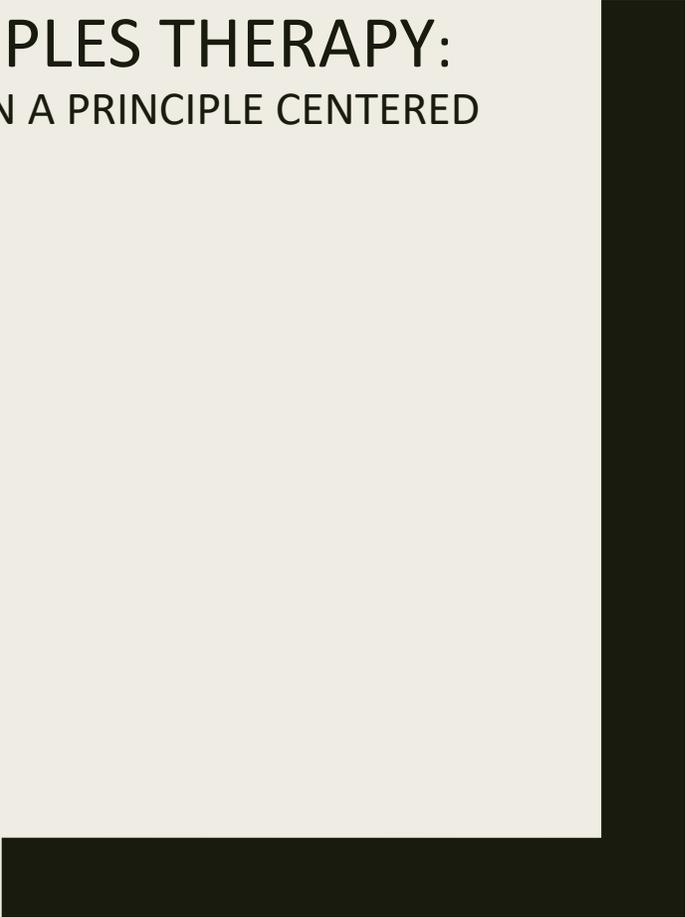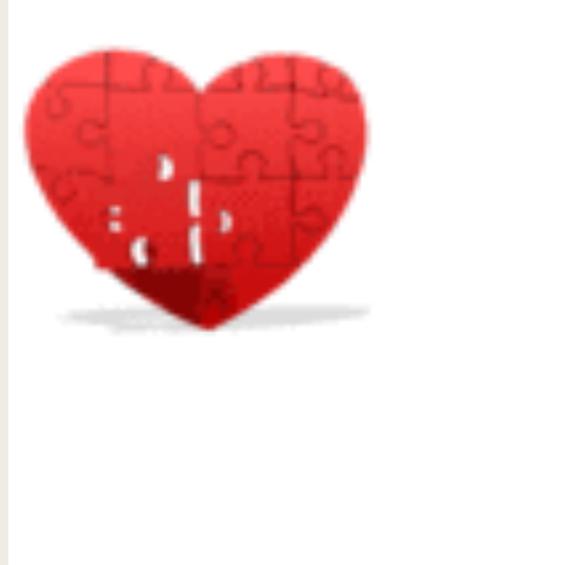# A PRINCIPLE CENTERED APPROACH TO COUPLES THERAPY:

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK; TEN PRACTICAL HABITS WITHIN A PRINCIPLE CENTERED APPROACH.

Donald Gilbert, MS, PhD, LMHC BCPC

President/CEO New Life Counseling PC

A Principle Centered Approach to Couples Therapy

By: Donald Gilbert, MS, PhD, LMHC, BCPC

Objectives

- Explore a multidimensional approach to a complex idea.

- Examine seven overlapping dimensions to consider in the development of intimacy in a love relationship.

- Explain that Intimacy can be understood and intentionally developed to enhance the breadth and depth of a relationship.

- Identify principles of thinking that can be taught and encouraged to be developed in an intentionally cognitive process.

- Determine personal disciplines of behavior that can be taught and learned in the growth and development of intimacy in relationships.

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

■ What do we mean by Multi-Dimensional?

– *The assessment of a subject from different perspectives.*

– *A set of criteria or stated values in relation to which measurements or judgments can be made.*
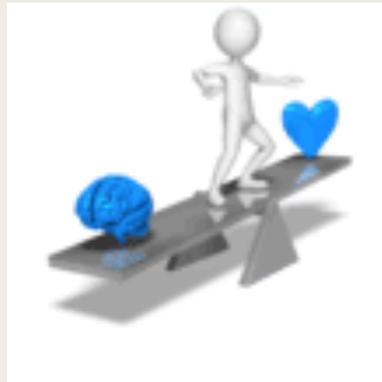
MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

EMOTIONAL SOCIAL RELATIONAL SPIRITUAL INTELLECTUAL RECREATIONAL PHYSICAL
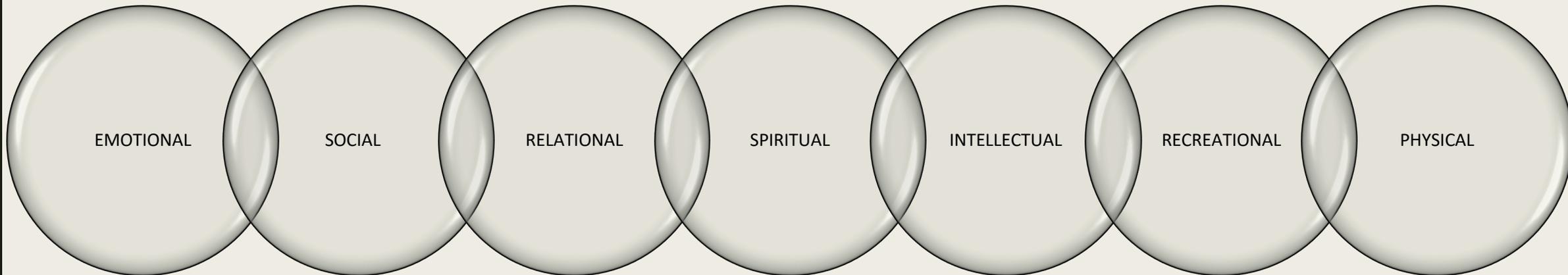
MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

■ **What do each of these areas represent?**

■ Emotional- "the capacity to be self-aware, self-regulate, have empathy and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically"

■ Social- "the capacity to be aware of self and others, to identify social cues, and have healthy relationships as a couple with other couples or groups."

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

■ <u>Relational</u>- "the ability to be self-aware, to self-regulate during emotional and interpersonal conflict, and to arrive at a mutually satisfying solution."

■ <u>Spiritual</u>- "having a common basis of spiritual belief, a set of core values that both live by, within the boundaries of mutually agreeable limitations."

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

■ <u>Recreational</u>- "having refreshment in body or mind, as after work, by some form of play; any form of play, amusement, or relaxation used for this purpose, as games, sports, or hobbies, together as a couple."

■ <u>Intellectual</u>- "The ability to be attentive, curious, thoughtful, showing interest, sharing conversationally, with one another, on topics of interest."

■ <u>Physical</u>- "the practice of being affectionate; loving, gentle touching, holding hands, kissing, petting and sexual contact, within the shared boundaries as a couple."

# CORE CONCEPTS

■ We DON'T **'fix'** people – people grow!

■ We DON'T 'fix' but replace old structures with new ones!

■ We DON'T 'fix' relationships – they grow as the people in the relationship grow!

■ We practice progress – not perfection!

■ Practice makes permanent – not perfect!

■ Emotions are information – not instructions!

■ Attitude is the greatest influence we can have on others.

CORE CONCEPTS

■ Your words matter. Choose the words you think and speak wisely.

■ You have control over what you think. Challenge your thinking.

■ You either do or do not do - there is no 'try'.

■ Failure and success are definitions we make up.

■ Values are the source of who you think you are.

■ Purpose is the driving force to your accomplishments.

■ Pain is a great motivator – it depends on how you use it.

Core Relational Objectives

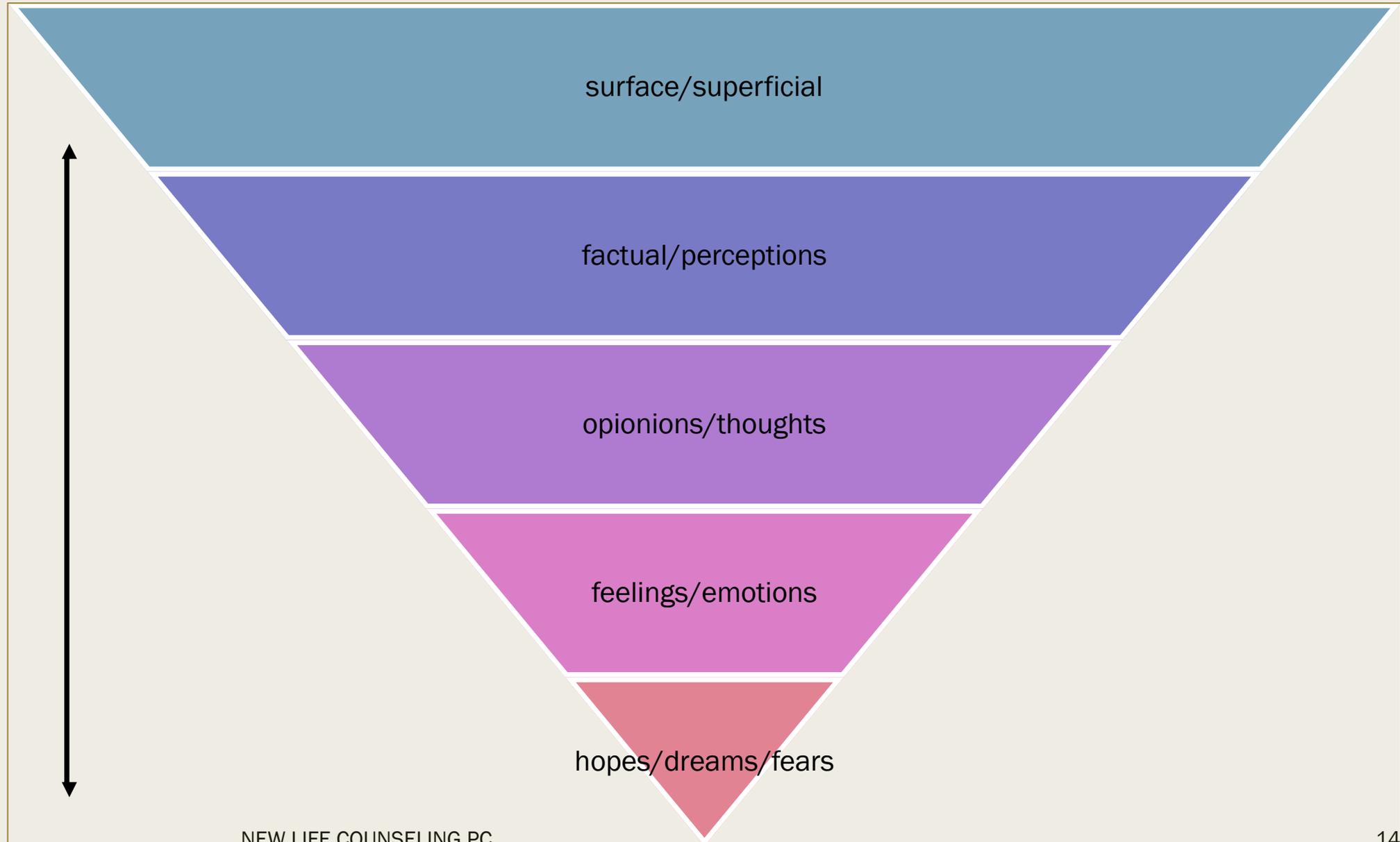■ Mutual satisfaction – reciprocated behaviors.

■ Mutual connection – mutually healthy communication.

■ Balance between the "'I's" and the "us".

■ Mutual respect – maintain appropriate boundaries.

■ Common 'Core' Values – united in 'core' beliefs and purpose.

■ Collaborative Partnership – harmony in our differences.

■ Mutual focus on strength based growth.

■ Mutual ownership of personal responsibility.
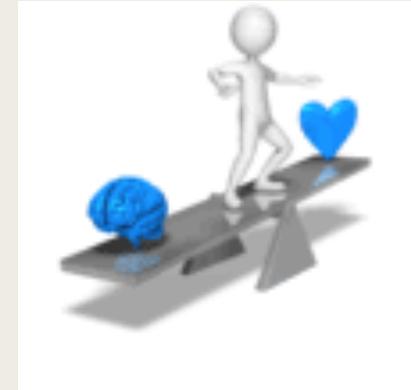
Depth

- **Relational IQ**
  - The ability to communicate effectively at all levels of the pyramid.
  - Consciously choosing to communicate at the level that fits the relationship.
  - To be able to mirror another person at the level that they are communicating.
  - The ability to go up an down the communication pyramid as needed in a conversation.

Depth

surface/superficial

factual/perceptions

opionions/thoughts

feelings/emotions

hopes/dreams/fears

Depth

- Relational IQ

  - Recognize that all relationships start at the top of the communication pyramid.
  - A person has more numbers of relationships at the top level than the bottom.
  - You can not force another to converse with you at a deeper level that they want or know how.
  - Intentionally communicate at least 15% of your conversations on the bottom two levels.

PRINCIPLE CENTERED APPROACH

■ What does Principle Centered mean?

- – A general scientific theorem or law that has numerous special applications across a wide field
- – A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

PRINCIPLES

SOME EXAMPLES

- **The Principle of Emotion** - Emotions are information NOT instructions.

- **The Principle of Personhood** - You are not what you do. Understand the difference between who you are and what you do.

- **The Principle of Thought** - You are what you think. Every choice begins with a thought.

- **The Principle of Understanding** - Seek to Understand, before you seek to be understood.

PRINCIPLES

SOME EXAMPLES

- **The Principle of Intentionality -** Growth doesn't just happen.

- **Principle of Control -** You can't choose to change what you are not aware and mindful of.

- **The Principle of Freedom -** You can not, not choose. Everything is a choice..

- **The Principle of Conflict** - Conflict is inevitable and necessary for growth. How are you handling conflict?

PRINCIPLES

■ **Principle of Openness –** What you tell others about your self, choosing to be transparent.

■ **Principle of Forgiveness –** Forgiveness is for you, allowing you to heal and move forward in your life.

■ **Principle of Trust -** Trust is both earned and given**.**

PRINCIPLES

- **Principle of Accountability –** I am responsible for myself, allowing someone I trust to hold me responsible for who I want to be.

- **Principle of Sowing and Reaping –** You can only reap what you sow. What are you sowing/planting in your relationship?

- **Principle of Visibility –** To be visible, you must have a voice. Speak up.

HABITS

What do we mean
- These habits are not the end all.
- They are a starting place, when practiced will transform your life and your relationship.
- These are not just behaviors, they are a HABIT, a way of thinking and being.
- These habits will never change anyone until they are practiced consistently over time.

Grow Up Your Habits

1. **Speak Up**– Have a voice. Express your needs, wants, desires and preferences..

2. **Build Up** - Affirm, accept, appreciate, encourage, support, inspire and reassure others.

3. **Listen Up** - Active Listening skills. Be quick to listen and slow to speak.

Grow Up Your Habits

4. **Loosen Up** – Practice self control and self discipline. Learn to be less rigid, more flexible.

5. **Grow Up** – To develop and become mature; emotionally, physically, spiritually, psychologically, intellectually and relationally.

Grow Up Your Habits

6. **Connect Up** – Establish communication, join and unite with another.

7. **Clear Up** – Resolve conflict. Stay up to date. Forgive others and ask for forgiveness.

8. **Step Up** – Take responsibility for your self. Own your stuff. What you say, feel, think and do.

Grow Up Your Habits

9. **Follow Up** – Be a person of your word. Do what you say you will do.

10. **Stand Up** – Stand up for your personal values and principles.

Conclusion

- This is a multidimensional approach to a complex idea.

- There are seven overlapping dimensions to consider in the development of intimacy in a love relationship.

- That Intimacy can be understood and intentionally developed to enhance the breadth and depth of a relationship.

- There are principles of thinking that can be taught and encouraged to be developed in an intentionally cognitive process.

- There are personal disciplines of behavior that can be taught and learned in the growth and development of intimacy in relationships.

DIGGING DEEPER

CO-DEPENDANT

(ENMESHED)

"I"   "I"

"US"

INDEPENDANT

US

"I"

"I"
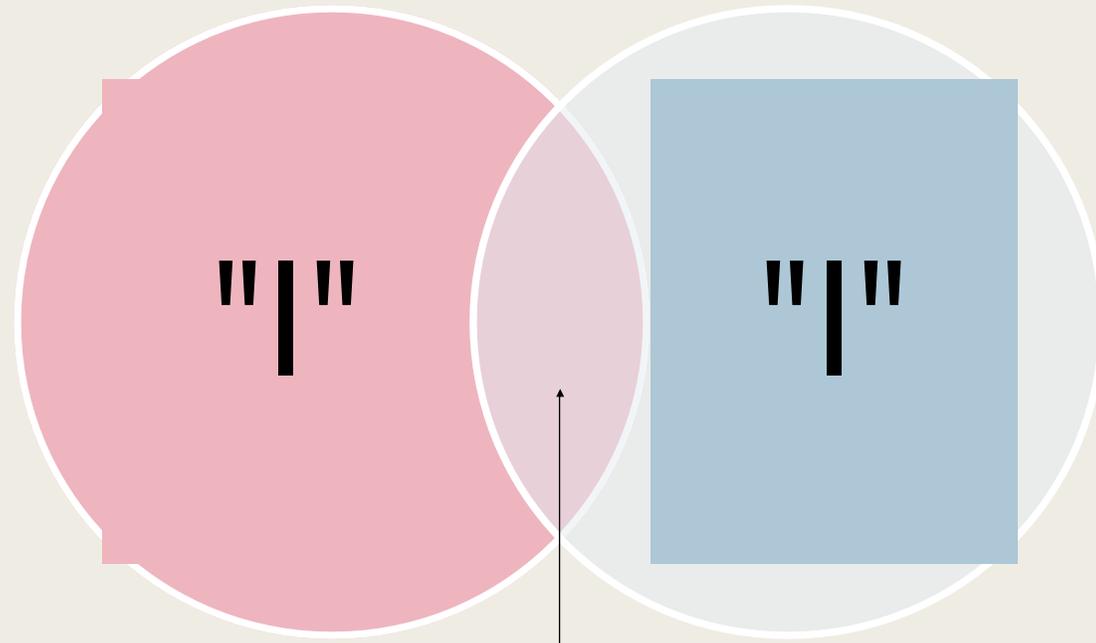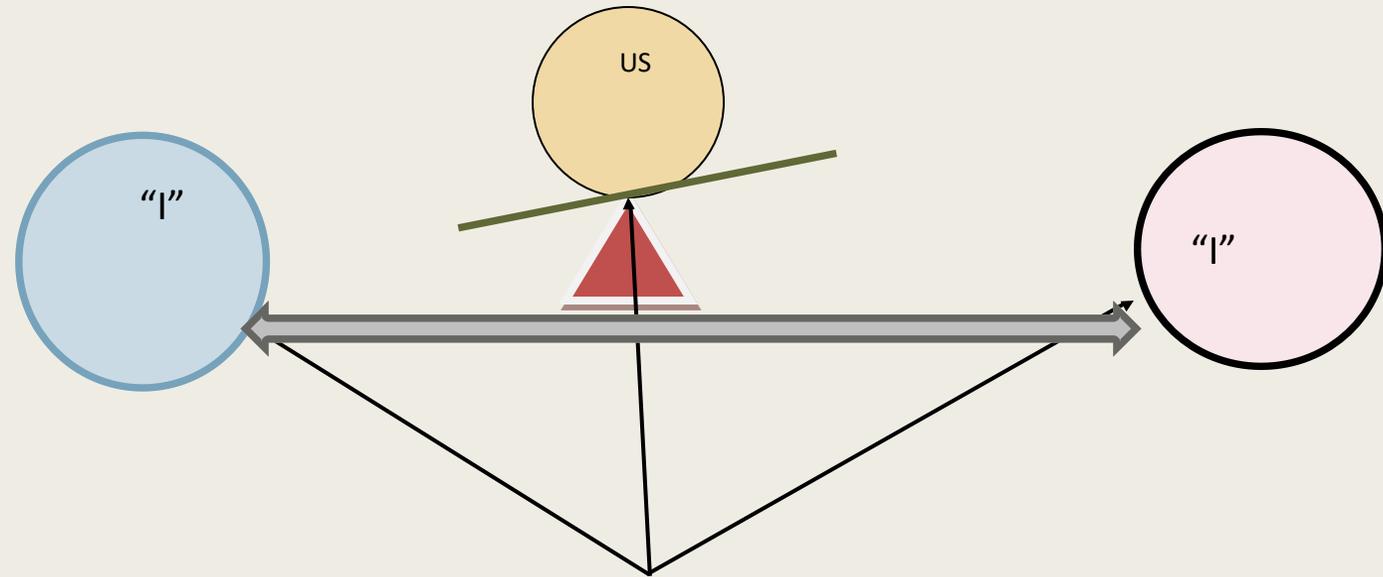
BOUNDARIES

DEPENDANT STYLE OF RELATIONSHIP

"I"

"I"
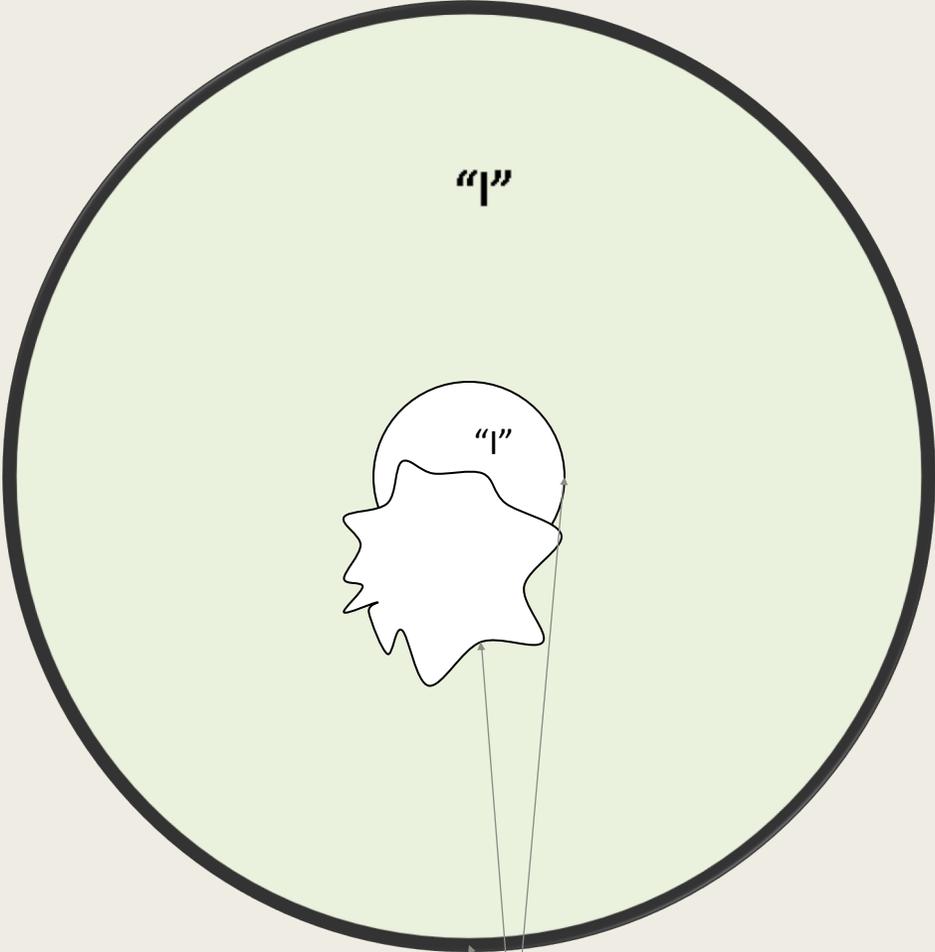
Boundaries

INTER-DEPENDANT

"US"

"I" "I"
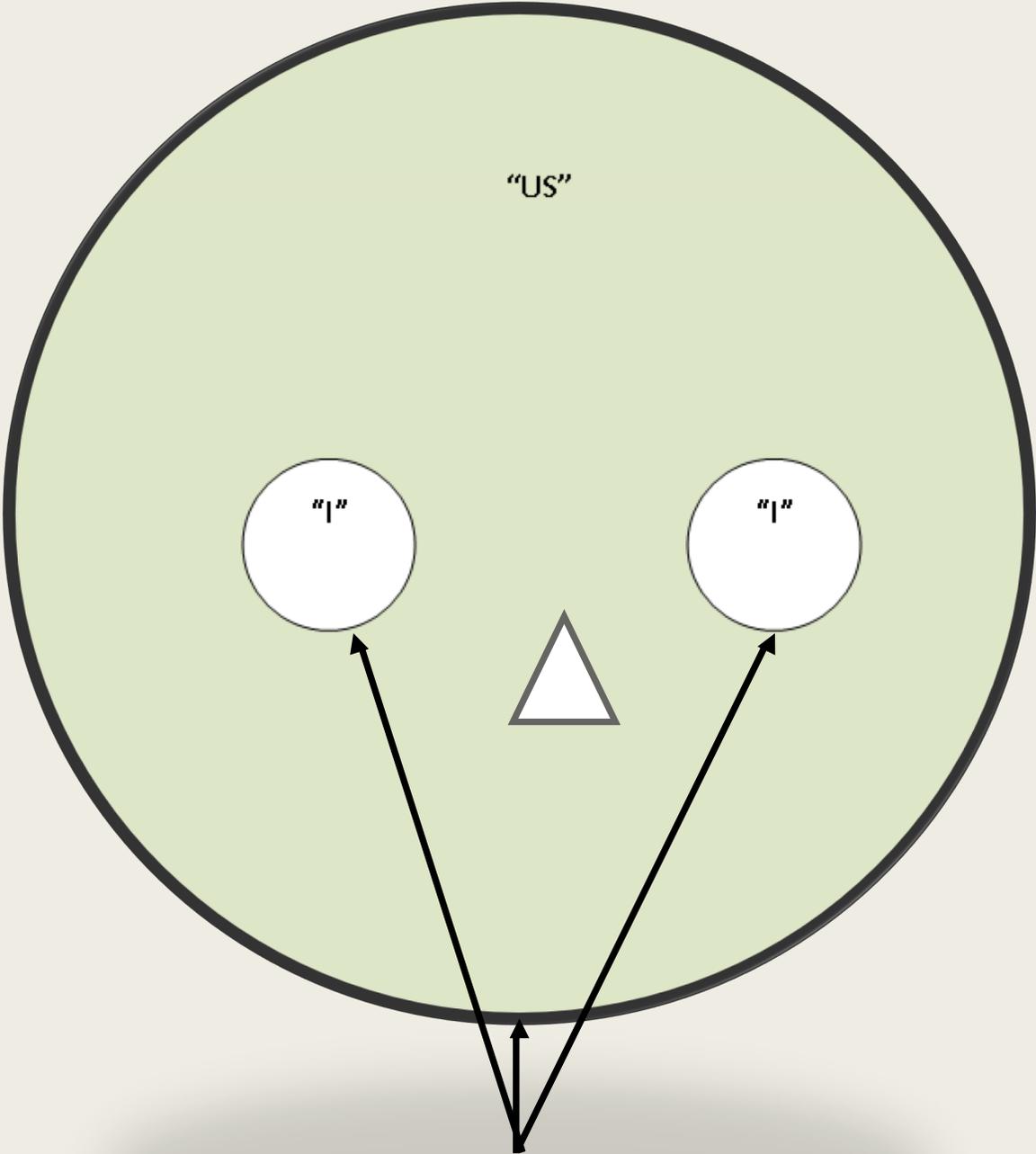
BOUNDARIES

Rational **E**motional **B**ehavior **P**rocesses

event → thought process → emotions → action reaction → result

| thought processes | emotions | behaviors | results |
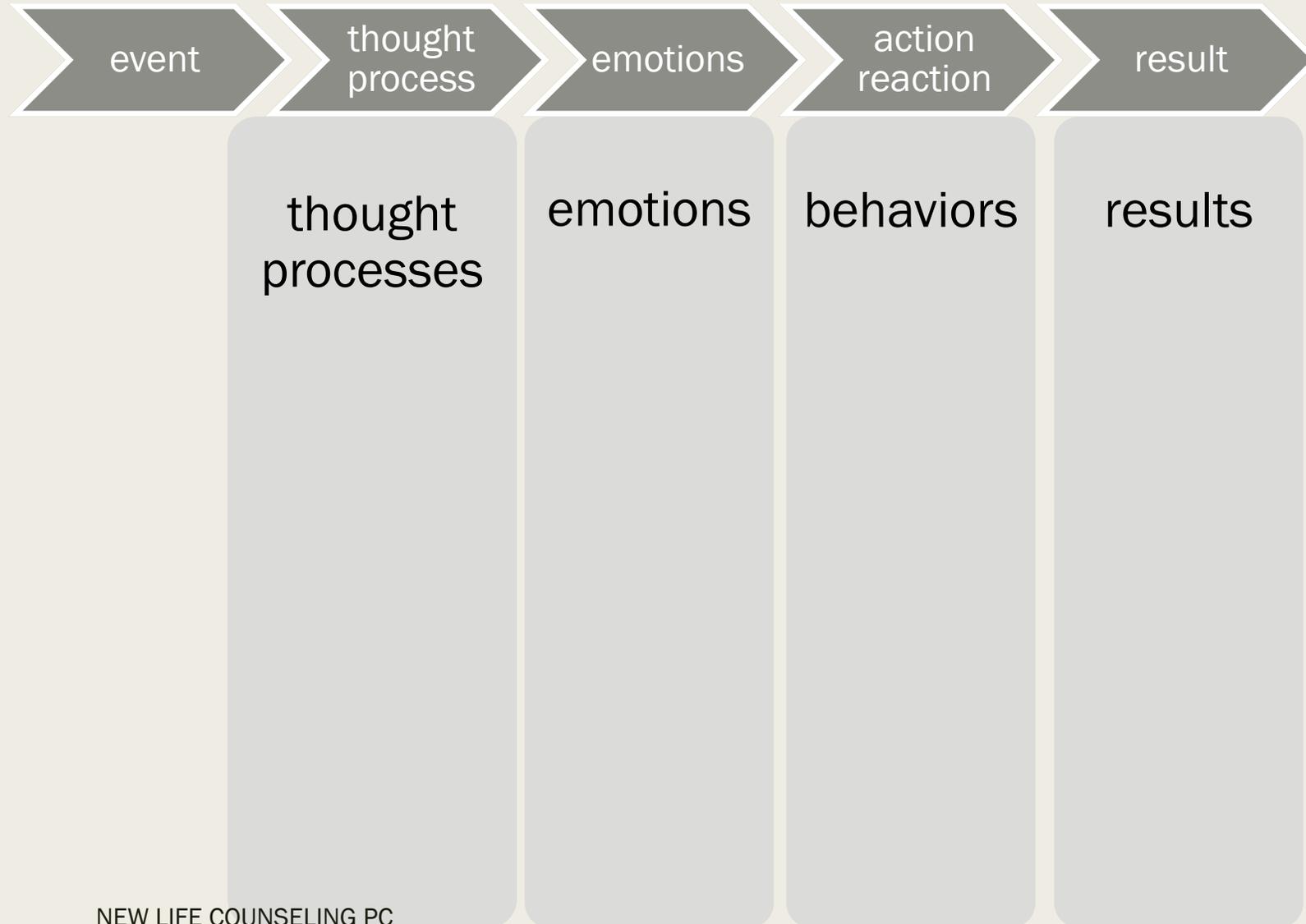
ASSESSMENT AND CASE CONCEPTUALIZATION

I   Initial Conjoint Interview (May take more than one session.)

- Gather background information
- Define presenting problem/conflict areas
- Compare and contrast spouses' individual perception of the problem(s)
- Listen for any distortion or ingrained beliefs about themselves and their spouses
- Explore previous therapeutic interventions and/or self-help strategies – what has worked and what has failed
- Learn their dance
- Early formulation of road map
- Distribute and explain the use of questionnaires/inventories

II   Individual Session with Spouse

- Score inventories and review feedback
- Focus in on highlighted areas of automatic thoughts, ingrained beliefs, schemas and maladaptive behavior patterns
- Probe for the need for personality testing
- Assess the amenability to change
- Ascertain collaboration

III Second Conjoint Interview (May take more than one session.)

- Provide feedback on conceptualization of the problem
- Discuss their amenability to change
- Review realistic vs. unrealistic expectations
- Ascertain collaborative set
- Orient couple to the Principle Centered Approach
- Orient couple to the Multi-Dimensional Concepts
- Orient couple to the cognitive-emotional-behavior model
- Establish a plan of action (e.g., communication, addressing rigid belief systems, problem solving, etc.)

THE ROLE OF COGNITION IN INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

Beliefs and Assumptions

External Events

Biased Perception and Recall

Automatic Thoughts

Responses of Others

Emotional Responses

Interpersonal Behavior

Partner

Partner

Union

problems

needs

issues

emotions

Self-talk
thoughts
beliefs

family
of origin

principles
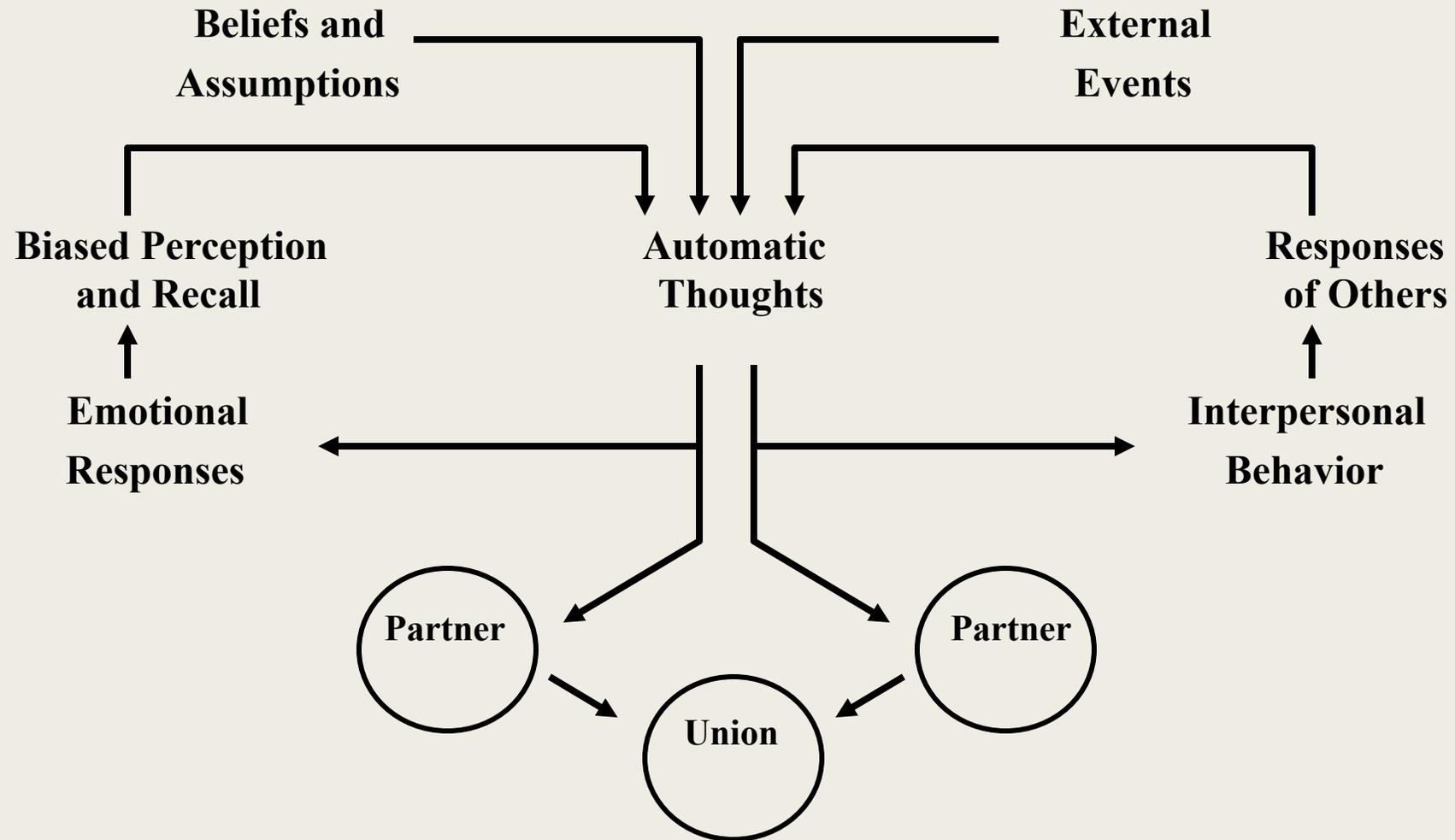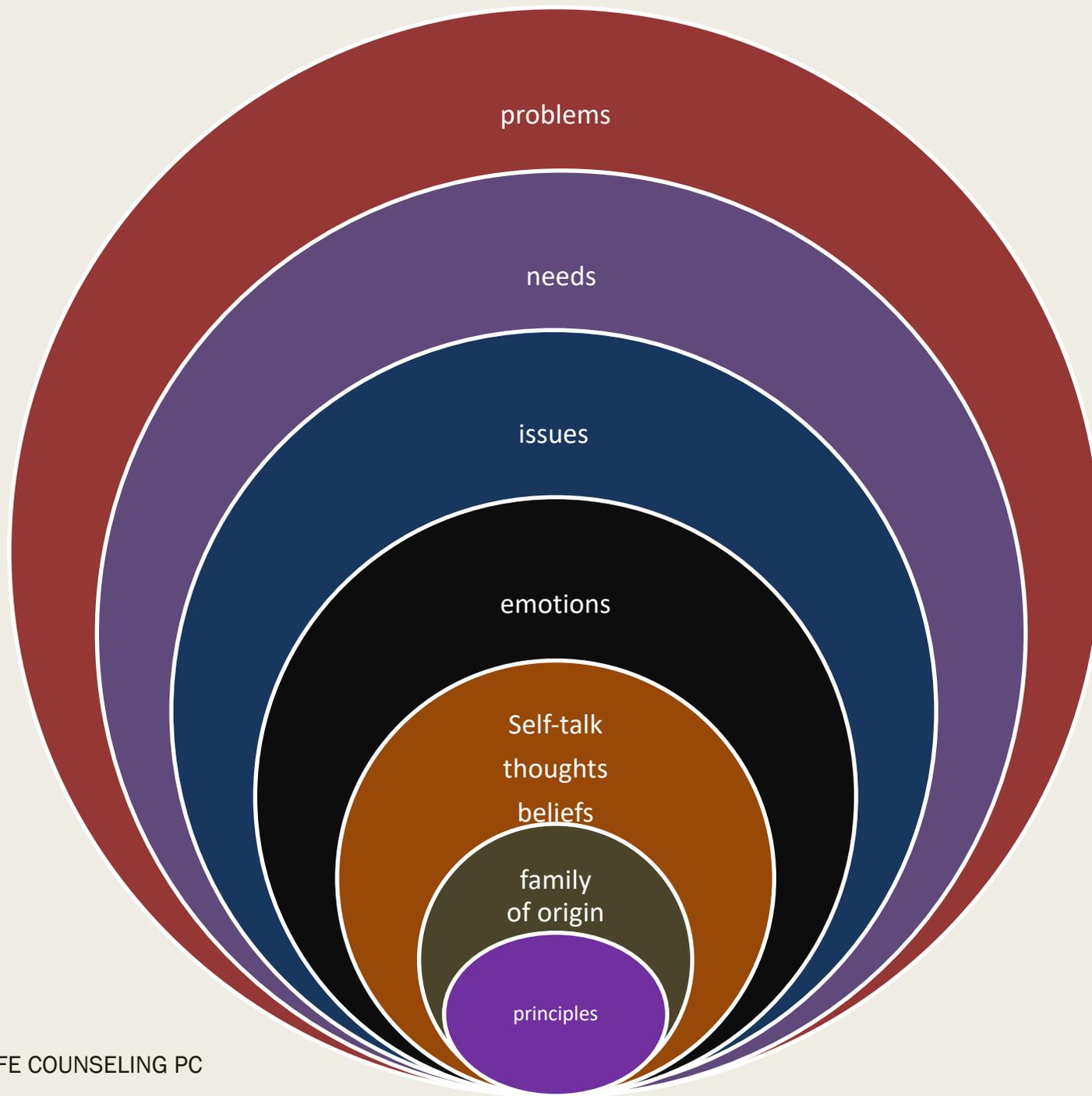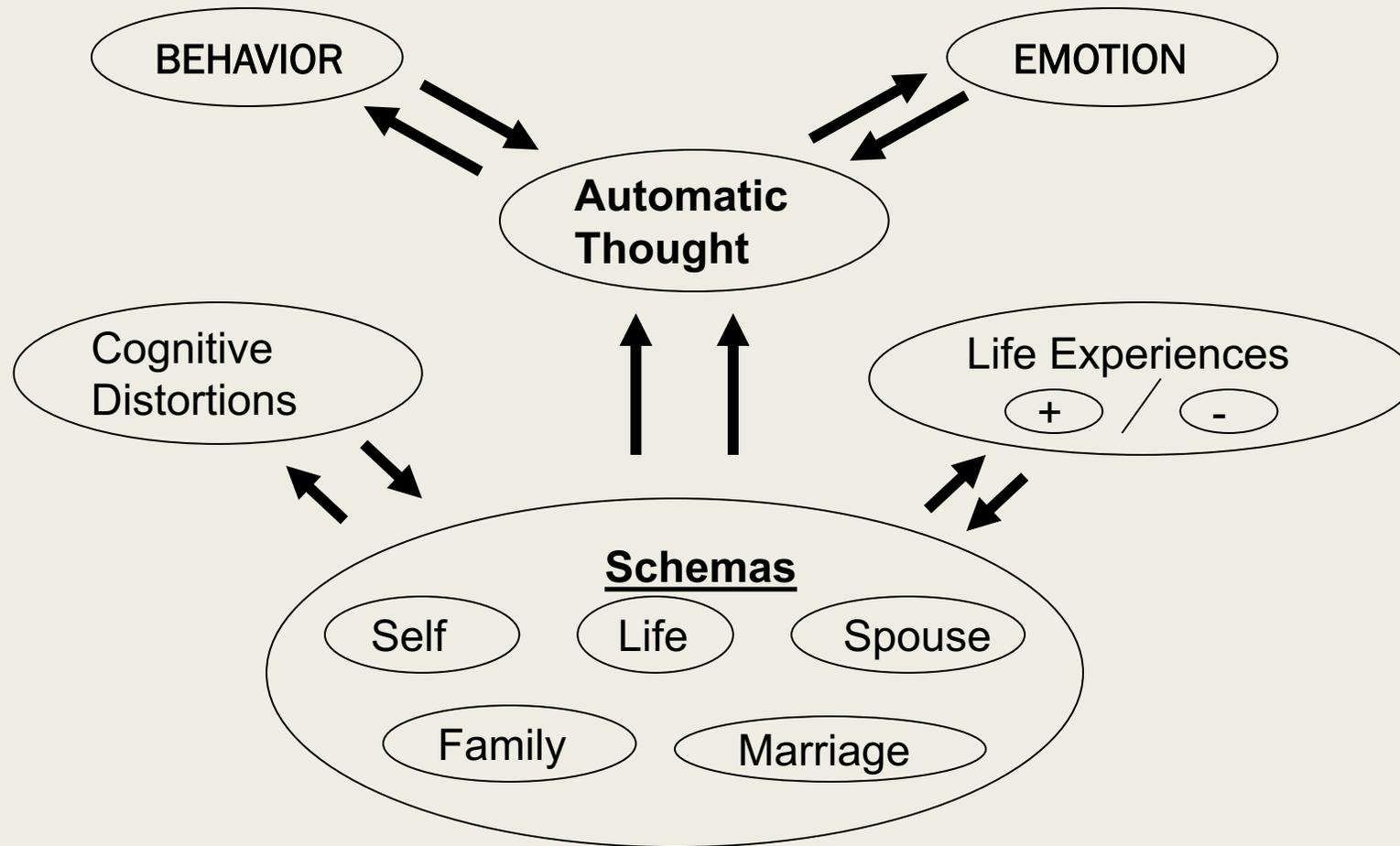
Cognitive Techniques
- Socratic Questioning
- Miracle Question
- Before/After Framing
- Metaphors & Story Telling

YOUR WALL

Label the pieces of your wall. What are you hiding behind?

COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS WITH COUPLES

Arbitrary Inference.   _Conclusions are made in the absence of supporting substantiating evidence. For example, a man whose wife arrives home a half-hour late from work concludes, "She must be having an affair."_
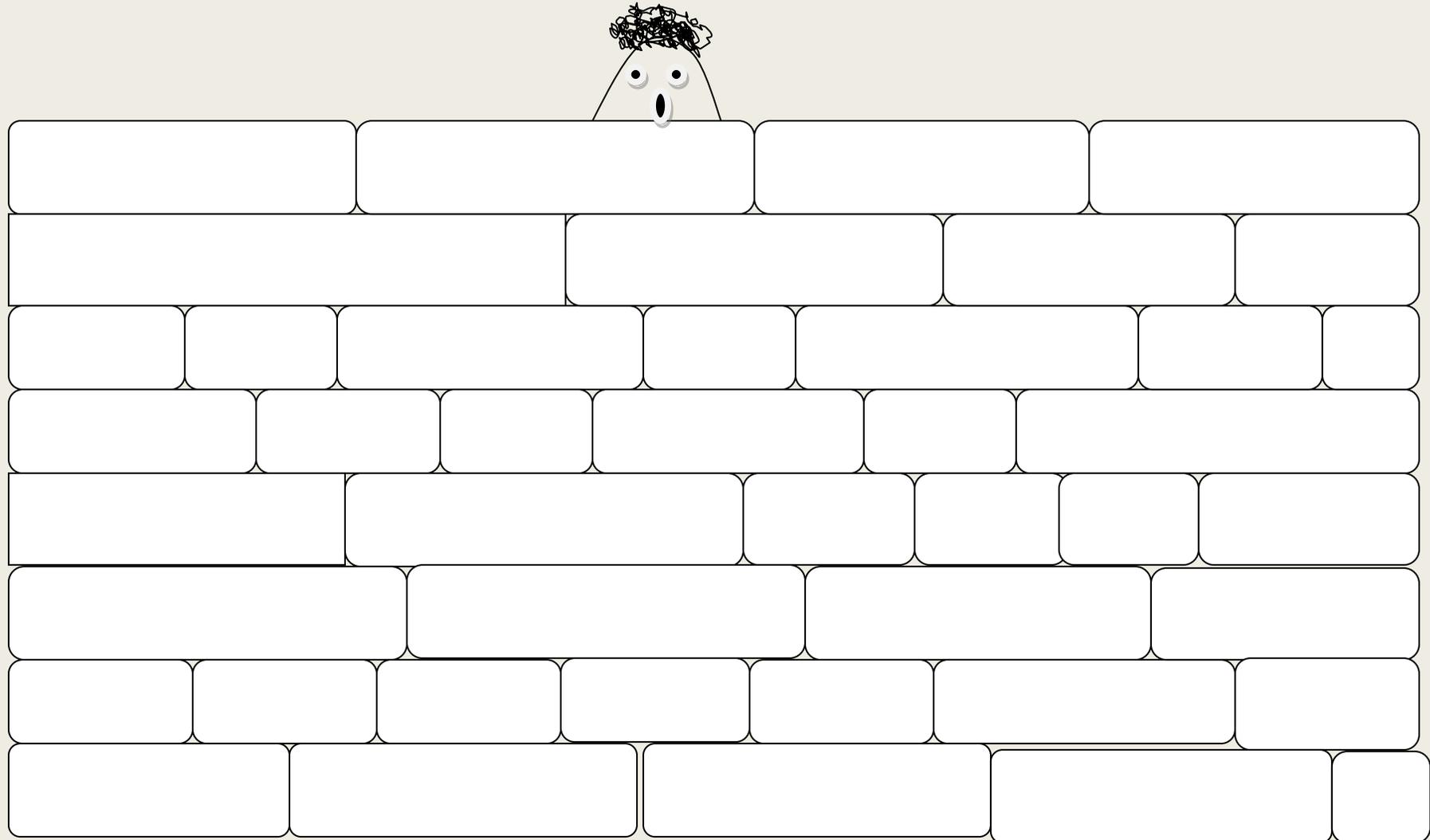
Selective Abstractions.   _Information is taken out of context and certain details are highlighted while other important information is ignored. For example, a woman whose husband fails to answer her greeting the first thing in the morning concludes, "He must be angry at me again."_

Overgeneralization. _An isolated incident or two is allowed to serve as a representation of similar situations everywhere, related or unrelated. For example, after being turned down for an initial date, a young man concludes, "All women are alike, I'll always be rejected."_

Magnification and Minimization. _A case or circumstance is perceived in greater or lesser light than is appropriate. For example, an angry husband "blows his top" upon discovering that the checkbook is unreconciled and states to his wife, "We're financially doomed."_

Personalization. _External events are attributed to oneself when insufficient evidence exists to render a conclusion. For example, a woman finds her husband re-ironing an already pressed shirt and assumes, "He is dissatisfied with my preparation of his clothing."_

Dichotomous Thinking. _Experiences are codified as either black or white, a complete success or total failure. This is otherwise known as "polarized thinking." For example, upon soliciting his wife's opinion on a paperhanging job underway in the recreation room, the wife questions the seams, and the husband thinks to himself, "I can't do anything right."_

Labeling and Mislabeling. One's identity if portrayed on the basis of imperfections and mistakes made in the past, and these are allowed to define oneself. For example, subsequent to continual mistakes in meal preparation, a spouse states, "*I am worthless,*" as opposed to recognizing her error as being human.

Tunnel Vision. Sometimes spouses only see what they want to see or what fits their current state of mind. A gentleman who believes that his wife "*does whatever she wants anyway*" may accuse her of making a choice based purely on selfish reasons.

Biased Explanations. This is almost a suspicious type of thinking that partners develop during times of distress and automatically assume that their spouse holds a negative alternative motive behind their intent. For example, a woman states to herself, "*He's acting real 'lovey-dovey' because he'll later probably want me to do something that he knows I hate to do.*"

Mind Reader. This is the magical gift of being able to know what the other is thinking without the aid of verbal communication. Spouses end up ascribing unworthy intentions onto each other. For example, a gentleman thinks to himself, "*I know what is going through her mind, she thinks that I am naïve to her 'shenanigans'.*"

"A.N.T." Thinking: Definitions & Assessment			

Read each styles of automatic negative thinking with it's definition and mark all that apply to you. Indicate whether you have the thought towards "self" or towards "others." After marking the styles of thinking you use, go back and indicate on a scale of 1-10 how often you use this thinking style.

(A)utomatic (N)egative (T)houghts	Definitions	Self	Others
1 Personalizing	You believe everything that happens, happens to you. You may also think what people do or say is some kind of a reaction to you.	__ __	__ __
2 Blaming	You hold other people responsible for your pain and/or problems; or take the other tact and blame yourself for every problem or reversal.	__ __	__ __
3 "Should" Thinking	You have a list of ironclad rules and expectations about how everyone should act. People who break the rules anger you, and you feel guilt or shame if you violate the rules.	__ __	__ __
4 Labeling	You generalize one or two behaviors into a negative global judgment. This may take the form of name-calling, criticism, or contempt. You label the person rather than the behavior.	__ __	__ __
5 Emotional Reasoning	You think that what you feel must be true. If you feel stupid and boring, then you must actually be stupid and boring. Your reasoning is based on how you feel in that moment.	__ __	__ __
6 "What if" Thinking	You start asking "what if" questions. You get stuck worrying about future potential negative outcomes, and/or get anxious about the unknown.	__ __	__ __
7 Catastrophizing	You expect disaster. You notice or experience some small problem, you think that everything is bad , awful, horrible, terrible and the "sky is falling."	__ __	__ __
8 Mind-Reading / Fortune-Telling	Without their saying so, you know (assume)what people are feeling and why they act the way they do. In particular, you are able to "divine" how people are feeling towards you.	__ __	__ __
9 Perfectionism	You have unrealistic expectations of self/others that is based in being perfect. You may be "obsessed" with everything being just so. This may cause you to not try for fear of failure.	__ __	__ __
10 Imperative / Polorized Thinking	You see things as black or white, good or bad. You have to be perfect or you're a failure. There is no middle ground. There is a right way and a wrong way. Nothing less can be accepted.	__ __	__ __
11 Comparison-itis	You compare your weaknesses (faults) to others strengths, or your strengths to others weak-nesses (faults). Either to make your self feel better, or reinforcing your negative view of self.	__ __	__ __
12 Yes, But-isms	You are agreeable to what others say, but tend to have a reason why you may disagree, why it won't work, or in some way is not true. It serves as a distraction to avoid the real issue.	__ __	__ __
13 Negative Filtering	You take the negative details and magnify them while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation.	__ __	__ __
14 Fallacy of Change	You expect others will change to suit you if you just pressure or cajole them enough. You need to change people because your hopes for happiness depends on them.	__ __	__ __
15 Fallacy of Control	You feel externally controlled, you see yourself as helpless, a victim of fate. The fallacy of internal control has you responsible for the pain and happiness of everyone around you.	__ __	__ __
16 Fallacy of Fairness	You feel resentful because you expect life to be fair, and it's not. You think you know what's fair but life doesn't seem to agree with you, and you feel personally hurt.	__ __	__ __

The Change Process

A. Knowledge

B. Personal Understanding –Insight

C. Inner/outer Awareness

D. Wisdom – personal application

E. Practice that makes permanent

The Challenge

A.   Captivate your thoughts

B.   Take your own inventory

C.   Self-control through surrender

D.   Replacement therapy – making specific choices

E.   Practice Progress not Perfection

PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT:

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES THAT HELP YOU GET WHAT
YOU WANT!

Principles:

1. Practice makes Permanent, never perfect
2. Practice Progress not Perfection
3. Define your wedge
4. Don't just change, exchange. We don't do stop therapy; we do replacement therapy.
5. 2x2 growth factor
6. 80/20 Parretto Principle
7. Plan=Power
8. Walk Through
9. SAP Strata
10. Competence Failure

Principles:

11. Next Step
12. Emotions are information not instructions
13. Your emotions always tell you about You.
14. Boundaries protect you; walls imprison
15. You cannot, not choose; everything is a choice
16. Control is not a bad word: Every choice is a choice to control something. The question is what are you trying to control and how are you using it?
17. 'What' is the most powerful question. 'Why' is the least powerful.
18. Less is more
19. Great questions are better than good answers.
20. Seek to Understand before you seek to be understood.

Principles:

21. What 'is' not What 'ifs' Live in the present.
22. You can only 'harvest' what you 'sow'.
23. Are you planting 'weed seeds' or 'good seeds' (no pun intended)?
24. Greatest human need: 'to love and be loved' Which comes first?
25. You go where 'you go'.
26. You will have plenty of time to worry, when you get there.
27. Learn from your past; don't "relive your past"
28. 'Ruminate' on the good
29. We don't fix people or relationships; we grow!
30. Growth is a process, not a destination.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Atkinson, Brent J. (2005). *"Emotional Intelligence in Couples Therapy."* New York, NY; W.W. Norton and Company.

Avery, Carl L. (1989, May). How do you build intimacy in an age of divorce? *Psychology Today*, May, 23:27-33.

Becnel, Harry P. (l978). The effects of a marriage encounter program on marital need satisfaction in regard to role identity, focusing, and self-disclosure in intimacy. *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 39(I-A), l23.

Benner, David (1990). *Healing Emotional Wounds*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Bogolea, Myron S. (l979). Intimacy breakdown: Its nature, treatment and relationship to the intimacy reconstruction model. *Dissertation Abstracts* International, 40(2-B), 903.

Bradshaw, John. (1990). *Home Coming--Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child*. New York: Bantam Books.

Brehm, S.S. (1985). *Intimate Relationships*. New York: Random House.

Burggraf, C., and A.L. Sillars. (1987). "A Critical Examination of Sex Differences in Marital Conflict." *Communication Monographs* 54: 276-94.

Carter, Les (2007). *"When Pleasing You is Killing Me."* TN, Nashville; B&H Publishing Group.

Chelune, G.J., (1976). A multidimensional look at target differences in disclosure. *Psychological Reports,* 39, 259-263.

Chelune, G.L., (1979). "Measuring openness in interpersonal communication." G.J. Chelune, (Ed.), *Self-disclosure.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979.

Chelune, G.J., Waring, E.M., Vosk, B.N., Sultan, F.E., & Ogden, J.K. (l984). "Self-disclosure and its relationship to marital intimacy." *Journal of Clinical* Psychology, 40(l), 2l6-2l9.

Cole, Charles L., (l985). Relationship quality in long-term marriages: A comparison of high quality and low-quality marriages. *Iowa State University,* 7(4), 248-257.

Crider, Wallace E. (l982). A comparison of verbal intimacy and verbal control levels of males and females. *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 42(l2-B, Pt. l), 4968-4969.

Derlega, V. (Ed.), (1984). *Communication, Intimacy and Close* **Relationships.** Orlando, FL.: Academic Press.
Ferguson, David, Teresa. (1997). *"Intimate Encounters".* Texas, Austin: Intimacy Press

Ferguson, David, Ferguson, Teresa, Thurman, Chris & Thurman, Holly. (1992). *The Pursuit of Intimacy*. Nashville:
    Thomas Nelson.

Ferguson, D. (l992, June). Intimacy Assessment for Couples.   *Center for Marriage and Family Intimacy.* Austin, TX:
    Author.

Gilbert, S. (1976). "Self-disclosure, intimacy and communication in the family." Family   Communicator, 25,
221-231.

Gottman, John M. (1999). *"The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy."* New York, NY: W.W. Norton and
Company.

Gray, John. (l992). *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus*.   New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins.

Johnson, Susan M. & Greenberg, Leslie S. (l985). Emotionally focused couples' therapy: An outcome study. *Journal of*
    Marital *& Family Therapy,* 11(3), 3l3-3l7.

Jourard, S. (1971). *Self-disclosure*. New York: Wiley

Jourard, S.; & Jaffee, P. (1970). Influences of an interviewer's self-disclosure on the self-disclosing behavior of interviewers. *Journal of Counseling* Psychology, 17, 252-257.

Lerner, H.G. (l990). *The Dance of Intimacy*. New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers.

Morris, D. (1982). *Attachment and Intimacy*. In M.Fisher & G. Stricker (Eds.), *Intimacy*, 305-323. New York: Plenum.

Otis, Gray H.; Williams, Sandi and Messina, James (2018). *"Key Core Beliefs."* Utah, Highland: Colorian Press.

Potter – Efron, Ron, Pat. (2006). *"Reclaim Your Relationship: A Workbook of Exercises and Techniques to Help you Reconnect with Your Partner."* New Jersey, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Robinson, Jonathon (2008). "Communication Miracles for Couples." California, San Francisco: Conari Press.

Schaefer, M.T., & Olson, D.H. (1981). Assessing intimacy: The Pair Inventory. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy,* 7(1), 47-60.

Severson, Larry J., (1993). "Female Sexual Abuse and A Perceived Sense of Intimacy in a Relationship with God."   Dissertation, Oxford Graduate School.

Sieburg, E., and C. Larson. (1971). "Dimensions of Interpersonal Response." Paper Presented to the International Communication Association. Phoenix, AZ.

Stoop, David & Stoop, Jan. (1993). *The Intimacy Factor*.   Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Timmerman, G.M. (1991). A concept analysis of intimacy.   *Issues in Mental Health Nursing,* 12, 19-30.

Waring, E.M. (1985). Measurement of marital intimacy.   *Journal of marital and family therapy,* 10(2), 185-192.

Waring, E., McElrath, D., Lefcoe, D., & Weisz, G. (l98l).   Dimensions of intimacy in marriage. *Psychiatry,* 44, l69-l75.

Waring, Edward M. (l98l). Facilitating marital intimacy through self-disclosure. *American Journal of Family* Therapy, 9(4),33-42.

Wright, Norman H. (1977). *Communication: Key to your Marriage*. Waco, TX: Word Books Publishing.

Wynne, Lyman & Wynne, Adele. (1986). The quest for Intimacy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.* 12, (4), 389-394