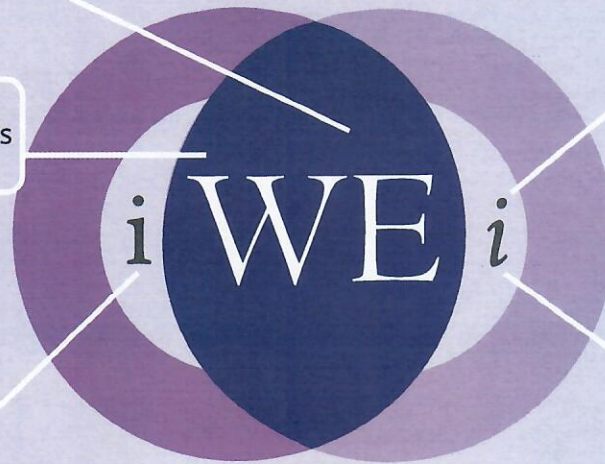


The Conflict Avoidant Relationship

Each individual "I" makes sacrifices to preserve the primacy of the "we." Self-sacrifice is idealized. Pursuing individual desires is seen as being at the expense of the couple.

These relationships can appear "rosy" and look ideal. Often, partners experience passionless lives and lack a deeper degree of intimacy. High incidence of sexual disinterest and boredom.

Boundaries are very permeable. Few skills in limit setting.



The "I" is dominated by fear of abandonment and high need for validation from the partner. Verbal and nonverbal communication is often vague, general and unclear in order to mask differences.

Self lacks definition, i.e., little or no definite expression of feelings, desires, thoughts, beliefs or values. Self-activation is inhibited. Few, if any, personal goals.

Presentation

Conflict avoidance may present itself along a broad continuum from occasional appearances to an extremely fused, and enmeshed couple. Strong messages in the media, and in the world of pop songs often reinforce and idealize symbiosis. This may present obstacles to recognizing the problems that come from avoiding conflict. Often in our culture, sacrifice and selflessness are idealized, and we are strongly admonished against selfish ways.

Variation

One partner asserts primacy of their needs, while the other willingly accommodates and has low self-definition. Self lacks definition, i.e., little or no expression of feelings, desires, beliefs or values. Self activation is absent. Few, if any, personal goals.

Suggestions

Focus on increasing self-awareness; feelings, thoughts, desires and values. Express these. Practice initiating individual desires. Start with easier issues. Set goals for self. Activate yourself towards these. Take risks. Where there is a history of trauma, child abuse, sexual abuse, or substance abuse, individuals may tend to want to preserve stability and predictability of the emotional environment. This is at the expense of defining yourself in the world. Practice allowing self to experience and tolerate anxiety.