



Overcoming the Fear of Intimacy

with Dr. Lisa Firestone

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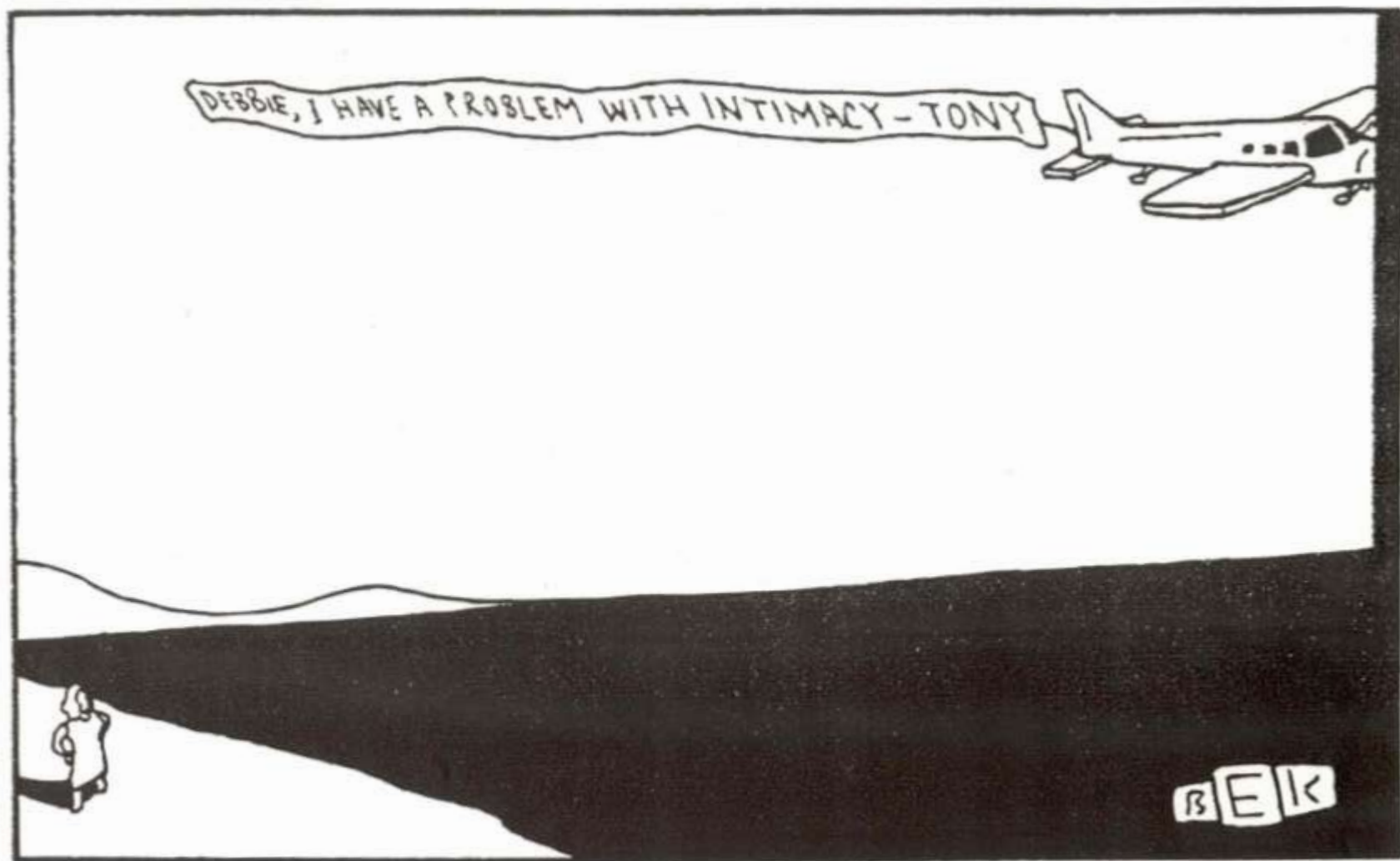


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A 75-year study at Harvard University found one true key to a happy and fulfilling life...

LOVE

Dr. George Vaillant's two ingredients for a happy existence:

LOVE +

“finding a way of coping with life that does not push love away”

So, why is it that we push love away?





Fear of Intimacy



Interpersonal relationships are the ultimate source of happiness or misery. Love has the potential to generate intense pleasure and fulfillment or produce considerable pain and suffering.

- From Sex & Love in Intimate Relationships

What is the Fear of Intimacy?



What is the Fear of Intimacy?



Most people say that they are seeking love, yet they often find it difficult to accept being loved and acknowledged for who they really are.

What is the Fear of Intimacy?

We may be tolerant of realizing our dreams and desires in fantasy, but very often we are intolerant of having them fulfilled in reality.



What is the Fear of Intimacy?

- “Love—kindness, affection, sensitive attunement, respect, companionship—is not only difficult to find, but is even more challenging for many people to accept and tolerate. ”
- Many people are unaware that being loved or especially valued makes them feel angry and withholding.



Three Parts to this Webinar

Part 1

Where does fear of intimacy come from?

Part 2

What does the fear of intimacy look like?

Part 3

How can you overcome fear of intimacy?



Part 1: Where does fear of intimacy come from?



Reasons We Defend Against Love

What are we afraid of?



Arouses anxiety
and makes us feel
vulnerable



Arouses sadness
and painful
feelings from the
past



Provokes a painful
identity crisis



Disconnects
people from a
“fantasy bond”
with their parents



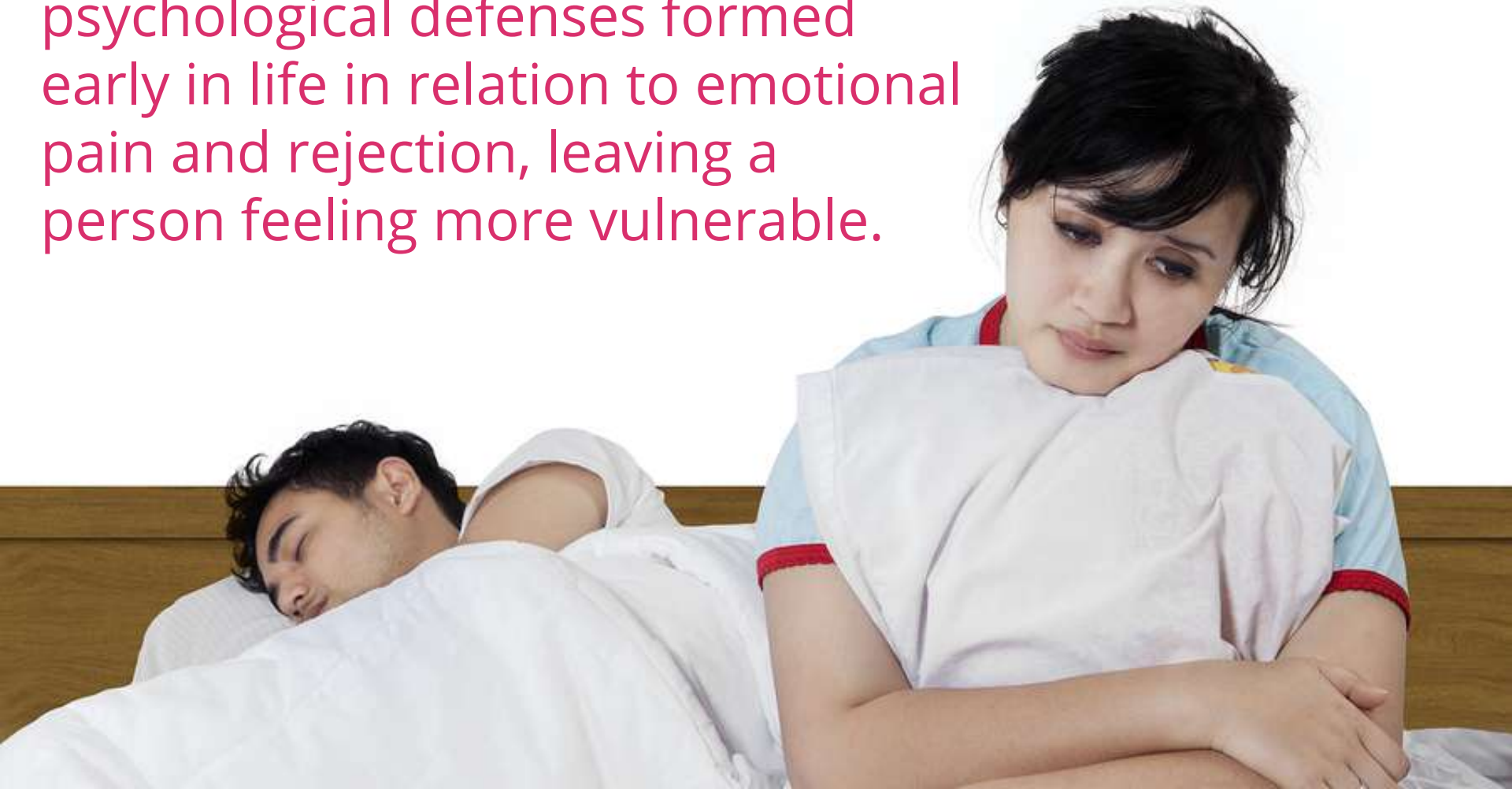
Arouses guilt in
relation to
surpassing a
parent



Stirs up painful
existential issues

Real love makes us feel anxious and vulnerable

Love threatens longstanding psychological defenses formed early in life in relation to emotional pain and rejection, leaving a person feeling more vulnerable.



Real love makes us feel anxious and vulnerable

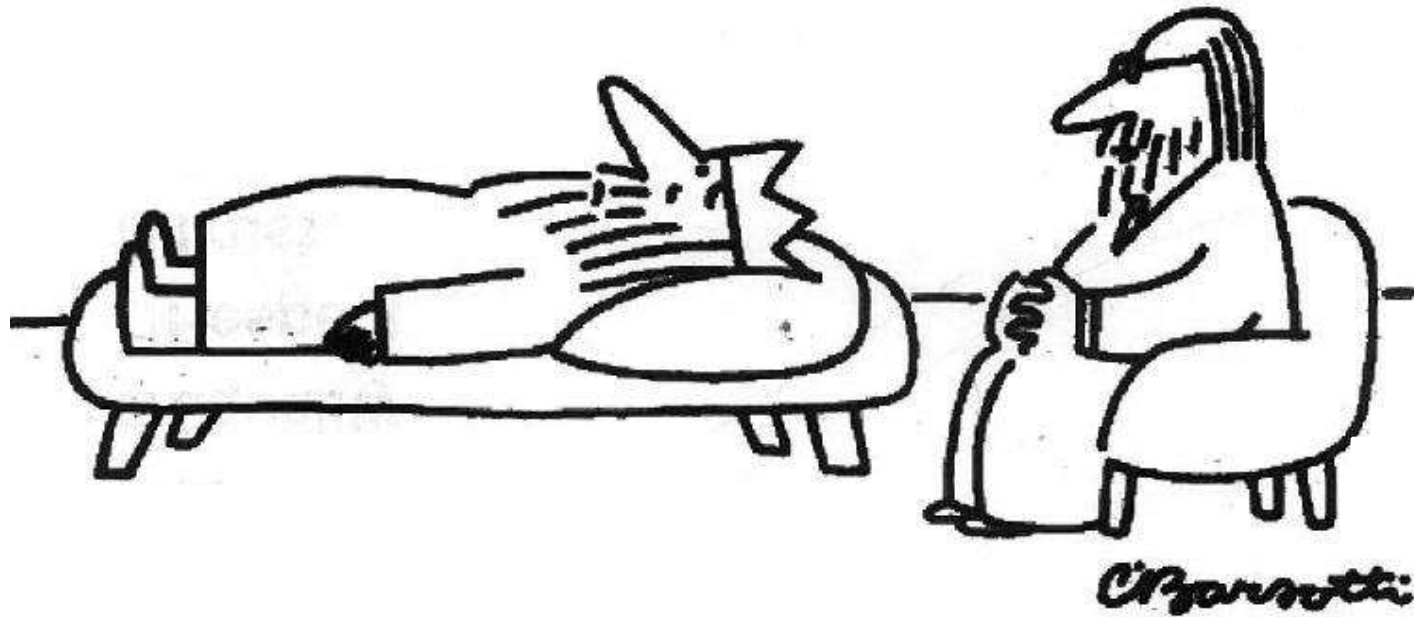
- Letting ourselves fall in love means taking a risk.
- A new relationship is uncharted territory, and most of us have natural fears of the unknown.
- We're trusting another person, which makes us feel exposed and vulnerable.
- We tend to believe that the more we care, the more we can get hurt.





Don't get too close.

People just wind up getting hurt.



"Enemies, yes, but doesn't your moat also keep out love?"



Why do we push love away?

On an unconscious level, we may sense that if we did not push love away, the whole world as we have experienced it would be shattered, and we would not know who we were.

Psychological Defenses

- ◇ Being loved by someone we love and admire threatens our defenses.
- ◇ Habits we've long had that allow us to feel safe, self-focused or self-contained
- ◇ Adaptations to our early environment that aren't adaptive in our adult lives

Real love stirs arouses sadness from the past

- The ways we were hurt in previous relationships, starting from our childhood, have a strong influence on:
 - Why we choose the partners we do
 - How we perceive the people we get close to
 - How we act in our romantic relationships
- Old, negative dynamics may make us wary of opening ourselves up to someone new.
- We may steer away from intimacy, because it stirs up feelings of hurt, loss, anger or rejection.



Love stirs up past pain



“When you long for something, like love, it becomes associated with pain,” the pain you felt at not having it in the past.

. - Pat Love, Ph.D., Author [The Truth About Love](#)

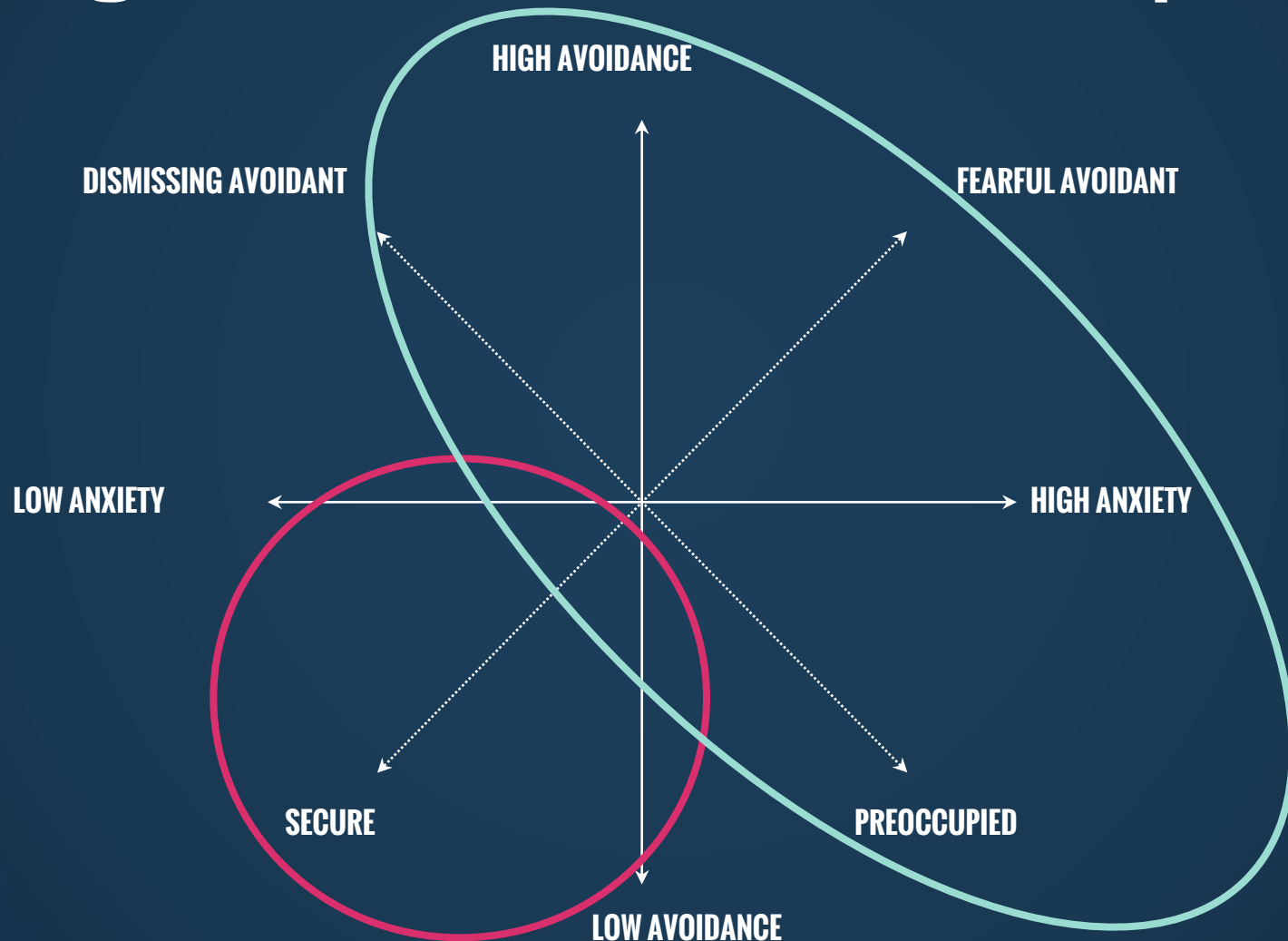
Attachment Theory and Research

“Attachment underlies later capacity to make effectual bonds,” particularly with marital bonds and trouble parenting.



From “Attachment Theory and Research: Implications for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy”
http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-60761-792-1_24#page-1

Adult attachment 'styles': *Regions* in a two-dimensional space



*From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.
Adapted from Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991), Fraley & Shaver (2000)*

Love provokes a painful identity crisis

- **Both giving and receiving love tend to disrupt the negative, yet familiar, ways we have of thinking about ourselves.**
- **Many of us struggle with underlying feelings of being unlovable.**
- **We have trouble feeling our own value and believing anyone could really care for us.**

*But I said "yes"!
What's wrong?*

*It's the sudden change.
I'm accustomed to
being rejected.*



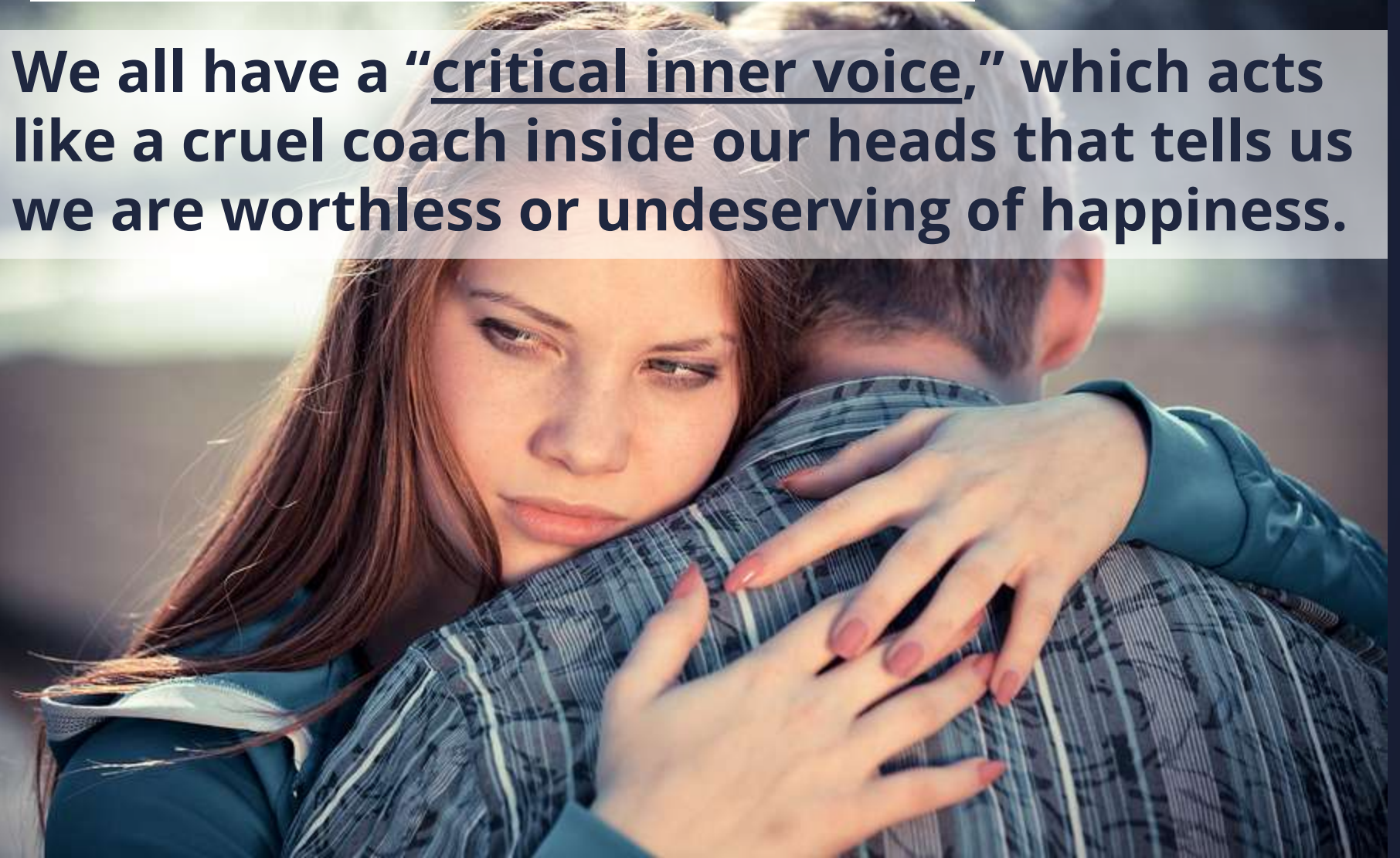
Maintain Self-Critical Attitudes



We feel like the “bad kid” to justify how we were treated and to maintain sense of control.

The Critical Inner Voice

We all have a “critical inner voice,” which acts like a cruel coach inside our heads that tells us we are worthless or undeserving of happiness.



What is the Critical Inner Voice?

- ❑ The critical inner voice refers to a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward our selves and others. The “voices” that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our maladaptive behavior.
- ❑ This internal enemy fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities.
- ❑ The critical inner voice effects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, and most importantly, our personal and intimate relationships.

Common “Voices” in Relationships

Voices About Yourself:

- You'll never find someone who understands you.
- Don't get too hooked on her.
- He doesn't really care about you.
- She is too good for you.
- You've got to keep him interested.
- As soon as she gets to know you, she'll reject you.
- You've got to be in control.
- It's your fault if he gets upset.
- Don't be too vulnerable, or you'll just wind up getting hurt.

You're
better off on
your own.



Common “Voices” in Relationships

Voices About Your Partner:

- Men are so insensitive, unreliable, selfish.
- Women are so fragile, needy, indirect.
- He only cares about being with his friends.
- Why get so excited? What’s so great about her anyway?
- He’s probably cheating on you.
- He just can’t get anything right.

She’s so dramatic!

You can’t trust him.



Voices about Relationships:

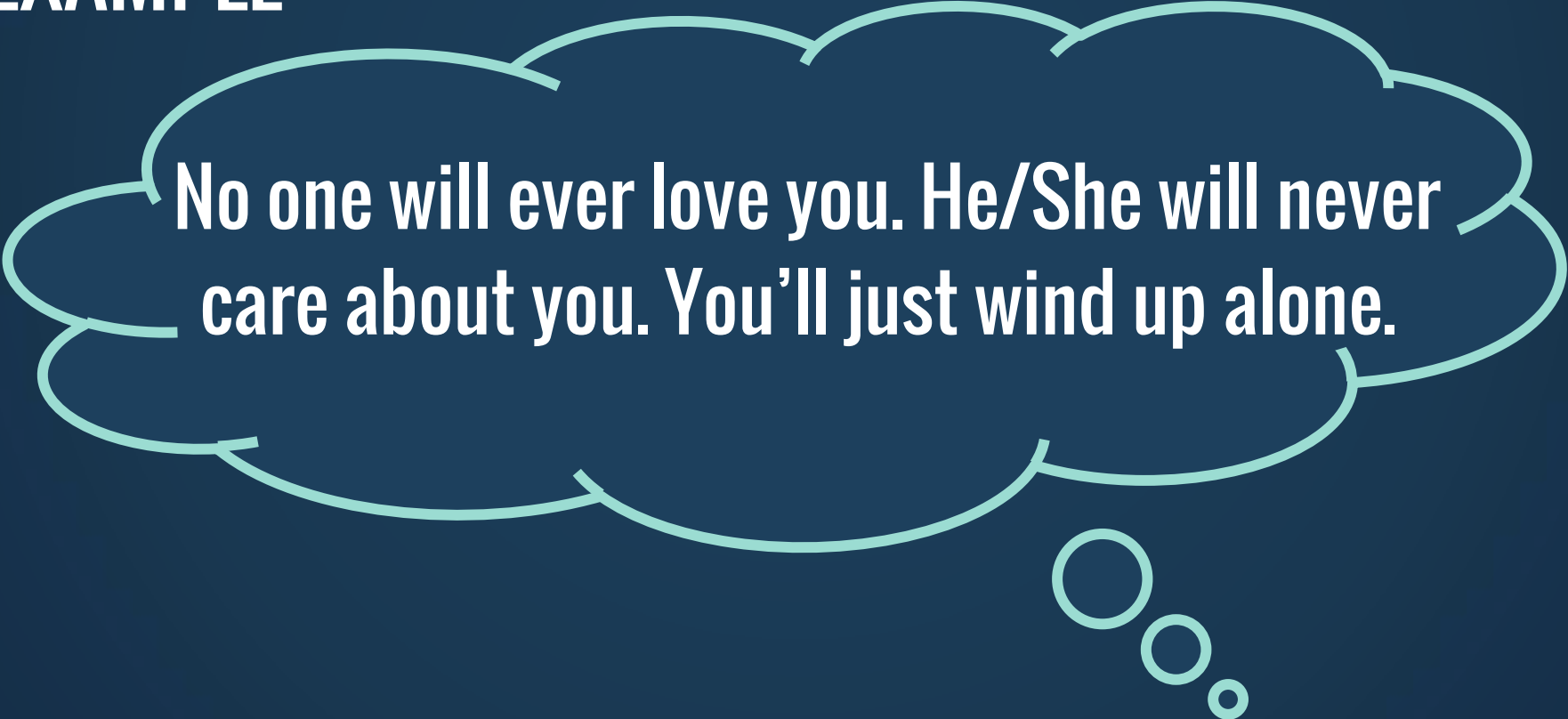


**Relationships never work out.
People always just wind up getting hurt.**

How the Voice Process Impacts Relationships

Self-Punishing Voice Process in Relationships:

EXAMPLE:

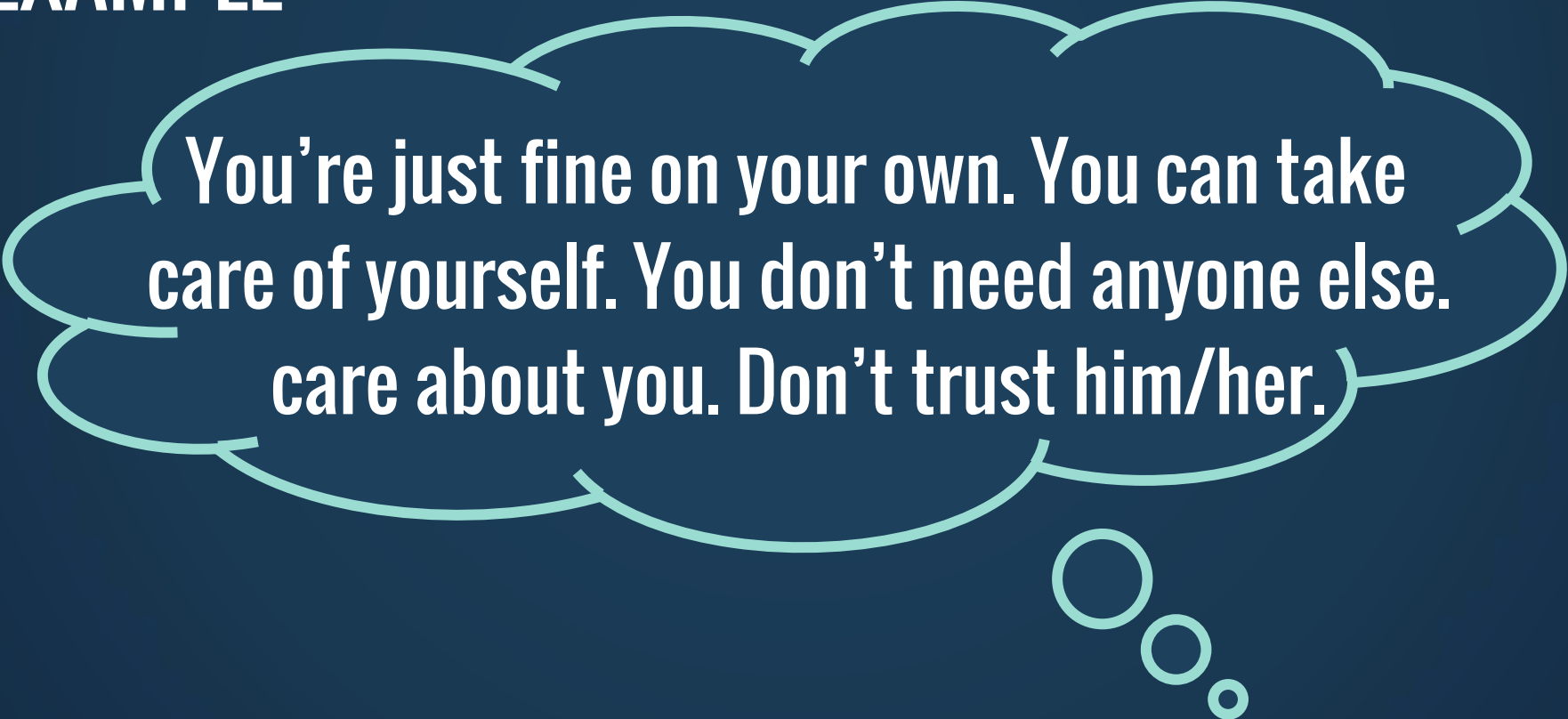


No one will ever love you. He/She will never care about you. You'll just wind up alone.

How the Voice Process Impacts Relationships

Self-Soothing Voice Process in Relationships:

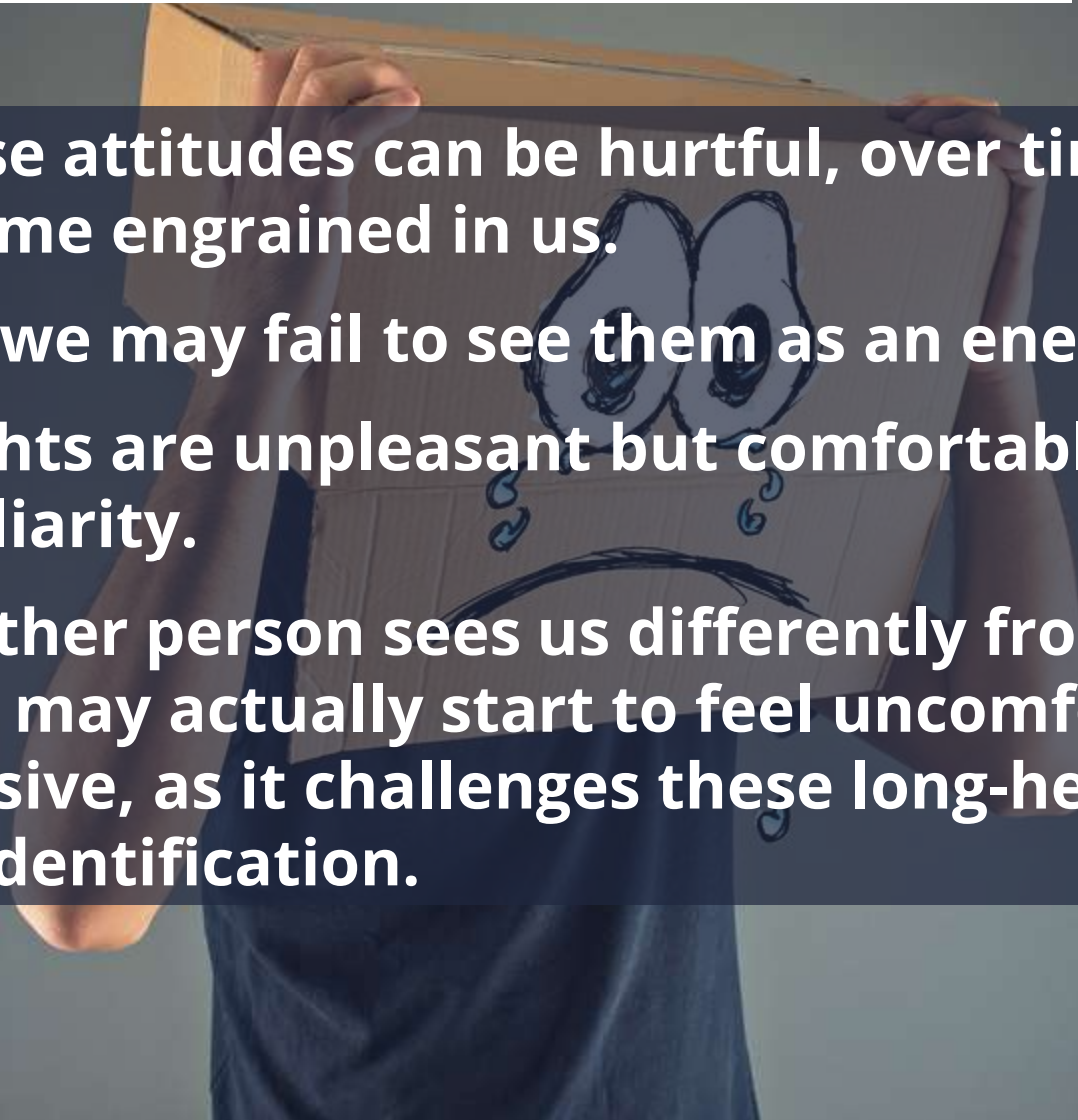
EXAMPLE:



You're just fine on your own. You can take care of yourself. You don't need anyone else. care about you. Don't trust him/her.

Why do we listen to our inner critic?

- While these attitudes can be hurtful, over time, they have become engrained in us.
- As adults, we may fail to see them as an enemy.
- The thoughts are unpleasant but comfortable in their familiarity.
- When another person sees us differently from our voices, we may actually start to feel uncomfortable and defensive, as it challenges these long-held points of identification.



Love breaks a “Fantasy Bond” with our parents

Relationships:

- Ultimate symbol of growing up
- Represent starting our own lives
- Symbolize a parting from our family
- Letting go on an emotional level
- Differentiating from negative dynamics that plagued our early relationships and shaped our identity

Separation Theory

Robert Firestone. Ph.D.



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

Love stirs up existential fears

We are rarely fully aware of how we defend against these existential fears. We may even try to rationalize to ourselves a million reasons we shouldn't be in the relationship. However, the reasons we give may have workable solutions, and what's really driving us are those deeper fears of loss.



Love arouses guilt in surpassing a parent



With real joy comes real pain

- Any time we fully experience true joy or feel the preciousness of life on an emotional level, we can expect to feel a great amount of sadness.
- Many of us shy away from the things that would make us happiest, because they also make us feel pain.
- We cannot selectively numb ourselves to sadness without numbing ourselves to joy. When it comes to falling in love, we may be hesitant to go “all in,” for fear of the sadness it would stir up in us.



Kiss of the Porcupine



Part 2: What does fear of intimacy look like?



What does fear of intimacy look like?



Behavior Patterns



Selection/ Distortion/ Provocation



Attachment Styles



The Fantasy Bond

Behavior Patterns: Ways We Defend Against Love

In Relationships:

- Play the victim
- Withhold (interest, affection, sexuality, shared activities)
- Lash out/ pick fights/push away partner
- Shut down
- Distort
- Project
- Withdraw into fantasy (form over substance)
- Become critical of our partner

Behavior Patterns: Ways We Defend Against Love

When Single:

- Keep ourselves out of reach
- Feel like we aren't good enough
- Isolate ourselves
- Fail to be open
- Criticize all possible choices

Factors that Contribute to Relationship Distress

✓ Selection



✓ Distortion



✓ Provocation







“I know. But I think I can change him.”

*And then a horrible ogre came along — you
know the type: weak chin, thinning hair...*





"When I fell in love with you, suddenly your eyes didn't seem close together, now they seem close together again."

Kiss me.

Again? I kissed
you three times
last week.





“You may well be from Mars, but the children and I are still from Westchester.”

Attachment and Relationships

- Many studies have shown that attachment anxiety and avoidance are related to deficits in caring for relationship partners and engaging in altruistic behavior more generally (e.g., Kuncle & Shaver, 1994; Gillath et al., 2005).
- Anxious people tend to be self-focused when engaged in supposedly caring/altruistic actions, leading to intrusiveness, poor assessment of others' actual needs, and personal distress.
- Avoidant people tend to be less interested in helping others and to derogate needy others. They are relatively deficient in the domain of compassion and love.

A close-up photograph of a man and a woman smiling and looking at each other. The man is on the left, wearing a grey sweater, and the woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Is Your Attachment Style Affecting Your Relationship?

Secure Attachment: Securely attached adults tend to be more satisfied in their relationships.

Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment: People with an anxious attachment tend to be desperate to form a fantasy bond. Instead of feeling real love or trust toward their partner, they often feel emotional hunger.

Is Your Attachment Style Affecting Your Relationship?

A man and a woman are seated at a table, viewed from behind. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The man on the right has short dark hair and is wearing a dark, textured sweater over a red and black plaid shirt. They are both looking towards a light-colored screen or wall that occupies the background.

Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment: People with a dismissive-avoidant attachment have the tendency to emotionally distance themselves from their partner. They're often the other half of a Fantasy Bond.

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment: People with a fearful-avoidant attachment live in an ambivalent state in which they're afraid of being too close to or too distant from others.

Formation of a Fantasy Bond



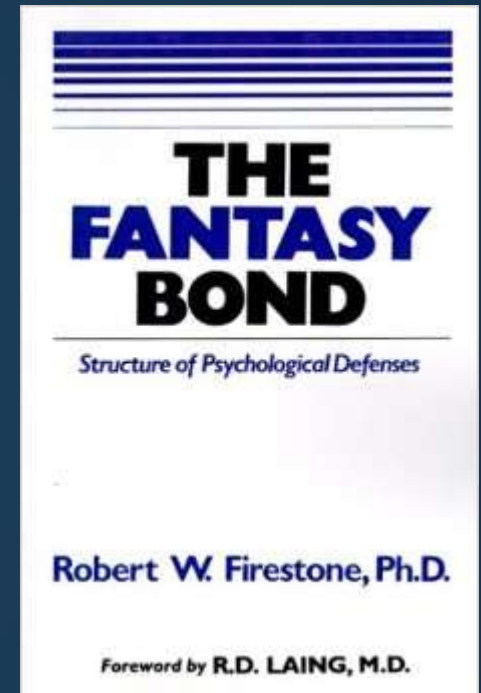
◆ A “fantasy bond” describes an illusion of connection between a couple that is substituted for feelings of real love and intimacy.

◆ Forming a fantasy bond is an often unconscious act of self-parenting and self-protection, in which two people become pseudo-independent, replacing the real relating involved in being in love with the form of being a “couple.”

◆ The degree of reliance on a fantasy bond is proportional to the degree of frustration and pain experienced in a person’s developmental years.

From *The Fantasy Bond*

Most people have a fear of intimacy and at the same time are terrified of being alone. Their solution is to form a fantasy bond – an illusion of connection and closeness – that allows them to maintain emotional distance while assuaging loneliness and, in the process, meeting society's expectations regarding marriage and family.



Manifestations of a Fantasy Bond

- Withholding
- Polarization of parent-child ego states
- Idealization/denigration of the other
- Loss of independence
- Form versus substance



Couple Interactions Chart

Interactions in an Ideal Relationship

Nondefensiveness and openness

Open to trying anything within reason

Honesty and integrity

Respect for the other's boundaries, priorities and goals, separate from self

Physical affection and personal sexuality

Understanding—lack of distortion of the other

Noncontrolling, nonmanipulative, and nonthreatening

Interactions in a Relationship Characterized by a Fantasy Bond

Angry reactions to feedback

Closed to new experiences

Deception and duplicity

Overstepping boundaries. Other seen only in relation to self

Lack of affection; inadequate or impersonal, routine sexuality

Misunderstanding—distortion of the other

Manipulations of dominance and submission

Couple Interactions Chart

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Interactions in a Relationship Characterized by a Fantasy Bond

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Interactions in a Relationship Characterized by a Fantasy Bond

Lack of affection, inadequate or impersonal, routine sexuality



Couple Interactions Chart

Interactions in an Ideal Relationship

**Understanding -
lack of distortion
of the other**



**Interactions in a Relationship
Characterized by a Fantasy Bond**

**Misunderstanding -
distortion of the other**



Couple Interactions Chart

Interactions in an Ideal Relationship

**Noncontrolling,
nonmanipulative
and nonthreatening**



**Interactions in a Relationship
Characterized by a Fantasy Bond**

**Manipulations of
dominance
and submission**





Part 3: How can you overcome fear of intimacy?





"Before you chop off my head, don't you think we should see a counsellor?"

The Importance of Connection

Studies show that love and relationships lead to:

1. Faster healing
2. Reduced pain
3. A sharper mind
4. More success
(as a leader and in business)
5. Decreased stress
6. Increased happiness
7. Longer lives



Romantic Love

vs. Passionate or Companion-like Love

- “Romantic love,” characterized by “intensity, engagement and sexual intimacy, emotional satisfaction, well-being, and happiness.”
 - “Passionate love is characterized by intense feelings as well as physical attraction. It is often associated with anxiety and is more likely to occur in short-term relationships.”
 - “Companion-like love is characterized by moderate satisfaction in both short-term and long-term relationships.”
- Researcher Bianca P. Acevedo, Ph.D.**
- Romantic love can last in a long-term relationship and keep both people happy.

Our Definition of Love

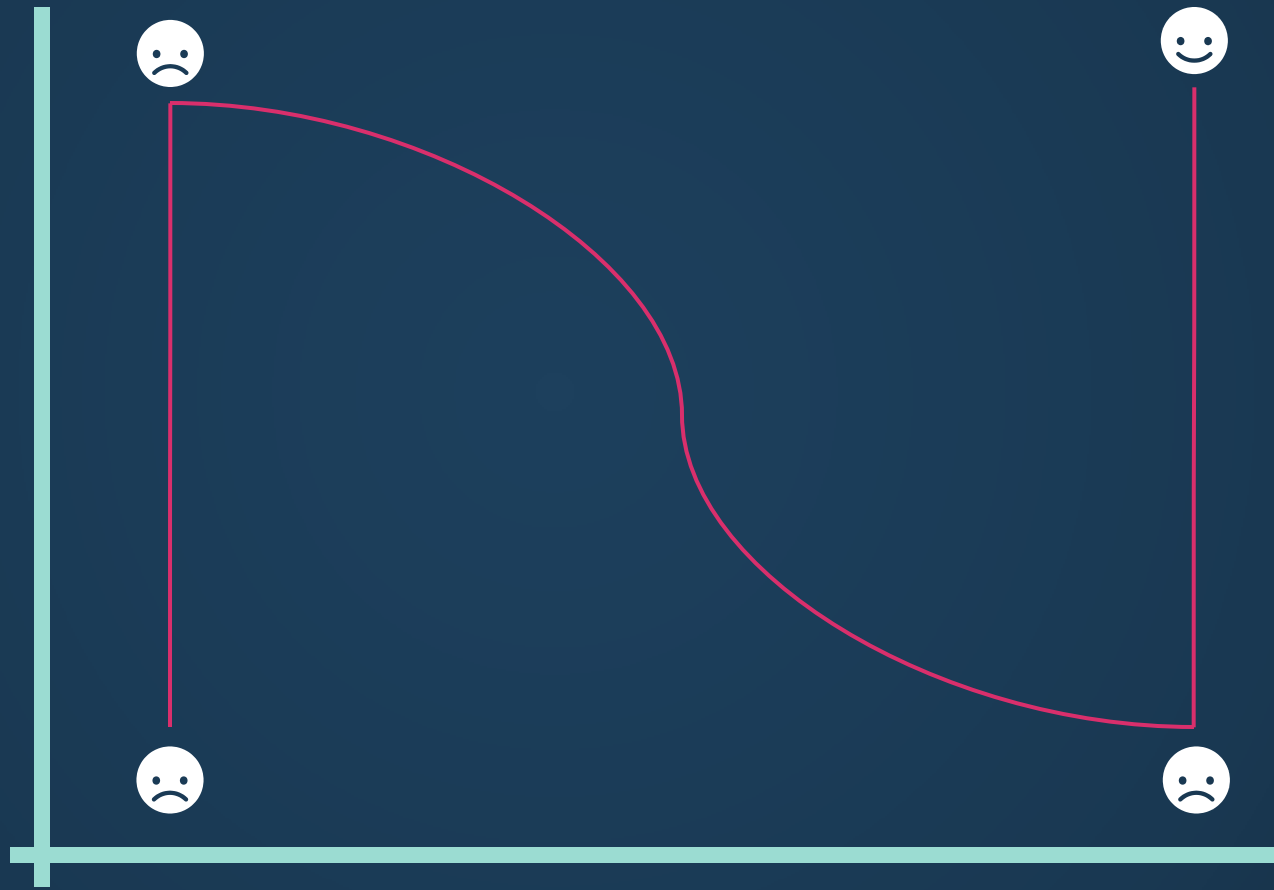
“Defining love in behavioral terms is a challenging undertaking.”

◇ “In our view, actions that fit the description of a loving relationship are expressions of affection, both physical and emotional; a wish to offer pleasure and satisfaction to one’s mate; tenderness, compassion, and sensitivity to the needs of the other; a desire for shared activities and pursuits; an appropriate level of sharing of one’s possessions; an ongoing, honest exchange of personal feelings; and the process of offering concern, comfort, and outward assistance for the loved one’s aspirations.”

◇ “Love includes feeling for the other that goes beyond a selfish or self-centered interest in the loved one. As such, love nurtures and has a positive effect on each person’s self-esteem and sense of well-being. Love is truth and never involves deception, because misleading another person fractures his or her sense of reality and is therefore a serious human rights violation that adversely affects mental health.”

Differentiation and Linkage

Linkage
(emotional
closeness)



Differentiation
(individuation as an individual)

Behavioral Checklist for Partners

Describe yourself and your partner along these dimensions on a scale of 1 to 5:

1. Does not describe me/does not describe partner at this time.
2. Describes me on infrequent occasions/describes partner on infrequent occasions.
3. Describes how I am some of the time/describes how my partner is some of the time.
4. Describes how I frequently am/describes how my partner frequently is.
5. Describes me most or all of the time/describes my partner most or all of the time.

non-defensive and open (able to listen to feedback without overreacting/open to new experiences):

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

respect for other's boundaries:

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

vulnerable (willing to feel sad, acknowledge hurt feelings, etc.):

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

honest (straightforward, non-deceptive):

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

physically affectionate:

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

sexuality (satisfied with sexual relationship):

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

empathic and understanding (lack of distortion of the other):

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

communication (sense of shared meaning, feel understood):

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

non-controlling, non-manipulative, and non-threatening:

Self: 1 2 3 4 5 / Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

How would you rate yourself along these dimensions?

sense of well-being:

1 2 3 4 5

self-confidence:

1 2 3 4 5

optimism:

1 2 3 4 5

Behavioral Checklist for Therapists

Describe each partner along these dimensions on a scale of 1 to 5:

- 1. Does not describe this person at this time.
- 2. Describes me on infrequent occasions/describes partner on infrequent occasions.
- 3. Describes how this person is some of the time.
- 4. Describes how this person frequently is.
- 5. Describes this person most or all of the time.

non-defensive and open (able to listen to feedback without overreacting/open to new experiences):

First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5
respect for other's boundaries:												
First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5 vulnerable

(willing to feel sad, acknowledge hurt feelings, etc.):

First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5
honest (straightforward, non-deceptive):												
First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5

physically affectionate:

First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5 sexuality
(satisfied with sexual relationship):												
First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5 empathic and

understanding (lack of distortion of the other):

First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5 communication
(sense of shared meaning, feel understood):												
First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5

non-controlling, non-manipulative, and non-threatening:

First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5
sense of well-being:												
First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5

self-confidence:

First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5
optimism:												
First Partner	1	2	3	4	5	/	Second Partner:	1	2	3	4	5

Dating Outside Your Comfort Zone

- **Identify Your Pattern**

- Look at your relationships history:**

- What are the qualities you typically look for in a partner? Are there certain negative qualities that seem to show up?
 - Do you have a pattern of choosing a person with specific traits only to end up dissatisfied with them?
 - Do your relationships seem to always break up for the same reasons?

- **Take chances**

- **Listen to your friends**

- **Don't listen to your inner coach**

- **Hang in there**



The Firestone Voice Scale for Couples

FVSC

Instructions

All people experience thoughts that are critical towards themselves and others. For example, when a person is worried about his (her) relationship, he (she) might think:
"You'd better hang onto him (her). This may be your last chance. You may never get anybody again."

Or a person might have critical thoughts about a potential partner:
"Don't get involved. You might get hurt because he (she) is so unreliable."

Negative thoughts are a part of everyone's thinking process. Please indicate the frequency with which you experience the following thoughts by circling the corresponding number.

1 – NEVER 2 – RARELY 3 – ONCE IN A WHILE 4 – FREQUENTLY 5 – MOST OF THE TIME

For example, you think or say to yourself:

1 2 **3** 4 5 "You're unattractive. Why should she (he) want to go out with you?"

- | | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | You'd better put on a good front. Put your best foot forward or he (she) won't be interested. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | You'd be better off on your own. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | He (She) doesn't give a damn about you. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | He (She) never spends time with you. He (She) is always with his (her) friends/family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | He (She) doesn't want to hear your opinions, so keep them to yourself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

You in Your Relationship: Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

- What my critical inner voice says about me in my relationship

- What I realistically think about myself in my relationship

Your Partner in Your Relationship: Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

- **What my critical inner voice says about my partner in my relationship**

- **What I realistically think about my partner in my relationship**

Relationships:

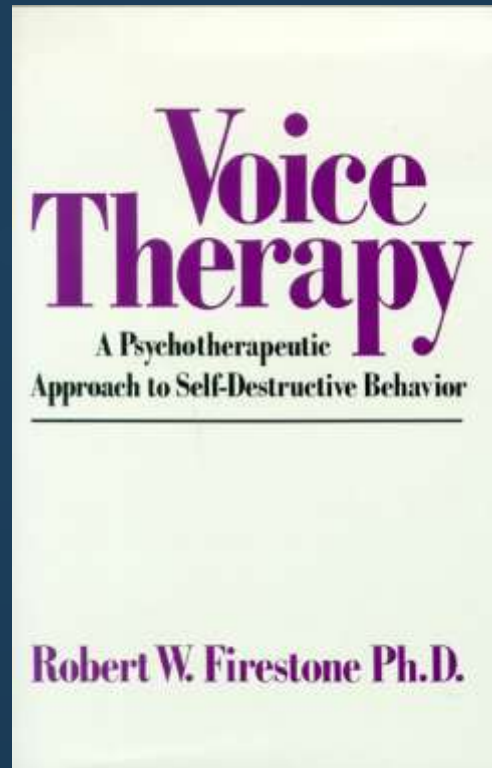
Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

- What my critical inner voice says about relationships

- What I realistically think about relationships

Voice Therapy

Cognitive/ Affective/ Behavioral/ Approach



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step I

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 or visit www.glendon.org.

The Therapeutic Process with Couples

- Between sessions, couples are encouraged to reveal their negative thoughts to each other when they occur during the sex act
- They are encouraged to maintain physical contact while “giving away” self attacks and critical thoughts
- Results of these experiences are discussed in subsequent sessions



Self

Anti-Self



EIGHT

Ways to Overcome Your Fear of Love

1. Recognize your fear.
2. Look at your history.
3. Challenge your critical inner voice.
4. Challenge your defenses.
5. Feel your feelings, but do the right thing.
6. Be vulnerable.
7. Date outside your comfort zone.
8. Focus on what you give over what you get.



The Value of Vulnerability



There can be no intimacy-emotional intimacy, spiritual intimacy, physical intimacy-without vulnerability. One of the reasons there is such an intimacy deficit today is because we don't know how to be vulnerable. It's about being honest with how we feel, about our fears, about what we need, and, asking for what we need. Vulnerability is a glue that holds intimate relationships together.

- Brene Brown, Ph.D., Author [The Power of Vulnerability](#)

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

Ways to Help Your Relationships

- **Reveal destructive thought processes to each other.**
- **Keep a journal. Out your inner coach.**
- **Set goals for the relationship.**
- **Monitor your behavior.**
- **Use the tools:**

- Disarm
- Be generous
- Challenge withholding
- Don't board the train of destructive thoughts
- Recognize your triggers
- Let go of resentments



The background of the image features a vibrant sunset or sunrise sky with hues of purple, pink, and orange. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of a man and a woman are visible. The man, on the left, is wearing a cap and looking towards the right. The woman, on the right, is looking towards the left. They appear to be standing on a dark, rocky outcrop. The text is overlaid on this scene.

We love, because it's the
ONLY TRUE
ADVENTURE

- Nikki Giovanni

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THANKS

ANY QUESTIONS?

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