

Overcoming Relationship Fears

Considering the Seven Deadly Fears



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Considering the Seven Deadly Fears

We will next consider in detail each of the Seven Deadly Fears in order of their increasing relational complexity. That is, in the course of growing up, children experience the most basic human fears first, while the more complex relational fears are learned later. But it is not uncommon for later more complex relational fears to become layered on top of earlier more basic fears, so that the Seven Deadly Fears appear in a variety of personal combinations.

1. The Fear of Being Alone

We dread reaching out and finding nobody there to respond to our needs. We fear being ignored, being left alone, and being seen as unimportant. We feel the world does not respond to our needs. So what's the use?

A Story to Illustrate the Fear of Being Alone

Petra arrives fifteen minutes early at Starbuck's Coffee for her meeting with Ivan. She locates a table in a quiet corner, glances quickly at her watch then at the newspaper headlines. Out of the corner of her eye she can see some of the bakery selections and the Latte menu. She'll probably just have a Grande with a little Splenda. Earlier that morning, Petra had carefully selected her outfit and makeup because this meeting could turn out to be an important one. Ivan, who works in another branch of her company, had introduced himself at a sales meeting last Friday and had asked her to meet for coffee today. The meeting was ostensibly to exchange some sales leads, but it seems to Petra it could turn into something more.

Five minutes passes by and Petra feels her excitement building—Ivan is a really good-looking guy. She has noticed him from afar a few times before, but now she would get to experience him at close range. Five more minutes pass. He'll probably be here any time now, she tells herself. During their brief chat at the meeting he had seemed really nice. No ring, so he's probably single she muses. Three o'clock arrives. Petra checks her cell phone again to be sure she hasn't missed any messages. Her stomach growls. She wonders if they still had any lemon chiffon cake left—her favorite. As a few more minutes pass Petra

becomes aware that she has caught the attention of several young people working behind the counter. They'd surely noticed that she'd been here 20 minutes waiting by herself. Disheartened, after a few more minutes Petra gets up to order her Grande. There is no lemon chiffon cake left, only a selection of large cookies and a few morning muffins. She'd be okay with just coffee. "Leave room for cream, mam?" "No thanks, just coffee." She considers taking one of the overstuffed lounge chairs by the coffee table, but that seemed a bit informal.

Scanning the street for signs of Ivan, his brisk walk and winning smile, Petra slowly sips her Guatemala roast with Splenda. By now she finds herself nervously fingering her cup and shifting her napkin about on the table. At ten after, that sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach slowly begins again. She should have gotten one of those cookies after all. By a quarter after three Petra feels weak all over. Her excitement and racing thoughts have given way to depletion, a slumping feeling inside, an emptiness, a weariness. He must have gotten delayed, she tells herself. Or did he forget? Maybe he thought better about meeting her and decided not to show. Petra's sinking feeling causes her to flash on a bout of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome she had experienced a few years ago. The feelings in her body recalled the exhaustion she had felt for weeks. "It's so often this way," she reflects. "I get my hopes up, I do my best to reach out, but in the end nothing ever works out." She's had her share of nice flings, to be sure, but right now she feels like Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*—nothing to do and no one to be with. What's the use of even trying? Defeated again, Petra quietly slips out of Starbucks and makes her way home to her lonely apartment.

Do I have to go on? We all know how discouraging it can be to make an attempt at relating only to find ourselves stood up, disheartened, discouraged and depressed, without the connection we had hoped for. We all know the pain of feeling left alone—of going out on a limb and then feeling unresponded to and unsupported. The fear of being alone is our deepest fear reflex and it comes up often in various subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

How the Fear of Being Alone Forms in Early Childhood

When as infants we reached out to those who loved us and found ourselves unresponded to, we lost heart. We lost our motivation for ever reaching in that same way again. We came to believe that there

was nobody there to receive us or to interact rewardingly with us. So we gave up trying, gave up our efforts to seek emotional contact.

Since reaching out emotionally to others is expanding, and expanding is moving toward greater activity and aliveness, when we are frustrated in our efforts as infants we quickly learn that feeling more alive can be dangerous. Our experiences with failed attempts to reach our loved ones emotionally teaches us that the more we expand, the more we reach out for connection, the more we are likely to experience the pain of how alone we really are. The greater our disappointments, the more we realize how inadequate our efforts are to get others to be present for us in the ways we need or hope for.

The instinctive fear in infancy is that when we are left alone we may literally wither and die. So as infants we put up a loud protest which in time turns into rage. When rage also fails to bring satisfaction to our needs we slump into hopelessness and despair. We saw this illustrated in Dave's car-buying story earlier when he knew that raging at the salespeople wouldn't work but he had no idea what else to do. Better to have few or no needs than to risk facing the agonizing possibility that there's nobody there. And so we learn to protect ourselves from disappointment, fear, and even our own rage, by minimizing what we ask for.

The bottom line on the fear of being alone is that as infants our instincts told us that we could not survive alone. In our infancy that was true. That was our reality then. But once this fear reflex leading to collapse becomes established in our mental and physical attitudes, it repeatedly crops up to spoil later relationship situations—until and unless we learn how to move beyond the fear of being alone.

We dread reaching out and finding nobody there to respond to our needs. We fear being ignored, being left alone, and being seen as unimportant. We may feel, "what's the use?" Best simply wither and retreat, feigning disinterest or a lack of enthusiasm. "Reaching out, going all out when there's no promise of success, is just too much effort. It won't work anyway," we tell ourselves.

Some people cope with this fear by living a frenzied life-style—always doing things, going places, or being with people—whether those people are real, fantasized, fictional, internet or media people. In this way they can feel hyper-alive. In denial of their basic fear of being alone, such people are always on the run, doing, planning, and cooking up schemes to keep things alive and moving—never allowing

themselves a minute of peace to relax, to contemplate, or to enjoy time alone. All of this activity certainly wards off the terror of aloneness, but does not get them any closer to satisfying their deeper needs.

Making Contact with Your BMR Connection

Imagine you are eagerly anticipating getting together with someone you are intimately involved with. You are looking forward to some special one-on-one time together. As you read this scenario you may want to allow yourself to really feel, to notice where in your body you experience what's happening in your imagination.

So imagine anticipating getting together with someone special. Perhaps it's your spouse, your partner, your closest friend, your child, your beloved grandmother, or your therapist. As the time approaches you start feeling a bit fatigued and realize you're not quite as up for the get-together as you thought you would be. You have been overburdened lately, a lot on your mind. You are reminded that some of your old familiar physical complaints have been surfacing lately. You really want to get together with your special person, to chat, to laugh, to play, to make love, or whatever you two enjoy doing best—but you're feeling down and disappointed because your mood just isn't right somehow.

The time arrives and you get together with your special person and do manage to muster enough energy to go forward, but your heart isn't quite into it. Your relating partner senses it and maybe feels a little off too. You try to force more interest and enthusiasm, but you really can't quite pull it off. You're just not quite all here today.

After the encounter you wonder why things didn't just pick you up more. Why, despite the fact that you really were looking forward to special time together, you weren't feeling all that great so that relating seemed to be a little burdensome? This depressive, depleted feeling has happened to you before, but you've not quite been able to understand your sagging reluctance, your lackluster attitude at those times either. Maybe you need more sleep, you think. Maybe you ought to have your thyroid checked? Maybe it's time for an anti-depressant, or something else to perk you up or give you a new lease on life?

On the surface this withering, slumping, weakening, disinterested, or withdrawing mental and physical experience doesn't look or feel like fear. But on closer examination it often turns out that a fear

reflex is indeed involved—the long-held fear that if I reach out, assert myself, make an effort to connect, that it will do no good. The fear that in the end my efforts won't yield much and I will still find myself essentially alone. What's the use trying? You may know this isn't really the case with your special person, but the strong feeling is there anyway.

Bringing the Fear of Being Alone Reflex into Consciousness

The deep fear of being alone usually lies far from our conscious awareness because it started in infancy. The patterns of fear reflex associated with the very early and life-threatening terror of being all alone in the world (left to die) are usually embedded in our changing daily body states and in our anticipated and real social interactions with people. So when we experience things like fatigue, physical symptoms, moods, posture pains, negative attitudes, frustrations and stress reactions, we are usually not even aware that it is, at bottom, a fear of being alone reflex that we are dealing with.

If we want to work on fear reflexes that are embedded in changing body states and social interactions we must make it a point to learn how to “monitor our aliveness”—our changing body states—on a moment-to-moment basis. And we must learn how to “touch base with our bodies” frequently during the day in order to see what physical sensations or tensions we are experiencing. Only when we can begin to allow sensations, words and images to emerge can we get clues as to what is going on with us. That is, we have to learn to listen to our bodies and learn to discern what fear reflexes are operating below the level of our awareness. In the fear of being alone reflex we have basically given up.

When I hear people repeatedly complaining about how bad the traffic is, how upsetting work is, how unpredictable the weather, how tired they are, or how many symptoms get in the way of feeling good or doing well in life, I immediately think that this is a fear reflex from the earliest reaching out experiences. There are so many insurmountable obstacles, so many frustrating situations, so many demands, so many unrelenting physical concerns that the person simply cannot reach out and move effectively and efficiently into the world of vitalizing relationships.

As a therapist I hope to reflect this pattern of fear reflexes to my clients, often recurring self-defeating process. I do this first by continuing to highlight the “what's the use” aspect in as many ways as possible, thus hoping to bring the sense of giving up or collapsing in the face of frustration and

anticipated failure closer to consciousness.

Additionally, as I listen to the many frustrating or impossible situations a person is dealing with, I try to discern and give words to what the underlying fears might actually be in each situation. I may find myself saying to someone, “so when you figure your ideas really won’t be valued anyway, what’s the point in putting them out there in the first place?” Or, “knowing that rejection from him is likely, best not even make yourself available.” Or, “no matter how hard you work to be an effective employee, with such a critical boss there’s really no point in even trying to satisfy her.” Or, “you’ve worked so hard on developing good friendships, but when they go sour so easily it seems better to just stay at home with your cat, your computer, and your TV.”

As you begin to get comfortable with “Putting on Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body” throughout the day, keep alert to places in your body that seem to say, “what’s the use, anyway?” Then allow the sensations, words and images that come up for you to suggest what the fear of reaching out into the world of relationships may be about for you.

2. The Fear of Connecting

Because of frightening and painful experiences in the past, connecting emotionally and intimately with others feels dangerous. Our life experiences have left us feeling that the world is not a safe place. We fear injury so we withdraw from connections.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Connecting is About

Horst and Lin fell in love at first sight and set up a blended family that felt ideal to both of them. Oh, to be sure, they experienced disagreements but they prided themselves on never going to bed angry with one another and on always being able to find a way to process their differences.

Recently, a custody battle with Lin’s ex-husband further drew Horst and Lin together. Following this increased sense of closeness, Horst burst into tears in therapy one day telling me how much he loves Lin, how dependent he is on her and how horrible it would be if anything should ever happen to her.

The following night Horst has a dream of a tsunami wiping out everything where he and his family live, with him hopelessly searching in the rubble for his beloved wife and children. In the weeks that follow Horst is doubly horrified when sudden unbidden images of Lin being in a terrible accident begin flashing in his mind while he is driving on the freeway. He is hesitant to even describe for me what he is seeing for fear it might come true. Lin might be burned in a great house fire. She might be killed in an earthquake. Their house might be struck by lightning and she be instantly killed. The entire family might be wiped out by the coming bird virus—so he needs to stock up on Gatorade. Horst considers the possibility that these flashes might be wishes to eliminate his deep sense of love and extreme dependency on Lin by eliminating her and the family—but no, that doesn't feel right.

A terrifyingly real dream awakens Horst—he is convinced that lightning has struck near his bed and in a panic he gets up to check things out. He remembers being terrified as a young child of burning in Hell for not being good enough.

As Horst's story unfolds it comes out that his mother was hospitalized repeatedly for months at a time for major depression throughout his early childhood. In his mind it was always because he wasn't being good enough, wasn't doing enough to help her. Time and again, just when he felt secure in his relationship with her, she would suddenly disappear—sometimes with sirens and flashing red lights, maybe even blood. As the nature of his mother's depression became clearer to Horst in therapy, he realized there must have been many times he was feeling close to mother when her illness once again abruptly ruptured the connection.

A lifetime of experiences began cascading into Horst's consciousness. Time and again he would have done his best to connect with someone he loved when crash—and yet another relationship disaster would befall him. Now his deep abiding love for Lin and his secure and rewarding emotional dependency on her and the family has triggered a series of nightmares and fantasies of sudden disaster.

For Horst, any deep attachment meant that he would soon face a fragmenting calamity. How many times had he missed deep love or intimate friendship for fear of connecting deeply? He knew that he wore himself out "being good" in relationships—obviously in an effort to stave off the anticipated painful disconnection disaster. In addition, Horst had developed a secure, trusting relationship with his

therapist—depending on his therapist to see him safely through all of this fragmenting trauma. Was that relationship, too, setting off these fears? Tears streaked down Horst's cheeks in therapy session and frightening sensations coursed through his body as he contemplated the fears associated with love.

How the Fear of Connecting Forms in Early Childhood

Connecting to others has proven dangerous to us in many ways in the past. We have all been injured by others we loved in the course of growing up. The experience stored in our BMR connection is that life itself is somehow threatened. We had no capacity in early childhood to think objectively or to reason out the actual reality of the interrupted connection. Nor did we have the capacity to deal effectively with the potential threat that ruptured connections posed to our wellbeing. From the core of our being emerged a fear of feeling annihilated in response to painful rejections of our longings and devastating lost connections.

Thus our fear of making connections was born. Entering into a deep relationship meant risking ourselves, our wellbeing, even our lives. Or so it seemed. Better to stay frozen. Better to avoid such risks by cutting off frightening feelings. Better to flee than to risk injury. Better to create a fight that maintains distance rather than to connect lovingly.

When we were children our biological instincts told us, "If you get hurt like that again, you may not survive!" That may have been true then. But it is not true now. We can have bad feelings and live through them. As adults we are capable of experiencing and sustaining the pain of rejection. But as children we did not know this; we could only fear the pain of re-traumatization. We learned to freeze, flee, or fight our way through relationships.

Making Contact with Your BMR connection

Imagine yourself approaching someone with whom you are in the process of developing an emotionally significant relationship. Your partner likewise approaches. It could be your spouse, your child, your grandchild, one of your parents, a sibling or a friend, your therapist, or even someone special with whom you work or play.

You feel alive and happy to be seeing your special person and excited by the feelings you have for each other. You both smile as you greet each other warmly. Your eyes gleam with eager anticipation as you begin the engagement. Two hearts pick up their pace as the relating dance proceeds. You two have been in this place before; co-creating experiences of joy, laughter, sadness, pain, grief, anger, inspiration, mutual regard, and love.

And then, just when things are starting to get good, something starts happening inside. You feel yourself backpedaling, pulling away. Perhaps you find yourself thinking about how many things you have to do today or about something you have to pick up at the store. Some part of you is drifting off toward seemingly unrelated thoughts and pictures. In your reverie you may find yourself feeling drowsy, moody, tired, or cautious—for no reason you can readily point to. You may be getting inexplicably tense or antsy. You may be aware of voice strain, shoulder pain, or of some other discomfort somewhere in your body.

As the relating dance continues, you make a quick, valiant attempt to figure out what's going on with you or what's going on with your partner in the interaction that is causing your attention and focus to drift away. You wonder what's happening in your BMR connection at the moment to cause this distancing, this breach in intimate contact.

An invisible wall is going up. Emotional distance is threatening. "What's happening around here, anyway," you ask yourself. "This is my child I love so deeply. These moments are fleeting and precious—why am I feeling bored?" Or, "This is my spouse, my lover with whom I would rather spend time than anyone else on Earth. Why am I mentally fleeing the scene?" Or, "This is my best friend, my trusted colleague, my valued client, or my therapist, with whom I truly treasure my time. What's happening to spoil my enjoyment, to wreck these few precious moments of intimacy, to limit my opportunity for enrichment and transformation?"

If you're lucky you may soon realize that your internal process itself, your fear of connecting reflex, is actually causing the rupture in your connection at the moment. If you are skilled at the relating game you may attempt to process your feelings with your partner. Perhaps you feel edgy, nervous, hyperactive, distracted, constricted, or drowsy. It's possible even that you first noticed these feelings when you

thought it was your partner who was feeling them rather than yourself. You might think to ask yourself, “Why am I feeling this way at this particular moment?”

You attempt a quick recovery. Maybe you are able to take a deep breath and dive back into the fast-paced fray of the relating dance and be okay. Maybe not. Perhaps processing what’s happening with your partner will help. But maybe you suspect that the particular trend toward disconnection that you are experiencing at this moment haunts the bigger picture of your relationships, your intimacy, your love. Perhaps you realize these feelings have been around in subtle or perhaps not so subtle ways for a lifetime. “How does what I am experiencing at this moment fit into the bigger picture of my life? What are my hopes and desires here? What are my dreads and fears? Why and in what ways does this loss of connectedness frequently happen to me?”

Involuntarily disconnecting this way happens to all of us in various ways from time to time, but we seldom consciously focus on the process. At the time we may hardly consider the discomfort we’re experiencing as a fear reflex. At certain moments of building excitement, of increasing intimate connecting, we simply find ourselves feeling cautious, silently backpedaling, or drifting off. We may find ourselves jumping from thought to thought or entirely blanking out what’s happening in the moment. It’s important to recognize that we are rupturing the connection from inside ourselves. That we are unconsciously creating the disconnection we so much fear in close relationships.

We may successfully reconnect with our partner, but then find it difficult to sustain that connection. There are myriad ingenious ways of pursuing and then rupturing or limiting the aliveness of connections. Can love last? Certainly not, until and unless we get to the bottom of this puzzle of our fear reflexes—how connecting and disconnecting work for us personally.

Alternate strategies that some people use for dealing with the fear of connecting, include being frantically driven to connect with others almost nonstop. Incessant talking, intrusive questions, dogged pursuit, and uncontrolled stalking activities are all compulsive attempts to engage others in what passes for interpersonal connection. But this is not mutual connection because the intensity is essentially one-sided. In denial of their own fears of connecting, such people create pseudo-connections all day long in real life or in cyberspace, that are time- and energy-consuming—and in the long-run frustrating and

unsatisfying.

Bringing the Fear of Connecting into Consciousness

If we hope to contact the fear of connecting we will need to learn how to monitor our feelings in the course of our intimate exchanges. Perhaps you are feeling restless, irritable, impatient, drowsy or bored. Perhaps you are having a hard time maintaining your concentration or focusing on the here-and-now relating process. These are likely indications that the fear of connection is active, so search your body carefully for exactly where the telltale tensions are.

Your goal in contacting the fear of connecting is to locate where in your body-mind-relationship self something distracting is happening, then to find words and images to describe your feelings. My earlier dream of being “scared to death” in the burnt child story gave me important pictures to go with the troubling body states I was feeling. In that way I was able to get in touch with the childhood origins of fear reflexes still operating in the present.

In a relationship in which you are committed to being fully present and alive with each other it can be a good idea to make an agreement on how to signal each other when either of you feel yourselves pulling away. The signal is a call to pay attention to what’s going on, and then to see if you can relate the disconnect to the body experiences you are having.

Once you realize that you emotionally disconnect—often without even being aware of it—you can then begin tracking exactly when in the interaction the disconnects occur and then explore how each of you experience the need to disconnect. Over time you and your partner can develop a here-and-now focus on what happens in your BMR connections when you over-ride the urge to disconnect and work on staying alive and connected in the moment. Over-riding the long-standing disconnecting urge often elicits some kind of disturbing experience. For example, reactions involving shaking or crying, or perhaps even a sense of confusion, numbness, or fragmentation may result. Relating partners can cultivate the ability to stay with whatever anguish or pain may erupt as each person over-rides the disconnect impulse and stays fully emotionally present.

Release from fear reflexes comes about by feeling encouraged to experience the fullness of the fear

in the present relationship. In this way each partner can fully know that these conditioned fear reflexes live on in our BMR connections and are simply triggered by the present relating situation. Through a process of mutual study the fear of connecting reflex can make itself known to each partner.

I find in any emotionally significant relationship it takes me quite a while to learn how to track the other person's emotional disconnections. In childhood we have all been trained to carry on smoothly in social interactions, regardless of what is silently happening inside. So the other person may be connecting and disconnecting emotionally in ways that are hard to identify until we have learned each other's styles.

In an effort to get to know the other person more deeply I may find myself saying something like, "you know, this is a fascinating story about what went on at dinner Wednesday night, but I sense that somewhere in the telling you lost interest, you somehow drifted away emotionally. Where are we right now?" Or, "only a few minutes ago we were laughing and having a good time discussing your reactions to that wonderful movie, but then something happened and it seems like a part of you left the room—what happened between us?" Or, "this habit you say you have of switching topics often without knowing why—did that just happen? Can we look at what may be going on between us that caused the shift?" Or, "you know, I just had that same puzzling angry sensation I sometimes get when I'm with you—could it be that I was irritated that you began going more into your head rather than staying emotionally connected with your body and with me?" These would all be my attempts at calling attention to the disconnecting process as something perhaps worthy of attention. It might also be that what feels like a disconnect in my partner may be my own way of disconnecting so we have to talk about that. As a therapist I often use my own awareness of my disconnecting tendencies in order to better grasp the nature of what's going on in my interactions with my clients—whether in my BMR connection or theirs.

If you want to study your fear of connecting reflex, work towards raising your consciousness of when you silently disconnect in various kinds of relationship situations. Pay close attention to how your fear of connecting reflex appears in your body-mind-relationship self. Try to focus the fear of connecting reflex as it appears in the course of each day by using the "Put on Your Aliveness Monitor" and "Touching Base with Your Body" exercises. Take some time to study your fear of connecting reflex and to get some relief from it by searching for sensations, words and images that accompany all of your relationship

situations.

3. The Fear of Being Abandoned

After having connected emotionally or bonded with someone, we fear being either abandoned with our own needs or being swallowed up by the other person's. In either case we feel the world is not a dependable place, that we live in danger of emotional abandonment. We may become clingy and dependent or we may become super-independent—or both.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Abandonment is About

Mala believed her marriage was ideal. Her husband, Hiromi, seemed motivated to provide well and was able to give her a beautiful daughter late in her life. In her happiness she resumed singing after 18 years of being away from it and was soon accorded great esteem as a local star. Indeed her voice was truly remarkable.

But when Mala was diagnosed with breast and ovarian cancer Hiromi was not at the hospital for the radical surgery nor was he able to help care for her or to empathize with her illness or great losses. While recovering, Mala resumed her voice lessons and choral singing but shortly thereafter was stricken with total aphonia—complete loss of her voice for two months. Medical tests revealed the aphonia was wholly psychological; there was nothing physically wrong with her voice.

Not long after the cancer surgery and Hiromi's inability to be responsive to Mala, it became clear to her that her marriage was anything but ideal. She painfully realized that, in fact, it had never been good. In her eagerness for an ideal life she had been in denial of how much he depended on her and expected her to be totally at his beck-and-call. As her belief that she was living a fulfilled life gradually broke down and she realized that she would have to leave Hiromi, Mala lost her voice—and with it her belief in her happiness. In an effort to find solutions she began to review her life. Perhaps she could discover clues that would help her reclaim her happiness.

Mala recalled that as an infant her first words were song. Everyone in the family and neighborhood loved her voice and her singing. She grew up being praised for being “a little angel”—always the star in

church pageants and later in choirs and all of the school musicals. Singing was the one thing she felt she could do to please her mother, to get her mother's attention, to make her mother proud of her—or so Mala thought.

Later in therapy Mala realized that her mother's pride was more about what a good mother she was to have such a talented child. The truth was that she'd never taken much pleasure in her child's successes.

At sixteen Mala had entered a scholarship contest and won—all expenses paid to go to college in California. Her starring role in the senior musical, followed by the scholarship and the prospect of touring with the college choir the following year was a glorious triumph. Then came the fateful night when her mother took her to the Chicago airport for her trip to California. Over dinner at the hotel Mother got uproariously drunk and began raging at Mala for leaving home, for abandoning her, for selfishly considering only herself. Didn't she realize Mother would be left alone with no emotional support! These revelations came as total shock to Mala who always believed her mother wanted her to sing and that her mother was proud of her for going to college with a singing scholarship. With a dark cloud over her head, Mala reluctantly boarded the plane. She managed with difficulty to fulfill her singing obligations for that first year. Then she dropped the scholarship and never sang again—for eighteen years. Only when she came to believe that her life with Hiromi was ideal and joyous had she been able to sing.

With hindsight Mala realized that she had always been bound to her mother's happiness, doing anything and everything to keep her emotionally fragile mother from coming apart. While in therapy several short bouts of aphonia made clear that her throat constrictions were her internal mother's commands not to leave her, not to have a life of her own, not to have relationships other than with Mother, not to be truly joyful on her own, not to have her own voice in life.

Following Mala's mother's death, this entire scenario was transferred to Hiromi whom she also emotionally supported. With her abandonment issues seemingly solved by her marriage, she was able to start voice lessons and resume chorale singing. But as Mala formed important independent relationships with her singing teacher and with members of her chorale, cancer had struck. Later when Mala resumed

singing lessons she lost her voice completely—in obedience to her internal mother’s command—triggered by Hiromi’s insecurities—not to be emotionally independent, not to have her own voice.

In therapy Mala realized that for a lifetime she had kept herself in self-limiting and self-effacing positions that emotionally supported her mother and later her husband for fear of them emotionally abandoning her. The command not to be joyous for herself, or to enjoy herself with others, lived in her throat and chest. When emotional independence threatened, her throat muscles fiercely constricted to keep her from having her own voice—thus strangulating her body-mind-relational self until she got into therapy to study her BMR connection.

How the Fear of Abandonment Forms in Childhood

When as young children we bonded with our caregivers and then later came to experience those people as emotionally or psychologically unavailable to us, the painful fear of abandonment became established in our BMR connection. The dominant abandonment feelings are sadness, depletion, and loss, though we may also experience self-blame. If we had just been good enough we wouldn’t have been abandoned.

In the face of abandonment we tend to develop substitute gratifications to soothe the pain—later known to us as personal addictions. Or, in order to avoid the depressive feelings of loss, emptiness, or hopelessness, we may become self-sufficient, taking care of everyone’s needs but our own (co-dependency). We may become clingy, demanding, and possessive (over-dependency). Or we may learn to manipulate and control those around us somewhat ruthlessly (sociopathy). All of these strategies contribute toward making certain that we don’t have to feel our dreaded abandonment fears.

Later in life when we bond with another person, we may fear being either left alone with our own needs or swallowed up by the other’s. In either case the fear reflex involved relates to our feeling of being emotionally abandoned—a deep-seated belief that relationships are not dependable or safe.

Making Contact with Your BMR Connection

Consider a relationship you have had at one point in your life that has been very satisfying and

close to your ideal. Think of the person and three or four strong qualities that made that relationship truly worthwhile and good.

Now think of some important relationship in your life that was once hopeful but then turned out especially badly. Think of that person and name three or four qualities that made the relationship seem less than worthwhile or perhaps flat-out bad.

Whether we like to admit it or not, it is probably fair to say that all of these qualities we just thought about—both good and bad—characterize the kind of person we have been drawn to in the past and the kinds of people we are likely to be attracted to in the future! These personal qualities have a certain familiarity, a certain subliminal draw for us. Over the years we have developed a strong affinity toward the positive traits of that personality and a certain capacity to overlook the negative traits.

We know that we are attracted to similar kinds of relationships. And we can usually specify where in our pasts we have previously experienced both the good and the bad qualities. San Francisco psychiatrists, Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, in *A General Theory of Love*, demonstrate convincingly how we learn to be attracted to certain emotional qualities in others. They show us how this can be related to a level of actual brain and neuron conditioning that starts at or before birth. Unfortunately, we usually go for the types of people who will be the worst for us in long-term relationships. We repeatedly replicate childhood emotional relationships because they are known and familiar to us. We also repeat disturbing relationships because we are attempting to master our earliest relationship traumas and fears!

How often have we told ourselves “never again”...but then later...all over again, somehow we repeat the same scenario. It can be impossible to determine if the new people somehow really are the same as old relationships or we’re simply experiencing them that way because of fear reflexes. Nevertheless, these are the people we tend to become involved with, bonded to, and with whom we repeatedly form emotional attachments. And, of course it is also these people with whom we continue to experience emotional abandonment.

Now comes the really hard part for most of us to grasp. We suffer greatly when we lose people whom we have become emotionally attached to, who possess familiar, sought-after qualities—both good

and bad! We tend to become greatly agitated and/or depressed when once valued relationships come to a grinding halt. We are strangely reluctant to end emotionally engaging attachments—no matter how bad they are for us!

Regardless of how many times we tell ourselves that we are better off that the bad relationship is ending or has ended, we keep replaying in our minds and bodies the trauma of that loss. We obsess about the person and the relationship, unable to simply let go. We dread the great internal pain always involved in such losses.

Therapists first began to understand our uncanny “compulsion to repeat” emotionally significant relationships when it became clear that emotionally abused children gravitate toward emotionally abusive adults, and that battered women gravitate toward battering men. It turns out that in our own ways we all do basically the same. As psychiatrist Martha Stark, in her book *Working with Resistance*, says we move toward repeating our worst old fears in new relationships!

So the fear of abandonment doesn't simply mean that someone disappointed us, let us down, or betrayed us but rather that an important enmeshed relationship, with all of its positive and negative qualities of emotional familiarity, has ceased and that our body-mind-relationship self is painfully counting and recounting its losses. Anyone who has been through a divorce or who has lost a parent or loved one knows the devastation of such loss, even if the actual circumstances of the final loss are a relief.

Alternate strategies for dealing with the fear of abandonment by long-familiar emotional attachments include manic reactions that deny the depressive effects of loss. One declares that one never cared in the first place, that one was never really attached to the lost person, or that one should have seen the betrayal coming all along. In manic abandon one races around cracking jokes and at funerals feels nothing—or in extreme instances breaks into uncontrollable laughter before the wake begins. Manic denials may temporarily protect us from abandonment depression—but at what price?

Abandonment Role-Reversals

An important variation of fear of abandonment reflexes is the reversal of roles from the way we first experienced abandonment. That is, fear abandonment reflexes show up in the ways we ruthlessly

abandon others who are attached to us. The Golden Rule of relating might be: “We do unto others what was once done unto us.” Or: “We get others to do unto us what has been done to us before.”

Role-reversal reflexes, based on the fear of abandonment, are much more common than one might think—why? During the course of growing up and building internal working models of expectable relationship scenarios, the young child not only experiences her or his own abandonment fear at the hands of caregivers, but also learns the caregivers’ role in the abandonment scenario. That is, in an effort to master the abandoning scenario set up by the parent or caregiver, the young child learns to predict how the abandonment fear reflex of the parent or caregiver works. Thus, we not only carry within us our own fear reflexes, developed in response abandonment experiences we have suffered, but we also carry abandonment reflexes learned by imitating our parents and caregivers.

Role-reversal abandonment scenarios are seldom conscious. Rather, the scenarios are manifest in our characteristic ways of interacting in relationships. We seldom notice role-reversal abandonment scenarios until a partner complains that we are abandoning them emotionally, in one way or another.

First the good news. Role-reversal fear of abandonment scenarios are not the direct result of abandonment experiences themselves. Rather, role-reversal scenarios are simply learned by imitation of or identification with our parents’ ways of abandoning us. As such, imitative abandonment scenarios often feel inauthentic or somehow inconsistent with a person’s fundamental character. Also they are not so deeply embedded in our BMR connections as are abandonments that directly impacted us.

Next the bad news! As you act out your parents’ ways of interacting your partner will surely feel the pangs of fear! This is because you are doing to them what so often was done to you. You are manipulating them by stimulating distress and fear. When we swear that we will never treat our children as our parents treated us, it is this imitative dimension of human interactions that we are speaking of. And yet how often, much to our horror, we find ourselves doing exactly what we have vowed never to do.

Often therapy clients with great shame find themselves behaving in perfectly horrible ways toward loved ones—ways that seem not at all in keeping with their general character. I have to point out to them, “but this isn’t really you behaving in this way. It’s the way you as a young child took in, identified with your mother. The mother inside you is the one who is being so ugly in this situation.” This doesn’t let one

off the hook for bad behavior, but it does allow a realistic perspective on what is happening. As a person relinquishes such identifications, grief reactions do occur, with accompanying depression and fear of abandonment because some internal piece of self is being given up or lost.

Bringing the Fear of Abandonment into Consciousness

In my closest relationships I often pick up signs of depression in myself or in the other person the minute we get together. One or both of us may be a little slowed down, less lively or less cheerful than usual. I find that people can often acknowledge that they feel a little off and sometimes are quickly able to say what has happened to set this tiredness or depressive feeling off. But most of us are not aware of how some childhood fear of abandonment reflex may have been triggered by something emotional leaving us feeling sad, sluggish and down. I listen carefully to whatever is being discussed with an eye to bringing to light something that is being lost in this person's life or my own—something that is setting off an abandonment depression reflex. As we relate it seems important to contact whatever body-mind-relationship sensations, words and images are present and to link them to whatever is being lost.

We each have our own personalized ways of feeling the lifelessness of abandonment and depression. The challenge is to get in touch with how loss hits each of us in our BMR connection.

4. The Fear of Self-Assertion

We have all experienced rejection and perhaps even punishment for expressing ourselves in a way that others don't like. We thus may learn to fear asserting ourselves and letting our needs be known in relationships. We feel the world does not allow us to be truly ourselves. We may either cease putting ourselves out there altogether, we may assert ourselves with a demanding vengeance, or we may even relate in passive-aggressive ways.

A Story Illustrating What the Fear of Self-Assertion is About

The best story I know to illustrate how a fear of self-assertion reflex can work to limit performance for a lifetime is my own burnt child story I related earlier. While unconsciously anticipating attack from captive audiences at state-required continuing education classes, I became aware of holding pain in my

upper neck, lower back and voice muscles. When I asserted myself in these public forums my body was recalling frightening and physically abusive experiences of early childhood at the hand of my angry father when I attempted to assert myself.

The memories of severe punishments for asserting myself were living on in my BMR connection in the form of painful fear reflexes. These reflexes were diminishing my performance and my enjoyment of my teaching experiences.

There is an additional factor that I have not told you yet. At 7 years of age my parents, much to my chagrin, were seeking to adopt a girl. By the time I was 8 they had indeed adopted two girls—over my vigorous protests. In the end there was no attempt to take my feelings into account or to acknowledge them in any way. My desires in the matter were harshly squelched and my life as I had known it was devalued, invaded and crushed by the unwanted adoptions. The little child in me cried, wasn't I enough of a boy-girl for them? How I must have strained my back and neck crying out to have my voice heard—to no avail. The dream depicts a boy-girl child locked in a fiery furnace on a self-imposed torture rack stretching his/her back, neck and voice to painful limits, screaming bloody murder for help from Daddy. Whatever my feelings or reasons were at the time, my self-assertion was not welcome and I realize now that I have carried that fear reflex into any number of painful relationship experiences well into adulthood.

How the Fear of Self-Assertion Forms in Childhood

Once a child has experienced a robust bonding dance with her caregivers, she has learned personhood in relationship to them and what they expect. But inevitably the moment comes when her imagination comes alive and she wants to do things her own way. To the extent that her “no,” her opposition, and her negativity, cannot be appreciated, respected, and negotiated by caregivers, she will either collapse into herself, feeling crushed, or oppose with an angry vengeance, or both. But in either case she fears asserting her own way. Thus, the earliest ways we learned as toddlers to say no or to stand against the wishes of others, and the consequences we experienced for doing so, become mind-body-relationship fear reflexes governing future assertions of our psychological autonomy and how we expect our assertions to be met by others.

Later in life when our way cannot be received by those who love us, we may become frightened when we speak out, express negativity, affirm our differences, or attempt to get some separateness from others. We may fear that our efforts, our “no,” or our relational anger will be punished. We may feel shamed or crushed. Or we may get the message that we won’t be loved if we behave that way. If we are not “good” in the expected manner we come to fear that we won’t have the needed connection with our loved ones anymore. The threat of being humiliated or crushed leaves us afraid to assert ourselves.

Self-assertion or the assertion of emotional independence or autonomy is often associated with the expression of anger and the fear of its consequences. Psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller in *Women's Growth in Connection*, points out that most people agree that we have problems with the expression of anger in our society. She holds, however, that the main problem is not with anger expression per se but with constraints to the expression of anger—even to the extent that we often do not even know if and when we are angry. Anger as communication of emotion, says Dr. Miller, tells us that something is wrong, that something hurts, or that something needs attention or changing. Anger provides an important recognition of discomfort and a cause for personal action. If anger as a communication to others can be expressed and recognized then it has served a good purpose.

However, when we express our anger it doesn’t guarantee that someone will be there to listen and truly understand our needs. The fear at any age in life may be that retaliation, resentment, and/or the experience of feeling crushed will be the end result of anger expression, of self-assertion, or of a striving for emotional independence or autonomy.

We have all experienced rejection and perhaps even punishment for expressing ourselves in ways that others don’t like. We thus may learn to fear asserting ourselves and letting our needs be known in relationships. We feel the world does not allow us to be truly ourselves. We may either cease putting ourselves out there altogether, we may assert ourselves with a demanding vengeance, or we may even relate in passive-aggressive ways. We’d best behave ourselves to preserve our valued bonded or committed relationships.

An alternate strategy to the fear reflex of suppressing self-assertion is to be loudly, insistently and aggressively asserting oneself all the time. In denying the fear of self-assertion, one runs roughshod over

everyone else and expects not to get into trouble. I think of the kind of person who constantly dominates every conversation, raising his voice to interrupt or talk over people. Unbridled aggression or anger that is expressed in an attacking way usually does get us into trouble in relationships.

Making Contact with Your BMR connection

Imagine that you are about to meet someone you have a close relationship with and whom you respect and value greatly. Let's call that person Sally. For some time now you have realized that a basic difference in points of view has been developing between Sally and you. Sally seems to have been moving forward unilaterally, doing things and making decisions that affect both of you—without fully taking your feelings or your views into account. You have attempted to express your concern but haven't yet seemed to have gotten through to Sally. The situation is clearly coming to a head and you are going to have to do some major confronting.

You have thought of simply going along with Sally's way, but that really doesn't work for you. Maybe if you backed off a little, things would go better? But no, this growing disparity is too important to you. You simply have to hold your ground. It looks as though there's going to be a rumble. You are quite nervous getting ready to speak your piece. You are perspiring, your heart is pounding, your fists are tightened, your jaw is set—you're getting ready for a full-on battle. Here it comes!

Then you're in the midst of it. Your fears and anxieties rise as the moment of confrontation approaches. You feel that surge of energy required when it comes to insisting that your views be respected, and if necessary, mustering up anger in order to be heard.

No one is without fear and anxiety when getting prepared to "speak one's piece" in a relationship or in a group. This is especially true when you know your position is not an acceptable or popular one. The living memory of how dangerous it has been to have your own voice comes alive. Maybe you first notice it in your hesitation to stand up for what you think or believe. You may fear being criticized, put down, embarrassed, humiliated, shamed, blamed, or crushed for having personal beliefs and opinions.

Bringing the Fear of Self-Assertion into Consciousness

The actual fear of self-assertion is closer to consciousness than some of the other fear reflexes since we usually are aware when we are about to oppose someone and we therefore feel the anxiety of anticipation. However, when we focus on our deep fear reflexes in our BMR connection we may come up with some surprising, if not shocking or terrifying, sensations, words and images beneath that clinched jaw, that trembling nostril, that tightened fist, or that outstretched neck.

The perfect example, again, is my “scared to death” burnt child story. By agreeing to teach state-mandated classes in law and ethics to therapists I can be sure that there will be any number of people in the room who did not choose to be there. Their aggression will be mobilized over having to give up a Saturday, to pay a sizable fee and to sit six hours in a hotel conference room to take a class they never wanted to take in the first place.

Even though I am not personally the one who required them to be in class, in agreeing to teach the class I put myself in a position to receive displaced rage. I do think that I make the class interesting and that most therapists do leave feeling glad for what they learned. But early in the day the resentful tension fills the room and my body picks it up.

Until my colleague Gayle suggested that I stretch into the tension and allow myself time and space for sensations, words and images to arrive, I would never have suspected that my neck, back, and throat tension had anything to do with my childhood abuse by my father who invariably violently disagreed with everything I chose to do and the way I chose to do it! In contacting the fear of self-assertion we need to monitor our body for the exact locations of the tensions. Then we need to allow sensations, words and images to surface from our body-mind-relationship constrictions.

In emotionally significant relationships I have learned to be always on the alert for the slightest sign of anger in a person’s voice, body language, or the stories they are telling me. I have learned to ask about the tenseness, to try to bring the full range of anger out into the relationship. As a therapist at times I urge people to scream whatever they need to say at me, to use wildly aggressive language if necessary, or even to use degrading and murderous phrases—whatever it takes to raise the roof in order to focus the problem in the here-and-now emotional relating of this room.

When the fear reflexes are mobilized in the BMR connection in the here-and-now of emotional relating I can tune into wherever the tension is and try to come up with what's going on now for them or between us. More often than not past rages pour out, sometimes tears of impotence and defeat, sometimes victorious shouts, sometimes vindictive threats. But whatever comes up it quickly links the body-mind-relationship constrictions with patterns of painful if not terrifying past oppositions.

As a therapist I may say something like, "this sounds like you've been in this place before, can you tell me about it?" Or, "you say you are really pissed off, but I also think I hear some hurt—what's that about?" Or, "are you stifling your true feelings about him?—you know this is the place to really let the anger and hate out!" Or, "of course you aren't going to strangle her, but that's the feeling her actions are bringing up for you—try owning your wish to strangle her and see where it takes you." Or, "it sounds like what I said to you last session brought up a lot of feeling, but you seem reluctant to let it fly at me."

Anger as communication in a relationship does say something is wrong, something hurts, something in me feels small and helpless, cornered. If we want to get to the fear of self-assertion the path is likely to be anger leading to fear and injury. Dave's story about the stresses he encountered at the car dealer illustrates well how childhood humiliations re-appear in present situations to elicit anger, fear and helplessness.

5. The Fear of Lack of Recognition

When we do not get the acceptance and confirmation we need in relationships, we are left with a feeling of not being seen or recognized for who we really are. We may then fear we will not be affirmed or confirmed in our relationships. Or we may fear that others will only respect and love us if we are who they want us to be. We may work continuously to feel seen and recognized by others or we may give up in rage, humiliation or shame.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Lack of Recognition is About

Pierre has been planning a fiftieth birthday party for his partner of 22 years, Greggorio. Months ago Pierre had ordered new carpet and drapes for the front rooms of the house. Their decorator friend, Terrence, had helped him select some truly new and exciting colors and fabrics with accent pillows to

fluff up the old couch a bit. Several rooms had been re-painted, and the bathrooms tastefully refurbished. The master bedroom, guest room, study, and exercise room had all been shifted around to favorably display the artwork they had brought back from their travels over the years.

Pierre ran out of money before he could have their kitchen entirely remodeled to his satisfaction—but he was able to get some new counter-tops on sale that his handyman, Patrick, was able to install before painting the cabinets and walls.

Pierre had searched for new accessories at all his favorite boutiques for months and had located a number of remarkable additions to the house. Lulu's had agreed to cater an authentic French country dinner with fresh seafood crepes prepared on the premises. The Village Winery had given him a really good deal on birthday champagne, French table wine, and some new crystal wine glasses. Black Forest Bakery was doing their famous double chocolate cake with Hershey Bar icing—Gregg's favorite. He purchased new party shirts for himself and Gregg from Franco's Italian Menswear where they both liked to shop.

The birthday occasion was clearly to be the event of the season for Pierre, Greggorio and all of their friends. Everything was in readiness. As guests arrived, birthday gifts and greetings were presented to Greggorio—but Pierre and his many house and garden creations were clearly the center of attention. Everyone wanted to know where this statue and that plant came from? They wanted to know how on earth Pierre ever thought to put this together with that? How had Pierre managed to get Lulu herself to do the crepes? Would Pierre explain how he got his cymbidiums to put on such tall spikes? Pierre was basking in tribute and self-satisfaction as the evening came and went with Greggorio and friends praising all of his accomplishments that had made the event such a smashing success.

The crowd slowly dwindled and George and Estéphano cleared up the worst of the after-party mess. With just a few close friends hanging around still sipping drinks, Pierre began to feel depleted. What was going on for him? Everything had been a great success—but no one had noticed the new draperies or matching accent pillows. No one commented on his or Greggorio's new shirts either. Pierre noticed that Greggorio was so busy with friends that he barely touched his seafood crepe or the Hershey Bar double chocolate cake. The list of disappointments raced through Pierre's mind as he tried to

maintain good cheer until the last guests left.

Later in bed Gregg thanked him profusely and praised him for the wonderful occasion he had hosted. They made love and Gregg rolled over and went to sleep. But Pierre continued to cast randomly over the events of the evening. How dare Giovanni suggest that he saw those very wine glasses at Costco last week! Destinie remarked that his butt was cute but she missed the new shirts entirely! All the possible slights of the evening and the numerous small faux pas came back to Pierre in a fit of indignant rage. His true measure of success had been entirely missed by virtually everyone. The time, the money, the talent that he had lavished on them all—like pearls to swine. Pierre dropped into a pit of despondency marked by occasional flashes of revenge—and then shame followed for not appreciating what wonderful friends he had and how lucky he was to have Gregorio.

Yes, the birthday party had been a great success, but Pierre's insatiable quest for recognition had left him a disappointed, resentful, and an ashamed wreck afterwards. After all, how much recognition and acclaim do any of us need? And what happens in our BMR connection when the lack of recognition fear reflex gets triggered?

How the Fear of Lack of Recognition Forms in Childhood

In the past when we did not get the affirmation, confirmation inspiration, or recognition that we needed from important people in our lives, we were left with the feeling of not being good enough. So we learned to search or push others for the recognition that we felt we needed. We may have come to fear that others would only respect and love us if we are who they want us to be and admire us for it. We came to feel the world does not accept or honor who we really are or what we have to offer.

When we experience not being seen, affirmed, reflected, or recognized in a positive or satisfying way, we fear we don't count, that we can't measure up, or that we'll never matter enough to anyone. As children when we did not live up to our parent's expectations or to an image projected by society, then we may have felt worthless, impotent or at least less than adequate or special.

We may have learned to compensate for lack of recognition with a tendency toward perfectionism or with grandiose fantasies of who we are. But grandiosity is like a balloon that can be deflated in an

instant by the pinprick of any real or imagined criticism or slight. Then we're back to square one, feeling worthless, a sham, a phony, a slob or no good.

On the deepest level, we may feel humiliated by our intense desires for recognition. We may fear that we don't deserve the life or the relationships that we do have. Or we may feel ashamed for seeking the kinds of self-recognition that we know we need.

As alternate strategies we may walk around radiating the picture of extreme modesty when in fact we are deflated and feel bad about ourselves for not being worthy of more recognition. Or conversely, we may puff ourselves up with forced grandiosity—demanding or eliciting from others the steady confirmation we cannot provide for ourselves. In either case we may fear that people around us sense our inner emptiness, depletion, low self-esteem and insecurity.

Making Contact With your BMR connection

Imagine that you are about to meet someone for lunch or a drink whom you do not know very well. The meeting is important because this person may be able to give you some good ideas or provide you with some important networking connections. Or you may see this person as a possible candidate for a good friend or personal relationship. The meeting is exploratory. You have dressed up a little for the occasion, but have taken care not to overdo it. As you approach the meeting you become conscious of your hair, your fingernails, and your overall appearance. You hope to make a favorable impression.

The meeting begins somewhat cautiously with each of you feeling a little tense, commenting on the weather, the restaurant, and today's headlines looking for views you hold in common. As the pace picks up you find yourself starting to drop names and to mention places you have visited in your travels when you really hadn't intended to discuss such things. Or, perhaps feeling pleased with how well read you are, you find yourself throwing in comments about a couple of recent books you have read. You may offer insightful comments on current movies or new albums. You perhaps mention a few recent purchases made at upscale shops or special bargains you have managed lately.

You know that you hate this kind of patting yourself on the back, but it is inadvertent and your companion seems to be enjoying it and reciprocating in kind. There is a mutual need for recognition that

you both are experiencing and expressing. The exchange goes well and profitably for both of you, even if you are worrying that you may be overdoing it a bit!

We do need ongoing recognition, admiration, and confirmation, from others, despite how awkward it sometimes feels. When the needed and appropriate recognition isn't forthcoming we feel a little insecure or tense. If our narcissism is wounded greatly we may feel rageful or even ashamed that we need certain kinds of recognition or that we become upset when it is not forthcoming.

Bringing the Fear of Lack of Recognition into Consciousness

We are so shamed as children for taking pride in ourselves—for patting ourselves on the back or tooting our own horn, that we are often unaware of when and where we could use some genuine personal recognition. Or the reverse may be true, that we hide behind such a cloak of modesty that people have to strain to give us the recognition we deserve.

Mutual recognition in rewarding relationships is essential. We all have different ways of putting ourselves out there to be seen and of enjoying the affirmation that recognition by important others entails. Pierre may be an extreme case but he is certainly not alone!

In my emotionally significant relationships I try to be as sensitive as I can to when people are proud of themselves for some achievement and I work hard to bring out that pride. I find myself encouraging people to enjoy the personal confirmation involved by feeling recognized in important ways by myself and others.

By the same token I try to sensitize myself to moments when something has happened and needed recognition has not been forthcoming—either from myself or from others. Everyone has a fear of lack of recognition reflex that gets triggered when we need some affirming recognition and it is not forthcoming. Being mindful at all times of the BMR connection and the need for recognition as well as disappointed longings for recognition can be a part of any significant relationship.

It's painful to want to be seen, to want to be valued for who we are and for what we have to offer, and then to feel there is not enough appreciation or recognition. This pain was experienced repeatedly

in various ways throughout our childhoods so we have deep fear reflexes that make us sensitive to empathic failure from others.

Often our reactions are notably subdued—a dampening of the spirits or a physical complaint like fatigue, sluggishness or mild physical symptoms in response to a failure of empathic recognition. At other times the reaction is rage at the other for missing us. Or it may even be a sense of shame for needing recognition.

As a therapist I may say something like, “now I understand, last session when you were telling me about how well your office presentation went you were expecting as much enthusiasm from me as you felt yourself. When I sat here like a bump on a log missing how truly important this was to you, you felt greatly let down. No wonder you didn’t quite feel like coming to see me today.” Or, “of course you’re angry, you put weeks into that PTA banquet and hardly a word of thanks was offered—I’d be furious myself!” Or, “I’m sorry, but I think the family should have been more appreciative rather than acting as if you were showing off—there is absolutely no reason to be ashamed simply because you want a little well-deserved recognition!”

We need to be able to sing along with Barbara—“Nobody’s going to rain on my parade!” And when somebody does dampen things for us, we can certainly take that opportunity to check out what tensions appear in our BMR connection.

Pierre needs to be honest with himself about his great fear of lack of recognition and try to learn where in his childhood his failing self-esteem came from. He pays an enormous emotional price for not having yet found ways to affirm himself and to enjoy the confirmations he does receive from others. In studying his BMR connection Pierre needs to allow himself to stay in touch with his incessant needs for tribute and to notice what happens to him when affirmation is not forthcoming. Stretching into the pain and allowing sensations, words, and images to appear is clearly the direction he needs to pursue. The “Put On Your Aliveness Monitor” and “Touching Base with Your Body” exercises will do a lot to put Pierre on the best course to understanding and obtaining relief from his fear of lack of recognition reflex.

6. The Fear of Failure and Success

When we have loved and lost or tried and failed, we may fear opening ourselves up to painful competitive experience again. When we have succeeded or won—possibly at someone else's expense—we may experience guilt or fear retaliation. Thus we learn to hold back in love and life, thereby not risking either failure or success. We may feel the world does not allow us to be fulfilled. Or we may feel guilty and afraid for feeling fulfilled.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Failure and Success is About

Since antiquity the potentially tragic effects of triangular emotional relationships have been well known. The great myths and dramas of all time portray a hero or heroine caught up in some sort of a competitive love triangle. Oedipus in his love for his mother was caught up in competitive feelings with his father. Electra in her love for her father was caught up in competitive feelings with her mother.

Aurora's parents separated when she was three but she experienced in her upbringing a respectful and cooperative atmosphere between them. In her mid-twenties she married Serge whom she admired for the way he cared for her and his stated ambitions in life. As the relationship developed, however, Serge became unbearably possessive and controlling, experiencing intense jealousy over her relationships with her family and her lifelong friends as well as her newly formed friends. His stated ambitions deteriorated into a general passivity, most of the time he sat in front of the television watching sports.

As Aurora struggled to define her position in individual and couples counseling, she encountered deep-seated rage at her mother who, while always seeming to promise a special relationship with Aurora, in fact often emotionally deferred to her husband in a way that left Aurora feeling emotionally left out. Aurora was able to turn to her father for understanding and support while working on resolving her angry feelings at her sense of emotional abandonment by her mother.

Later in counseling Aurora got in touch with her rage at her father for his preoccupations with his work and his own love relationships which she had always experienced as emotionally excluding her. At this point she was able to turn toward her mother for support in working out her rageful feelings toward

her father.

Growing up as an only child with parents who were divorced at an early age had made it difficult for Aurora to experience and work through emotional triangles as a young child. As a result she was having to work through triangular relationship experiences in the context of having a husband who was unable to tolerate the competition of her loving relationships with her family and friends. Her distress in her marriage brought up her triangular relationship fear reflexes from childhood.

In the process of getting in touch with her fear reflexes regarding succeeding and failing in emotional triangles, Aurora realized that she could not stay in a marriage ruled by controlling jealousy. In the turmoil of the separation and divorce she experienced considerable anxiety and a variety of stress symptoms that affected various parts of her body.

Aurora met Nicole in the cafeteria at the company where she worked. Nicole's husband had died several years earlier from pancreatic cancer as a young man. Both women were looking for a bonded relationship in which they could love and be loved. They longed for a relationship in which they could each experience strong loving relationships with friends and family as well. They soon moved in together and established a deeply committed relationship based on mutual love and respect.

It was only a matter of time before Aurora and Nicole found themselves wanting to share their love with a child. Who would carry the baby? Where would the sperm come from? Would their child know and have a relationship with the biological father? Would they be able to provide needed father figures for the child to relate to? How would friends and family react? Given the support each of them had experienced from their own parents in the course of growing up, how would they each as parents be able to establish a loving relationship with a child within a cooperative and inevitably competitive love triangle? Only time would tell.

How the Fear of Failure and Success Forms in Childhood

As a child growing up I feel some sense of security and control in my exclusive relationship with my mother. But when my father enters the room my relationship with her changes and I no longer feel the same sense of control over my relationship with her. In my exclusive relationship with my father I also

develop a sense of security and control in what I can expect and cannot expect. When my mother enters the room everything changes and the sense of confidence I have in my relationship with my father is diminished. Worst for me is when they move into their exclusive love relationship with each other and I feel shut out, abandoned by both of them. Clearly three is a treacherous number for relationships. And yet our early family life and our later social life is filled with competitive emotional triangular relationships.

Relationship triangles are marked by cooperation and competition in giving and receiving love and respect. Relationship triangles are where as children we first develop the fear of failure and fear of success reflexes that later become so deeply embedded in our BMR connections.

When our major fear is of failing—whether in love, in a chosen occupation, or in life in general—the deep fear is that we will be devastated if we fail. Failing is often unconsciously equated with emotional injury. If we fail in achievement or competition, we fear we will not survive the pain—our hearts will break. Failure in love means heartbreak. But failure in work or in goals we set for ourselves also feels devastating. Failure represents not measuring up, not making it. In order to protect ourselves from the pangs of failure, we often find that we don't open our hearts fully to others and we don't go “all out” in work or play.

If I succeed in competition the third party in the triangle will either be destroyed or will wipe me out! On a rational level, of course, we know this isn't quite true. But on an unconscious or non-rational level, this primitive fear resides in each of us. So we often undermine our efforts—we “blow the deal” or spoil the relationship—to assure ourselves that we won't injure or be injured, that we won't kill or be killed.

Underlying the fear of success and the fear of failure reflexes are the deep, unconscious fears of our own lust and murderous intents toward intervening or interfering third parties. We fear our painful demise in face of competition with third parties. Or we fear success with dangerous consequences. When we have loved and lost or tried and failed, we fear ever opening ourselves up to painful competitive experiences again. When we have succeeded or won—possibly at someone else's expense—we fear guilt and the fear of retaliation. We learn to hold back in love and life, thereby not risking either failure or success. Deep in our BMR connection we come to feel the world does not allow us to be fulfilled.

In considering triangular relationships, the ways in which parents and children handle competition and cooperation in three-way relationships are paramount. In adult love relations the history of our internalized love triangles is always silently played out in the background, in the bedroom, and with our friends, associates, and children.

An Aside on Morality

Moral issues are often associated with triangular relating, as it is the third person or force in each triangle that seems to dictate the rules for relating. But morality in different people takes different paths and often becomes structured differently for men than for women. Since morality is critical in three-way interactions it seems important to dwell for a moment on how men and women tend to experience morality in different ways.

In Carol Gilligan's, *In a Different Voice*, she reports her research into the different images of relationship that emerge when men and women are presented with the same moral dilemmas. Pictures of relational hierarchies (more valued by men) versus pictures of relational webs or networks (more valued by women) repeatedly occur in studies of morality. Images of a hierarchy and images of a network convey different views of moral dilemmas that so frequently arise in triangular relating.

The woman's moral position, reports Gilligan, tends to revolve around an ideal of care as an ethic and activity of relationship. Hers is a position of seeing and responding to human need, of taking care of others in the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is hurt or left alone. The image of a hierarchy of guiding ethical principles of right and wrong tends to characterize male morality. His moral position revolves around seeing, judging, and acting on the basis of the best standard of equality and fairness for all.

In studying our fear of failure and fear of success reflexes in our triangular relationships and the limiting or inhibiting effects of third parties and influences, these gendered aspects of morality are likely to emerge as qualities to be continuously negotiated in the triangle—regardless of the gender of the participants. Consider your own moral values as they arise in your triangular relationships? What are your views and your feelings? What moral values and position do others in your emotional triangles hold? What part of your BMR connection becomes quickly affected when you think of how your moral

values harmonize or conflict with others in some of your emotionally significant triangular relationships?

Making Contact With your BMR connection

Think of someone with whom you have a significant relationship and in which there is an important third-party emotional involvement that you both take into account in your relationship. The classic triangle is mother, father, and me—but a universe of possible triangles branches out from there.

Perhaps you think of your relationship partner and his or her child with whom there is significant triangular relatedness that you both experience. Perhaps it is your own child or children that you experience as competing for attention with your relatedness partner. Perhaps it is your partner's mother who provides a significant emotional triangle, or your partner's father. Maybe there is a boss, a business partner, or a business or profession that constitutes a viable third party in your relationship. Sometimes the competing third is an allegiance to a personal value system, a religious orientation, a political platform, or an alternative life style.

I will next ask you to dwell for a moment on the complications of emotionally significant three-way relationships in your life and to consider your fears of failure and success in the context of all of your triangular relationships. I will ask you to consider carefully how you relate in four areas of your life: (1) your work, (2) your social relationships, (3) your intimacy, and (4) your sexuality. You may wish to jot your ideas down as we go, specifying how each triangle works in your life.

1. **Work:** Whether you run a company or run a household, whether you take care of clients or students, or you care for your own small children, focus on how you feel about what you do on the job every day. In what ways do you feel a failure? Do you fear being—or being found out to be—a failure, a phony, or a fraud? Are you afraid of not being as good as others in your workplace? Are you afraid to be too good? Do you fear standing out as special or accomplished in your work? Do you undermine yourself just as you are about to attain success?
2. **Social Relationships:** Do you find yourself competing with others? Are you competing with a true competitor or with all other men or all other women? Or are you competing with an internalized image of what you "should" do and be? Or with something your parents wanted for you, or a way your family or society wants you to be? How do your fears of failure show up differently in different social triangles? What are the ways that you feel

powerless or out of control in emotional triangles? How does your fear of social success show up for you? Are your competencies likely to be experienced as threatening to others or to endanger you in some way?

3. Intimacy: What are your fears of failing or losing out in your intimate relationships? Do you undermine yourself? How do you cut off or emotionally distance yourself from other people when things get too close? Do your methods of minimizing yourself indicate a fear of losing? Or do they reflect a fear of succeeding? Do you use affairs or multiple lovers as a protection against the vulnerability and potential pain of intimacy? Do you emotionally pull out just when you are about to get what you thought you wanted and deserved? If you succeed in intimacy, who will be hurt or left out? What will be the fallout for you?
4. Sexuality: What are your fears in regard to failure and success in sexuality? How do you see yourself as a sexual being? Do you fear being sexually inadequate, unattractive, or unwanted? In what ways do you minimize or avoid sexual feelings and involvements? Who are your sexual competitors? When you are aware of diminished sexual interest, arousal, or activity, how do you relate to yourself and to your past and present partners? Do you use third parties or outside involvements as excuses for maintaining blindness or deadness to your sexual impulses—thirds such as competitors, preoccupations, work pressures, social obligations, children, moral authorities, or parents?

As you considered each of these four areas of triangular emotional relationships what came up for you in your BMR connection. What sensations, words and images came up for you as clues to how your fear of failure and fear of success reflexes operate in your life?

Bringing the Fear of Failure and Success into Consciousness

Emotional triangles inevitably contain a desire to compete for love and a fear of being injured in competition for love. In my emotionally significant relationships I try to consider all possible third parties operating in the background that silently influence the action in the foreground. I find it is important when considering possible triangular influences to include as third parties all values, social standards, customs, judgments, and morals—as well as people, real and imaginary—present, past, and future.

It may be useful and illuminating for you to actually diagram on a piece of paper the triangles in your life and to consider the emotional connections among each three. Based upon your reflections, you can write down your fears of failure and success related to each triangle. As you consider each triangle,

your fear of failure or success may immediately be apparent...but it might also be quite hidden. Take time to consider all of the relationship issues carefully before concluding that you have no fears in any particular three-way relationship! As you are thinking do any sensations, words or images accompany your experiences of triangles?

In therapy people often need to re-experience the cooperative and competitive aspects of their original emotional triangle. It may be illuminating for you to reflect on your own experience with your "original triangle," the relationship between you, your mother, and father. Even though you may have grown up with a single parent, an absent father or mother certainly formed one part of an emotional triangle in your BMR connection. Or perhaps there was a step-parent or grandparent, a sibling or someone else who formed part of an important early triangle. As you reflect on each cooperative and competitive aspect of your original relationship triangles, what emotions emerge? Do you feel warmth, longing, and admiration? Or do you experience dread, contempt, hatred, disgust, or repulsion? What sensations, words and images, do you experience in your BMR connection as you consider your early triangles? Where exactly are there tensions and constrictions?

Given what you have just noticed about your original triangles, how do you notice similar sensations, words and images affecting current intimate relationships? How do your fears of failure and success show up differently in different relationships?

Doing the "Put on Your Aliveness Monitor" and "Touching Base with Your Body" exercises on a regular basis will give you interesting information about how triangular fear reflexes operate in your BMR connection.

7. The Fear of Being Fully Alive

Our expansiveness, creative energy and joy in our aliveness inevitably come into conflict with demands from family, work, religion, culture, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness in order to be able to conform to the demands and expectations of the world we live in. We feel the world does not permit us to be fully, joyfully, and passionately alive. Rather than putting our whole selves out there with full energy and aliveness, we may throw in the towel, succumb to mediocre

conformity, or fall into a living deadness.

A Story to Illustrate What the Fear of Being Fully Alive is About

To say Marcie has too many things on her plate would be an understatement. She is a high-energy woman with a smile and a word of encouragement for everyone. When it's time to get something done, call Marcie. She'll spend half the night if necessary getting the award banquet table decorations ready. She never hesitates to do more than her share of driving in the kids' car pool and for after-school and weekend activities. If phone calls have to be made to remind people of a meeting or e-mails need to be sent out—you can count on Marcie. When a new president of the board is needed, there is Marcie—competent, ready, and available. When there are squabbles to be settled Marcie's the one who can handle things tactfully and effectively. "The trouble with me is I can't say no."

Marcie certainly doesn't look lifeless. But she pays a heavy price for giving her all to each group adventure she is a part of, for not guarding her personal boundaries more carefully from social intrusions, for not valuing her inner life more than group expectations, and for not treasuring her intimate relationships more dearly.

In my years of being Marcie's therapist I can only remember once her telling of a day she fixed herself a tuna sandwich and took a great book into her back yard and had a perfectly delicious afternoon by herself reading, enjoying the spring breezes and gentle sunshine in her garden.

Marcie grew up in a large family in a northwest farming community. From as early as she can remember everyone relied on her to get things moving, to make things happen, to organize the chores, to cheer everyone up. Exactly when her father's alcoholism began to insert itself insidiously into family life isn't quite clear. But it was Marcie's job to manage him, to protect the others from his abuses, to see that he got to bed safely. Where was mother all this time?

Needless to say, Marcie was always the class president, the athletic team captain, the yearbook editor. In high school and college she graduated with high honors. She met Nathan, her husband, at a college weekend get-together, but since they were each committed to different graduate school programs in nearby states their early years together were spent weekend commuting.

Children came along, but because Nathan's job required him be on the road much of the time, the weekend marital intimacy and family life has continued indefinitely.

Every circumstance in Marcie's life requires her to wear another hat—and she wears them all well. She has learned how to fit in well at church, at the kids' schools, in her profession, in the neighborhood, in the community, in her husband's company group and among their set of close friends. Whatever the demand Marcie finds some way to rise to the occasion. Most of the time Marcie feels energetic and well—though she spends a lot of time at her shrink's and her chiropractor's offices. Otherwise everything with Marcie is great!

What's wrong with this picture? Marcie simply isn't fully alive to herself. Living for her own pleasure and satisfaction with her own desires, hopes and goals is somehow forbidden by her fear of being fully alive reflexes. She has no right to a fulfilling life of her own.

How the Fear of Being Fully Alive Forms in Childhood

From our earliest years our energy, creativity, expansiveness, and joy in relationships inevitably comes into conflict with demands from family, work, religion, culture, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness in our relationships in order to be able to conform to the expectations of the social world we live in. The fear of being fully alive is a fear associated with group life.

We might think of group life as a complex series of overlapping triangular relationships. When in the previous section of this book we began defining our personal relationship triangles, we were able to see how our fear of failure and success reflexes live on in our BMR connections. In group life the effects of our triangular fear reflexes are greatly magnified because so many triangles are operating simultaneously.

Reflex fears of being fully alive for oneself become established in young children as soon as they become involved in the groups their parents choose for them. In adolescence we have greater choices as to what groups we will become involved with. So we expect that we will gain a new sense of life and self-fulfillment from participation in the groups we choose. But we soon discover that all groups have credos, expectations, and standards that are inevitably at odds with some of our own beliefs, opinions, and

standards. As we strive to participate and integrate ourselves into group life, earlier-learned relational fear reflexes appear in new and different forms in relation to people in the group and in relation to group life itself.

In adulthood we may no longer actually be dependent on specific individuals or groups for survival, but our deep-seated group relatedness fear reflexes continue silently to eliminate options for us and thus to limit us in various ways. We come to live as if the world does not permit us to be fully, joyfully, and passionately alive.

As a result of a lifetime of living in groups we have learned to be sensitive to the demands of the social world around us. The minute we come under the influence of any particular group, we are immediately aware of how people in this group talk, dress, think, and behave. Each group we encounter is identifiable by characteristic codes and beliefs—the standards of the group.

But no matter how much we may identify with the beliefs and standards of any group, we know that we are, in our own ways, different. We tend to suppress our individuality and to lie low when our opinions and beliefs are likely to be at odds with the group ideals.

All around us we can see the results of the massive social inhibitions in which we all unwittingly participate. Every day we see people moving through the world like zombies—hardly noticing that the sun is shining, that flowers are blooming, and that all of nature is singing! We can so easily forget that we are living, breathing beings with a capacity for love and happiness, joy and sorrow, anger and fear.

It is as if in our BMR connections we have somehow chosen to die before it is our time! It is as though we have become infected by the forms of living deadness we see in people all around us—whether it's in our eating, drinking, and working habits, or in our mindlessly watching television or surfing the net.

Where did all of this numbness, inhibition, and deadness come from? How can we focus on the ways we unwittingly allow lifelessness to take us in? How can we release the chronic constrictions that live on in our BMR connections? How can we release our fear of being fully alive reflexes?

In considering how we experience our fear of being fully alive reflexes in groups, it is important to

realize that all of the other earlier-learned fear reflexes in our BMR connection get triggered in response to different aspects of group life. It is a serious mistake to think that the boredom, dreariness and lack of aliveness we so frequently experience is caused by outside social forces—as so many people honestly believe. Rather, we need to pay careful attention to the subtleties of all of our fear reflexes to notice how they are being re-stimulated by group life.

Making Contact With Your BMR connection

Imagine that your Thanksgiving table is set. The candles are lit. Platters heaped with steaming food pour from the kitchen as the extended family and guests assemble for the Thanksgiving prayer and the carving of the bird. Shrieks are heard from the children eating in the kitchen, pets silently settle into their corners, and the conversation begins. It hardly strikes us at this moment that beneath the weeks of careful preparation, the anxieties of coordinating family plans, and the private anticipations about the day lie a thousand silent fears. And similar pageants await in the weeks beyond Thanksgiving as with eager anticipation and silent dread we prepare ourselves for the upcoming holiday season.

Yes, there is thankfulness. And yes, there is joy. But in the background lie the darkness, fear, dread, and depression that have always accompanied Winter solstice celebrations. How each of us experiences the emotional pressures of these social events differs from occasion to occasion and from year to year. But none can deny that the bustle of the holidays, the pressures of large family gatherings, and the obligations of seasonal get-togethers are something of an ordeal.

But why, if we are so glad to be reunited with family and friends, does it have to be such a strain? And aren't these stressful holiday occasions simply exaggerated versions of the many social events we find ourselves participating in all the time? What is it that we so object to about being with people in groups? Why do we pacify or anesthetize ourselves with customs and rituals, with spending and giving, and with massive amounts of food and drink? What are we struggling with? What are we fleeing from? What exactly do we dread so much? What keeps us from being fully alive to ourselves and to those around us that we care about so much?

There must be many ways we could address these questions about our group life. But what we want to know is how our fear of being fully alive reflexes operate silently in social situations to rob us of

full enjoyment of ourselves, our friends, and our loved ones. Our task is to bring whatever keeps us from being fully energized, fully inspired, fully creative, and fully spontaneous and alive into focus in here-and-now relationships for continuous study.

Bringing the Fear of Being Fully Alive into Consciousness

As a therapist I am always on the alert for ways people's fear of being alive reflexes dampen their spirits, their energies, and their relationships. I may ask something like, "Doesn't it seem like with all of this busyness and concern about the children that you can't quite get a life for yourself?" Or, "I know corporate hierarchies are exasperating, but must you take this whole nightmare home with you?" Or, "caring for people certainly has its rewards, but don't you sometimes confuse a desire to be helpful with a certain sense of helplessness you have always felt?" Or, "I know it's painful to think that you yell at the kids over things that don't really matter. But doesn't your impatience with them simply repeat your parents' impatience with you?—Can you not let this go?"

These kinds of questions point the way towards experiencing in sensations, words, and images your BMR connection. For example, in the burnt child story I told earlier Gayle's question to me about my history of being attacked and my "scared to death" dream opened an escape hatch to liberate me from a kind of living death that I had been experiencing since childhood. The fear of opposing my father, the fear of speaking my own piece, the fear of desiring recognition and the fear of desiring a sense of pleasure from my teaching experiences were all fear reflexes living on in my neck, my lower back and my throat—limiting my sense of being fully alive.

By Way of Review

Since our fear reflexes are heavily conditioned in early childhood they never totally leave us and can re-possess us at any moment. For this reason it is important that we cultivate an attitude of ongoing mindfulness of our body-mind-relationship self and to learn ways of releasing fear constrictions as they arise in the course of daily living. The "Put on Your Aliveness Monitor" and "Touching Base with Your Body" exercises have been devised to aid you in developing increased mindfulness.

At the end of considering all of the Seven Deadly Fears ask yourself now:

- Have I learned to monitor all parts of my body on a continuous basis so I can detect fear reflexes as soon as they crop up?
- Am I ready on a moment's notice to stop whatever I am doing, touch base with my body, and release the constricting reflexes almost as fast as they arrive?
- Am I convinced that taking myself and my life seriously is worthwhile?
- Am I truly committed to becoming more fully alive?