

# OVERCOMING BREAKUPS AND REJECTION

LISA FIRESTONE, PH.D.

# WELCOME



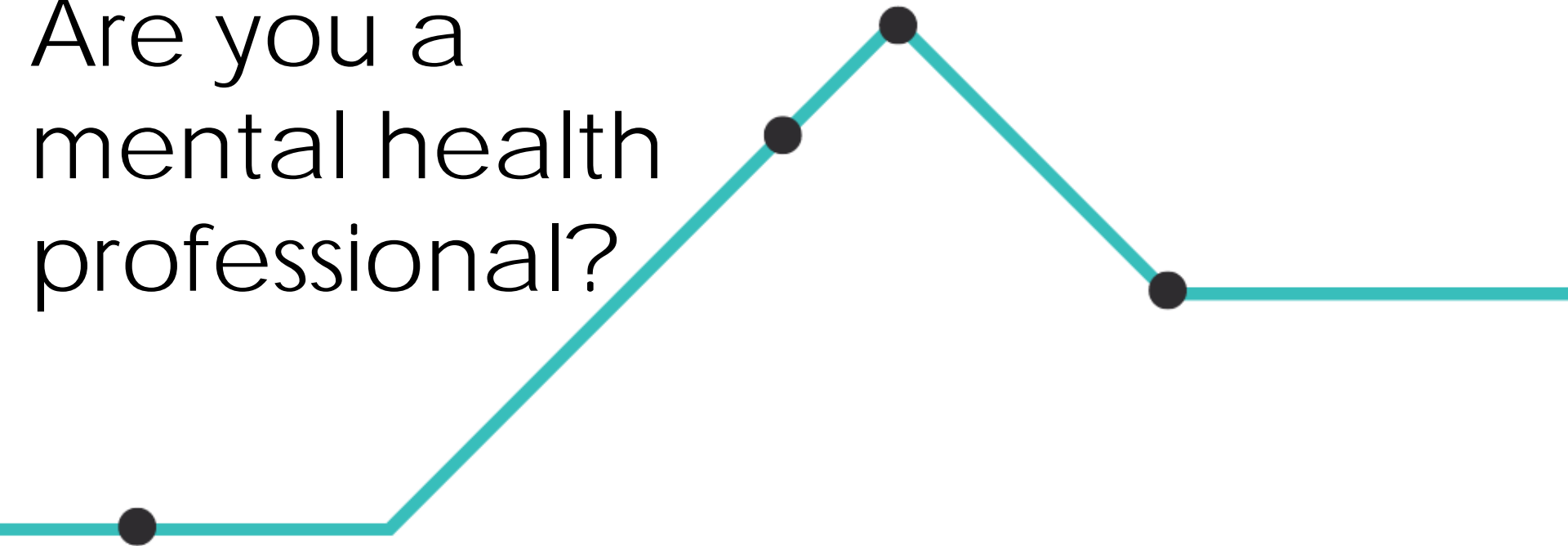
**LISA FIRESTONE, PH.D.**

Director of Research and Education  
**The Glendon Association**  
Senior Editor  
**PsychAlive**



# POLL

Are you a  
mental health  
professional?



# TWO PARTS TO THIS WEBINAR:



## PART 1:

Why we suffer after a  
breakup or rejection

## PART 2:

How to heal from a  
breakup or rejection



# PART 1:

Why we suffer after a  
breakup or rejection

# WHY ARE BREAKUPS SO PAINFUL?

- Real loss
- Physical pain (rejection shares somatosensory representations with physical pain)

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS:

- Attachment History
- Fantasy Bond
- Critical Inner Voices
- Mindset (Fixed/ Victimized)



# WHY ARE BREAKUPS SO PAINFUL?

People who do the breaking up suffer too.

- Anxiety
- Breaking of a fantasy bond
- Critical inner voices





# ATTACHMENT PATTERNS





# INTERNAL WORKING MODELS

Our early relationships provide a template for how relationships go.

- *Can I depend on others?*
- *Will they soothe me when I need it?*
- *Will they see me for who I really am?*



# INTERNAL WORKING MODELS

## EARLY ATTACHMENT PATTERNS:

- Perceive people as **REFLECTIONS** of our past, assuming they will think and behave in certain patterns
- Unconsciously **CHOOSE** partners who fit these patterns, **PROJECT** these patterns onto our partner, or **ELICIT** these behaviors from our partner



# WHAT IS ATTACHMENT THEORY?



How do I get these  
people to take  
care of me?

# THE 3 S'S OF SECURE ATTACHMENT

Humans rely on attachment figures for:

1

Protection (SAFE)



2

Support (SEEN)



3

Emotion (SOOTHED)



# PATTERNS OF ATTACHMENT IN CHILDREN

## Attachment Style

- ▷ Secure
- ▷ Insecure – avoidant



## Parental Interactive Pattern

- ▷ Emotionally available, perceptive, responsive
- ▷ Emotionally unavailable, imperceptive, unresponsive, and rejecting





# PATTERNS OF ATTACHMENT IN CHILDREN

## Attachment Style

- ▷ Insecure – anxious/ambivalent
- ▷ Insecure – disorganized



## Parental Interactive Pattern

- ▷ Inconsistently available, perceptive and responsive, and intrusive
- ▷ Frightening, frightened, disorienting, alarming





# DIFFERENT ATTACHMENTS

We have different attachments to different people.

FATHER



MOTHER



AUNT / UNCLE



GRANDPARENT



# PATTERNS OF ATTACHMENT

## PATTERNS IN CHILDHOOD

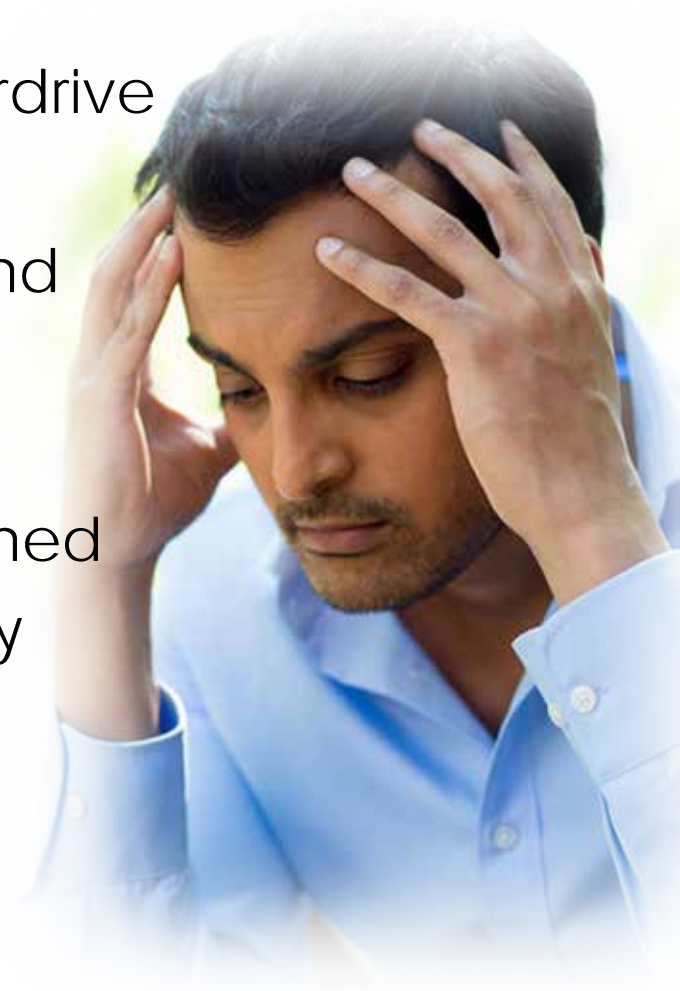
Secure -----> Secure  
Insecure - avoidant -----> Dismissive  
Insecure - anxious/ambivalent -----> Preoccupied  
Insecure - disorganized -----> Fearful-Avoidant

## PATTERNS IN ADULTHOOD



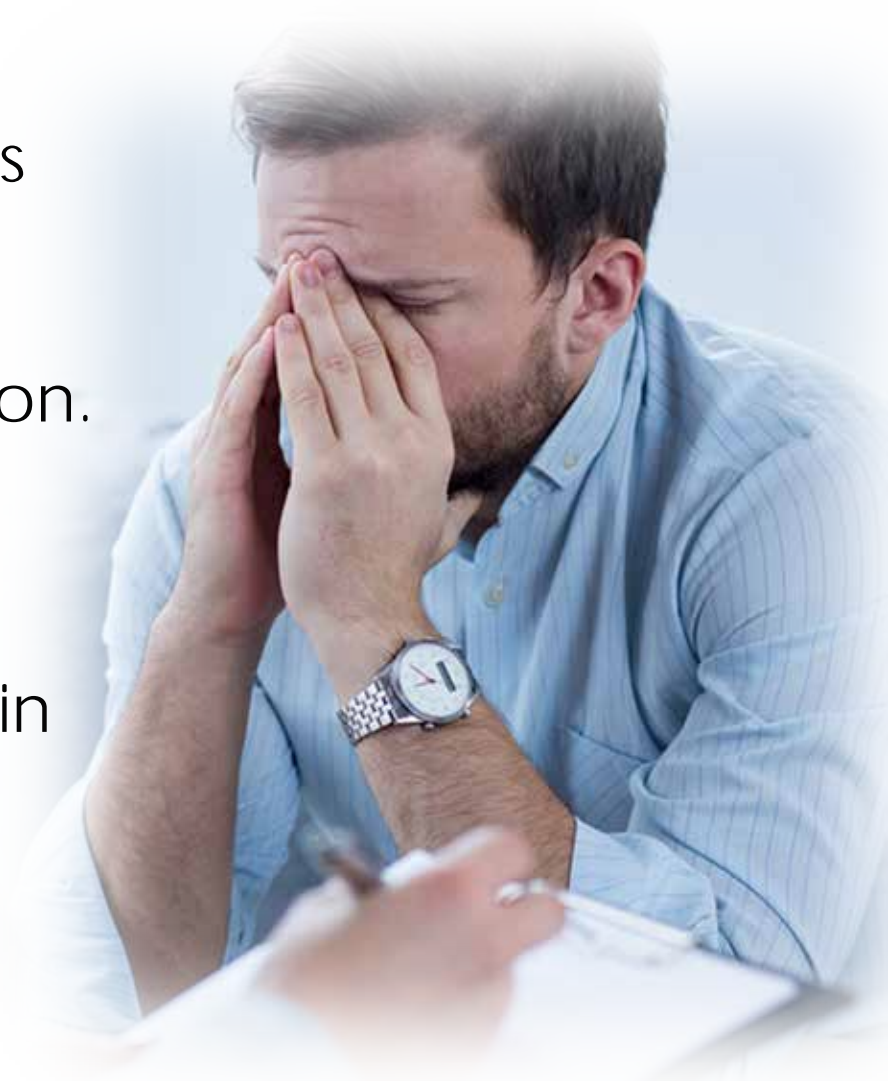
# PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT

- ▷ Self-critical and insecure
- ▷ Attachment needs are always in overdrive
- ▷ Seek reassurance/ feel need to “fix it”
- ▷ Anxious over abandonment before and after breakup
- ▷ Panicked about the future
- ▷ Ruminates/ obsess about what happened
- ▷ Feel desperation, resentment, and fury
- ▷ Stuck in the pain of rejection
- ▷ Emotions are dramatic, devastated, and intense



# PACE UNIVERSITY STUDY

- ▷ Individuals measuring high in rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style experienced the most adverse effects to romantic break-up and rejection.
- ▷ Contrary to predictions, who initiated the break-up did not result in significant differences in adverse symptoms.





# DISMISSIVE ATTACHMENT

- ▶ Tend to be overly focused on themselves
- ▶ Denigrate needs of others
- ▶ Find it painful to disclose their thoughts and feelings
- ▶ Resist a depth of emotional closeness in the relationship and feel devastated after the breakup
- ▶ Feel intruded on in the relationship – feel longing after the breakup
- ▶ Were disconnected from wants; now they flood them



# FEARFUL AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

- ▷ Have chaotic relationships
- ▷ Feel afraid when the relationship is close
- ▷ Feel afraid when the relationship is distant



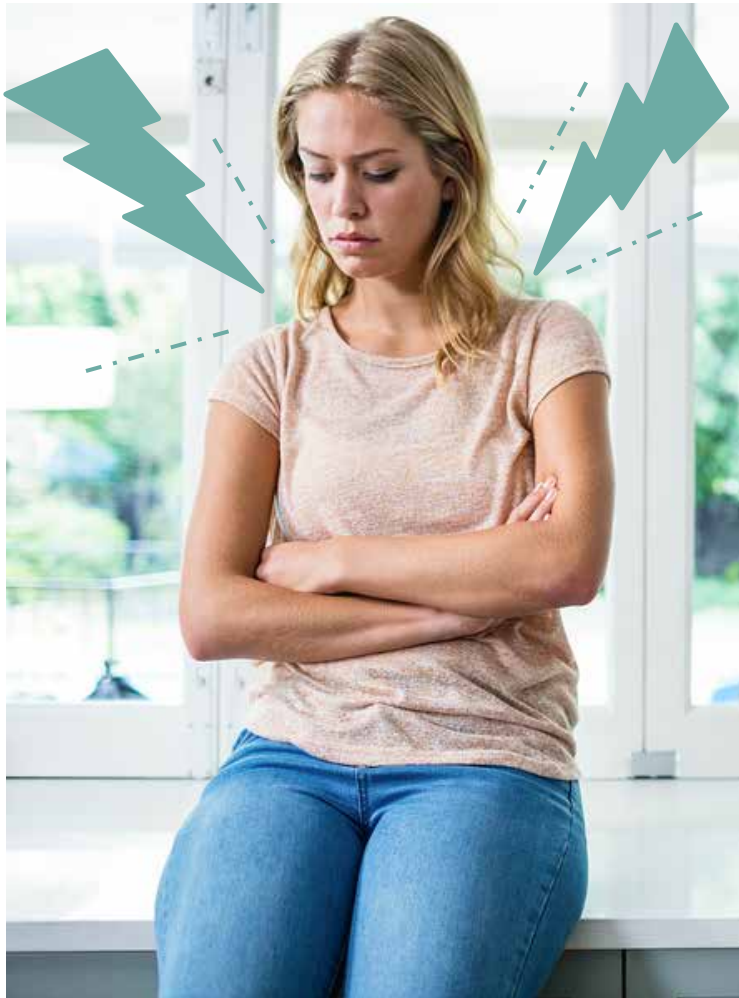


# BREAKUPS CAN FLIP YOU INTO DIFFERENT ATTACHMENT PATTERN



# ADAPTATION GETS OVERWHELMED

*Your reaction on steroids*





**PATTERNS**

**PRECIPITATE**

**BREAKUP**

# SELECTION:

## Why are we drawn to certain people?

- Who we choose has a lot to do with our past.
- When we act on our defenses, we tend to choose less-than-ideal relationship partners whose defenses fit with ours.
- Represents a person from our past
- Replicates old dynamics or makes us feel old ways



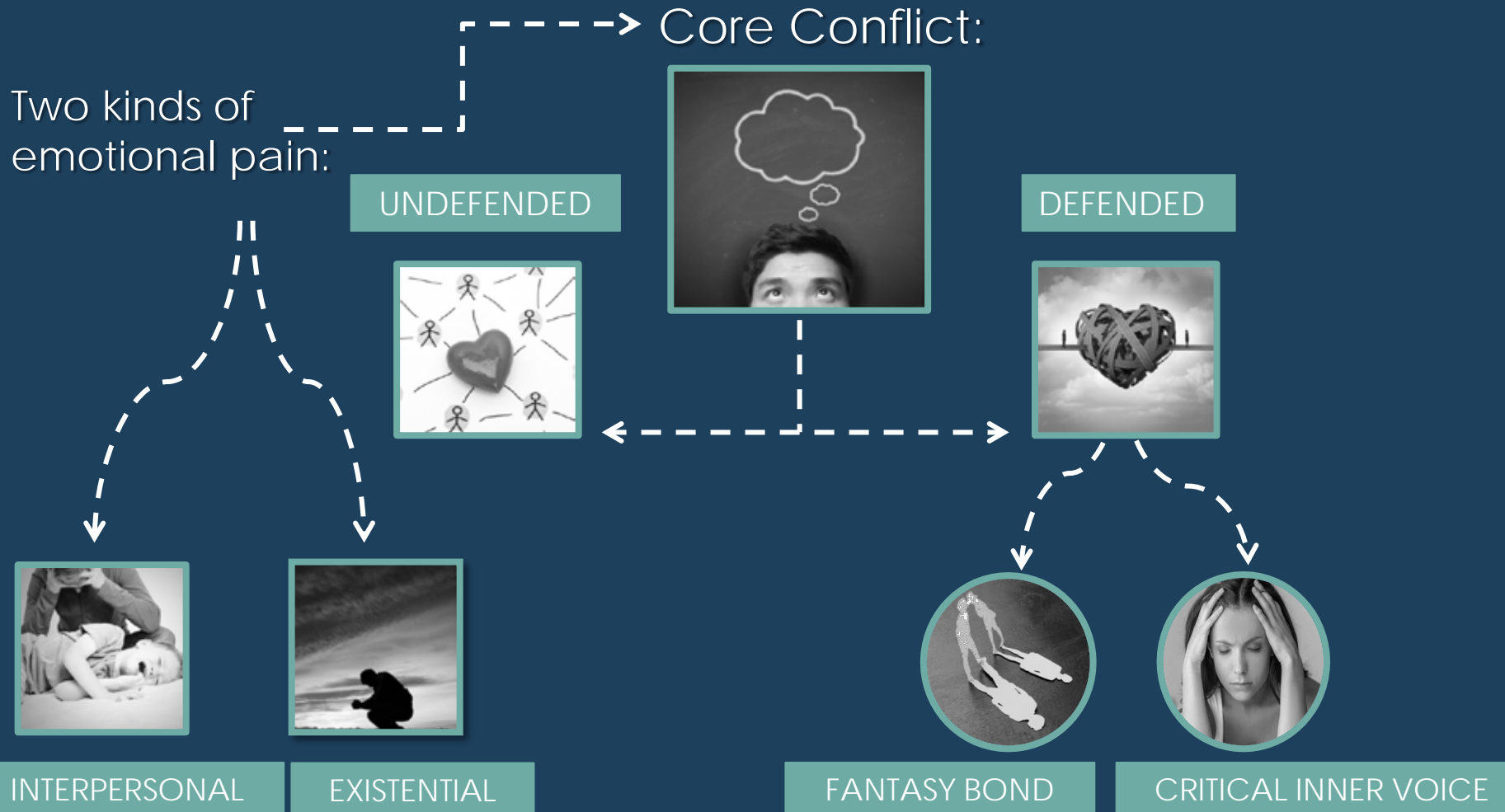




# Separation Theory

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought



# THE 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 pseudoindependent, 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.

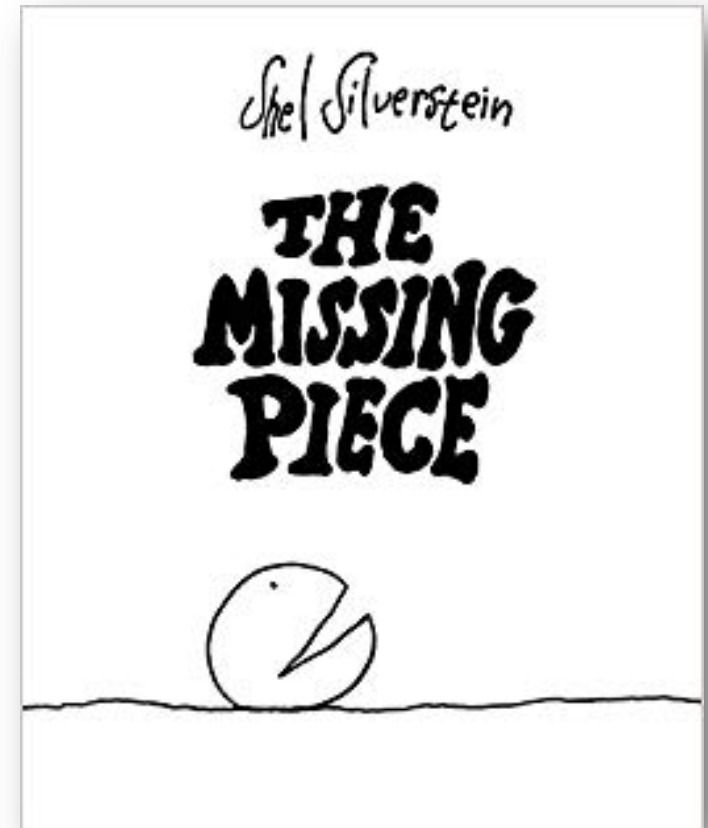


# FROM *THE FANTASY BOND*

*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.*

# SAFE/ MERGED

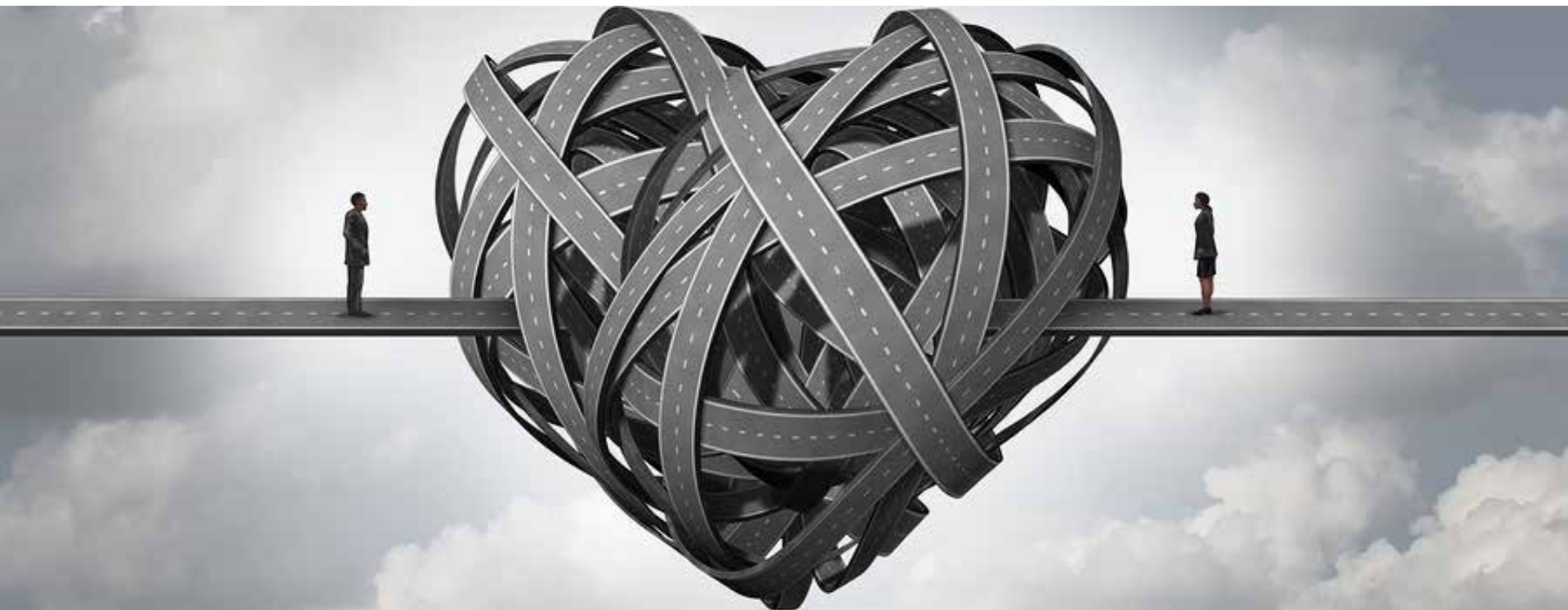
- “Missing piece”
- Sense of security



# HOLDING ON TO THE FANTASY

We think we hold on, because we believe getting the person back will make us feel better, but it actually is a way to stay stuck in our pain.

# WAYS WE HOLD ON TO A FANTASY DURING A BREAKUP



# WAYS WE HOLD ON TO A FANTASY DURING A BREAKUP





# VIDEO

## THE FANTASY BOND







## SECURE ATTACHMENT:

Tend to be more satisfied in their relationships

## ANXIOUS-PREOCCUPIED ATTACHMENT:

Tend to be desperate to form a fantasy bond. Instead of feeling real love or trust toward, they often feel emotional hunger.



## 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:

Live in an ambivalent state, in which they are afraid of being both too close to or too distant from others

**What happened**

**VS**

**What we tell ourselves about  
what happened**

# THE CRITICAL INNER VOICE

## The Language of the Defensive Process



- Well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward ourselves and others
- At the root of much of our maladaptive behavior
- Fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities
- Affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, and most importantly, our personal and intimate relationships

# CRITICAL INNER VOICES

You should never  
have put yourself  
out there.

No one could ever  
really like you. You'll  
never find what you  
want.

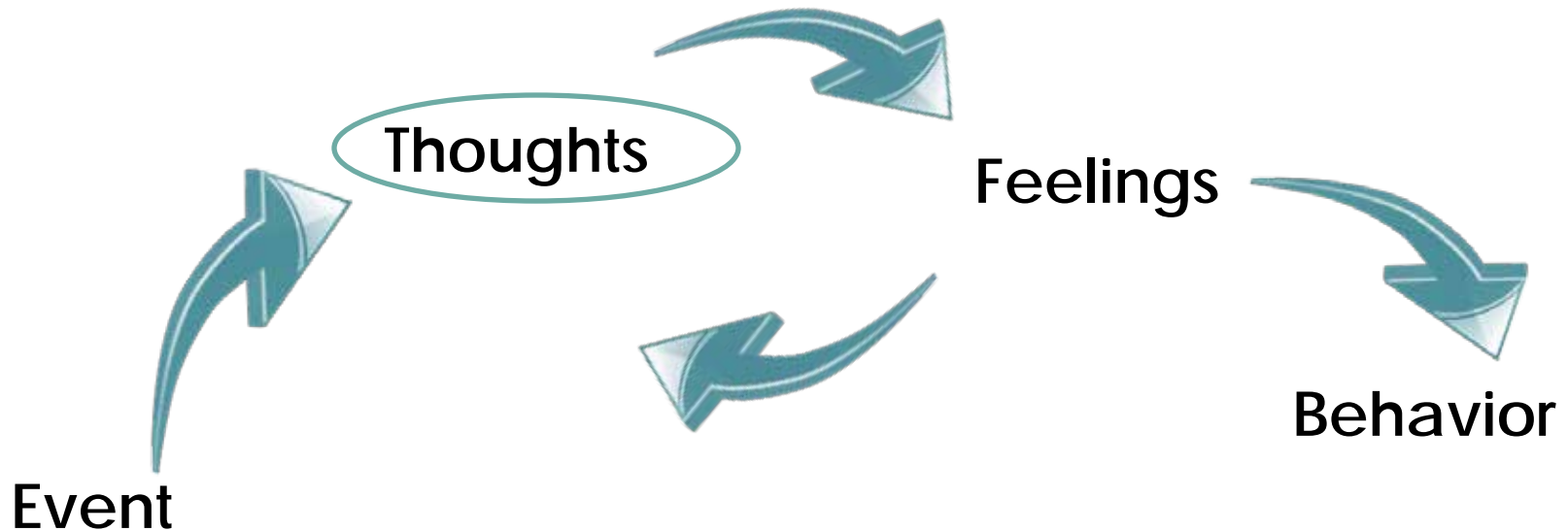
*"See? I told you it  
wouldn't work out."*

You can never trust  
anyone again.  
You'll only get hurt.



# RUMINATION

FEED THE FEELINGS



# SEDUCTION OF REJECTION



EXAMPLE

“



*All I want is him. He's the only one that I will ever love, that I will ever feel this way with. What went wrong? Why did he stop loving me? Stop wanting me? How can I get him to love me again? If I could just figure it out. If I get in better shape, wear the clothes he likes, try to look my best, do his laundry, make him food, will he love me then? What is it? What's wrong with me? He wanted me, and **he loved me, and now it's gone**. This is making me crazy.*

*I have to figure it out. I have to fix it: I need to get his love back.*

# SEDUCTION OF REJECTION



EXAMPLE

“



*Why do I want someone who doesn't want me? What am I yearning for? Why am I so compelled to get this love back? How can a man who doesn't want me be the object of my whole focus and desire? I realize, suddenly, something is wrong. It's too much; he's too much. It's out of proportion. He doesn't deserve this level of my need and want and focus. Why? Why am I doing this? And then I understand. **I realize his not wanting me, but more than that, his changing...the love being there, and then being gone... that's what's so compelling.***

# SEDUCTION OF REJECTION



## EXAMPLE



*Fixing this, getting the love back... I am back home. I'm 4 years old, in a house with a mother who doesn't want me, who has no love for me, and a father who can only show his feelings for me when she is out of sight. I'm so confused. I had my father's love and attention, and then, it went away... This is what I'm trying to fix. It's not about the man in my life today. I can handle that. **The reality is, I wasn't happy.** I wasn't getting what I want. I'm a desirable woman. I can have more. **It was me, the old me, the child me, hoping and needing to fix myself and get the love, strategizing for love.***

# HOW THE VOICE PROCESS IMPACTS BREAKUPS

## SELF-PUNISHING VOICE PROCESS IN RELATIONSHIPS:

**EXAMPLE:** “Of course, he/ she left you. You’re so unlovable. No one will ever want you. You’ll just wind up alone.”

## SELF-SOOTHING VOICE PROCESS IN RELATIONSHIPS:

**EXAMPLE:** “You are just fine on your own. You can take care of yourself. You don’t need anyone else. Don’t trust anyone again.”



# COMMON “VOICES” IN BREAKUPS

## VOICES ABOUT YOURSELF:

- ▷ You'll never find another person who understands you.
- ▷ Something is wrong with you.
- ▷ You're such a loser.
- ▷ You're not attractive.
- ▷ You'll never meet anyone else.
- ▷ You're so pathetic and weak. Just get over it.
- ▷ This is all your fault.
- ▷ You're nothing on your own.
- ▷ Nobody cares about you.
- ▷ You'll never be happy again.



# COMMON “VOICES” IN BREAKUPS

## VOICES ABOUT YOUR PARTNER:

- ▷ You need him to make you okay.
- ▷ She doesn't care about you. All women are cold.
- ▷ He never loved you. Men are selfish.
- ▷ I can't believe she left you.
- ▷ You should never have trusted him.
- ▷ He is the only person who will ever love you.
- ▷ You were lucky to be with her. You blew it.
- ▷ She was too good for you.





# VIDEO

## CRITICAL INNER VOICES



# GROWTH MINDSET

## STANFORD STUDY

Ability to see things as “CHANGEABLE” has a strong influence on how we deal with rejection.



*Basic beliefs about personality can contribute to whether [they] recover from, or remain mired in, the pain of rejection.*

# VICTIMIZED MINDSET

Get **STUCK** in our suffering







# PART 2:

How to heal from a  
breakup or rejection

“

*The fantastic news is that if you can make sense of your childhood experiences—especially your relationships with your parents—you can transform your attachment models toward security. The reason this is important is that relationships— with friends, with romantic partners, with present or possible future offspring—will be profoundly enhanced. And you'll feel better with yourself, too!*

**- DR. DANIEL SIEGEL**



# EARNED SECURE ATTACHMENT

Uncover ways of defending oneself from getting close and being emotionally connected and work toward forming an “earned secure attachment.”

- Choose a partner with a more secure attachment style
  - See a therapist
  - Create a coherent narrative
- 



# COHERENT NARRATIVE

- Technique for developing inner security, which allows us to form healthier adult relationships
- No matter how difficult a person's childhood was, if they're able to make sense of and feel the full feeling of what they experienced as children, they're better able to form healthier ties in the present.





# CREATING A COHERENT NARRATIVE OF YOUR BREAKUP

Focusing on **YOURSELF** vs focusing on other person

- Why did you choose the person you chose?
- What were you drawn to about the person when they started to reject you?
- How did you act toward the person?
- What motivated your actions (from infidelity to distancing behaviors)?
- Why did you tolerate negative treatment?
- What thoughts or feelings made you choose to stay?
- What are you drawn to about the other person now?

This is **YOUR** story.



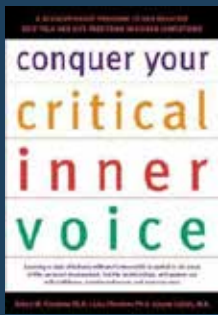


# SEPARATING REALITY FROM FANTASY



**IDENTIFY CRITICAL INNER VOICES  
THAT ARE FUELING YOUR SUFFERING**





# Exercise from *Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice*

## You in Your Breakup: Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

What my critical inner voice says about me

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What I realistically think about myself

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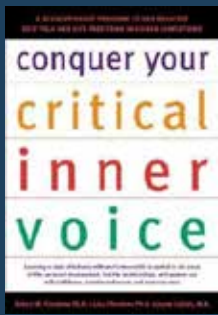
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# Exercise from *Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice*

## Breakups and Rejection: Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

What my critical inner voice says about the breakup

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What I realistically think about the breakup

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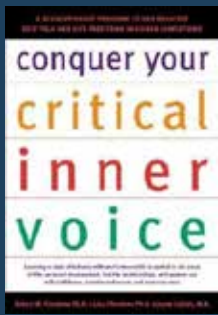
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# Exercise from *Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice*

## Your Ex: Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

What my critical inner voice says about my ex

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What I realistically think about my ex

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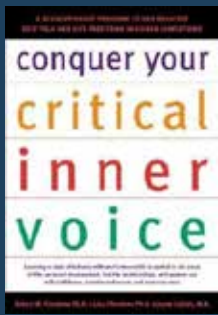
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# Exercise from *Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice*

## Relationships: Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

What my critical  
inner voice says  
about future  
relationships

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What I realistically think  
about future  
relationships

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# AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION ABOUT BREAKUPS

What would your mother/father say about you and your partner breaking up?





# Voice Therapy

A Psychotherapeutic  
Approach to Self-Destructive Behavior

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Robert W. Firestone Ph.D.

# VOICE THERAPY

Cognitive/ Affective/ Behavioral Approach

# VOICE THERAPY:

1. Verbalize the voice and release affect
2. Develop insight about the source of the voice
3. Answer back to the voice
4. Develop insight about how voices are influencing behaviors
5. Plan corrective suggestions for changing behavior



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



# SELF-COMPASSION

## UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA STUDY

People who'd gotten divorced but had a high level of self-compassion "reported fewer intrusive negative thoughts, fewer bad dreams about the divorce, and less negative rumination."



*If you pick all of the variables that predict how people will do after their marriage ends, self-compassion really carries the day."*

- DAVID SBARRA  
LEAD RESEARCHER

# SELF-COMPASSION

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



*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.*

- KRISTIN NEFF

## THREE ELEMENTS:

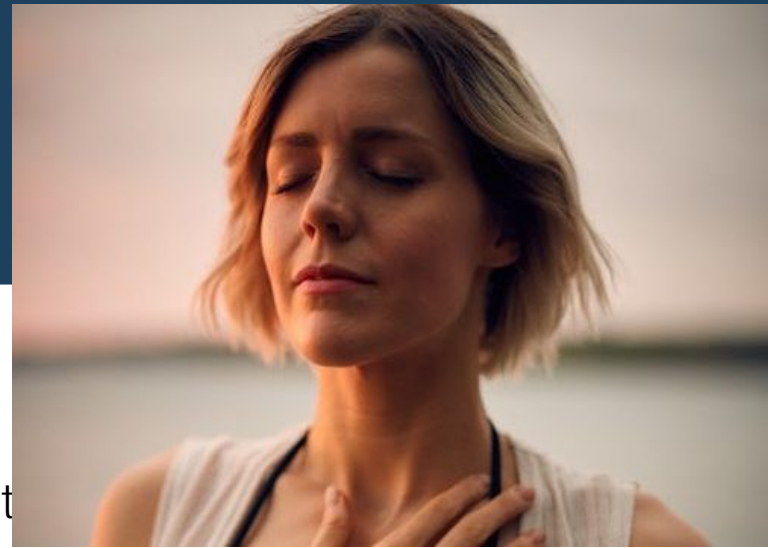
1. SELF-KINDNESS Vs. Self-judgment
2. MINDFULNESS Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. COMMON HUMANITY Vs. Isolation



# GROWTH MINDSET

## FIXED MINDSET:

- See personality as more set in stone
- Blame themselves and their “toxic personality”
- Tend to second guess and criticize themselves
- Regard future relationships as less hopeful



## GROWTH MINDSET

- See their personalities as something that can be altered or developed
- Able to look at the breakup as an opportunity to grow and change
- Hopeful that their romantic future will improve, and relationships will get better
- Recover emotionally from a breakup much more quickly

*If we can embrace this idea that life is flexible and that losses offer us opportunity, we can grow more within ourselves and suffer less when we experience a rejection.*

# ADAPTIVE ANGER VS RUMINATION



# INWARD VS OUTWARD OUTLOOK

## VICTIMIZED VS GENEROUS





# EMBRACE YOUR INDIVIDUALITY

- Pursue whatever lights you up and makes you who you are (friends, places, activities).
- Try new things/ discover new parts of yourself.
- Reignite old connections that matter to you.
- Remember you have a whole life outside of whatever rejection you experienced.
- **Take responsibility for your own happiness.**



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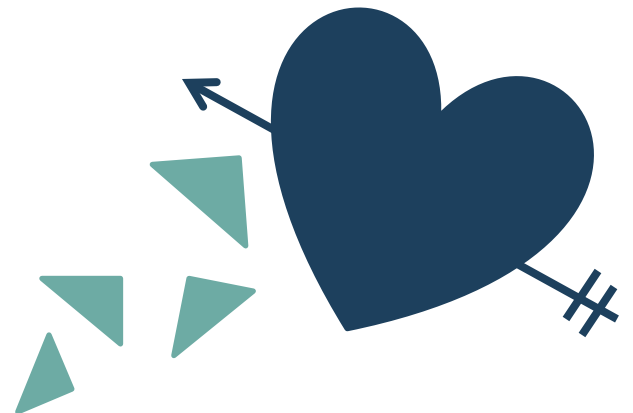
*Seek not good from without:  
seek it within yourselves  
or you will never find it.*

**- EPICTETUS**





Differentiate what we *want*  
from what we think we *deserve*.







# PERSONAL POWER

PERSONAL POWER IS AN ATTITUDE OR STATE OF MIND THAT WE CAN DEVELOP.

**We cultivate our personal power by:**

- Getting in touch with our own unique desires
- Conquering our critical inner voices
- Pursuing our goals

# LOOK INSIDE YOURSELF

- Think about the partners you select.
- Note if there are patterns to your selections.
- Ask yourself how you could break these patterns.
- Be open to dating outside your comfort zone.
- Give these opportunities a chance, even though they may make you feel uncomfortable at first.



“

*Far too many people are looking for  
the right person, instead of trying to be  
the right person.*

**- GLORIA STEINEM**

# “NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED”

## STUDY

“People anticipate more regret from missed romantic opportunities than from rejection.”



Source: Joel, S., Plaks, J., & Macdonald, G. (2017). Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained: People Anticipate More Regret from Missed Romantic Opportunities than from Rejection. doi:10.31219/osf.io/s45ce

# SIX QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR IN THE “IDEAL” PARTNER AND TO DEVELOP YOURSELF:

- Nondefensiveness and openness
  - Honesty and integrity
  - Respect for the other’s boundaries, priorities and goals that are separate from yourself
  - Physical affection and personal sexuality
  - Understanding – lack of distortion of the other
  - Noncontrolling, nonmanipulative and nonthreatening attitudes and behaviors
-

“

*We cultivate love when we allow our  
most vulnerable selves to be deeply  
seen and known.*

- BRENÉ BROWN



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# THANK YOU SO MUCH!

**Any questions?**

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

[lfirestone@glendon.org](mailto:lfirestone@glendon.org)



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