

Differentiation

Intimacy is experienced in two ways:

- Connecting sexually and/or in a nurturing way, with a sense of secure attachment
- In moments of clear *differentiation* & *deeper self-exposure* to another

What is Differentiation? - The active, ongoing process of defining self, revealing self, clarifying boundaries, and managing the anxiety that comes from risking either more intimacy or potential separation. Differentiation is a process that can *only* happen in the context of a relationship. Often people confuse this with individuation. They are both important but different processes.

Differentiation is the fuel that allows effective couples to attain exceptional or uncommon results and helps them become increasingly committed to one another and over time to recognize that their love is irreplaceable.

Differentiation of Self

- Capacity to internally self-reflect & identify own thoughts, feelings, wants, desires & internal cues, as distinct from those of others.
- Able to express thoughts, feelings, wants, desires and impulses congruently & clearly, in real time, or at least close enough to real time that a partner doesn't feel blindsided.
- Able to be an effective initiator of discussions: contain self, manage defenses, open vulnerability (talk *about* vulnerability without being flooded by emotion).
- Actively manage emotional contagion, resist getting swept up in partner's feelings.

Differentiation from Partner

- Able to calm oneself & listen without interrupting or defending self.
- Ask *other*-directed questions.
- Have *genuine interest and curiosity* about partner's internal process.
- Understand partner in light of his/her history.
- Work to develop and express empathy.
- Ability to manage emotional contagion, allowing openness & closeness to a distressed partner, without getting caught in their distress.

Evolution of Differentiation:

1. Internal self-reflecting and identifying of one's own thoughts, feelings, values, wants and desires.
2. Developing the increasing ability to express congruently one's own thoughts, feelings, wants and desires. To expose "who I am."
3. Developing awareness of the partner as *separate and different*.
4. Developing an increasing ability to listen, hear and then respond effectively *to these differences* – with clear boundaries.
5. Developing the ability to *create an accepting environment* in the relationship that also supports desired changes.

Self-Capacities that are Developed and Strengthened:

- Increased self-accountability
- Increased capacity to self-soothe
- Clearer boundary definition
- Increased ability to self-validate
- Increased anxiety tolerance
- Increased capacity to experience empathy
- Increased acceptance of other as separate & different from self
- Increased ability to internally self-reflect and self-define