

# Live Your Life to the Fullest



Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

**Studies from the University of Pennsylvania show that the happiest people are those who seek meaning as opposed to immediate gratification or pleasure.**



# The Meaningful Life

## Stanford Study

*"The quest for meaning is a key part of what makes us human."*

- Satisfying desires was a reliable source of happiness but not for a sense of meaning.
- Happiness is about the present, and meaning is about linking the past, present and future.
- Connections are important both for meaning and happiness.
- Highly meaningful lives include many struggles and stresses.
- A life of meaning is more deeply tied to a valued sense of self and one's purpose in the larger context of life and community.

# The Meaningful Life

## Harvard's 75-Year Longitudinal Study



Relationships are the actors to have a meaningful life.

They don't correlate with happiness.

From the start, we can be happier.

Our work and relationships are essential to life.

Changes can have a significant effect on our overall well-being.

How do you live a life of  
meaning that has unique  
value to **you**?





# Differentiation





# 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.”

Robert Firestone, Ph.D.  
*The Self Under Siege*

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright orange-yellow disk on the horizon, with its light reflecting on the water. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with some clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# 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?



# What is a Differentiated Self?

- “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.



# Bowen's Differentiation of Self

- 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.

# Our Approach to Understanding People

## Each person is divided:

- One part wants to live and is goal directed and life-affirming.
- And one part is self-critical, self-hating and at its ultimate end, self-destructive. The nature and degree of this division varies for each individual.

**Real Self - Positive**



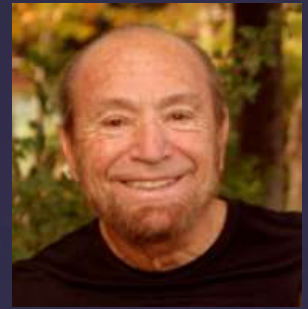
**Anti-Self - Destructive**





# 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



# The Core Conflict

## Undefended

Contending with emotional pain,  
both interpersonal and existential

Live with the pain of awareness,  
feeling integrated

Experiences all emotions, retaining  
the capacity to find happiness and  
joy in life

Better able to tolerate intimacy

More humane toward others

## Defended

Avoiding painful realities

Disengaging from self

Denial and escape to an  
unfeeling existence

Loss of personal identity,  
freedom and autonomy

More punitive toward others

# Definition of the Fantasy Bond

No parental environment is perfect and families vary considerably in terms of the emotional damage they impose on their offspring. The more trauma children experience, the more they rely on the fantasy bond, an imagined connection or fusion with the parent(s). In this sense, parental mis-attunement, particularly during the early developmental years, is a primary determinant of how much an individual will suffer from the presence of psychopathology and from an inability to differentiate.

*The Self Under Siege (2013)*



# 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.





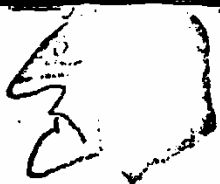


*"To this day, I can hear my mother's voice—harsh, accusing. 'Lost your mittens? You naughty kittens! Then you shall have no pie!'"*

# FEIFFER

by JULES FEIFFER

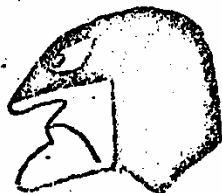
I AM A CRITIC.



I AM NOT A BOOK, ART  
THEATRE, FILM, MUSIC  
OR DANCE CRITIC.



I AM A  
BERNARD  
CRITIC.



A RESIDENT CRITIC WORKING  
INSIDE THE HEAD OF A BERNARD.



HE WAKES UP I TELL HIM,  
"YOU'RE LATE." AT THE OF-  
FICE I TELL HIM "YOU'RE  
BEHIND." AT DINNER PARTIES  
I TELL HIM,  
"YOU'RE  
BORING."



WHEN HE FALLS IN  
LOVE I TELL HIM,  
"YOU'RE NOT GOOD  
ENOUGH."



ON OCCASION HE CAN'T  
TAKE ANY MORE RE-  
VIEWS AND ORDERS  
ME OUT OF HIS HEAD.



SO I RIP OFF MY  
MASK AND SAY,  
"IS THAT THE WAY TO  
TALK TO YOUR  
MOTHER?"



CRITIC: JULES FEIFFER

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE 1977

# 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.”**





# 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 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.

## 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.



## 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...





# Saying Goodbye to Your Parent

- Picture each of your parents sitting in front of you.
- Describe your experience of each of them when you were a child.
- Say goodbye to them as a parent.
  - *“I don’t need you anymore as a parent.”*
  - *“I’m an adult.”*
  - *“I’m a separate person from you.”*



# 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.”**



# A Conversation with Your Child Self

- Picture your child self sitting in front of you.
- Describe how you see that child from an objective and compassionate point of view.
- Acknowledge that you're no longer that child.



When you recognize that you are no longer that child you can let go of taking care of that child in yourself and live in an adult mode appropriate to your current life.



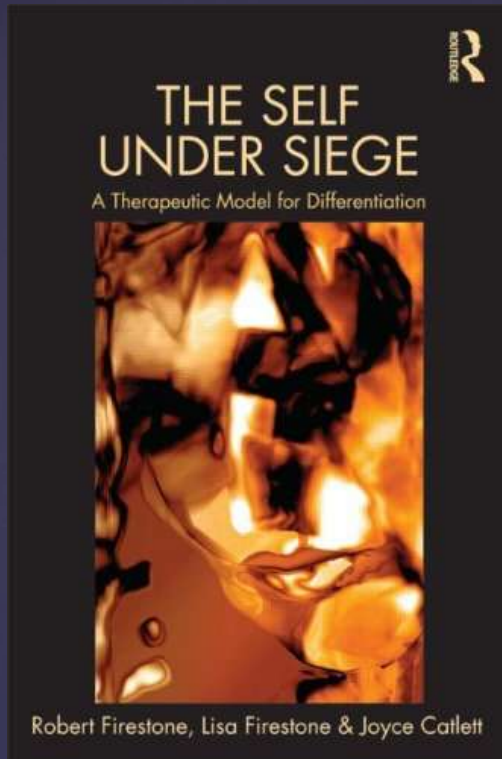
## **Most people either:**

**Are compliant and rarely deviate from the beliefs and opinions held by their parents and tend to live conventional and predictable lives.**

**OR**

**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.**





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.”**



**Child Self**



**Real Self**



**Parent Self**



# 5 Aspects to Being an Adult

**There are five major aspects of the adult approach to life:**

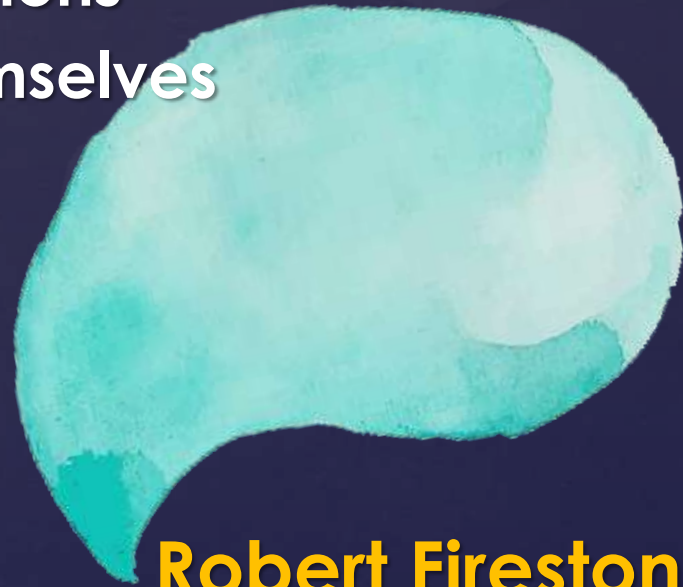
1. Rationality
2. Equality in Relationships
3. Active Versus Passive Attitude
4. Non-defensiveness and Openness
5. Personal Power





# What is a Mentally Healthy Person?

- Has a strong sense of values that are inner directed, rather than outer directed
- Is neither defiant nor submissive, but independent
- Experiences their emotions but makes rational decisions when it comes to their actions
- Has a strong sense of themselves
- Can deal with feelings
- Is non-defensive



**Robert Firestone, Ph.D.**

# What is a Mentally Healthy Person?

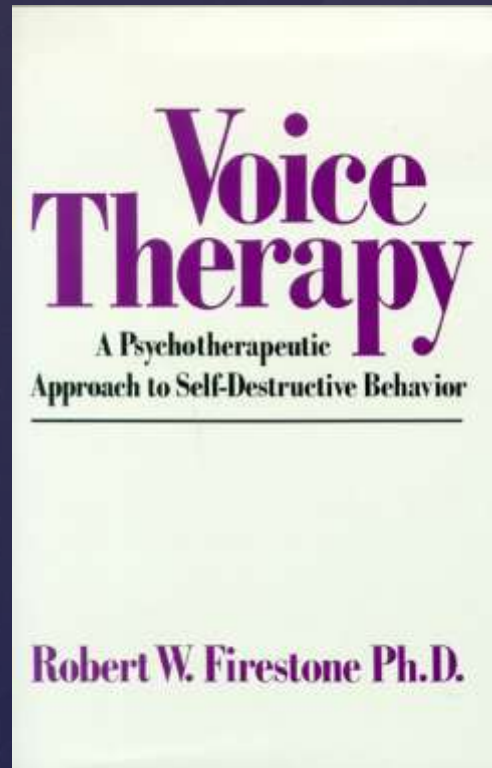
- The capacity to be compassionate
- The capacity to deal with abstract reasoning
- The capacity to be creative
- The capacity to express their uniqueness



**Robert Firestone, Ph.D.**

# Voice Therapy

Cognitive/ Affective/ Behavioral Approach



# Identify Your Critical Inner Voice

1. Recognize the events that trigger your critical inner voice
2. Recognize the specific outside criticisms that support your Critical Inner Voice
3. Become aware of times you may be projecting your self-attacks onto other people
4. Notice changes in your mood





# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step 1

- The person articulates his or her self-attacks in the second person and expresses any feelings that arise.



# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step II

- The person discusses reactions to saying their voices.
- The person tries to understand the relationship between these attacks and early life experiences.



# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step III

- The person answers back to the voice attacks.
- The person makes a rational statement about how he or she really is.



# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step IV

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





# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step V

- The person collaborates with the therapist to plan changes in these behaviors.
- The person is encouraged to not engage in self-destructive behaviors and to increase the positive behaviors these negative thoughts discourage.



If you are interested in attending a voice therapy training or in getting training materials please contact [jina@glendon.org](mailto:jina@glendon.org) or visit [www.glendon.org](http://www.glendon.org).

# Self



# Anti-Self

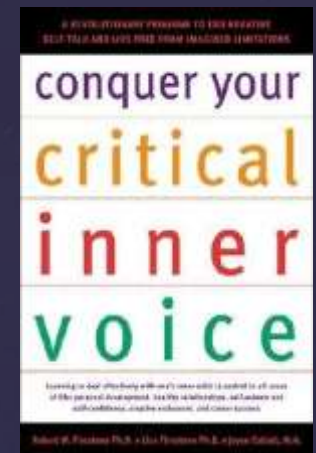


# Who is the Real You?

- Times when you notice you feel the most yourself.
- Times when you notice yourself following in the footsteps of others (i.e. of parents or other influential figures).
- What are the things that light you up?
- What are the things you do to please or conform to the standards of others?
- Are there areas of your life in which you act either childish or parental?
- At what times do you lose your own point of view?

# Your Critical Inner Voice Attacks

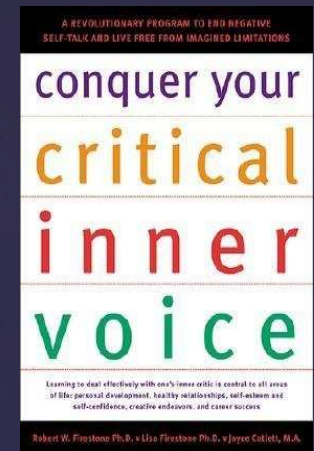
## From Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice



1. Draw a vertical line, splitting the page into two columns.
2. On the left side, write both your self-critical and self-soothing attacks as “I” statements.
  - *“I don’t think I’m an attractive person.”*
  - *“I should just have another drink. I deserve it.”*
3. On the right side of the page, change this statement to the second person, as a “you” statement.
  - *“You are not attractive.”*
  - *“You should just have another drink.”*



# Your Critical Inner Voice Vs. The Real You



1. Draw a vertical line, splitting the page into two columns.
2. On the left side, write both your self-critical and self-soothing attacks as “you” statements.
  - *“You’re so stupid.”*
  - *“Don’t go out tonight. You’re fine on your own.”*
3. On the right side of the page, write a more compassionate point of view that represents the real you as an “I” statement.
  - *“I struggle at work at times, but I learn fast and usually do a good job.”*
  - *“I don’t want to be shy and isolated. I want to push myself and meet people.”*



# Identifying Your Core Trigger, the Underlying Emotions

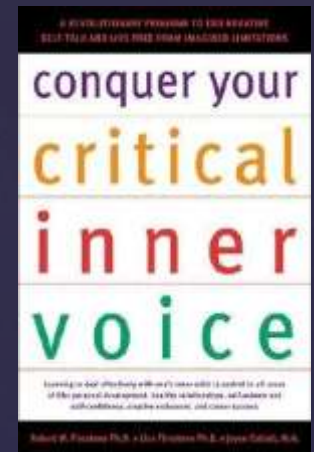
Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up for you in moments when you are triggered. This is often some kind of core fear or feeling about yourself, deeply rooted in your past. It may be some kind of anguish or hurt.

Lonely  
Overwhelmed  
Hurt  
Intimidated  
Rejected  
Sad  
Lost/Confused

Let down  
Vulnerable  
Worried/Shaky  
Unimportant  
Scared  
Hopeless  
Panicked

Inadequate  
Failing/Ashamed  
Humiliated  
Small/Insignificant  
Unwanted/ Dismissed  
Helpless

# A Plan for Action



1. Write down actions that are dictated by your critical inner voice.
2. Identify ways you reenact or react to negative traits in your parents or other influential early caretakers in your current life.
3. On the right side of the page, write actions to take that reflect the real you.

# Interpersonal Neurobiology



**C**urious

**O**pen

**A**ccepting

**L**oving





# Self-Compassion

*“Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering”*

**From Kristin Neff:**

Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.

**Three Elements:**

1. **Self-kindness** Vs. Self-judgment
2. **Mindfulness** Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. **Common humanity** Vs. Isolation

**Source:** <http://www.self-compassion.org/>





# Studies show that self-compassion has a significant positive association with:

- ✓ Happiness
- ✓ Optimism
- ✓ Positive affect
- ✓ Wisdom
- ✓ Personal initiative
- ✓ Curiosity and exploration
- ✓ Agreeableness
- ✓ Conscientiousness
- ✓ Extroversion



# The Value of Mindfulness





# What Gives Your Life Meaning?

- What did your parents think gave life meaning?
- Name three areas that you feel give your life meaning.
- What about these things matter to you/ light you up?
- How could you do these things more justice in your life?



# Build a Transformation Team



Individuals can change their lives significantly. Change is often facilitated when a person has the support of other people. It is important, however, to select your transformation team carefully.

- Think about the people - friends, family members and co-workers - that you feel good being around. Are these people supportive of your making the changes you want to make?
  - ✓ List their names and describe their qualities.
- Think about those people that you don't feel so good being around. For example, a friend who offers you unwanted advice.
  - ✓ List their names.
- Think about the toxic traits and behaviors that these people may possess.
  - ✓ List these qualities.



# Actions to Build a Transformation Team

## Take action!

### Action 1:

1. Make a plan to spend more time with the people who make you feel good.
2. Think of activities you might share with these people.
3. Think of steps you could take toward this goal.

- STEPS IN YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

### Action 2:

- Describe the steps that you plan to take to recruit a friend (supportive person) to talk with from time to time on a one-to-one basis.

- STEPS IN YOUR PLAN OF ACTION:

# 5 Steps to Live Your Life to the Fullest

1. Be open to feedback.
2. Take note of times you are triggered. Get to know your patterns.
3. Make a conscious effort to act differently.
4. Push past the anxiety that arises when changing a behavior.
5. Have empathy for yourself as you challenge these deep, emotional ties.



# Excitement? Anxiety?



Same physical feeling

# Dimensions of a Meaningful Life

- ✓ Formulate one's own values and ethical principles
- ✓ Formulate and take action to achieve meaningful goals
- ✓ Develop one's capacity for love, empathy and compassion: learn to give and accept love
- ✓ Develop more integrity, honesty, independence, tolerance and inclusiveness





# Dimensions of a Meaningful Life

- ✓ Create transcendent goals
- ✓ Practice being generous in all your relationships
- ✓ Compose a life story or narrative
- ✓ Become aware of existential realities
- ✓ Develop a spiritual perspective and appreciate the mystery of existence





# Guidelines for Continued Personal Development

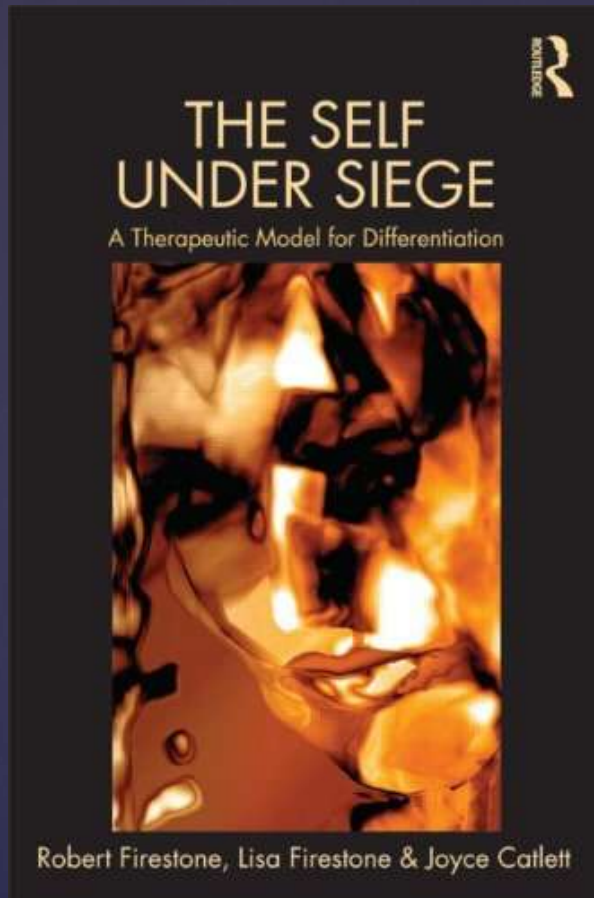
- ✓ Be aware of the fear that accompanies change
- ✓ Realize that psychological pain is valid
- ✓ Develop a more realistic view of your parents
- ✓ Differentiation – unlearn old behaviors, learn new behaviors
- ✓ Become more aware of specific defenses against feeling
- ✓ Recognize the value of friendship



**“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.”**

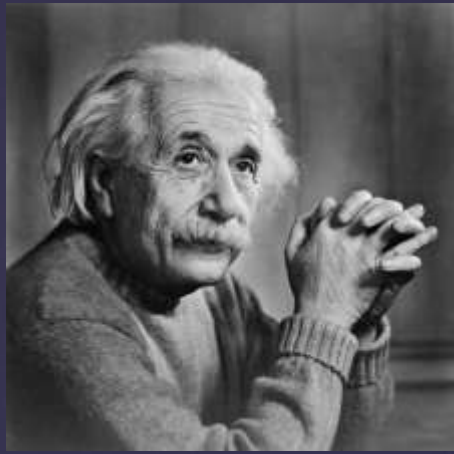
**Robert Firestone, Ph.D.**





- “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.”

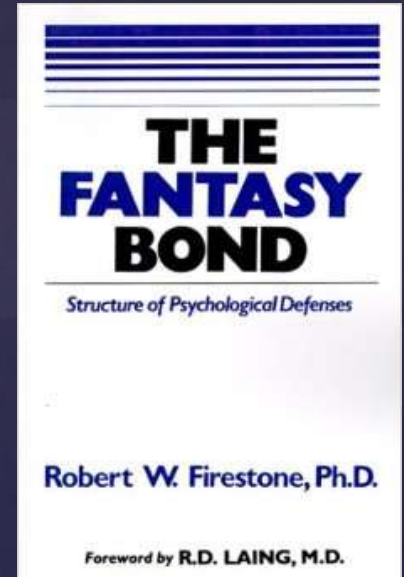
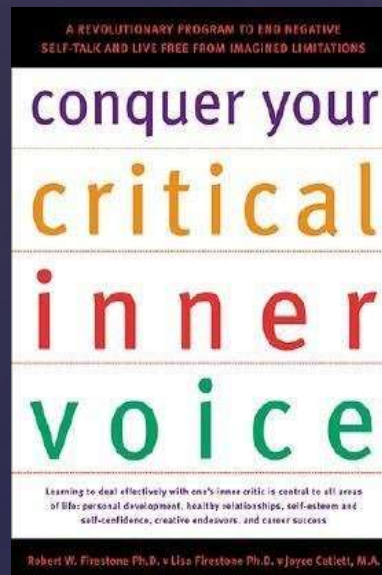
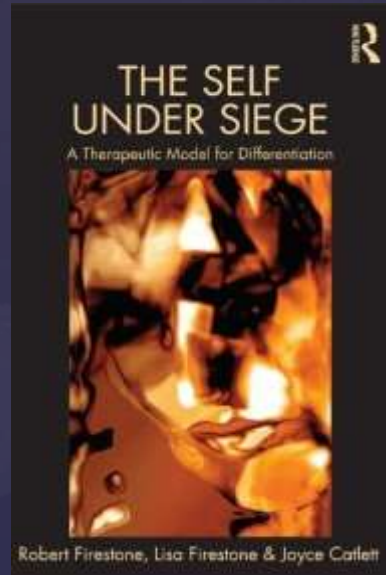
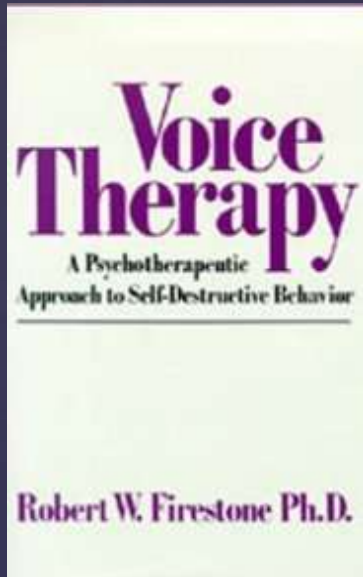
[The Self Under Siege, Routledge, 2012](#)



*"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: Books



See all book titles at [PsychAlive.org](http://PsychAlive.org)



# eCourses



**Become Your True Self:**  
A Therapeutic Model for Differentiation



**Overcome Your Inner Critic:**  
How to Free Yourself from Imagined Limitations



**Creating Your Ideal Relationship:**  
How to Find and Achieve the Love You Say You Want



**Compassionate Parenting:**  
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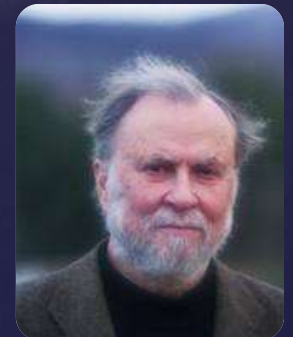
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