



Differentiation

For Strength & Balance Within Your Self and Within Your Relationships

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WHAT IS IT? WHY IS IT HELPFUL? HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP IT?

You, like every person, were born with two different innate drives to help you live life.

1. **Your drive for independence & autonomy** – the drive that plays a central role in fulfilling your need to be a self-sustaining person.
2. **Your drive for dependence & belonging** – the drive that plays a central role in fulfilling your need to have a sustainable relationship.

Differentiation is the on-going development of your ability to manage these two drives:

- your drive for independence/autonomy, which is your need to be an “I” with
- your drive for dependence/belonging, which is your need to be a “We”

so that you can fluidly move in and out of these two different drives, depending on how you choose to take care of yourself in the particular situation you find yourself in.



Sometimes you may want to embrace your need to belong, by leaving your autonomous point of view to join your partner’s viewpoint. And sometimes you may want to emphasize your own autonomy and either ask your partner to give into you and join your viewpoint or compromise with you or just agree to disagree.

Differentiation allows a positive synergy to be created within a relationship.

- The balancing of your drive for independence with your drive for dependence creates an energetic tension within you and within your relationship.

- This tension is created when you can accept and manage these opposite drives within you and when you can recognize, accept and work with the differences between you and your partner.
- Instead of you and your partner merely depending upon each other, you will depend on the synergy of functional interdependence that you create together when you interact. This energetic synergy will fill your own life and your relationship with an aliveness that is fresh, dynamic and life enhancing.
- Differentiation allows this positive synergetic interaction to be created when each partner is able to balance their need to belong with their need to remain autonomous while they are interacting with each other.

When you have developed Differentiation, you can:

- be in conflict with your partner without breaking your connection.
- connect with your partner without feeling like you are losing yourself.
- let go of competition, and get beyond needing to be completely right so as not to feel completely wrong.
- change your thoughts and/or behavior without it being a threat to your identity or self-worth.
- hold the tension of a disagreement, and take the time to listen and mull over what your partner has said, without needing to rush to a solution to reduce the uncomfortable tension.
- manage your reactivity to your partner's anxiety while still caring for your self and the relationship.
- self-regulate your own anxiety and self-soothe your own hurt if your partner is not willing or able to help you.
- accept the fact that you and your partner are different and won't always agree with each other, but you can agree to disagree.

If either partner has too great a need in one area or the other, problems can arise.

- Individuals with too great a need for autonomy fail to sufficiently connect with their partner and thus lose their opportunity to contribute to the synergy of the relationship, where they could *feel the joy of belonging* while they experience being centered in their own self and making a connection.

- Individuals with too great a need to belong will attempt to enmesh with their partner and thus lose their opportunity to contribute to the synergy of the relationship, where they could *feel the joy of individuality* while they experience being centered in their own self and making a connection.

To develop Differentiation, you need to grow your “I” and your “We”:

- By focusing on yourself and letting yourself grow more fully into who you are by
 - getting to know and appreciate yourself and developing self-awareness of all that you are.
 - taking responsibility and caring for yourself and your own needs when you feel vulnerable.
 - talking about and healing any unprocessed trauma or grief.
 - opening to more of your untapped potential and developing it.
 - learning to manage all of the different parts of yourself with awareness and personal power.
- By focusing on your relationship and giving it time and attention so that your relational connection can grow by
 - recognizing what you like about the relationship and noticing and appreciating it when it happens.
 - finding space in your day/week to spend enjoyable quality time together.
 - making time to regularly communicate and discover what you each think and feel.
 - developing common goals and supporting each other in their attainment.
 - discussing and working through any painful history between you, so you each can let go and move on.
 - defining the patterns you get stuck in and the different qualities you carry for each other, and then doing the individual work to open to that which you project on to your partner.