

## Hurt Feelings and Personality Socialization in the Family

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**ABSTRACT** - The purpose of this article is to summarize a developmental, relational theory of personality socialization in the family and other settings. This theory consists of two assumptions about space and time, from which are derived two respective processes about the ability to love and the ability to negotiate. The contents of the theory consist of three modalities: Being, Doing, and Having. From these processes and contents other models about a continuum of likeness, selfhood and personality propensities, priorities, and intimacy are developed. This theory can be evaluated in the laboratory through self-report, paper-and-pencil tests, and in applied or clinical settings through enrichment programs, workbooks, and therapeutic tasks.

**Key words:** Theory construction; theory testing; models; family; personality.

## Sentimentos de Injúria e Socialização da Personalidade na Família

**RESUMO** – O objetivo desse artigo é apresentar, resumidamente, uma teoria desenvolvimentista e relacional da socialização da personalidade na família e em outros contextos. Esta teoria consiste de dois pressupostos sobre espaço e tempo, dos quais são derivados dois processos respectivos sobre as habilidades de amar e negociar. Os conteúdos da teoria consistem de três modalidades: Ser, Fazer e Ter. A partir desses processos e conteúdos, são desenvolvidos outros modelos sobre o continuum de similaridade, tendências de personalidade e temor de ser injuriado, prioridades e intimidade. Esta teoria pode ser avaliada em laboratório, através de testes de auto-relato e de lápis e papel, e em contextos aplicado ou clínico, através de programas de enriquecimento, livros e tarefas terapêuticas.

**Palavras-chave:** construção de teoria; teste de teoria; modelos; família; personalidade.

This article is a short summary of a theory of personality socialization in the family which is found in its various expansions in both English and Italian languages (L'Abate, 1976, 1986, 1994, 1997, 1998a, 1998b). The thesis of this theory is that at the bottom of personality socialization there are underlying hurt feelings and fears of being hurt that are produced in the family of origin. Personality socialization, in this regard, can be viewed as a process of creating an artichoke. Underneath its external leaves, after passing through the prickly choke at the very heart, there are these feelings of hurt. They are often but not always and not always fully solved and resolved in functional relationships through reciprocal sharing with loved ones. However, they are not confronted and shared, and usually not resolved, in dysfunctional ones. They linger on and influence personality socialization throughout individual and family life-cycles (Bradley, 2000; Watson, 2000). Before reaching these feelings of hurt, however, one must deal with many leaves that cover, defend, and protect them. One cannot get to these feelings because the prickly choke of anger and, sometimes rage, makes it difficult and in some cases impossible to reach them (L'Abate, 1999).

Requirements for this theory were: (a) contextuality, as seen in specific settings, rather than in vague and general terms like "environment", "culture", or "situation"; (b)

relationality, as seen in intimate relationships rather than in hypothetical or inferred internal traits or states; (c) development, over the individual and family life-cycles, from dependency in childhood to denial of dependency in adolescence, interdependence in adulthood, and return to dependence in old age; (d) covering both functional and dysfunctional aspects of personality socialization; and (e) verifiability, not only in the laboratory, through self-report, paper-and-pencil tests, but also in primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention settings as well.

The theory, in brief, is composed of: (a) processes in time and space, (b) postulates about contents in resources and modalities exchanged, leading to the ability to love and the ability to negotiate, (c) settings, and (d) models. These components go from general, seemingly abstract constructs (see the left side of Figure 1) to the specific and concrete ones (at the right of Figure 1). The rest of this article is devoted to expanding and explaining Figure 1.

### Assumptions of processes in space and time

Personality socialization assumes space and time as two basic processes that subsume respectively, distance and regulation or control. Distance is defined by extremes in approach-avoidance between intimates, and among non-intimates. For example, extremes in approach could be seen in symbiotic attachments ("I cannot live without you") that result in internal (against the self rather than against others) self-abuse and apathy or neglect. Extremes in avoidance-withdrawal are seen in abandonments and rejections.

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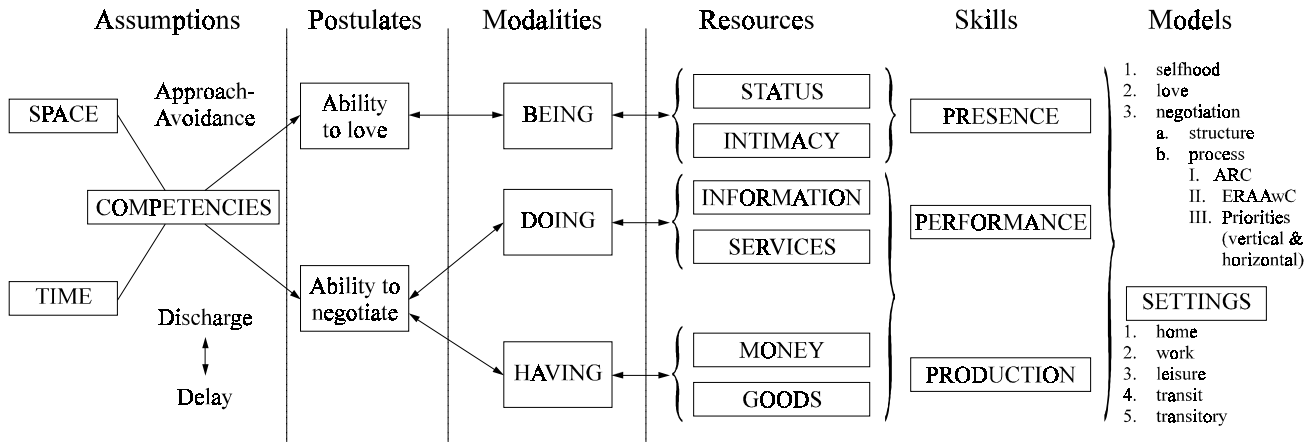


Figure 1. A developmental theory of interpersonal competence.

Somewhere in the middle of this dimension lies the proper balance of distance, ultimately culminating in closeness and intimacy. The latter is defined as the sharing of hurts and fears of being hurt. Intimacy is frequent in functional relationships and defective, if not absent, in dysfunctional ones.

Time subsumes a dimension of regulation defined by extremes in discharge or disinhibition (fast responding) on one hand, and delay or inhibition (slow responding) on the other. Extremes in discharge are visible in externalizations, as in hyperactivity, impulsivity, and acting out behaviors. Extreme in delay are visible in internalizations, as in compulsive thinking and ruminations, anxieties, depressions, and, ultimately, alienations and suicides. Functionality is found in a balance in the regulation of discharge-delay processes. Developmentally, the infant is born in a world of space (distance) that becomes a world of time with age (regulation).

Both distance and regulation underlie the concept of interpersonal and intimate competence, implying an interaction between individuals, parents, partners, relatives, and friends. This framework is consistent, continuous, and reducible to monadic models of behavior that follow acontextual and intraindividual rather than interindividual thinking. Both distance and regulation are well accepted constructs in the psychological literature, even though they are not used in an interpersonal context as they are used in this theory.

### Postulates and modalities of exchange

The two assumptions of space and time lead to two postulates about two respective sets of abilities: the ability to love and the ability to negotiate.

#### The first postulate: Ability to love

Love is expressed through (a) attributing, asserting, and affirming the importance of self and of loved ones, and (b) the ability to be intimate, that is, being emotionally avail-

able to oneself and intimate others through sharing of hurts and fears of being hurt. This process means being together unconditionally, without demands for performance, perfection, production, or problem-solving. The ability to love, therefore, even though it may possess a cognitive component, is based on the ability to experience, accept, and share a wide spectrum of feelings, painful and joyful. Hence, emotionality (*E*) is at the very bottom of our existence. It consists of feelings of love between partners, between parents and children, and among relatives and friends, as well as hurt feelings that unavoidably occur in everybody's life, whether we like them or not.

*E*, therefore, is the primary component of a crucial model of the theory. In *E*, it is where feelings of hurt and fears of being hurt are developed. They are shared reciprocally in functional relationships. They are avoided and even put down, ridiculed, suppressed, and repressed through internalizations or externalizations in dysfunctional ones. *E*, therefore, is the basic context of socialization. Infants are born in an emotional context, the marriage of parents or caretakers, and grow up in an emotional network of family relationships.

#### The second postulate: Ability to negotiate

The ability to negotiate, problem-solve, brain-storm, and bargain is developed from the ability to regulate the self in relationship with intimate others (Vichinich, 1999). This ability is based on a balance of discharge-delay processes that is present in functional relationships but defective or even absent in dysfunctional ones. It means being able to regulate oneself and, in so doing, allowing others to express themselves, giving them the freedom of free discharge in helpful and creative ways without delays, distractions, and procrastinations. If there is no balance in regulation, then severe, abusive, neglectful and contradictorily inconsistent, and hurtful discharges would result in rebellions and retaliations at one hand, or extremes in delays and withdrawals on the other.

Negotiation and problem-solving take place within functional, democratic relationships, where the singular importance of all participants is not only acknowledged but valued. In dysfunctional relationships, where either immediate discharge (name calling, blaming, put-downs, etc.) reaches abusive proportions or procrastinating delays take place, there is no possibility of reaching an agreement and consensus about how to solve even the smallest, irrelevant issues ("Making mountains out of mole-hills").

The process of negotiation is composed by various parts: (a) task assignments, consisting of decisions about orchestrationally large decisions, such as moving, buying a new house, or a car, versus instrumental issues like routine, every-day tasks, what to eat, where to eat, what TV show to see, etc.; (b) power sharing and division of labor, consisting of authority (who makes the decisions) and responsibility (who carries them out); and (c) contents (information, services, goods, and money).

Potential negotiation in personality and family members is a multiplicative function of level of functionality (*ill*), ability to negotiate (*skill*), and motivation to negotiate (*will*). While the motivation to be emotionally available to self and loved ones is based mostly on *E*, the process of negotiation requires access, acknowledgment of, and reliance on *E*, followed by *R* (for both Rationality and Regulation). Both *E* and *R* determine subsequent *Activities*, *Awareness*, and *Context*. These components of the model ERAAwC will be elaborated below.

**Modalities of exchange: Contents of the life triangle**

Processes of loving and negotiating are related to three modalities of exchange - Being, Doing, and Having - derived from six classes borrowed from the resource exchange theory (Foa & Foa, 1974): importance and intimacy make up Being, services and information make up Doing, and money and possessions make up Having. These resource classes and the three modalities make up the Triangle of Living (see Figure 2). Being or Presence means being emotionally available to ourselves and intimate others through attribution of their importance and sharing of hurts and fears of being hurt, that is, intimacy. Doing or Performance is defined as whatever has to be done to survive and to enjoy life. Having or Production is defined as the wherewithal relevant to survival and enjoyment. The combination of Doing and Having defines power and the ability to negotiate. In democratic relationships, power is shared and negotiated equitably, in win-win processes. In chaotic or dysfunctional relationships, power is either in the hands of one family member who uses it despotically, or there is no power negotiated at all, because everybody defeats everybody else. No one wins. Power is negotiated effectively and successfully in functional relationships but not is negotiated at all or negotiated ineffectively or unsuccessfully in dysfunctional ones.

Being together or Presence are not negotiable because they are based on feelings and attributions that are impos-

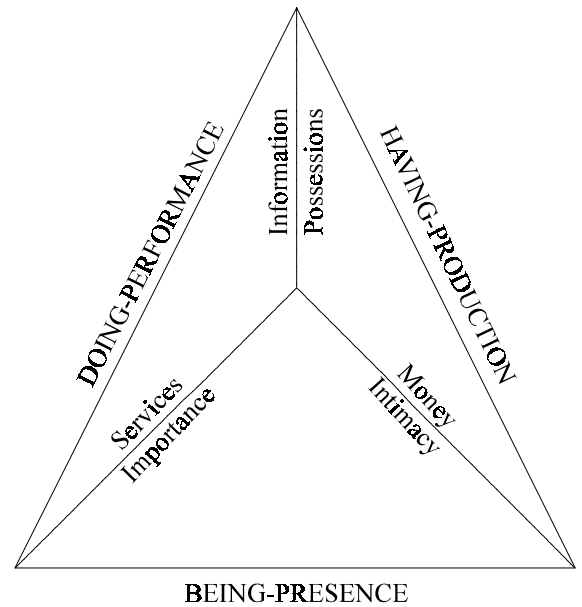


Figure 2. The triangle of living.

sible to negotiate. One does not negotiate how much one loves intimate others. Presence can only be shared in the sense of being emotionally available to oneself and significant others. In functionalities, Presence is kept separated from Performance and Production, i.e., from Power. In dysfunctionalities, Power and Presence become fused, confused, and diffused to the point that issues of Power (Performance and Production) are mixed with issues of Presence. When importance and intimacy are not expressed and shared unconditionally, they become conditional on Performance or Production or both. Consequently, Doing or Having often times become substitute expressions of Being ("If you loved me you would do..."; "If you loved me you would buy me...").

The greater the level of competence of family members, the greater the chances of successful negotiation. Unwillingness or inadequate ability to negotiate power is the basis of conflicts and struggles. We need to negotiate about what kind of information should be allowed at home, who should provide what services within and without the home, and what should be bought with the money earned.

For instance, L'Abate and Hewitt (1988) applied the distinction of Power (Performance + Production) vs. Presence (Importance + Intimacy), that is, Being Present, to a classification of sex and sexuality. They argued that most sexual dysfunctions are based on the inability to Be emotionally present to self and to a partner. Perhaps, our American culture stresses sexual performance and production, at the expense of sexual presence, the sharing of past hurts and fears of being hurt again. That process often means being vulnerable to the partner's whim and will. Functional sex and sexuality imply the ability to be emotionally available to one's partner before becoming fully available sexually. A couple cannot share a good orgasm unless they are able to cry together. Sexual performance or production, that

is, the physical act of intercourse at the expense of emotional presence is bound to produce deviations and disturbances that will affect subsequent development of how sex and sexuality are going to be shared with partners.

Personal and interpersonal competence in intimate relationships, therefore, is defined by what an individual *is, does, and has* in different settings. Various skills and testable models can be derived from the two sets of abilities and the three modalities.

Support for this seemingly abstract dichotomy of power and presence defined through modalities of exchange, in addition to the early work of Foa and Foa (1974), can be found, among others, in Bakan's (1968) important and influential distinction between communal and agentic relationships. This distinction has been supported empirically by the work of Clark and her co-workers (Clark, 1986; Clark & Reis, 1988). This distinction has been applied to psychotherapeutic practices related to relationship (community) and structuring (agency) skills (L'Abate, 1996, 1997). More recently, the importance of money and possessions as sources of power has been stressed by Doyle (1999). He developed models of personality development very similar to those presented here and elsewhere.

### Settings

The ability to negotiate requires also the skill to separate Being from Doing and Having in five settings: residence, school/work, surplus times, transit, and transitory. The importance of settings in determining behavior and interactions between personality socialization was stressed long ago by ecological psychologists, e. g., Barker (1968), to cite one pioneer among many to follow. Each setting has its peculiar, explicit or implicit rules, predictable or unpredictable regulations, consistent or inconsistent requirements and task demands that are setting-specific and that differ from one setting to another.

The three major settings where exchanges occur are: (a) residence, (b) school/work, and (c) surplus time. The latter is divided into survival and leisure activities, i.e., survival vs. enjoyment. All three settings interact and overlap with two other settings, transit and transitory. Transit settings are used for transportation from one setting to another, such as cars, buses, planes, trains, highways, parking lots, airports, or train stations. Transitory means settings that change over one's life-cycle, such as schools, grocery stores, barber shops, beauty saloons, shopping malls, restaurants, churches, sport arenas, and hotels. In some cases, survival and enjoyment overlap. For instance, some people have fun at work and no fun at home. Some have fun at home and none at work. Some have fun in both settings. Some have no fun in either. Others work very hard at settings that are supposed to produce enjoyment, like gyms, parks, and recreation facilities.

Furthermore, each setting has specific exchange functions. For instance, banks exchange money. Schools, bookstores, and libraries exchange information. Hospitals and

clinics exchange services, etc. Stores provide and exchange goods for money. The home, ideally, should provide importance and intimacy in addition to all other resources. However, not all homes provide importance and intimacy. On the contrary, they may provide some goods, services, and information but no love.

Competencies and abilities vary according to the task demands and requirements of each setting. The number of settings is finite and objectively defined. In order of functional importance, settings are: home, school/work, surplus time (survival and enjoyment), transit, and transitory. Of course there may be overlaps among all five settings. For instance, leisure activities may take place at home, or, in some instances, in work settings, as, for example fitness rooms in workplaces. Competence in one setting does not necessarily predict and transfer to competence in another setting. One could be a terrific parent but be a mediocre employee. By the same token, one could be a remarkable athlete during leisure hours but be a poor provider at home.

Competence in various settings helps to define the level of functioning of an individual. For instance, superior functioning may include being a caring and effective partner and parent who excels in school and at work, enjoying leisure time activities after successful completion of survival tasks. By the same token, then, settings are necessary to discriminate among levels of functionality in personality socialization, from superior to adequate, to mediocre, to inadequate, and to failure.

### Models

The theory is composed of one not-yet tested and eight testable models. A model is a simplified representation of more complex concepts or patterns derived from assumptions, postulates, and modalities of the theory (see Figures 1 and 2). For instance, the two assumptions of space and time become more concrete and visible when distance and regulation, with their respective polarities, are visualized as two orthogonal dimensions, making them into a first model (see Figure 1). By the same token, the three modalities of Being, Doing, and Having can be visualized as an equilateral triangle where Presence is at the bottom, Performance on the left, and Production on the right (see Figure 2), making them a second model.

#### A not-yet tested, metatheoretical model

This model has not been tested yet and it is called metatheoretical because it goes above and beyond the theory itself. Furthermore, it belongs to various theories independent from this one, and all reviewed in previous works. This model pertains to levels of observation and interpretation, how to look at relationships, and how to make sense of them on a dimension of depth. While relationships and models to be considered vary along a dimension of extensionality, from internal to external, this model pertains more to the multilayered or multileveled dimension of relation-

ships. It discriminates among two major levels, descriptive and explanatory. Each level is subdivided into two other ones.

The first descriptive level signifies what is publicly visible and immediate, to the point of being photographed, audio-taped, or video-recorded. Description can be either public, including how a relationship is presented to outside observers, the impression-making facade (“I am a nice person, with a nice marriage and nice children”) versus more private, phenotypical aspects that may be hidden from the self, intimate others, and public observation and even from measurement. What really happens in the secrecy and privacy of one’s own home? The publicly “nice” person may be actually a nasty despot, a mean partner, and an abusive parent. The connection between presentational and phenotypical levels can be minimal and consistent between the two levels (“What you see is what you get”) or can be reversed. What is presented publicly may be fairly consistent with what happens inside the home. Or else, it could be extremely inconsistent, for instance, nice on the outside but nasty inside the home. By the same token, this connection could be conceivably reversed the other way that is, nasty on the outside and nice on the inside, with all possible consistencies and inconsistencies between the public and private levels of observation and interpretation.

The explanatory level is what is used to make sense of both descriptive, presentational, and phenotypical levels. It is subdivided into genotypical and historical levels. The former has included hypothetical constructs like the ego and the superego, ascribed needs (drives, motivations), or inferred traits (extroversion, open-mindedness, introversion, etc.). The latter are constructs dear to theorists who stress the importance of specific traits or states inferred from self-report, paper-and-pencil instruments such as the Big Five Factors model (Costa & Widiger, 1994). These traits are used to “explain” why someone behaves or relates the way he or she does (“She is liberal because she is extroverted,

open-minded, etc.”). Consistent with the thesis of this theory, the most hidden part, even from the self, at the genotypical level, is hurt feelings and fears of being hurt.

The historical level consists of intergenerational, generational, and developmental events, including the current situation, underlying present behavior (“He abused his wife because he was an abused child.”). This level, therefore, “explains” all the other three levels in a much more adequate fashion than could be achieved at genotypical or descriptive levels. Here is where past traumas, illnesses, painful, and joyful events help us to understand how one relates to intimate others.

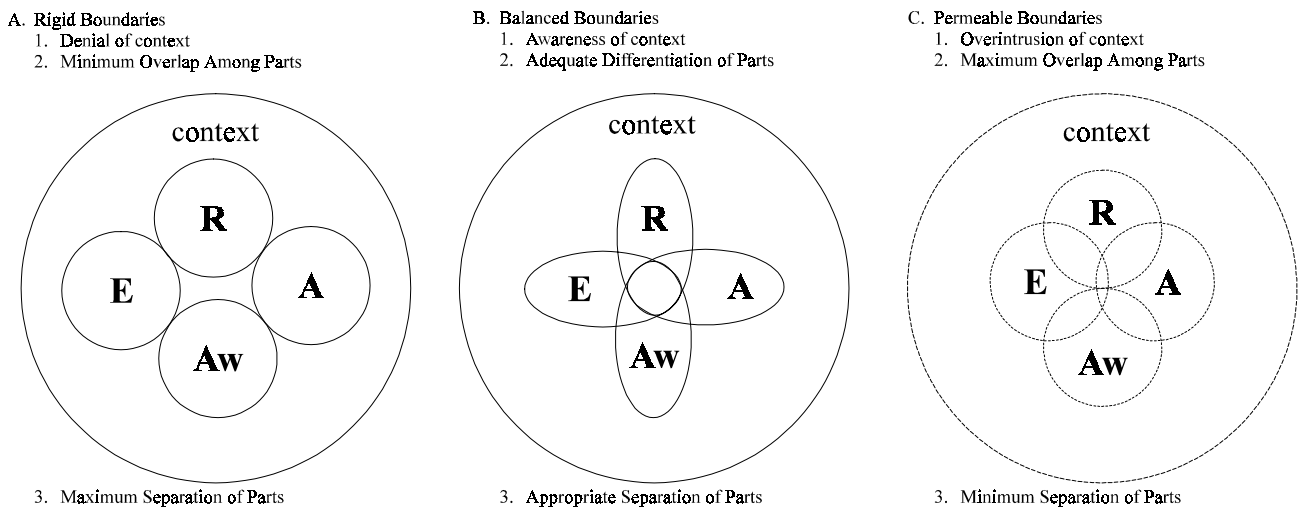
**Testable models**

From the assumptions and postulates of the theory are derived eight models. Of course, the first two models, distance/regulation and Presence, Performance, and Production – have been already introduced.

**ERAAwC**

The third model already introduced but needing expansion is the circular ERAAwC shown in Figure 3. The five components of the model vary in (a) size, (b) strength of boundaries, and (c) amount of overlap.

This model performs at least three functions. First, it serves as a basis for understanding the development of personality socialization from *E* to *C*, with the other components as intermediary steps (L’Abate, 1986, 1994, 1997). Second, this model serves to describe an almost invariant sequence of steps in the process of negotiation. One needs to start with *E*, expressing and sharing feelings of whatever kind, progressing then to *R*, discussing and brain-storming about pros and cons of possible courses of action, with an agreement or consensus about which particular course of action (*A*) to follow. After trying out *A*, for a chosen period



**Figure 3.** Functional and dysfunctional aspects of the ERAAwC model.

of time, ideally, there should be feedback (*Aw*) about whatever has been learned during the consensually chosen course of *A* (Ferrari & Sternberg, 1998). As Baumeister and Tice (2001) commented on the change function of *Aw*: "Self-awareness can help motivate people to try to change for the better" (p. 57). This feedback loop would return the process to *E*, starting it all over again, but restricting the choices available since one has already been used unsuccessfully. This process takes place within the overarching influence of *Aw* as a change agent with the acknowledgment, denial, or ignorance of *C*. Without an awareness of *C*, *Aw* may remain a futile, redundant exercise in rumination and obsessive-compulsive thinking. This process, of course, takes place internally as a dialogue within the self as well as with involved others. This is how negotiation and problem-solving occur.

Third, this model serves as the basis for a classification of theories of personality and psychotherapy. For instance, *E* has been stressed by humanistic schools. *R* has been stressed by psychoanalytic, reality, cognitive, and rational-emotive schools. *A* has been stressed by behavioristic schools. *Aw* has been stressed by Gestalt and Gestalt-like schools or Eastern philosophies as well as by present-day research (Ferrari & Sternberg, 1998). *C* has been stressed by family therapies. The latter, as well as primary prevention approaches, can be classified, in turn, according to the ERAAwC components of the model (Hansen & L'Abate, 1982; L'Abate, 1986, 1994, 1997).

### A continuum of likeness in close relationships

The fourth model consists of a dialectical, developmental *continuum* of likeness that underlies human relationships. The purpose of this continuum is to describe how people relate with each other in intimate and non-intimate relationships. This continuum was originally postulated (L'Abate, 1976, p. 79) as "a bell-shaped distribution consisting of six ranges: Symbiosis, Sameness, Similarity, Differentness, Oppositeness, and Alienation" (see Figure 4). No single range can conceivably describe behavior in intimate relationships by itself, isolated from other ranges. Each range needs a dialectical counterpart to define itself according to a combination of two ranges related to each other. For instance, a combination of the two extremes of the distribution, Symbiosis and Alienation, would lead toward an Abusive-Apathetic (neglectful) interpersonal style (AA) with individual-relational pathology in close relationships. At the intermediate level of the distribution, a combination of Sameness and Oppositeness would lead toward a Reactive-Repetitive, conflictful and competitive style (RR), intra- and interpersonally. In the center of the distribution, a combination of Similarity and Differentness would lead toward a positively collaborative Conductive-Creative style (CC). These three styles form the basis for the fifth ARC model (see Figure 4), with two dysfunctional styles, with AA being the most dysfunctional, RR being intermediate in functionality, and CC being functional.

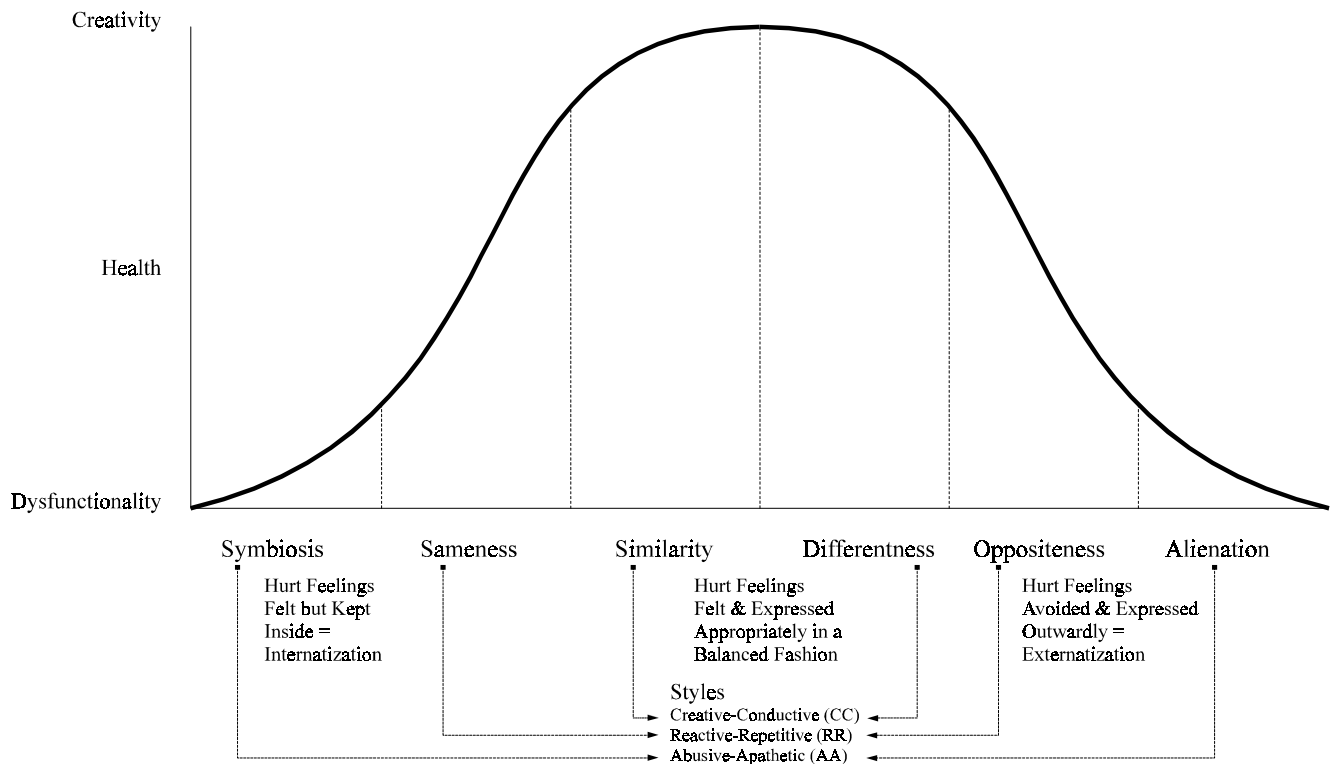


Figure 4. Continuum of likeness, hurt feelings, and styles in intimate relationships.

Hence, in Figure 4, vertically, a dimension of psychopathology lies at the bottom and at the two extremes of the distribution. Emotional and mental health lie at the middle, intermediate level, while CC lies in the center. By CC here it means interacting and relating with intimate others in extremely positive ways. It does not mean creativity in artistic, scientific, or professional endeavors. These two realms, intimate and non-intimate, may well be unrelated with each other. One could be a genius in art or science and a failure as a partner or parent.

The theoretical origin of this *continuum* has been expressed at length in previous publications (L'Abate, 1976, 1986, 1994, 1997, 1998a). Conceptually, its predecessors are found in: (a) social comparison theory; (b) research on modeling, identity-formation, and identification in developmental, personality, and social psychology theories; and (c) self-differentiation theory (Barone, Hersen, & Van Hasselt, 1998; Ewen, 1998).

Briefly, a child develops a sense of self-identity and becomes socialized, at least in part, in comparison with major caretakers, modeling how they relate to the child as well as between and among themselves. For instance, the child may learn positive or negative behavior from how caretakers relate to him or her and between themselves and intimate others. The child may model without awareness of this modeling process.

The three processes, social comparison, identity-formation, and identification have been "explained" in the extant literature through a single and simple dichotomy of similarity/dissimilarity, a process that takes place also within couples and between parents and children. Early theories describing this process, however, were usually acontextual, monadically non-relational, and rather vague as far as their interpersonal origins. Personality socialization seemed to develop in a *vacuum*, without specific relationships with intimate others. Most textbooks and handbooks about personality published in the USA fail to make references to "parents", "mother or father", "marriage", "siblings," or "parents" (L'Abate, 1994, 1997). Furthermore, since similarity was conceptualized according to a simple dichotomy of similar-dissimilar, no other possibilities along a continuum could be considered. Consequently, this relational continuum was deemed necessary to "describe" and even "explain" self-differentiation in close relationships. It meant going well beyond a simple-minded dichotomy and consider the possibility of a continuum of likeness along at least six ranges, as shown in Figure 4.

Applications of this continuum to various intra-interpersonal relationships are many. Very briefly, starting with the two processes of Approach-Avoidance in distance (space) and of Discharge-Delay regulation (time), it is possible to expand this continuum by applying it to various intra-and interpersonal relationships. Not all relationships can describe all individuals. For instance, one individual could conceivably be in the middle of the distribution in parental practices, that is, using a CC style in this area, but be at another extreme, even RR or AA in how he or she

manages work conditions. Being in the middle of one range (CC) does not necessarily predict whether that individual will be within the same range in work activities. Being in one range according to one style (RR) does not necessarily predict whether the same style will be followed in another area of functioning.

More concretely, parents who require blind, uncritical obedience and submission to their values and behaviors (i.e., sameness) will very likely produce oppositeness and rebellion in some of their offspring. Stereotypically, males may eventually rebel and become anti-establishment and join juvenile gangs, learning acting out and behaving impulsively. Females may submit to and follow parental demands for sameness. However, eventually they will end up marrying someone who is acting out and non-conformist (L'Abate & Harrison, 1992). Individuals or couples at the very extreme of symbiosis will produce offspring that is characterized by alienation and withdrawal from society. Parents who follow a CC style and are characterized by similarity and differentness in their personality and parental practices will very likely produce offspring with the same kind of style (CC) and positive personality characteristics.

Feelings, how one perceives and experience emotionally-tinged events, and how these feelings are expressed and shared outwardly as emotions develop along a continuum of likeness, transmitted generationally and intergenerationally.

## Selfhood

In addition to an underlying likeness continuum to describe subtle and not subtle or not so obvious development of functionalities (CC), internalizations (RR), externalizations (RR), and psychopathology (AA) in relationships, it was necessary to introduce a sixth model. This one deals with how intimates interact with each other in fairly obvious ways, if we were able to observe them in private. Here is where the metatheoretical model about levels of observation and interpretation comes into being. People behave in different ways, in different settings, and at different levels of observation and interpretation. How one relates privately at home does not necessarily predict how one is going to relate in public places, school/work, leisure time activities. Furthermore, the resource class of importance, already introduced, needs to be expanded into a full-fledged model concerning how the Self manifests itself. This model is needed to describe, if not explain, personality propensities that predict how individuals relate to each other in the privacy of home and not in public settings. Hence, this Selfhood model assumes that attribution, ascription, and assertion of importance is the primary, fundamental resource exchanged among intimates as well as in non-intimates, verbally, non-verbally, and in writing. Asking to write an article for a prestigious journal is how one's importance is ascribed, for instance.

Once the assumptions of approach-avoidance and discharge-delay are brought to bear on how one relates to intimate relationships, four possibilities come to the fore. When

there is an appropriate balance of distance and regulation, there is the development of functional relationships, as seen in a personality propensity named *Selffulness*. When approach is greater than avoidance and discharge is greater than delay, there is the development of a personality propensity called *Selfishness*. When avoidance is greater than approach, and delay greater than discharge, there is the development of a personality propensity called *Selflessness*. When there are extreme, contradictory, and inconsistent imbalances in distance and regulation, there is the development of a personality propensity called *No-self*. However, this is just an incomplete introduction sufficient to link this model to the assumptions of the theory. It is still insufficient in terms of how importance is asserted in four propensities.

These four propensities are coupled with the resource class of importance to complete the model according to its application to intimate relationships. *Selfhood*, in its four propensities becomes the centerpiece of exchanges between and among intimates (parents, parent-child, siblings) and non-intimates. The self is shown by how one relates intimates in close, prolonged, and committed relationships, away from the scrutiny of occasional outsiders. The self-presentational facade in public cannot last long and be sustained in private. Eventually this facade gives way to what an individual really is by how he or she relates with intimate others. It is relatively easy to make a good impression in short-lived, superficial, and even contrived relationships. It is much more difficult to behave positively in the heat of closeness and familiarity.

To expand on the four propensities in their interpersonal implications, they are:

- (1) *Selffulness* represents the positive attribution of importance to self and intimate others, resulting in positive outcomes and synergistic growth in the relationship (“We both must win together”). In *Selffulness* it is possible to balance appropriately distance and regulation, separating issues of Presence from issues of Power. Within the context of this propensity mostly functional relationships develop using a CC style.
- (2) *Selfishness* represents the positive attribution of importance to self and the negative attribution of importance to intimate others, resulting in conflictful outcomes and no growth in the relationship (“I win, you lose.”). *Selfishness* tends to rely more on approach than on avoidance, and on discharge more than on delay. Individuals characterized with this propensity tend to push limits on their partners, authorities, and anybody who lets them do that, such as seen in the pathological extremes of this propensity, as seen in addictions and criminalities. Extremes in selfishness are therefore represented by externalizations, where the self is asserted at the expense of others as in assaults, thefts, rapes, and murders, using a RR style.
- (3) *Selflessness* represents the negative attribution of importance to self and positive attribution of importance to others, resulting in conflictful stasis in the relationship

(“You win, I lose”). This propensity tends to rely more on avoidance than approach, and on delay more than on discharge. Individuals characterized by this propensity are unable to draw lines to protect themselves and their bodies (“the condom line”). This is the case of co-dependent individuals, usually spouses or partners of addicts and criminals (L'Abate & Harrison, 1992). *Selfless* individuals tend to be gullible, loyal, and responsible, trying to make up complementarily for qualities not usually found in selfish individuals. They are nonetheless attracted to selfish individuals just as the latter is attracted to the former (RR). In the long run, this attraction becomes antagonistic and conflictful, where either depression, suicide, hospitalization, or divorce become the inevitable outcome.

Another characteristic of selfless individuals is unrealistic optimism, hoping that somehow selfish partners will eventually, by some miracle, change for the better (L'Abate & Harrison, 1992). Extremes in selflessness are seen in internalizations, composed by anxieties, depressions, panic attacks, and affective disorders leading to suicide, either slow and prolonged as in some addictions, or sudden and seemingly unexpected.

(4) *No-self* represents the negative attribution of importance to self and to others, resulting in a negatively nihilistic, and ultimately destructive breakdown at the personal and interpersonal level (“We are not going to win. We both must lose”). The *No-self* propensity relies on contradictory and inconsistent extremes in both distance and regulation (AA), as represented by severe psychopathology as in paranoid, schizoid, and schizophrenic-type disorders, combining both ruthlessness and attack with apathy, passivity, and submission.

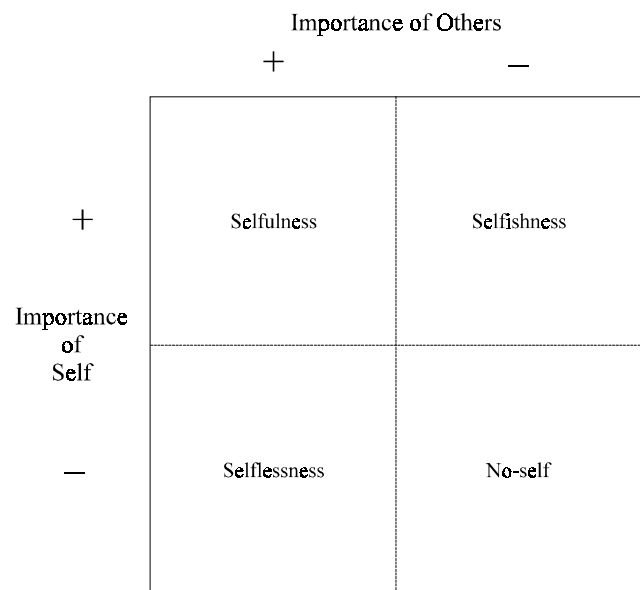


Figure 5. Selfhood and personality propensities.



## **Priorities**

All the previous models are developmental predecessors of those that follow. One model is the basis for the next one. One cannot understand this model unless he/she understand the previous ones. To understand how we allocate space, time, and energy within each setting and from one setting to another, we need to invoke the concept of priorities, a seventh model. This concept is motivational in nature and is similar to “goals” in the work of other theorists (Carver & Scheier, 1999). Priorities pertain to definite choices we make about who and what is important to us in our lives to survive and to enjoy. How important is a person, an object, or an activity? How important is one’s self in relation to other selves? In a way, the Selfhood model is another way of looking at Priorities. However, this model goes beyond Selfhood. It includes settings and contexts within each setting. One setting can be enhanced or reduced in importance by increasing or decreasing the importance of other settings. For example, activities in the leisure arena may become antidotes for the negative effects of stresses at work or at home. How one juggles and counterbalances demands and difficulties to maintain balance in one’s life reflects one’s priorities. Priorities motivate people to move toward or away from other people or to negotiate or to avoid negotiation with significant others over important issues in their lives. Love is not enough, just as negotiation is not enough. A person needs both to survive and to enjoy life, the two major priorities from which all the other priorities derive.

The priorities can be measured easily by time analysis. How much time does one spend in each setting? What modality of expression – Being, Doing, or Having – is being used in a primary, secondary, and tertiary manner? For instance, Being is much more relevant in the home setting than Doing and Having. However, without the latter two, one cannot live on being alone. Doing and Having may be more relevant in settings like school/work and leisure activities. Which of these three modalities is more important than the other two? As shown in the Selfhood model, individuals choose how self is related to other selves, it is an issue of priorities.

By the same token, priorities can be applied also to the ERAAwC model. For instance, one can choose E at the expense of R and derail the whole process of development. Or chose R at the expense of E and again derail the same process. One needs to balance E with R and with the other components of the model. Without this balance, it will be difficult to fully use one’s available assets.

Priorities can be divided into vertical and horizontal. Vertical priorities are developmental and can be differentiated according to the three modalities of Being, Doing, and Having. For instance, personal and interpersonal priorities are ranked according to the relative importance given to the self and significant others. One may value Doing more than Having or Being, stressing the importance of work setting at the expense of home or leisure settings. This stress, for instance, could define the great American workaholic

man or woman. By the same stereotypic token, of course, a woman could be defined by her stress on Being emotionally available at home. Work and leisure time settings may be considered secondary to her emotional availability and closeness with intimate others. Horizontal priorities, on the other hand, exist regardless of how one chooses what is important for the self and intimate others, because they relate to settings and not to a person’s level of socialization. In brief, vertical and horizontal priorities intersect and interact with each other to produce different outcomes.

How successful one is in any setting depends a great deal on individual priorities. If one defines oneself primarily in occupational terms, for instance, obtaining a sense of importance from one’s job or career (“I am an engineer”) rather than domestically (“I am a partner and parent first and then an employee”), it follows that that individual may spend more time and energy at work than at home. By the same token, avocational pursuits may overshadow domestic and occupational roles. There is a need to balance modalities and settings so that no modality or setting is stressed at the expense of the others.

Some priorities are automatic and outside the realm of *Aw*. Other priorities are completely conscious and within the realm of *Aw*. The salience and satisfaction derived from each modality and setting remain the individual prerogative that determines how each modality and setting is ranked in respect to the others. Consequently, we need to differentiate priorities into primary, secondary, tertiary and quartic. Primary priorities are automatic and outside the realm of individual *Aw*. They are called primary because they are developed earlier in the life-cycle than secondary ones. Consequently, they are more difficult to change. Secondary priorities are semi-automatic and somewhat within the realm of *Aw*, depending, of course, on how wide and deep *Aw* is, since this asset varies a great deal from one individual to another. Tertiary priorities are within the realm of *Aw* and within the conscious regulation of the individual. They are voluntary and intentional. Quartic priorities consist of routine, every-day behaviors that are taken for granted as a matter of course like brushing one’s teeth, taking a shower, etc. This hierarchy of priorities is similar to the one proposed by Carver and Sheier (1999) in regard to goals, a notion that is much more difficult to evaluate than priorities.

Ease of change is greater for quartic priorities and becomes more difficult to change going up the hierarchy. It is much easier to change how one brushes one’s teeth or takes a shower than to change developmentally produced, life-long habits that have been established automatically since early age. For instance, approach-avoidance and discharge-delay processes, an example of primary priorities, would be the most difficult to change. Secondary, semi-automatic priorities include the modalities of Being, Doing, and Having, where, normatively speaking, Being is balanced with Doing and Having being somewhat easier to change. Dysfunctionalities develop when Doing>Having or Being or Having>Doing>Being.

Voluntary, intentional, tertiary priorities include the ERAAwC model. Normatively speaking, there are various choices available, each with its pros and cons, as, for instance, if  $E > R$  or  $A$ ; or  $R > E$  or  $A$ ; or  $A > R$  or  $E$ ; or  $R > A$  or  $E$ . Additionally, within each component of this model, there are choices to be made according to which priority is relevant to the individual. For instance, with  $E$ , one must choose between disclosure vs. non-disclosure, expression vs. non-expression, sharing vs. non-sharing, positive vs. negative expression. Within  $R$ , one can choose whether to use it vs. non-using it, whether to consider its primacy vs. non-primacy in respect to  $E$  and  $A$ . Within  $A$ , one can choose whether to be destructive vs. non-destructive, helpful vs. hurtful. Within  $A_w$ , one can choose whether to allow it to intrude vs. reject it, accept it vs. rejecting it, overusing it vs. underusing or even disuse it. Within  $C$ , one can choose between its denial or its denial vs. its acceptance, its valuing vs. its dismissal. Of course many individuals do not feel they have choices concerning any of these components. Again, it depends on what is more important to them.

Within the level of tertiary conscious choices, there are vertical priorities pertaining to self, partner, parents, children, relatives, friends, and neighbors. These priorities are related to the Likeness continuum by being differentiated, and therefore functional, in the middle of the distribution (see Figure 4), and undifferentiated, and therefore dysfunctional, toward the two extreme ranges of the same distribution.

Quartic priorities consist of every-day habits necessary for self-preservation, self-presentation, and self-survival. Attainment of priorities at the higher level begins with the completion of priorities at lower levels, going up on the hierarchy. For instance, if the major priority is to advance at work and work is more important than family, then brushing one's teeth, taking a shower, and presenting oneself in acceptable if not elegant clothes, fitting the work setting and tasks to be accomplished at work could well begin before reaching that setting. One might not devote too much time and energy to self-presentation if his/her home and family have different priorities than work. At work, in addition to self-presentation, getting along with co-workers and fulfilling well a supra-ordinate's request may be the next step to reach the desired priority. Asking for extra assignments, staying later than other workers, and arriving early may be other ways to enhance one's self-presentation. However, if too much time and energy are expended at work, there may not be sufficient time and energy left to devote it to one's family, home, and leisure time activities.

Priorities become involved in the next, eighth, and last model, where one needs to choose whether  $E$  is more important than  $R$  or other components of the ERAAwC model, and whether relying on  $E$  is made at the expense of the other components of the model.

### Intimacy: Hurt feelings and fears of being hurt

The inability to experience and express hurt feelings and fears of being hurt leads to three dysfunctional roles in

intimate relationships, namely: Rescuer, Persecutor and Victim, forming what has been called the Drama Triangle (L'Abate, 1986). Given that triangle, there are four possible roles on how to deal with hurt feelings:

1. The Rescuer, Savior, or Saint role, trying to make things better for those who are hurting, often at one's own expense, by not valuing one's own feelings, and valuing others' feelings more than one's own instead, leading to the personality propensity of Selflessness, already discussed.
2. The Persecutor role means inflicting hurts on others, whether intimates or non-intimates, leading to Selfishness.
3. The Martyr or Victim role, keeping hurt feelings inside without ever expressing them, or, at the other extreme, exploding in a destructive manner, assuming all three roles at the same time, that is, stoic Victim, hateful Persecutor, or noble, compassionate Savior, leading to No-self.

These three roles are played out in dysfunctional relationships, with each individual switching from one role to another. The fourth alternative is played in functional relationships:

4. The normalizing role of Sharing hurt feelings with those we love and who love us through crying together, Being together physically and emotionally, leads toward Selffulness. Sharing hurts means not playing the three destructive roles and becoming sane and intimate.

## Conclusion

According to this theory, personality is manifested in relationships, especially intimate ones. The theory is composed of nine models, one probably non-testable and eight testable, in some cases, tested. Evaluation of these models has taken place in the laboratory through self-report, paper-and-pencil tests measuring the ERAAwC, Likeness, Styles, Selfhood, Priorities, Intimacy, and Drama Triangle models (L'Abate, De Giacomo, McCarty, De Giacomo, & Verrastro, 2000; L'Abate, Lambert, & Shenck, in press). In primary prevention, the ability to love and to negotiate have been evaluated through enrichment programs administered to functional and semi-functional couples and families (L'Abate & Weinstein, 1987; L'Abate & Young, 1987). In secondary prevention, assumptions and models have been evaluated through mental health workbooks (L'Abate, 2001). In tertiary prevention or psychotherapy, two tasks have been used to evaluate this theory clinically rather than empirically: Sharing of hurt feelings in couples (L'Abate, 1986, 1994, 1997), and hugging, holding, huddling, and cuddling in couples and families (L'Abate, in press).<sup>2</sup>

2 Detailed information about the tests mentioned in this article can be obtained directly from this author. Information about workbooks in general, and workbooks designed to evaluate models of this theory in particular, can be found on the Internet (<http://www.mentalhealthhelp.com>).

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Received March 20, 2000

Revision received October 18, 2000

Final version November 24, 2000

Accepted November 28, 2000 ■