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ON DIFFERENTIATION

MAINTAINING YOUR INDIVIDUALITY WITHIN A RELATIONSHIP

WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATION?



Differentiation is defined as the ability to hold onto one's sense of self within the incredible pressures of a system.

- A **system** is a set of parts that create a whole. They can include partnership, family, workplaces, peer groups, etc.
- Your **sense of self** is also known as your *individuality*. It is who you are and how you show up when you are not in a system.

A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT SYSTEMS

- Again, a system is a set of parts that create a whole.
- The goal of a system is to **establish and maintain homeostasis.**
- When in homeostasis, there is balance, and with balance comes **lower chronic anxiety.**

Remember: Homeostasis does not mean HEALTH. A system can have an unhealthy equilibrium.

Remember: The system is focused on REDUCING ANXIETY. A system WANTS TO MAINTAIN HOMEOSTASIS.

THEREFORE ...



ANY TIME YOU DIFFERENTIATE -
IE GROW HEALTHIER - THE
SYSTEM IS THROWN OUT OF
BALANCE!

UNDERSTANDING INTRAPERSONAL DIFFERENTIATION

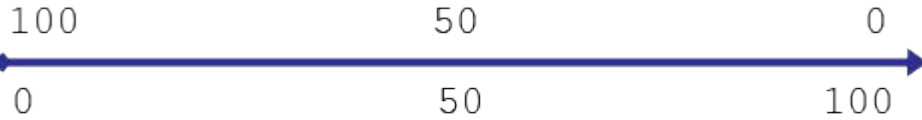


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INTRApersonal - differentiation on an individual level.

- Ability to balance **thoughts** with **emotions**
- Relates to **emotional management** & the size of your cup

Rational



UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL DIFFERENTIATION

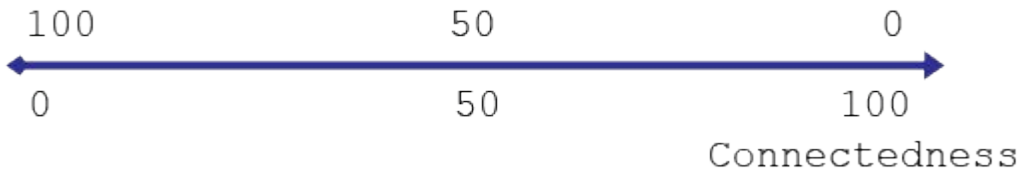


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INTERpersonal - differentiation on a relational level.

- Balance between need for individuality (doing what I want to do) and need for connectedness (doing what others want to do).

Individuality



WE ARE OFTEN ATTRACTED TO OTHERS WHO



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THE SAME LEVEL OF DIFFERENTIATION AS WE
ARE, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY & RELATIONALLY
(USUALLY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SPECTRUM)

'YOU COMPLETE ME' ... DOESN'T MEAN THAT'S HEALTHY

A FEW MORE FACTS ABOUT DIFFERENTIATION

- We inherit the **same level of differentiation** as our parent figures from our family of origin. Yikes.
- Therefore our kids will inherit OUR level of differentiation UNLESS:
 - We actively work to raise our level of differentiation or,
 - Our kids have differentiating events in their lifetime.

SO ... HOW DOES SOMEONE DIFFERENTIATE?

It requires structured experiences that increase emotional resilience and sense of self. Some examples include:

- Going to therapy
- Intentional family separation (ie studying abroad or moving to another city)
- Overcoming life hardships in healthy and productive ways

THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION ...

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE
STARTS TO DIFFERENTIATE?



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE STARTS TO DIFFERENTIATE?

Remember the System: it's all about homeostasis.

- When one person starts to differentiate, the system is thrown out of homeostasis. This increases the **anxiety** of the system, usually **escalating** behaviors at home as the system attempts to return YOU to your role.
 - Like the temper tantrum your child throws when you institute a new boundary
 - Like the workplace drama that accompanies new departmental expectations
 - Like the internal questioning of 'am I doing the right thing here?'

WHEN WILL THE SYSTEM CREATE A NEW HOMEOSTASIS?



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It depends on a variety of factors in the system. However:

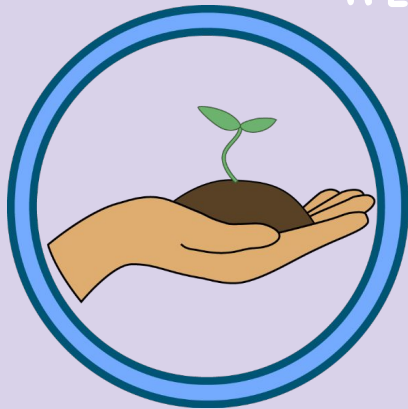
- If one is able to maintain their new level of differentiation, then usually the system will establish a new normal.
- At a new normal, the system's anxiety will return to a lower baseline.
- The system will thus be more stable because it is at a higher level of health than before.

But: sometimes the system cannot rise to a higher level of health. In these cases, the individual must decide - 'Do I return to my old habits, or do I maintain my higher level of health?' The individual must decide to stay in the system, or further separate.



REMEMBER ...

AS YOUR LEVEL OF DIFFERENTIATION INCREASES, YOUR
SYSTEM MUST GROW WITH YOU IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN
HEALTHY CONNECTION.



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