

Changing Sense of Identity



Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.



Welcome!



Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

Director of Research and Education
The Glendon Association

Senior Editor
PsychAlive.org



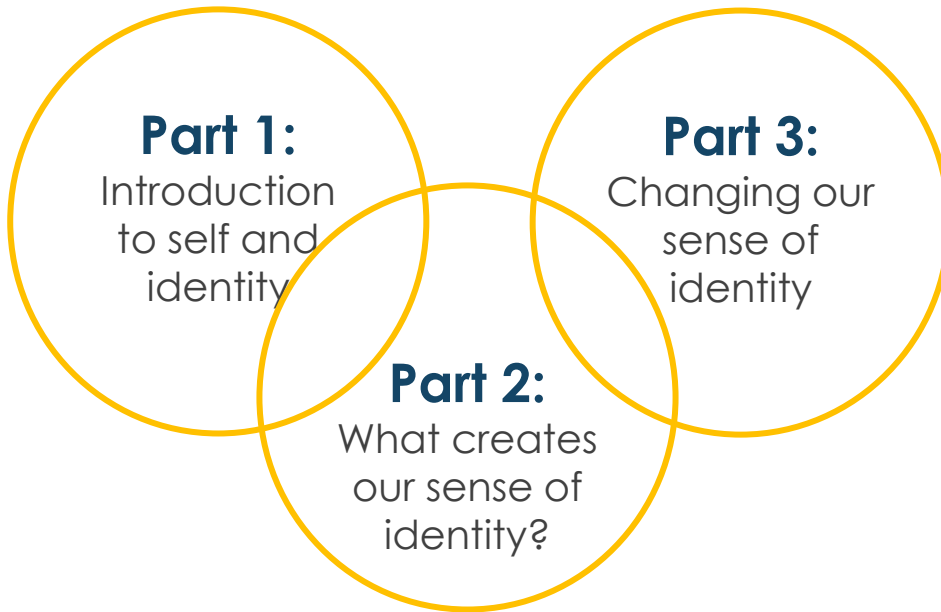
**THE GLENDON
ASSOCIATION**

(For Professionals)
www.glendon.org

PSYCHALIVE

(For the Public)
www.psychalive.org

Three Parts to this Webinar



Part 1:

Introduction to Self and Identity





“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

Identities

“not the fixed markers people assume them to be but instead are dynamically constructed in the moment.”



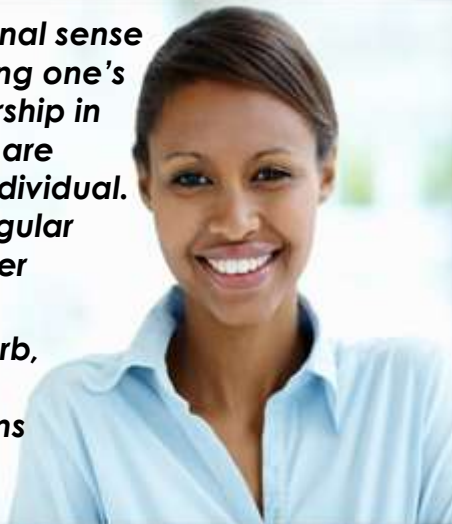
Source: Oyserman, D., Elmore, K., Smith, G. S. (2012). Self, self-concept, and identity. in M. Leary & J. Tangney (Eds), Handbook of self and Identity, 2nd Ed (pp69-104). New York, NY: Guilford Press

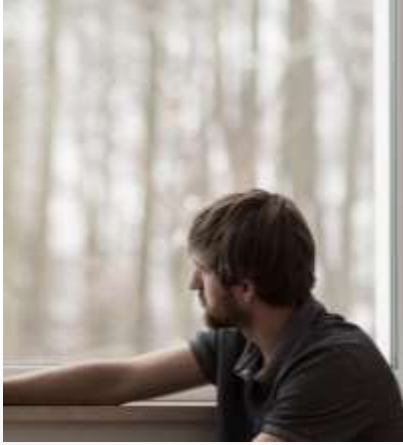


Defining Self

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 seen as a singular noun, whereas it may be better considered a "plural verb."
- "We are always unfolding (verb, not noun) and we are finding our sense of self in connections to others."





Self and Identity

"...thinking about self and identity. The 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



"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.

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?

Part 2:

What Creates Our Sense of Identity?



Overlays on Personal Sense of Identity



How You Were Seen in Your Family?



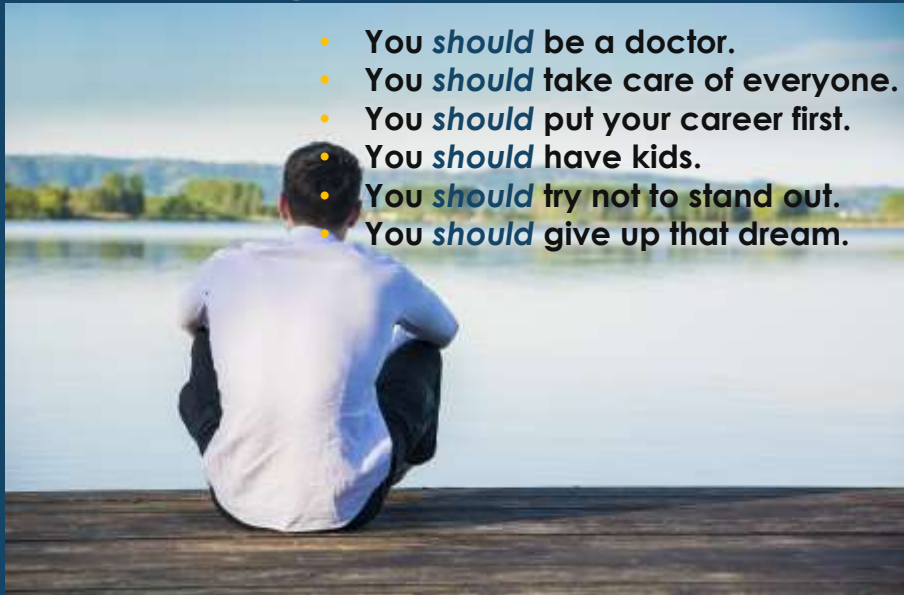
The Role of Roles

- The good girl/boy
- The perfect spouse/parent/grandparent/son/daughter
- The success
- The savior
- The star
- The athlete



Living by “Should’s”

- You *should* be a doctor.
- You *should* take care of everyone.
- You *should* put your career first.
- You *should* have kids.
- You *should* try not to stand out.
- You *should* give up that dream.

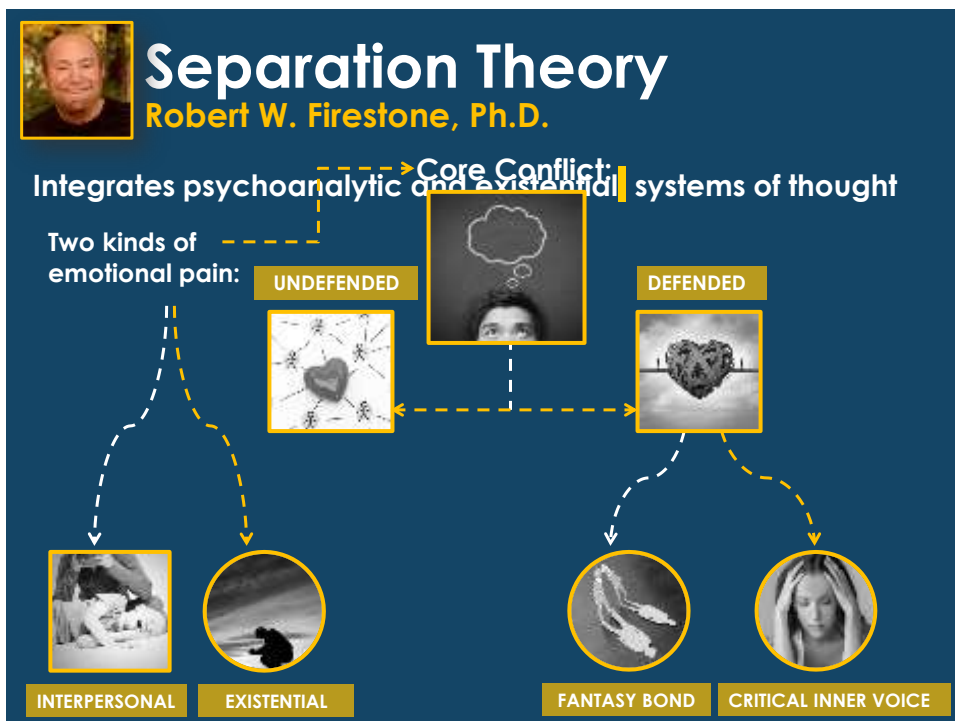


The Creation of an “Accidental Identity”

Every child suffers to some extent. They create a self-concept out of hurtful experiences then live out that self-concept believing that's just the way they are. This is still not their authentic self or an accurate picture of who they are but rather “an accident of experience.”

Three Important Influences:

1. Definition of ourselves picked up from emotional experiences - ways we were treated
2. Definitions by parents or early influential figures
3. Defenses formed to cope with painful experiences



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

The Critical Inner Voice

The Voice Process:

The "critical inner 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.



"I can't get anything right."



"You're a mess. What's wrong with you?"



"Don't show him how much you care."

Our sense of identity is often shaped by our inner critic.



Our Theory



Each person is divided:

- One part wants to live and is goal-directed and life-affirming.
- One part is self-critical, self-hating and even self-destructive.
- The nature and degree of this division varies for each person.



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



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, illness, 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.

Self-Parenting Process

Punishing



Soothing



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

Anti-Self System

Self-Soothing Voice Process

Voice Process

1. Self Soothing Attitudes
2. Aggrandizing thought toward self
3. Suspicious paranoid thoughts towards 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

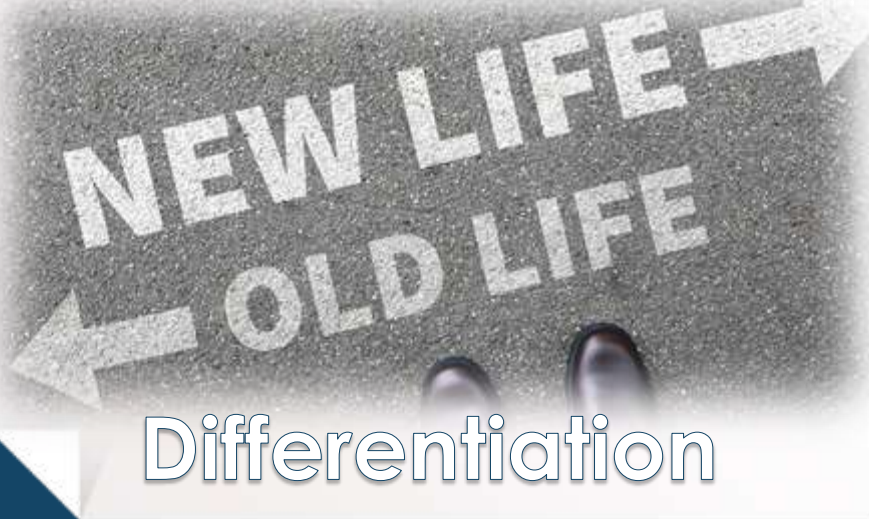
Aggressive actions, actual violence

Part 3:

Changing Our Sense of Identity



How to Break Free of the Past to Become Your Real Self



Differentiation

Differentiation refers to the struggle that all people face in striving to develop a sense of themselves as independent individuals.



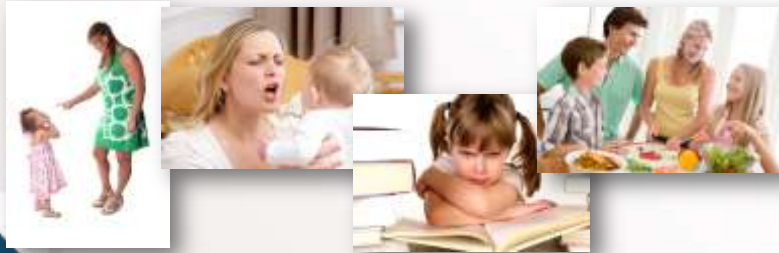
Steps of Differentiation

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



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.

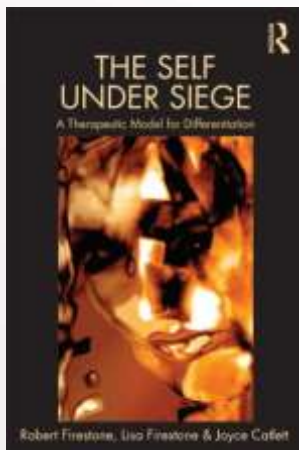
Step 4:

“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.”



“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

eCourse

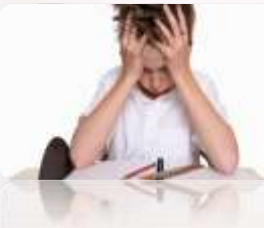
BECOME YOUR TRUE SELF: A THERAPEUTIC MODEL FOR DIFFERENTIATION

A Four-Week eCourse with Dr. Lisa Firestone

*8 CEs available for an additional \$15

Sign up today!

Child Self

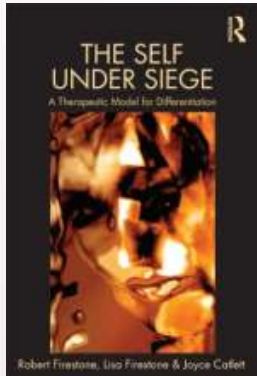


Real Self



Parent Self





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

5 Aspects to Being an Adult

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



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?

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?



Challenging the Critical Inner Voice



Identifying the Critical Inner Voice

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



Assessment Instruments



- Firestone Assessment of Self-Destructive Thoughts (**FAST**)
- Firestone Assessment of Suicidal Intent (**FASI**)
- Firestone Assessment of Violent Thoughts (**FAVT**)
- Firestone Assessment of Violent Thoughts – Adolescents (**FAVT-A**)

Voice Therapy

Cognitive/ Affective/
Behavioral Approach



Voice Therapy

A Psychotherapeutic
Approach to Self-Destructive Behavior

Robert W. Firestone Ph.D.

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.

Self

Anti-Self



eCourse



Sign up today!



Self-Compassion



Interpersonal Neurobiology



Curious

Open

Accepting

Loving



Self-Compassion Vs. Self-Esteem

Research from Dr. Kristin Neff:

Self-Esteem

- Self-esteem refers to our sense of self-worth, perceived value or how much we like ourselves.
- Low self-esteem is problematic, however trying to have higher self-esteem can also be problematic.
- The need for high self-esteem may encourage us to ignore, distort or hide personal shortcomings so that we can't see ourselves accurately.
- Our self-esteem is often contingent on our latest success or failure, meaning that our self-esteem fluctuates.

SOURCE: <http://www.self-compassion.org/>

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
- Extroversion
- Conscientiousness

Why People are Resistant

- Core resistance to forming a better image of yourself
- Involves breaking the bond with the original family where identity was formed. Family was once a source of safety.
- It's a kind of companionship/ connection to keep this identity.
- Scary to assume a new identity that's more positive
- It takes a lot of courage, understanding, and insight, but ultimately, the person has to take power.



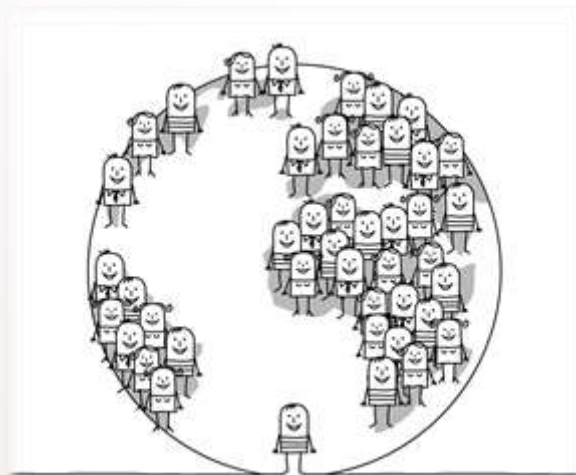
What You Can Do

- **Take action:** Act against your critical inner voice, resist resorting to defenses, take risks, make alterations, go after what you want.
- **Be adult:** Realize you have power over your life and can make changes that immediately change your identity.
- **Be kind to yourself:** Treat yourself like a friend, being kind, inquisitive, patient, honest, and open.



Choose Your Environment

Choose to be around people who have a positive orientation toward themselves and toward you, who are not critical or destructive.
Your environment reflects back on you.



We create the world we live in.

Webinars

Visit

www.psychalive.org for a full list of upcoming and archived CE Webinars



eCourses

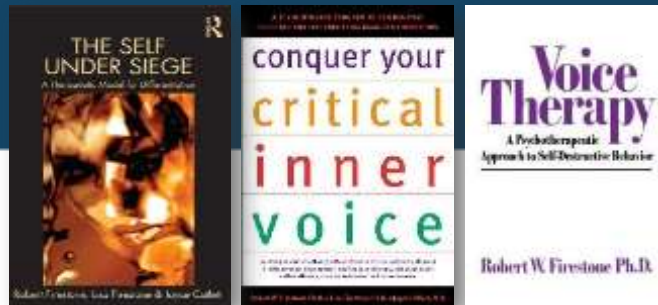
Visit

ecourse.psychalive.org for a full list of online courses

BECOME YOUR TRUE SELF:
A THERAPEUTIC MODEL FOR DIFFERENTIATION
A Four-Week eCourse with Dr. Lisa Firestone
*8 CE's available for an additional \$15

Sign up today!

Books



Visit www.psychalive.org for resource links

Continuing Education Information

CE's for this Webinar are optional and sold separately through R. Cassidy Seminars. A link to purchase 1.5 CE's will be e-mailed to registrants following the live Webinar. For those purchasing or watching this Webinar as an archived recording, a link to purchase home study CE's was provided with your purchase confirmation. Registrants can earn 2 home study CE's by watching the Webinar and completing a reading assignment.

Thanks!

Any questions?



Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.
lfirestone@glendon.org



THE GLENDON
ASSOCIATION

www.glendon.org



PSYCHALIVE

www.psychalive.org