



# Challenging the Fantasy Bond

with Dr. Lisa Firestone



THE GLENDON  
ASSOCIATION

& PSYCHALIVE



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# Four Parts to This Webinar:

**Part 1:**  
What is a  
fantasy  
bond?

**Part 2:**  
Why fantasy  
bonds form

**Part 3:**  
How fantasy  
bonds affect  
us and our  
relationships

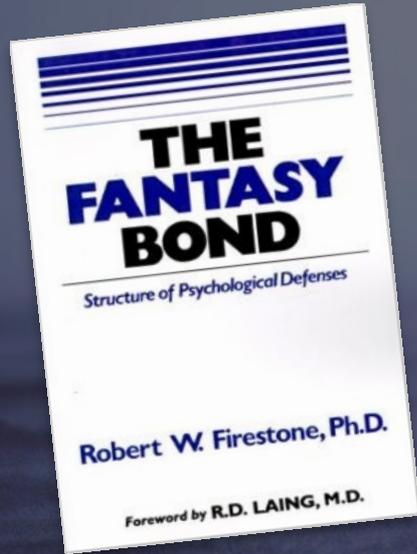
**Part 4:**  
Breaking  
free from a  
fantasy  
bond

A photograph of a couple lying in bed. In the foreground, a pair of feet is prominently displayed, resting on a patterned bedspread. In the background, a woman is lying down holding a smartphone, and a man is lying down holding a laptop. The scene is softly lit, suggesting a relaxed, intimate setting.

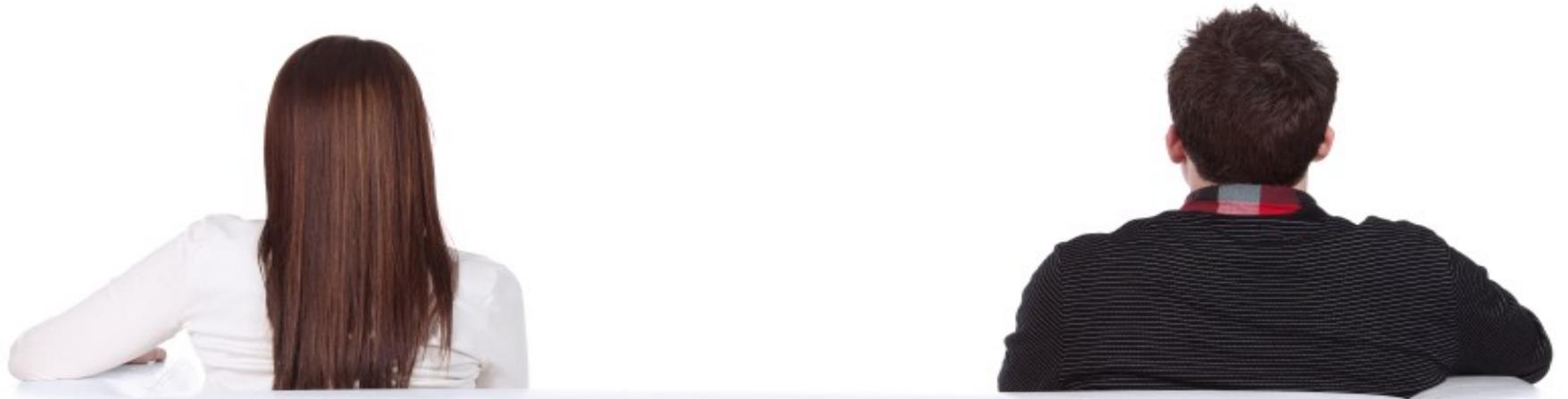
# Part 1:

## What is a Fantasy Bond?

## Definition of Fantasy Bond



A Fantasy Bond is an illusion of connection, originally an imaginary fusion or joining with the parent. We use the term Fantasy Bond to describe both the original imaginary connection formed during childhood and the repetitive efforts of the adult to continue to make these types of connections in intimate relationships.



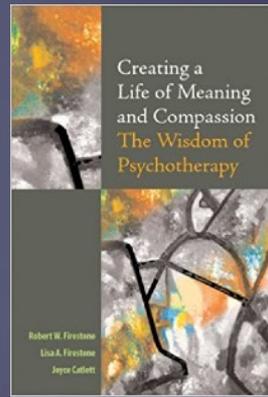
- The fantasy bond describes an illusion of connection that is substituted for feelings of real love and connection.
- Forming a fantasy bond is an often unconscious act of self-parenting and self-protection, in which a person becomes pseudo-independent, the helpless child and the all-powerful parent at once.

# Origins of a Fantasy Bond

- Illusion of connection we originally form with our parent to help relieve early anxiety and emotional pain
- Process of self-parenting - see and treat ourselves the way we were seen and treated by our primary caretakers, both punishing and soothing ourselves
- Fantasy bond extends to our adult relationships
- Defenses we form limit our capacity for real love and closeness



# Three States of Fantasy Involvement



- The individual with extreme propensities for fantasy and imagined fusion who moves toward increased isolation and withdrawal from other people
- The individual who, to varying degrees, uses elements reality to reinforce and support an ongoing fantasy process rather than really investing in relationships and career
- The individual who lives a realistic committed life, whose actions correspond to his or her aspirations and abilities

# Extensions of the Fantasy Bond

The Fantasy Bond is often extended beyond our parents, romantic partners, and children. We can develop a fantasy connection with:

- Siblings or other relatives
- Country
- Religion
- Work
- Sports team
- Social issue, cause, or political party
- Groups





# Part 2: Why Fantasy Bonds Form

# Separation Theory



Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought

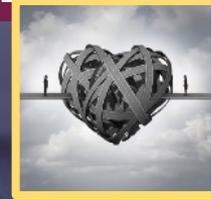
Two kinds of emotional pain:

Core Conflict:

**UNDEFENDE  
D**



**DEFENDE  
D**



**INTERPERSONAL**

**EXISTENTIAL**

**FANTASY BOND**

**CRITICAL INNER VOICE**

# The Fantasy Bond

Primitive defense mechanism that we developed in early childhood as a way of maintaining an illusion of safety and security at those times that were frustrating, hurtful, or frightening.





**Memory of being at one with the parent.**



Infants have a natural ability to comfort themselves by using images and memories of past feeding experiences to ward off the anxiety of being temporarily separated from their mothers. Fantasy helps reduce feelings of hunger and frustration.

- The bond compensates for (or substitutes) inadequacies in the early environment.
- In an attempt to cope with the emotional pain and restore a feeling of comfort, the infant merges with its mother in its imagination, magically believing itself to be one with her.



# Existential Issues

“The fantasy of being connected to another person gives us a sense of immortality, a feeling of living forever, but robs us of day-to-day life. The addictive and compelling nature of the bond lies in the fact that it denies death and relieves our anxiety about the future. The drawback is that it creates a powerful resistance to living a free, independent existence in harmony and genuine closeness with our loved ones.”

- Robert Firestone, *The Fantasy Bond*

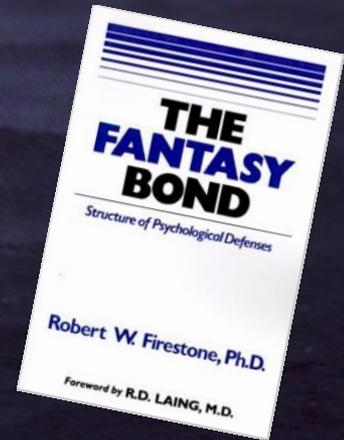


# Part 3: How Fantasy Bonds Affect Us and Our Relationships



“As humans, we are torn between pursuing an assertive goal-oriented life, and depending on passive-dependent machinations that assure us of a fantasy bond. How we resolve this basic conflict determines whether we have a free-flowing, changing existence or a static, rigid, defensive posture. The primary fantasy bond is the core defense underlying our resistance to change. It is the major barrier to a full, rich existence.”

~ Dr. Robert Firestone, The Fantasy Bond



## Ways We Maintain Fantasy Connections to Our Family

- Idealization of parents and family
- Maintenance of a negative self-image
- Projection of negative parental qualities and behaviors onto others
- Recreation of negative family dynamics in adult relationships
- Reliving your parents' life rather than living your own
- Maintaining psychological defenses that were adaptive as children but that limit us as adults

# Language of the Defense System



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. It affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, and most importantly, our personal and intimate relationships.

*Your parents were great.  
There's just something wrong  
with you. Don't trust him. She's  
gonna leave you. No one will  
ever love you. Make sure you  
look right.*

The critical inner voice supports our fantasy bonds:

- Coaches you about yourself and others
- Warns you to not get too close or to cling
- Keeps you from real relating
- Fosters attitudes and behaviors that support the fantasy bond
- Maintains idealization of parents, as you continue to find fault with yourself and those close to you



# Examples of “Voices”

*He's your better half.*

*You'll always be alone.*

*No one else would like you.*

*You can't live without her.*

*You deserve a drink. You've been working hard.*

*Your kids are making you look bad.*



# Do You Have a Fantasy Bond?

- Withholding from your partner
- Acting like a parent or child
- Putting partner up on a pedestal
- Becoming hypercritical toward your partner
- Focusing on form over substance
- Feeling like you can't do things on your own
- Less eye contact and physical affection
- Loss of independence

# Fantasy Bond on a Continuum

Fantasies about who partner is

Settling into routine, deadening behaviors

More criticism and projections of parent onto partner

Less connection – more distancing and withholding behaviors or taking partner for granted

Hating each other – overt nastiness or complete dependency

Separations or settling for living distantly together or totally merged identity



# Couple Interactions Chart

<b>Interactions in an Ideal Relationship</b>	<b>Interactions in a Relationship Characterized by a Fantasy Bond</b>
Nondefensiveness and openness	Angry reactions to feedback
Open to trying anything within reason	Closed to new experiences
Honesty and integrity	Deception and duplicity
Respect for the other's boundaries, priorities and goals, separate from self	Overstepping boundaries. Other seen only in relation to self
Physical affection and personal sexuality	Lack of affection; inadequate or impersonal, routine sexuality
Understanding--lack of distortion of the other	Misunderstanding-distortion of the other
Noncontrolling, nonmanipulative, and nonthreatening	Manipulations of dominance and submission

# Factors That Contribute to Relationship Distress

- Selection
- Distortion
- Provocation





# Part 4: Breaking Free From a Fantasy Bond

# To break free from a fantasy bond we must:

- Leave our own inward world and challenge our self-nourishing and punishing habits
- Redirect our energy toward taking chances on finding satisfaction in the external world through goal-oriented behavior



# Identifying Your Defenses

What are the ways you adapted to your early environment and to your parents' treatment that helped you as a child, but that now limit you in your adult life?



# Identifying Negative Traits

What negative behaviors or undesirable traits of your parent(s) do you recognize in yourself? Are there negative behaviors or traits that you are re-enacting in your current relationship, for instance?



# Admit the Existence of Fantasy Bonds

Do you have a fantasy bond with a parent?

*Idealize your parent?*

*Don't see how a parent hurt you?*

*React in child mode?*

*Limited based on parent's limitations?*

*Fear surpassing or being different from parent?*

*Hear parent's voice in your head?*

# Admit the Existence of Fantasy Bonds

Do you have a fantasy bond with your partner?

*No longer engage in loving actions?*

*Withhold, punish or criticize your partner?*

*Have rigid behavior patterns?*

*Relate as a unit?*

*Take your partner for granted?*

*Feel like you can't live without partner?*

# Admit the Existence of Fantasy Bonds

Do you have a fantasy bond with your child?

*Feel embarrassed by your child?*

*Feel the child reflects on you?*

*Make up for things you didn't get as a child?*

*Feel sorry for your child?*

*Need reassurance from your child?*

*Feel your child is the only one who loves you?*

# Steps of Voice Therapy

1. Identifying What Your Critical Inner Voice is Telling You
2. Recognizing Where Your Voices Come From
3. Responding to Your Critical Inner Voice
4. Understanding How Your Voices Influence Your Behavior
5. Changing Your Self-Limiting Behaviors



# Corrective Suggestions

**It is helpful to think of corrective suggestions for yourself to challenge:**

- Self-nurturing habits
- Dependency behavior
- Inwardness
- Destructive bonds
- Provoking behaviors
- Withholding patterns



**It is also important to think of suggestions for how you can:**

- Explore your new, independent identity
- Overcome fears

# Corrective Suggestions for Breaking a Fantasy Bond

- Move toward independence and respect for those close to you and establish true equality. Disrupt reciprocal patterns of dominance, submission, and defiance
- Develop a non-defensive posture toward feedback and an open and honest style of communication
- Move toward increased interaction with others—extend circle of family and friends to provide better reality testing



A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a dark green park bench, viewed from behind. The man is on the left, wearing a grey sweater and blue jeans. The woman is on the right, wearing a black leather jacket and black boots, with her long blonde hair flowing down. She is leaning her head against the man's shoulder. The background shows a park with trees and a bright, hazy sky. The text "Breaking a Fantasy Bond in Your Relationship" is overlaid in white, bold font across the middle of the image.

**Breaking a Fantasy Bond in Your Relationship**

# The Firestone Voice Scale for Couples

**Circle the frequency with which you experience the  
following critical inner voices:**

0 = Never    1 = Rarely    2 = Once in a While  
3 = Frequently    4 = Most of the Time

0 1 2 3 4    It's a man's job to take care of a woman.

0 1 2 3 4    You're never going to find another person who understands you.

0 1 2 3 4    Men are so insensitive. They're so opinionated. They don't  
want you to have your own views about anything .

0 1 2 3 4    Don't get too hooked on him (her).

# Don't Play the Victim

Be An Active Participant in Your Relationship

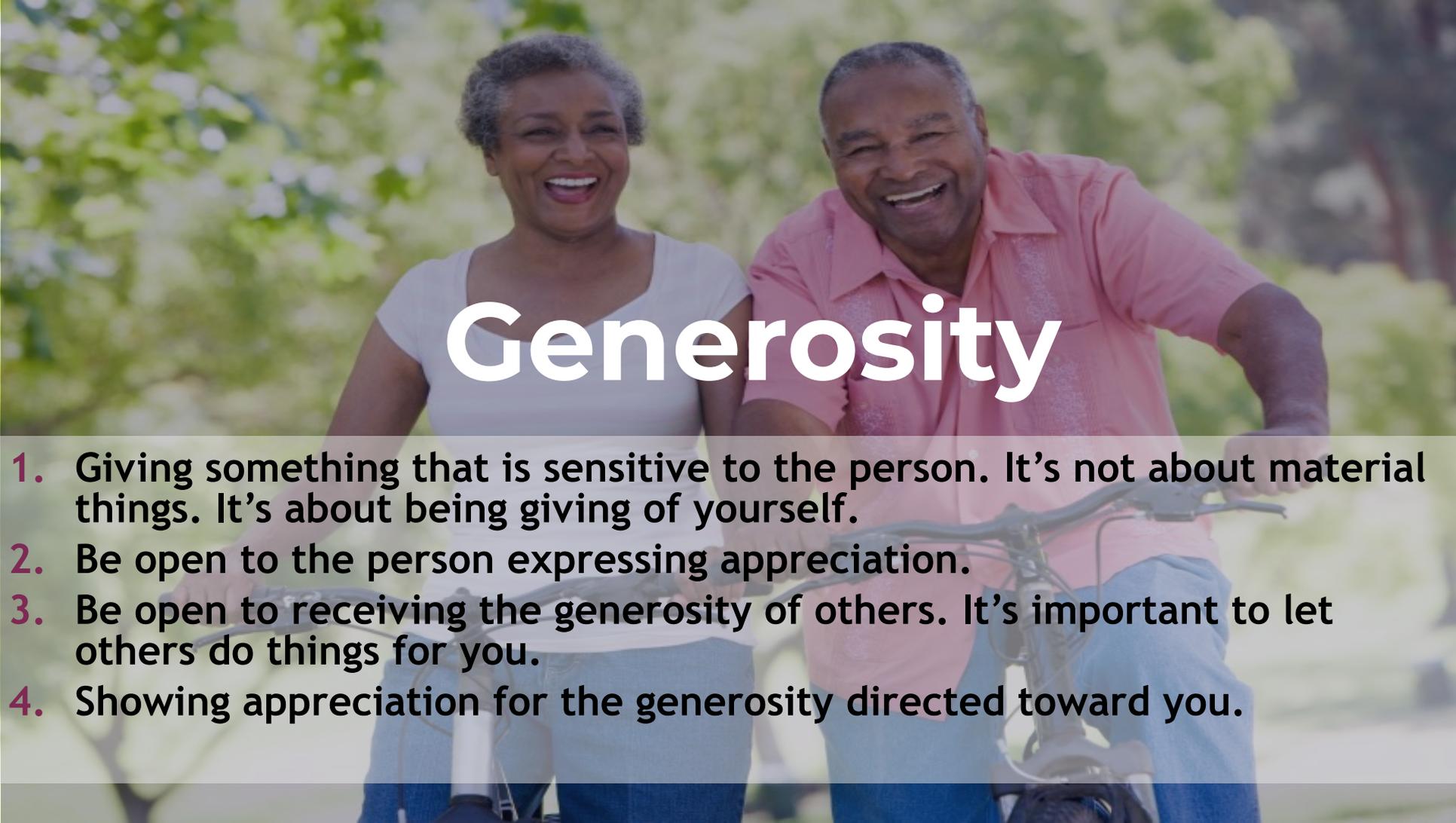
- 
- A young man with short dark hair and a silver hoop earring is kissing a young woman with long dark hair on the cheek. The woman is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.
- Assume responsibility for your relationship
  - Give up victimized language and thinking
  - Avoid the use of passive aggression to get what you want

# Withholding

The image features a man and a woman in silhouette, sitting back-to-back with their arms crossed. They are positioned against a light green background. A dark purple horizontal band at the top contains the word 'Withholding' in white. A semi-transparent white box at the bottom contains the text 'What does it look like?' followed by a bulleted list.

## What does it look like?

- Holding back positive qualities
- Feeling victimized or consumed by others

A photograph of an elderly couple riding bicycles outdoors. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, and the man on the right is wearing a pink polo shirt and blue jeans. They are both smiling broadly. The background is a soft-focus green landscape with trees. The word "Generosity" is overlaid in large white text across the middle of the image.

# Generosity

- 1. Giving something that is sensitive to the person. It's not about material things. It's about being giving of yourself.**
- 2. Be open to the person expressing appreciation.**
- 3. Be open to receiving the generosity of others. It's important to let others do things for you.**
- 4. Showing appreciation for the generosity directed toward you.**

# Unilateral Disarmament



- Defuse escalating arguments by dropping your stake in winning
- Say something warm and understanding
- Stress that it doesn't really matter who's right
- Express physical affection

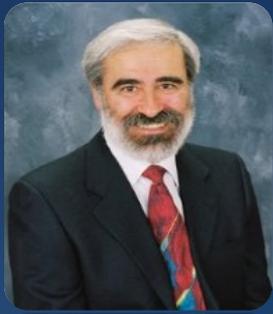
The technique of Unilateral Disarmament does not imply that you're surrendering your point of view or deferring to your partner's opinion. It simply indicates that you value being close to your partner more than winning your point.



## Integration

Daniel Siegel, M.D.

- Two differentiated people coming together and linking, not merging.
- Becoming a “we” while staying a separate self.



# Merge or Coevolve?

David Schnarch, Ph.D.



Are you living with a fused identity?

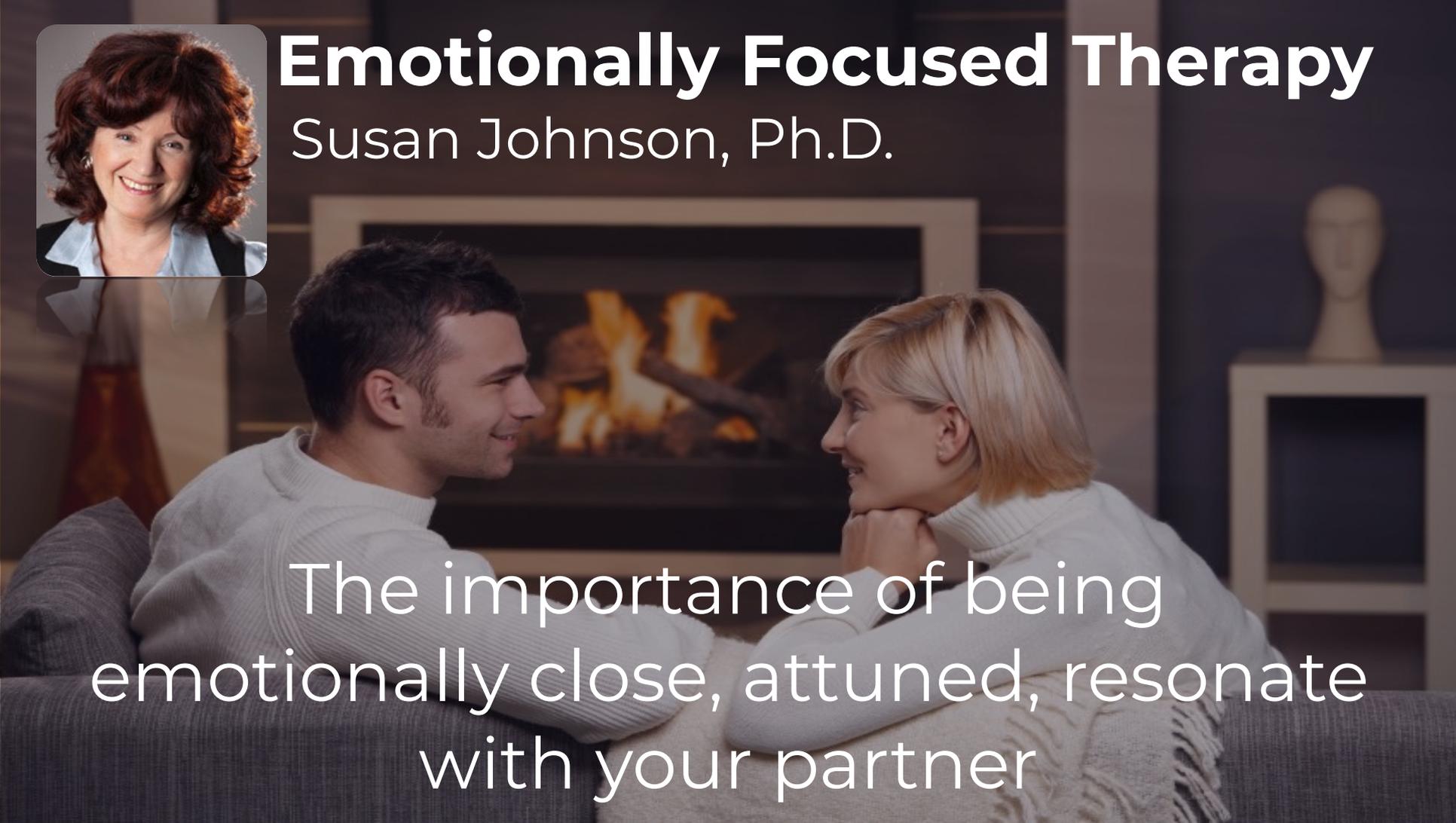
OR

Are you helping each other to evolve to be a better person? Coevolution.



# Emotionally Focused Therapy

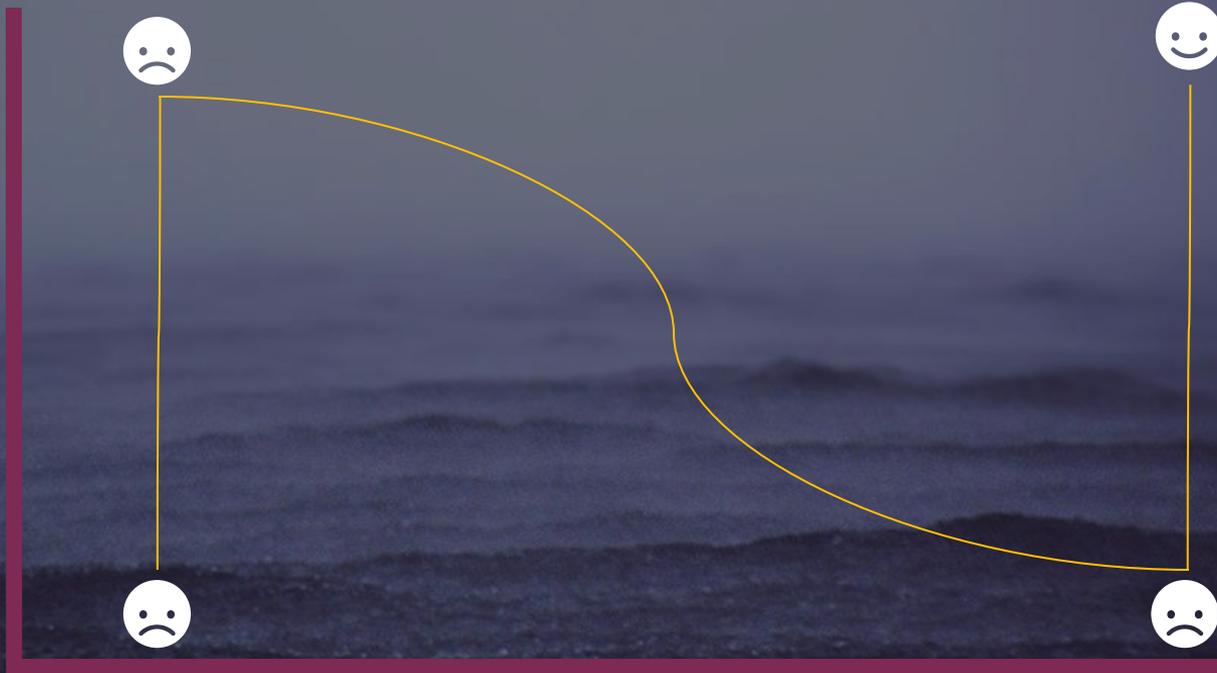
Susan Johnson, Ph.D.

A man and a woman are sitting on a grey couch in a living room, facing each other and smiling. The man is on the left, wearing a white sweater, and the woman is on the right, also wearing a white sweater. In the background, a fireplace with a warm fire is visible, along with a white bust on a side table to the right.

The importance of being  
emotionally close, attuned, resonate  
with your partner

# Differentiation and Linkage

**Linkage**  
(emotional  
closeness)



**Differentiation**  
(individuation as an individual)

# Actions that counter a fantasy bond:

1. Express love in a way your partner would experience as loving.
2. Be affectionate.
3. Slow down. Be kind and present.
4. See partner for who they are.
5. Make eye contact.
6. Try something old.
7. Try something new.
8. Break routine.
9. Avoid passivity and control.
10. Talk as an “I” instead of a “we.”
11. Be aware of your critical inner voice.





# 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

# Goals for Your Relationship



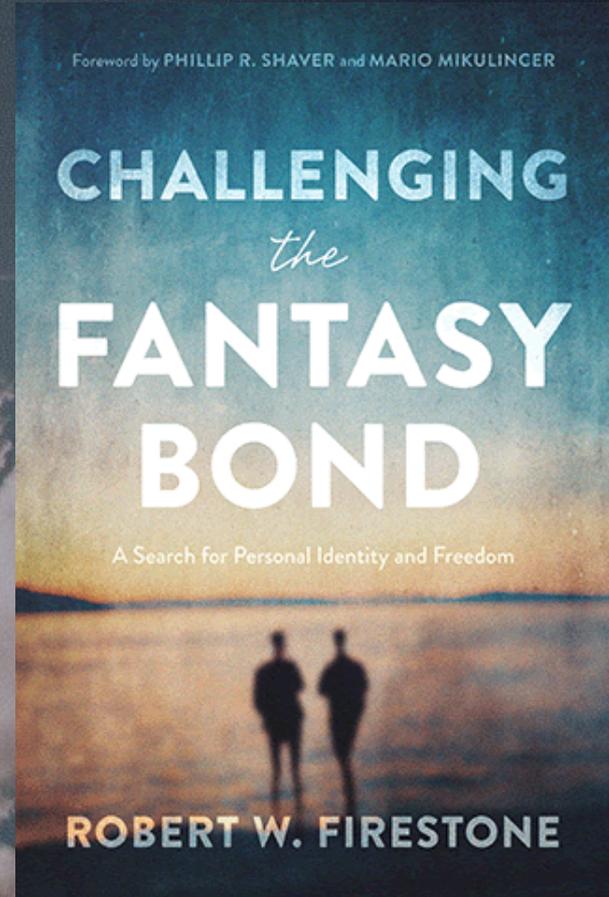
- Goals I have for my relationship
- Actions to take to achieve my goals



# New Book

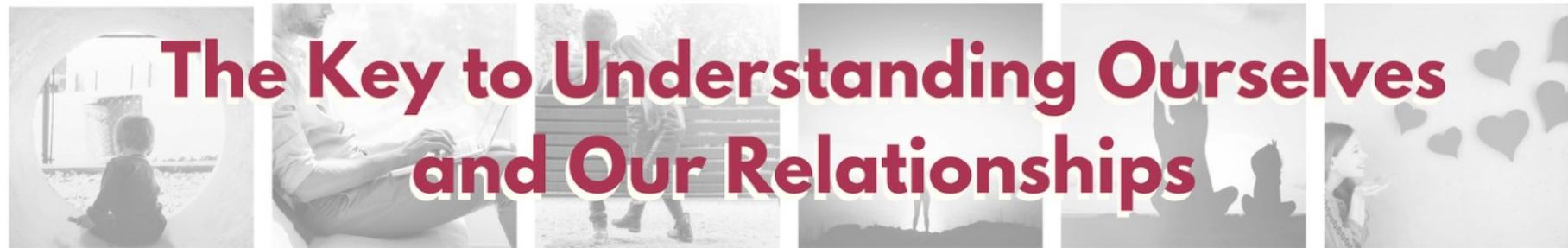
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# The Fantasy Bond



The Key to Understanding Ourselves  
and Our Relationships

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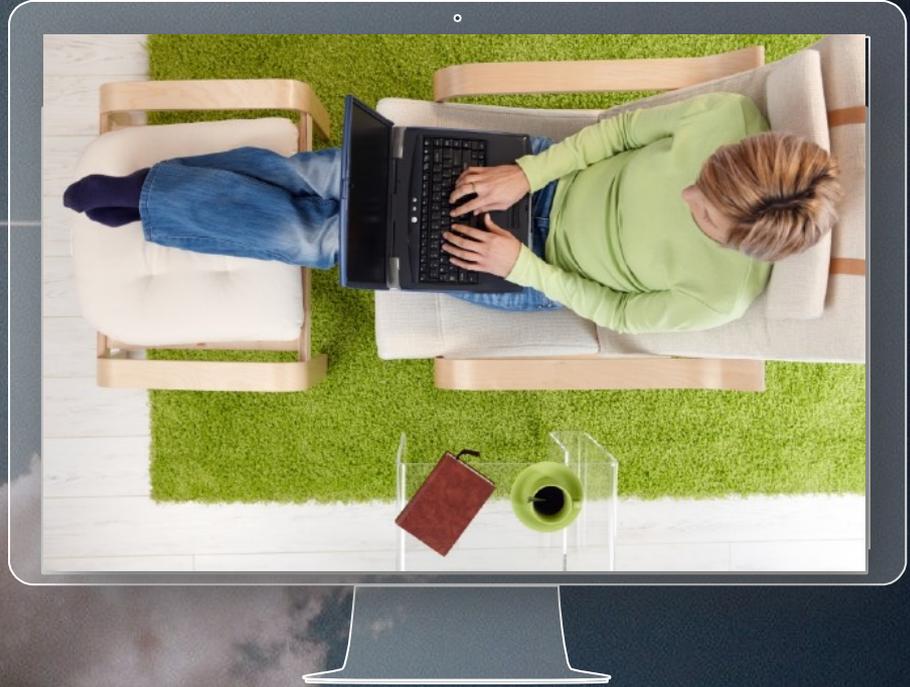
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# Thank you!

**Any questions?**

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