of the individual.”

Robert Firestone, Ph.D.



From Dr. Dan Siegel's book *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*

Differentiation: how parts of a system can become specialized, unique in their growth, and individualized in their development.



From Dr. Dan Siegel's book *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*

The basic proposal of interpersonal neurobiology is that integration is the fundamental mechanism of health and well-being. Integration is the linkage of differentiated parts of a system. Differentiation means that subsets of a collections of elements- water molecules in a cloud, functions of the mind, regions of the brain, people in a family-are able to become unique or specialized in their individuality. Linkage means that subsets interact with one another



Two Important Questions

1. Are we living based on pursuing the things that really light us up, that matter to us, and that give meaning to our lives, or are we living based on prescriptions we acquired in our past?
2. Are we living according our own values and ethical principles, or are we automatically living according to the values and standards of other people or of the society in which we live?

Poll #1:

Do you see clients struggling with these issues?

Yes, many

Yes, some

No, none

Differentiation

Child Self



Real Self



Parent Self



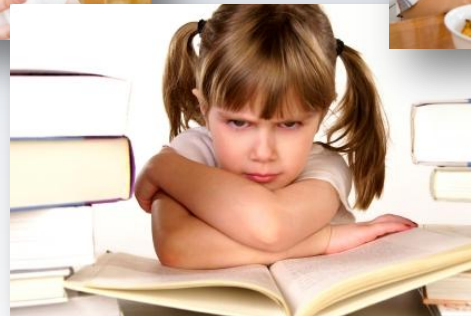
Steps of Differentiation

Step 1: Break with internalized thought processes, i.e., critical, hostile attitudes toward self and others

Step 2: Separate from negative personality traits assimilated from one's parents

Step 3: Relinquish patterns of defense formed as an adaptation to painful events in one's childhood

Step 4: Develop one's own values, ideals, and beliefs rather than automatically accepting those one has grown up with



Step 1:

“We have to separate from the destructive attitudes that were directed toward us.”





Definition of the Voice Process

The Voice Process:

The “voice” can be thought of as the language of the defensive process. It has been defined as an integrated system of thoughts and attitudes, antithetical toward self and hostile toward others. The concept of the voice is not restricted to cognitive processes but is generally associated with varying degrees of anger and sadness.





Separate from Destructive Attitudes:

- Self-critical
- Self-soothing
- Hostile and suspicious
- Self-aggrandizing





Common Critical Inner Voices

About Yourself:

- ❖ You're stupid.
- ❖ You're ugly.
- ❖ You're not like other people.
- ❖ You're a failure.

About Your Relationship:

- ❖ He doesn't really care about you.
- ❖ She is too good for you.
- ❖ You're better off on your own.
- ❖ Don't be too vulnerable, or you'll just wind up getting hurt.

About Your Career:

- ❖ Who do you think you are?
You'll never be successful.
- ❖ You're under too much pressure.
You can't take it.
- ❖ You'll never get everything done.
You're so lazy.
- ❖ No one appreciates you.



“One thing that is very valuable to look at is the parent’s point of view about life, about all the aspects of your life. What would they say about this? What would they say about you? What would they say about your marriage? What would they say about the way you are with your kids? What would they say about your profession, your career, and then answer back with your own point of view, separating yourself from the anti-self.”

Robert Firestone, Ph.D.



Step 2:

“We have to separate or differentiate ourselves from the negative traits of our parents, and their defensive posture toward life.”



For Example:

The way you are in your relationship...



The way you are as a parent...



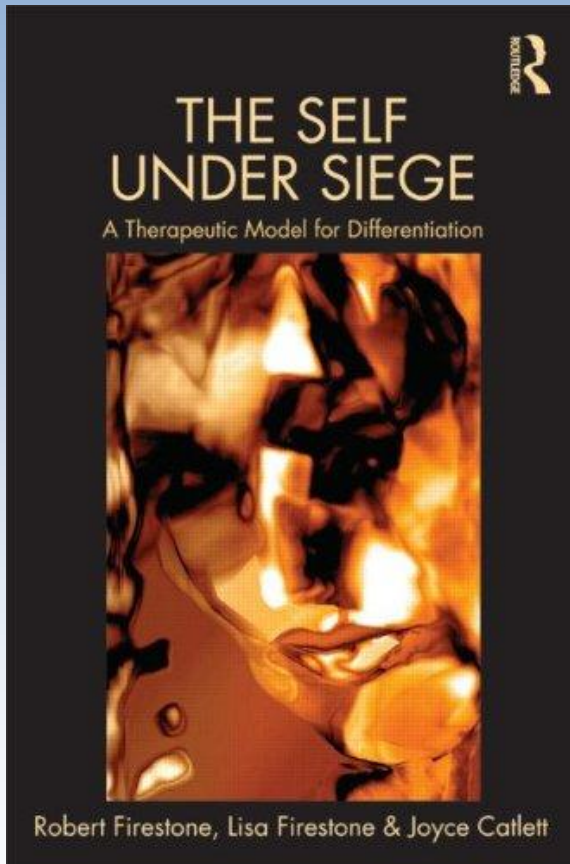
Step 3:

“We want to separate from the defenses we use to cope with elements of our childhood—we want to break with these defenses as well. And being ourselves, we have to move away from the defensive posture that we adopted realistically as children, but that are no longer necessary or functional.”





- Most people are compliant and rarely deviate from the beliefs and opinions held by their parents and tend to live conventional and predictable lives.
- They fail to recognize their lack of differentiation or the fact that they are reliving, rather than living, their own life.
- Others adopt a defiant stance in opposition to their parents' ideas and values and approach life, mistakenly believing that their defiance and rebelliousness is their real identity.
- However, compliance and defiance are both driven by the views, behaviors, or lifestyle of one's parents and neither is truly representative of one's own identity or self.
- It is of the utmost importance to take both of these contingencies into consideration when approaching the project of differentiation.



The Self Under Siege Routledge, 2012



Step 4:

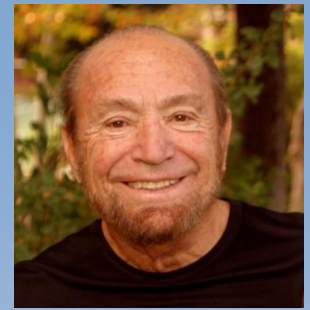
“We have to develop our own values, our adult value system, and approach to life, to really fulfill our destiny as a human being, our potential as a unique individual.”





Separation Theory

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.



- ❖ Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought
- ❖ Two kinds of emotional pain:
 - Interpersonal
 - Existential
- ❖ The core conflict
- ❖ Defended versus undefended lifestyles
- ❖ The concept of the **Fantasy Bond**
- ❖ The concept of the **Critical Inner Voice**





Separation Experience Throughout the Lifespan

- Birth
- Toddlerhood
- Going to School
- Moving
- Dating
- Marriage
- Becoming a parent
- Potential divorce
- Loss of parent
- Becoming a grandparent
- Loss of spouse
- Death





Definition of the Fantasy Bond

The Fantasy Bond:

A Fantasy Bond is an illusion of connection, originally an imaginary fusion or joining with the mother. It is used here to describe both the original imaginary connection formed during childhood and the repetitive efforts of the adult to continue to make connections in intimate associations.





The Negative Effects of Defenses and Why They Predispose Unethical Behaviors

The Fantasy Bond:

1. allows for destructive couple and family interactions that are denied, disguised or covered up by a fantasy of being loving.
2. favors isolation and insulation--predisposes a pseudo-independent attitude that is opposed to trusting and genuinely relating to others.
3. supports in-group vs. out-group attitudes--feelings of distrust or outright hostility toward different customs and peoples, and an attitude that one's family, ethnic group or religious affiliation is superior to all others.



The Core Conflict

Undefended

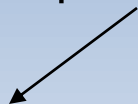
Defended

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| • Contending with emotional pain, both interpersonal and existential | → | Avoiding painful realities |
| • Live with the pain of awareness, feeling integrated | → | Disengaging from self |
| • Experiences all emotions, retaining the capacity to find happiness and joy in life | → | Denial and escape to an unfeeling existence |
| • Better able to tolerate intimacy | → | Loss of personal identity, freedom, and autonomy |
| • More humane toward others | → | More punitive towards others |

Division of the Mind

Parental Ambivalence

Parents both love and hate themselves
and extend both reactions to their
productions, i.e., their children.



Parental Nurturance



Parental Rejection, Neglect Hostility





Prenatal Influences

Disease Trauma



Substance Abuse/ Domestic Violence





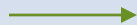
Birth



Trauma



Baby



Genetic

Structure

Temperament

Physicality

Sex





Self-System Parental Nurturance

Unique make-up of the individual (genetic predisposition and temperament); harmonious identification and incorporation of parent's positive attitudes and traits and parents positive behaviors: attunement, affection, control, nurturance; and the effect of other nurturing experience and education on the maturing self-system resulting in a sense of self and a greater degree of differentiation from parents and early caretakers.





Personal Attitudes/ Goals/Conscience

Realistic, Positive Attitudes Toward Self

Realistic evaluation of talents, abilities, etc...with generally positive/compassionate attitude towards self and others.

Goals
Needs, wants, search for
meaning in life

Moral Principles

Behavior

Ethical behavior
towards self and others

Goal Directed
Behavior

Acting with
Integrity





Anti-Self System

Unique vulnerability: genetic predisposition and temperament

Destructive parental behavior: misattunement, lack of affection, rejection, neglect, hostility, over permissiveness

Other Factors: accidents, illnesses, traumatic separation, death anxiety



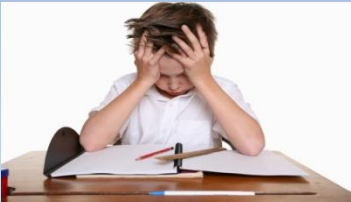
The Fantasy Bond (core defense) is a self-parenting process made up of two elements: the helpless, needy child, and the self-punishing, self-nurturing parent. Either aspect may be extended to relationships. The degree of defense is proportional to the amount of damage sustained while growing up.

Anti-Self System

Self-Punishing Voice Process

Voice Process

1. Critical thoughts toward self



2. Micro-suicidal injunctions



3. Suicidal injunctions – suicidal ideation



Behaviors

Verbal self-attacks – a generally negative attitude toward self and others predisposing alienation.

Addictive patterns. Self-punitive thoughts after indulging.

Actions that jeopardize, such as carelessness with one's body, physical attacks on the self, and actual suicide

Source

Critical parental attitudes, projections, and unreasonable expectations.

Identification with parents defenses

Parents' covert and overt aggression (identification with the aggressor).

Anti-Self System

Self- Soothing Voice Process

Voice Process



1. Self-soothing attitudes



2. Aggrandizing thoughts toward self



3. Suspicious paranoid thoughts toward others.



4. Micro-suicidal injunctions



5. Overtly violent thoughts

Behaviors

Self-limiting or self-protective lifestyles, Inwardness

Verbal build up toward self

Alienation from others, destructive behavior towards others.

Addictive patterns. Thoughts luring the person into indulging.

Aggressive actions, actual violence.

Source

Parental over protection, imitation of parents' defenses

Parental build up

Parental attitudes, child abuse, experienced victimization.

Imitation of parents' defenses.

Parental neglect, parents' overt aggression (identification with the aggressor).



Outward vs. Inward Lifestyle

OUTWARD LIFESTYLE

INWARD LIFESTYLE

- | | | |
|--|--------|--|
| • Social involvement | ←————→ | Isolation |
| • Active; assertive | ←————→ | Passivity; victimized orientation |
| • Maintaining a separate identity | ←————→ | Seeking a merged identity and fusion |
| • Feeling state | ←————→ | Cutting off or withdrawal of affect;
impersonal relating |
| • Goal-directed behavior; self-fulfillment; self-affirmation | ←————→ | Seeking gratification in fantasy; self-denial;
self-destructiveness |
| • Lack of self-consciousness;
realistic self-appraisal | ←————→ | Hypercritical attitudes toward self |
| • Adaptability | ←————→ | Non-adaptability |
| • Facing up to pain and anxiety
with appropriate affect and
response | ←————→ | Using substances & routines as painkillers
to avoid feeling |
| • Self-fulfillment | ←————→ | Self-denial |
| • Personal sexuality | ←————→ | Impersonal, masturbatory, or addictive
sexuality |
| • Searching for meaning and
transcending goals | ←————→ | Narrow focus |



Neurotic Guilt vs. Existential Guilt

Neurotic Guilt related to:

- Pursuing our goals
- Surpassing a parent
- Standing out from the crowd
- Enjoying a fulfilling relationship
- Career success
- Simply being alive (survivor guilt)

Existential Guilt related to:

- Retreating from goals
- Holding back from surpassing a parent by giving up a relationship or career goal
- Conformity
- Withholding from a loved one
- Not living up to your potential
- Not fulfilling one's destiny

Poll #2:

How do you identify your therapy orientation?

Psychodynamic

Existential/ Humanistic

Cognitive Behavioral

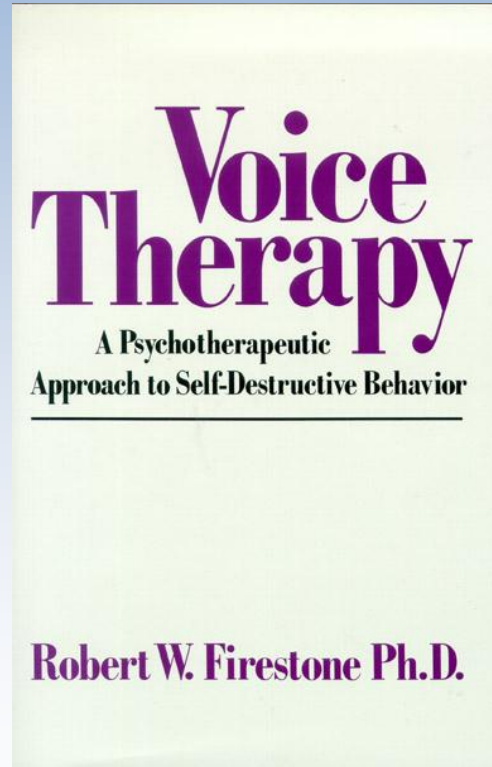
Integrative

Eclectic



Voice Therapy

Cognitive Affective Behavioral Approach



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step I

Identify the content of the person's negative thought process. The person is taught to articulate his or her self-attacks in the second person. The person is encouraged to say the attack as he or she hears it or experiences it. If the person is holding back feelings, he or she is encouraged to express them.



Step II

The person discusses insights and reactions to verbalizing the voice. The person attempts to understand the relationship between voice attacks and early life experience.





The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step III

The person answers back to the voice attacks, which is often a cathartic experience. Afterwards, it is important for the person to make a rational statement about how he or she really is, how other people really are, what is true about his or her social world.

Step IV

The person develops insight about how the voice attacks are influencing his or her present-day behaviors.

Step V

The person then collaborates with the therapist to plan changes in these behaviors. The person is encouraged to not engage in self-destructive behavior dictated by his or her negative thoughts and to also increase the positive behaviors these negative thoughts discourage.



Self

Anti-Self





Voice Therapy Challenges

Unethical Personality Traits and Behaviors

Utilization of Voice Therapy Techniques:

- a) exposes negative thoughts in a second person dialogue.
- b) offers a catharsis-deep feeling release of intense emotions such as rage and sadness.
- c) helps to develop insight into the sources of an individual's destructive voices.
- d) allows for compassion toward oneself and understanding that even if one has done something unacceptable, it serves no purpose to attack oneself as that is demoralizing and actually leads to more destructive acting out behavior. (It is far better to apologize and make restitution and change the behavior in the future.)
- e) leads to corrective suggestions to alter maladaptive, negative attitudes and behaviors.
- f) helps the individual become a more mature and compassionate person and a more valuable member of society.



People Can Learn: Learning Ethical Behaviors

- a) develop an inclusive world view.
- b) develop transcendent goals, to value people with different customs and beliefs, and embrace justness, fairness, and equal opportunity for all.
- c) handle aggression appropriately without externalizing it or internalizing it.
- d) all feelings are acceptable, but actions require both reality and moral considerations.
- e) war and violence are not inevitable. The best hope for peace is proper education in psychological principles which leads to ethical behaviors. Dedication to this goal must be coupled with the belief that peace is achievable. Conversely, if one believes that war is inevitable, war becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.



“To find peace, we must face existential issues, overcome our personal upbringings, and learn to live without soothing psychological defenses. In some sense we must continually mourn our own death in order to fully accept and value our life. In living a more vulnerable life, we would find no need for ethnic hatred or insidious warfare.”

-Dr. Robert Firestone, 1996



Dimensions of a Meaningful Life

- Further developing one's capacity for love, empathy and compassion: Learning to give and accept love
- Formulating one's own values and ethical principles
- Developing more integrity, honesty, generosity, independence, tolerance and inclusiveness
- Formulating and taking action to achieve meaningful goals in life
- Transcendent goals
- Composing a life story or narrative



Guidelines for Continued Personal Development

- ❖ Be Aware of the Fear That Accompanies Change
- ❖ Realize That Psychological Pain is Valid
- ❖ Develop a More Realistic View of Your Parents
- ❖ Differentiation – Unlearn Old Behaviors, Learn New Behaviors
- ❖ Become More Aware of Specific Defenses Against Feeling
- ❖ Recognize the Value of Friendship
- ❖ Seek Your Own Personal Meaning in Life





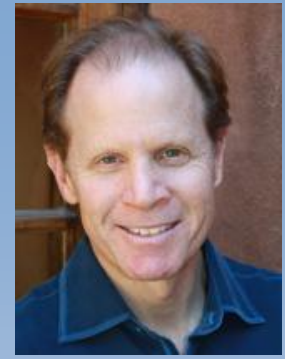
Guidelines for Further Developing a Meaningful Life

- ❖ Practice Being Generous in All Your Relationships
- ❖ Become Aware of Existential Realities
- ❖ Develop a Spiritual Perspective and Appreciate the Mystery of Existence





Interpersonal Neurobiology



C urious

O pen

A ccepting

L oving



The Healthy Mind Platter



The Healthy Mind Platter, for Optimal Brain Matter

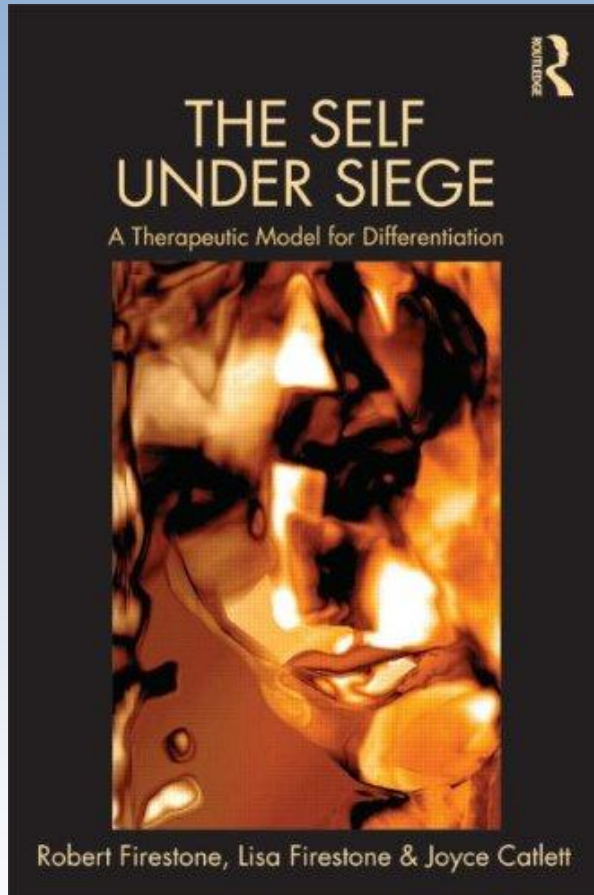
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“We can make the most of our short experience of life, actually, and to live it fully, to exist as a separate, creative individual, we have to differentiate in those ways.”

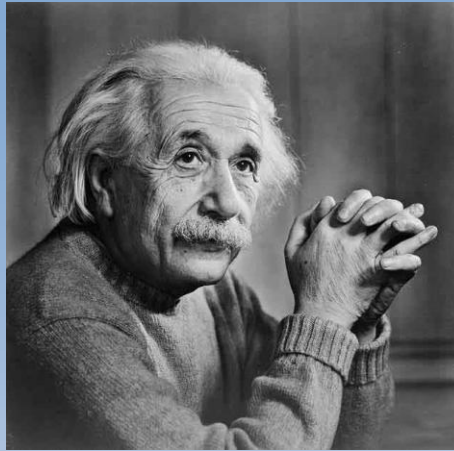
Robert Firestone, Ph.D.





- “More differentiated individuals have a greater potential to experience all of their emotions, including an increased capacity to feel the joy and happiness of life, and a higher tolerance for intimacy.”
- “People who are relatively undefended feel more integrated, are better able to live more fully and authentically, and tend to be more humane toward others.”

[The Self Under Siege](#) Routledge, 2012



A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security."

- Albert Einstein



Resources:

The Self under Siege

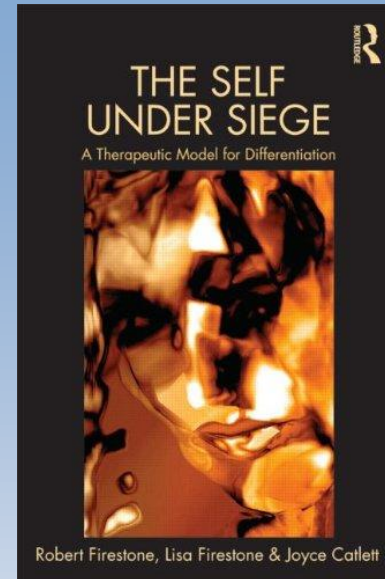
<http://www.taylorandfrancis.com/books/details/9780415520331/>

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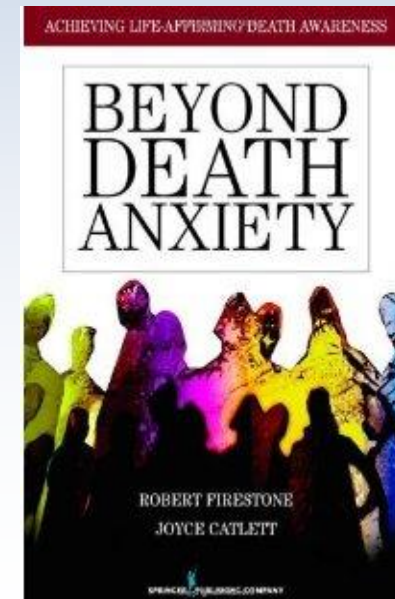
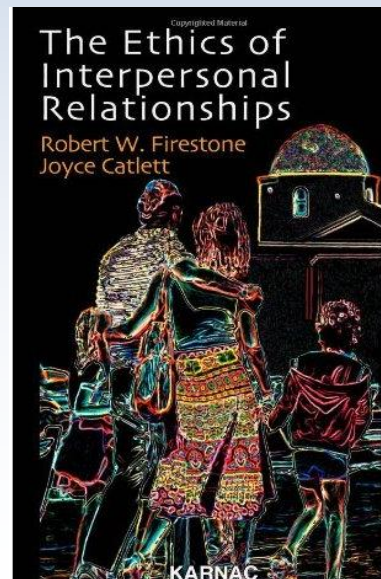
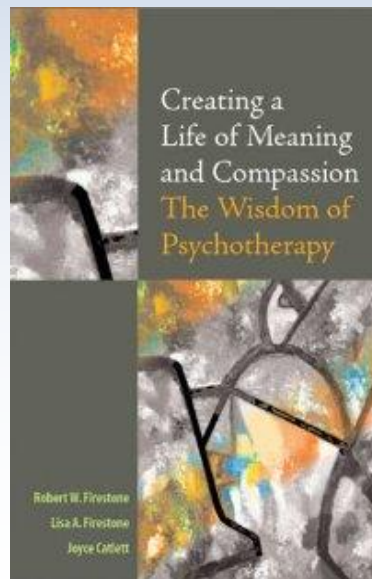
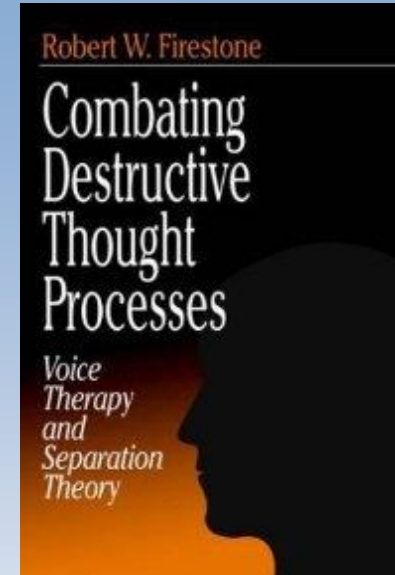
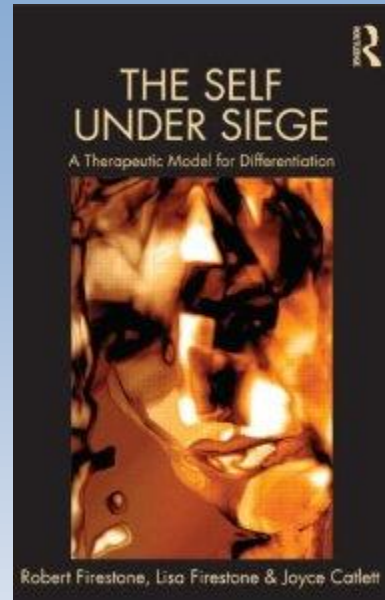
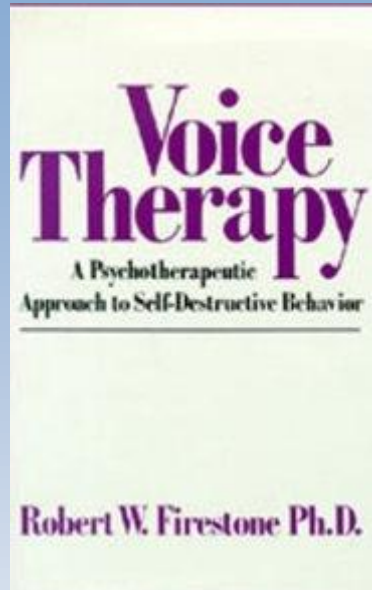
The Glendon Association

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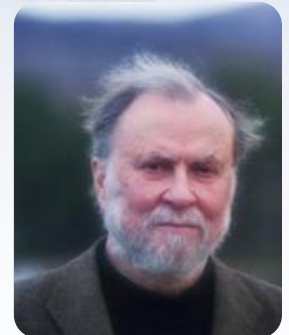
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