

804 Gender, Sex, and Love

"In some ways, a woman prefers a man who wanders," says Norma Jean. "That sounds crazy, I know."

"You're not crazy." Leroy remembers to drink from his Coke. Then he says, "Yes, you *are* crazy. You and me could start all over again. Right back at the beginning."

"We *have* started all over again," says Norma Jean. "And this is how it turned out."

"What did I do wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Is this one of those women's lib things?" Leroy asks.

"Don't be funny."

The cemetery, a green slope dotted with white markers, looks like a subdivision site. Leroy is trying to comprehend that his marriage is breaking up, but for some reason he is wondering about white slabs in a graveyard.

"Everything was fine till Mama caught me smoking," says Norma Jean, standing up. "That set something off."

"What are you talking about?"

"She won't leave me alone—you won't leave me alone." Norma Jean seems to be crying, but she is looking away from him. "I feel eighteen again. I can't face that all over again." She starts walking away. "No, it *wasn't* fine. I don't know what I'm saying. Forget it."

Leroy takes a lungful of smoke and closes his eyes as Norma Jean's words sink in. He tries to focus on the fact that thirty-five hundred soldiers died on the grounds around him. He can only think of that war as a board game with plastic soldiers. Leroy almost smiles, as he compares the Confederates' daring attack on the Union camps and Virgil Mathis's raid on the bowling alley. General Grant, drunk and furious, shoved the Southerners back to Corinth, where Mabel and Jet Beasley were married years later, when Mabel was still thin and good-looking. The next day, Mabel and Jet visited the battleground, and then Norma Jean was born, and then she married Leroy and they had a baby, which they lost, and now Leroy and Norma Jean are here at the same battleground. Leroy knows he is leaving out a lot. He is leaving out the insides of history. History was always just names and dates to him. It occurs to him that building a house out of logs is similarly empty—too simple. And the real inner workings of a marriage like most of history, have escaped him. Now he sees that building a log house is the dumbest idea he could have had. It was clumsy of him to think Norma Jean would want a log house. It was a crazy idea. He'll have to think of something else, quickly. He will wade the blueprints into tight balls and fling them into the lake. Then he'll get moving again. He opens his eyes. Norma Jean has moved away and is walking through the cemetery, following a serpentine brick path. Leroy gets up to follow his wife, but his good leg is asleep and his bad leg still hurts him. Norma Jean is far away, walking rapidly toward the bluff by the river and he tries to hobble toward her. Some children run past him, screaming noisily. Norma Jean has reached the bluff, and she is looking out over the Tennessee

him? She seems to be doing an exercise for her chest muscles. The sky is unusually pale—the color of the dust ruffle Mabel made for their bed. [1982]

1. What is the point of view in the story and how is it established? What kind of narrator tells the story? What are the results of these choices?
2. Compare and contrast what we know of Norma Jean and Leroy as characters.
3. What role does Mabel play in the story?
4. What is the crisis in the plot? How is it resolved?



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Individuation: From Fusion to Dialogue*

Growing interest in concepts of fusion and individuation within a number of different theoretical systems of psychotherapy suggests an emerging shift in perspective in the conceptualization of psychopathology and psychotherapy. This shift may represent a first step in the integration of individual and relational dynamic theories. A theoretical framework for the exploration of processes of fusion and individuation is presented, with suggested applications for the study of problems experienced by adult couples. The process of individuation from fusion to dialogue is outlined in the description of four modes of relationship. In this context, the paper suggests ways in which a variety of problematic relational patterns seen in couples may be viewed as reflecting the partners' struggles to move from fusion to dialogue.

In recent years, the literature of psychotherapy has paid increasing attention to what have been called "symbiotic," "merged," or "fused" relationships and to the related process of "differentiation," "individuation," or "self-delineation." These concepts have been developing along similar lines in areas as nominally disparate as psychoanalytic and family-systems theory until quite recently the concept of individuation seems to have emerged as a field of inquiry in its own right. This convergence of interest suggests the first outlines of a developing paradigm shift in the conceptualization of psychopathology and psychotherapy.

*Mark Karpel, "Individuation: From Fusion to Dialogue," *Family Process* 15 (1976): 65-82.

Its significance lies in its potential for integrating phenomenological and transactional concepts and for achieving a synthesis of psychoanalytic and family systems orientations.

At first glance, the phenomenon of fusion seems to be an exotic form of relational psychopathology, with a kind of quaint status accorded to *folie-à-deux* in textbooks of abnormal psychology. The study of this phenomenon, however, has led a number of different theorists to redefine it in ways that have significant implications for our understanding of all forms of psychopathology and psychotherapy, of human personality and relatedness. Psychoanalytic thinkers, such as Searles (16, 17), Fairbairn (7), Guntrip (9), Jacobson (10), and Mahler (11), and family therapists, such as Bowen (3), Minuchin (12, 13), Satir (15), and Boszormenyi-Nagy (2) have all addressed themselves to issues of fusion and individuation in a variety of relational contexts, including the mother-infant dyad, the nuclear family, the adult couple, and the patient-therapist dyad. This paper will concentrate on points of convergence and areas of conceptual complementarity between these various theoretical systems in order to sketch the outlines of this still nascent perspective more clearly. In addition, its relevance for the study of problems experienced by adult couples will be explored. The theoretical framework to be presented draws heavily on the work of several theorists, particularly that of Searles (16, 17) on the felt experience and underlying dynamics of fusion, Bowen (3) on the transactional structure of fusion and individuation, Fairbairn (7) on the stages of development of object-relations, and Boszormenyi-Nagy (2) on the dialectical process of self-delineation and the structure of dialogic relationships. Other influences include Perls' (14) perspective on individuation and Buber's (4, 5, 6) work on dialogic relationships.

The term "individuation" refers to the process by which a person becomes increasingly differentiated from a past or present relational context. This process encompasses a multitude of intrapsychic and interpersonal changes that share a common direction. In different relational contexts, the specific changes may vary greatly. They may involve an infant's gradual realization that the source of his gratifications is an object, a body, which is separate from his own and which becomes for him "mother"; an adolescent's determination to violate an unwritten family rule that mother chooses all the children's clothing; a husband's struggle to see himself as capable of surviving without the painful relationship that exists between his wife and himself; a mother's recognition that her child is in fact, *not* as anxious, dependent, shy or whatever, as she has felt herself to be. Individuation involves the subtle but crucial phenomenological shifts by which a person comes to see him/herself as separate and distinct within the relational context in which s/he has been embedded. It is the increasing definition of an "I" within a "We." The term "fusion" is used to describe the person's state of embeddedness in, of undifferentiation within, the relational context. The essence of this perspective is the perception of the process of individuation from fusion as a universal developmental and existential struggle and as a fundamental organizing principle of human growth. From this standpoint, a wide variety

of individual and relational problems may be seen as deriving from this struggle. More precisely, specific symptoms may be seen as reflecting either *consequences* of *défenses* against, or *ambivalence* over the persistence of the state of fusion, whether internally in the person's experience, externally in a relationship structured to maintain it, or both, in later life.

The Theoretical Context

To understand the problems of fusion and individuation, we must consider them within a matrix of two different dimensions. One dimension concerns the nature of self in relation, the dilemma of "I" and "We," which Bakan (1) has referred to as "the duality of human existence," and which Buber (5) speaks of as man's ability either to "set others at a distance" or to "enter into relation with others." We can, in different ways and at different moments in our lives, choose either to set ourselves apart, as an "I" separate from others, or to enter into relationship with another or others, to become part of a "We." The second dimension is that of maturation. The immature stage of human development is characterized by minimal individuation and an inability to form relationships based on differentiation. In this stage, the urge to give over responsibility for oneself is relatively undiluted, even if present only at an unconscious level as in the minimally differentiated but unrelated schizoid¹ position. The mature stage is characterized by the willingness and ability to accept responsibility for oneself and by relationships based on differentiation and not identification. Fairbairn (7) has described these stages with his distinction between "infantile dependence" and "mature dependence." Perls (14) has emphasized the change from "environmental-" to "self-support." These sets of concepts are partial and complementary, in that Perls conveys the sense of increasing *individual responsibility* but neglects the movement from immature to *mature relation* which Fairbairn supplies.

At the simplest level, we might postulate four possible modes of being and relating based on the interaction of these two dimensions. Diagrammatically, this is represented below in Figure 1. This matrix suggests two important and related types of omissions in the work of some theorists in this area. The first involves an emphasis on the dimension of distance and relation while ignoring that of

	IMMATURE		MATURE	
RELATION	fusion		dialogue	
	unrelatedness		individuation	
	DISTANCE			

FIGURE 1

maturity. Bakan's (1) distinction between agency and communion is an example of one such theory. Here one senses an emphasis on the potential pathology of agency or distance. In Bowen's (3) alternation of fusion and individuation, we see another, in this case with an emphasis on the potential pathology of fusion or relation. Tom Fogarty (8), a family therapist, has used the metaphor of two magnets to describe a couple's attempts to find an optimal distance between them. He suggests the couple should feel close enough to feel the emotional tug without fusing. The metaphor is helpful in suggesting a midground between fusion and lack of relation but again misleads by ignoring the maturational processes that make this midground possible. A second and more important type of omission can be seen in the tendency of some theorists to view individuation as an end in itself and to ignore the question of the nature of mature, non-fused relationships. In terms of the matrix presented here, there has been a tendency to ignore the nature of "dialogue," a term used to describe a mature relationship between individuated partners.

There remains an element to be added in order to complete a theoretical framework within which issues of fusion, individuation, and dialogue can be explored. This is the inclusion of a transitional stage between the immature and mature stages described above. If the immature stage represents *relatively* undifferentiated regressive desires for fusion and the mature stage represents *relatively* undifferentiated progressive desires for individuation, the transitional stage is that in which the struggle, the conflict and ambivalence, between the two is most intense. For this reason, as we will see later, the transitional stage is the least stable of the three. In other words, in spite of (or, more accurately, precisely because of) the fact that it is developmentally more mature, the transitional stage is *less* stable than the immature stage.

The combination of the two poles of distance and relation with the three stages of development yields six possible positions as illustrated in Figure 2.

The three stages of development can also be differentiated by the ways in which individuals within a stage integrate the duality of distance and relation—the poles of "I" and "We." In the immature stage, there is an attempt to rigidly eliminate one pole or the other. Theoretically, unrelatedness (which corresponds to the schizoid position) excludes the possibility of any "We" relation, just as the mode of pure fusion permits no intrusion of the "I." During the transitional stage, the experience of both "I" and "We" become available to the person, but

IMMATURE TRANSITIONAL MATURE

RELATION	DISTANCE	IMMATURE		TRANSITIONAL		MATURE	
		pure fusion	unrelatedness	ambivalent fusion	ambivalent isolation	dialogue	individuation

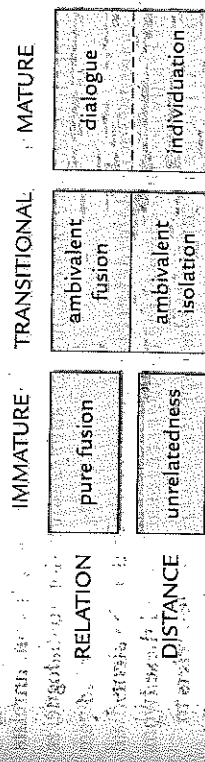


FIGURE 3

they co-exist as conflicting alternatives. The only options available are either loss of self to the "We" or unrelatedness as an "I." The person may feel either suffocated in the "We" or isolated as a lonely and unrelated "I." The lack of integration may be seen in a variety of uneasy compromises between the two, which we will describe later. In the mature stage, individuation and dialogue—the mature poles of "I" and "We"—are integrated in such a way that they nourish one another and are, in fact, meaningless without one another. The more strongly individuated the couple, the more capable they are of forming a differentiated "We," a dialogic relationship that furthers their continuing self-delineation. These differences between stages in the integration of "I" and "We" suggest four theoretical *modes of relationship*—(a) unrelatedness, (b) pure fusion, (c) ambivalent fusion, and (d) dialogue—as represented diagrammatically in Figure 3. This ordering of the four modes is not meant to suggest that unrelatedness precedes pure fusion, as will be clarified below. We begin, however, with the mode of unrelatedness in order to simplify presentation.

Modes of Relationship

The relational mode of *unrelatedness* corresponds to the schizoid position. It is "relational" only in that the position taken vis-à-vis relationship is one of rejection and denial. Unrelatedness is characterized by the elimination of the "We" from the person's life. Obviously, there must exist to some extent a set of internal relational others for any self-concept to exist, but close external relationships are largely avoided. Unrelatedness represents an interruption of the original state of pure fusion that exists between mother and infant. The reasons for this interruption are far too complex to pursue in this paper. Searles (16) has suggested that the infant is expelled from symbiotic attachment in response to the mother's anxiety. Fairbairn (7) relates the schizoid position to the infant's conviction that his/her love is destructive to the other. Regardless of terminology, what remains significant is the perception of unrelatedness as a detour (and dead-end) in terms of the development of object-relationships) from the natural process of individuation from pure fusion. Just as pure fusion represents the acceptance of the state of total infantile dependency that characterizes early development, unrelatedness represents an attempt to reject or deny this state of

The third and fourth relational modes take their names from the relational role of their

dependency. Thus, by preventing immersion in the state of pure fusion, unrelatedness precludes further development through ambivalent fusion to dialogue.

Before discussing some of the differences between pure and ambivalent fusion, let us briefly describe some of the common characteristics of these two relational modes. The term, "fusion," when applied to adult couples, refers to the transactional and experiential phenomenon that is created when two minimally individuated persons form a close, emotional relationship. The defining characteristic of the relationship is the high degree of identification that exists between partners. Searles (16, p. 39) has said that partners equate "relatedness with a process of engulfment, in which [one] personality is in the process of devouring or being devoured by the personality of the other . . ." Fairbairn (7, pp. 314-315) has described this as "both a mutual swallowing and a mutual merging, and the [person] is never quite sure at any given moment whether he feels most as if he is being swallowed or doing the swallowing." Partners experience the relationship with the feeling of absolute, needy dependence that characterizes a young infant. Their inordinate dependence on one another drives them to be almost exclusively relationship-oriented. Energy goes into seeking love or approval or into attacking the other for not providing it. Little or no energy is devoted to the task of developing self-support.

Searles (16) has made clear the degree to which the relationship must be characterized, due to the identification between partners, by a confusion of intrapsychic and interpersonal processes. Partners possess to an unusual degree "a galaxy of repressed concepts" (p. 225) of themselves, which they project onto the other, who is then responded to, not as a real other person, but as "the personification of the unacceptable, projected part-aspects of the patient's self, or . . . as a personification of his own repressed self-images" (pp. 721-722). Boszormenyi-Nagy (2) has pointed out how great a part is played in these relationships by partners' "vicarious participation" in the life of the other, suggesting, for example, that crucial determinants of one partner's acting-out be sought in the other's unconscious desires for such behavior.

Because partners see the other as essential for their very survival and because the boundary between self and other is so indistinct, object-loss, that is, the loss of the other, is tantamount to ego-loss and is, in fact, experienced in just this way. Because the only mode of relatedness possible at this level is identification and because security is seen as lying in this fusion of identities, any indications of difference, growth, or change are perceived as threatening, not only to the relationship but, as suggested above, to the person's very survival. Partners experience a terror of difference and separation, and they seek to create a stable transactional structure that eliminates these distressing intrusions into their oneness. Growth, change, the development of other relationships—any indications of separateness—are perceived in the other, and in oneself, as disloyalty and betrayal and generate guilt, blame, and anxiety.

One of the hallmarks of fusion is the blurring of boundaries of individual responsibility. Partners share a fantasy of absolute responsibility for the other—

must remain the same as the other and a fraction of him/her self, even if this is, as it must be, crippling, and each expects no less than this from the other. Each may bully, threaten, seduce, or cajole the other into taking responsibility for his/her partner in a futile attempt to deny and evade the burden of separateness and ultimate responsibility for oneself.

In order to erase individual differences and to eliminate movements toward growth, the partners must develop a rigid, highly predictable transactional system. Bowen (3) sees this as an automatic, unconscious chain-reaction pattern. Partners eventually come to feel like helpless objects within this predictable transactional system but participate in an unconscious collusion to maintain it, since they feel unable to tolerate its modification or dissolution. They each respect an unspoken agreement to respond to the other in predictable ways in return for the other's unspoken but demonstrated willingness to do the same.

Like unrelatedness, *pure fusion* represents the immature stage. It corresponds to Bowen's "comfortable fusion," Searles' "pre-ambivalent symbiosis," and Nagy's "merger." It is characterized by both individuals' and the relational system's complete acceptance of infantile dependence. The relationship is almost exclusively based on identification, and there is virtually no conflict (within or between partners) between progressive and regressive tendencies, since the latter dominate so strongly. In other words, both partners are fixated at so immature a level that there is none of the conflict or struggle of the transitional stage, and the relational system is structured to support the maintenance of these infantile features.

The most salient aspects of pure fusion for our discussion are its gratifications. These include, in Searles' (16) words, "the deep contentment," "the felt communion that needs no words," (p. 339), which, as he points out, can characterize the loving relationship between a nursing mother and her child. Fusion offers the presence of a "soulmate" to assuage the partners' loneliness and insecurity, the comforting hope that one can slide out from under the burden of one's own life by handing that responsibility over to another and by escaping into a dreamy idyllic haven from life. It promises that no foreign and threatening intrusion of another person's real otherness or growth will shatter the predictable security of the relationship. There is no need to face the fears, the losses, the uncertainty of growing up. It is noteworthy that many descriptions of fused relationships tend toward metaphors of biological re-union.

Pure fusion may be only a theoretical possibility in adult couples. Searles (17) has recently written: ". . . I have come to regard it as impossible to find any clearly defined, long-sustained instance of pre-ambivalent symbiosis" (p. 248). It seems unlikely that a relationship could be at such an immature level that there would be no anxiety or struggle over individuation. In any case, a consideration of the theoretical significance of pure fusion contributes to a greater comprehension of the more prevalent mode of ambivalent fusion.

The third relational mode, *ambivalent fusion*, characterizes the transitional stage. It is comparable to Bowen's "uncomfortable fusion," and Searles' "ambiva-

The essence of the transitional period is the conflict between progressive tendencies toward differentiation and regressive tendencies toward identification, between the responsibility and self-support that characterize individuation and the blame, guilt, and manipulation for environmental-support that characterize fusion. It is often experienced as being caught between the fear of being swallowed in a fusion that threatens ego-loss and the fear of being totally alone, unrelated, with a responsibility for one's existence that feels too great to bear. In Fairbairn's (7) words: "the behavior of the individual is characterized both by desperate endeavors . . . to separate himself from the object and desperate endeavors to achieve re-union with the object—desperate attempts to 'escape, to get from prison' and desperate attempts to 'return home'" (p. 43).

For these reasons, partners in an ambivalently fused relationship experience not only the gratifications but the anxieties of fusion. They have differentiated sufficiently to feel threatened by the loss of self that accompanies fusion. However, they have no haven outside of the fused state, since they are not sufficiently individuated to feel comfortable as separate persons. Outside the fusion, they are always lonely, never just alone. In addition, each will be repeatedly faced with his/her partner's attempts to avoid fusion and with all the anxiety over loss of self through loss of the other that this creates. Because of these conflicting tendencies and the anxieties they entail, the ambivalently fused relational mode is the least stable psychologically. The relationship cannot settle into either a regressive but secure infantile form or a structurally sound, dialogic form. Even if its transactional patterns are quite predictable and inflexible, the relationship provides a minimum of psychological security and stability to the partners. The awareness that a decrease in relational stability may actually reflect greater individuation may help couples in treatment and the therapists who guide them to understand and tolerate the often noted phenomenon of periods of intensified conflict and upheaval that may accompany or follow real progress.

As already stated, the relational forms this conflict can take may vary greatly. Some of the more common patterns are described below as an illustration of how different relational problems can be understood in the light of the theoretical framework presented here. Each of these relational patterns represents the joint translation of both partners' internal psychological experience into a predictable transactional structure. For this reason, we will focus on how each particular pattern represents a struggle between the regressive tendency toward fusion and the progressive tendency toward individuation.

(a) *One Partner Distancing.* The couple maintain contact without fusion by establishing a pattern in which one partner keeps up a facade of distance (which both consciously accept as real), while the other pursues. It is as though one partner were collusively chosen to embody the desire for individuation (expressed here at a less mature level as mere distance). The fact that this is not simply a case of one really wanting less closeness and the other wanting more, that both act to perpetuate this pattern that is painful for both, becomes apparent in their unwillingness to change the pattern and by the fact that if, at rare moments, they are shaken out of it, their roles will most likely reverse. This then

(b) *Alternating Distancing.* The pattern of distancing is the same as in (a) except that a larger cycle is created in which both partners take turns. The roles of distancer and pursuer are traded back and forth. This pattern demonstrates one way in which fused couples may experience frequent role switches because of the degree of identification and projection involved in the relationship. The end result of the couple's simultaneous steps toward and away from one another is that roughly the same degree and quality of distance is maintained throughout, despite both partners' movements. Here it is as though the couple move in a synchronized but alternating fashion to act out the basic conflict transactionally. At one point in the cycle, one embodies "We" and the other "I"; at the next shift, the roles are reversed, and so on.

(c) Another coordinated pattern is one in which both partners shuttle between poles together, creating cycles of fusion and unrelatedness in the relationship as a whole. Partners move toward one another until a degree of fusion is reached that is threatening to both, leading to a rush by both away from each other until anxiety over unrelatedness leads to another approach to fusion. Here again both partners embody movement between the poles of "I" and "We" but now in such a way that the relationship itself is characterized by one pole or the other at any given moment.

(d) *Continual Conflict.* The couple maintains a constant level of antagonism that represents a sort of uneasy compromise between fusion and unrelatedness. Boszormenyi-Nagy (2) has pointed out how this pattern of "chronic bickering," by steering a course between the poles of fused "We" and unrelated "I," may represent an "optimal definition of the members' ego boundaries" (p. 69), since it provides (conflictual) contact without a merger of identities. One frequent form this pattern takes is for the couple to "triangle" around some issue or object that serves as the focus of the conflict, such as a child, an extramarital sexual affair, alcohol, drugs, career, etc. It is as if they collude to place a protective buffer between themselves.

(e) *Impairment of One Partner.* In this relational pattern, the transactional expression of the partners' needs for fusion and individuation is less clear because these needs are cloaked by a relational facade of one mature, responsible, self-confident partner (A) and one helpless, dependent partner (B). Both collude at an unconscious level to create this facade while they accept it as accurate consciously. In a sense, they make an unconscious tradeoff. At the price of losing his/her own strength and self-support, B, the "weaker" partner, gets to give over much of his/her individual responsibility to A. However, B resents this loss of independence and may blame A for what they have together colluded to give over to A. Meanwhile, A has to take on additional responsibility for B but gets to project all his/her own weakness and dependence onto B. In other words, A is permitted to view his/her self as much stronger than it really is. However, he/she may always resent B for the burden they have together colluded to dump on A. The relationship provides a complementary self-delineation for both partners that is demanded by their regressive needs to remain immature but is frustrating to their progressive desires to mature and individuate.

These five relational patterns represent one attempt to organize the diversity

of ambivalent fusion. They are not seen as pure or static types. Couples may be in continual conflict over one partner's distancing. They may alternate distancing within a context of one partner's impairment. Relationships may move from one relational pattern to another. The point of such an organization is not to propose these as fixed types but to demonstrate how a wide variety of relational problems can be understood as resulting from the partners' struggles between regressive tendencies toward fusion and progressive attempts at individuation. For what differentiates ambivalent from pure fusion is the introduction of the "I," at first isolated, insecure, and unrelated, but with a potential to become stronger and more centered both alone and in relation.

Hopefully, these patterns also begin to suggest a way of looking at people in which the interpenetration and complementarity of individual and relational dynamic theories is more visible. In Boszormenyi-Nagy's (2) terms, the experience of Self depends on the availability of a matching Not-Self. A person forms the "figure" of him/herself against the "ground" of another. External transactions and internal experience are related facets of one unitary process—both partners' simultaneous self-delineation in relationship. We can no more speak of the person without the system than we can of the system without the person.

Boszormenyi-Nagy's (2) discussion of the relational positions of "being-the-subject" and "being-the-object" illuminates an important aspect of ambivalent fusion and provides a set of concepts that will later help describe the transactional structure of dialogue. In relationships we would characterize as ambivalently fused, there does exist some boundary between partners; there is some awareness of a separate "I." In Boszormenyi-Nagy's terms, there is a subject-object polarity. There is also, for all the reasons described so far, an inflexible process by which partners are assigned fixed and extremely limited roles vis-à-vis one another. Boszormenyi-Nagy believes that, to varying degrees, partners may be accurately described as being in one of two possible positions. The person who succeeds in forcing the other into an object-role assignment that is satisfying, on some level, to his/her own self-image but from which the other is unable to escape, is "being-the-subject." That is, s/he has the power of definition in the relationship. The other is trapped in the role of "being-the-object." Particular object role assignments may vary greatly. "You are—the 'sick' one, the 'strong' one, the 'nurturant' one, the 'selfish' one, the 'good' one, the 'quiet' one," etc. The pain of "being-the-object" lies not in the "negative" status of the role imposed but in the inescapable imposition of the role, whether "positive" or "negative." In some relationships, partners may be essentially fixed in one position or the other; in others, they may take up different positions in different areas ("I force you to be the 'sick' one sexually, but I am forced to be the 'sick' one parentally"); in still others, partners may take turns forcing one another into the same narrow object-role assignments.

The intensity of fusion between partners increases as the insulation of the relational system from outside influences is increased. And, in a sense, the dynamics of fusion move the relationship naturally toward greater insulation. The degree of fusion within the couple is directly related to the partners' subject-

relationships. In this way, a vicious cycle is created that moves toward a stagnant endpoint of complete investment within the fused dyad with no meaningful relationships outside the dyad.

The fourth relational mode, *dialogue*, represents the mature stage of human development, in which the poles of "I" and "We" are integrated in such a way that they nourish and foster one another. Individuation (the differentiated "I") and dialogue (the differentiated "We") are complementary parts of the overall process of both partners' simultaneous self-delineation in relationship. The more highly individuated the partners, the better prepared they are for a dialogic relationship. In Buber's (4) words: "... in order to be able to go out to the other you must have the starting place, you must have been, you must be, with yourself" (p. 21). Elsewhere (6), he asserts:

Every real relation in the world rests on individuation. This is its joy—for only in this way is mutual knowledge of different beings won—and its limitations—for in this way perfect knowledge and being known are foregone. (p. 99)

At the same time, dialogue represents the mode of relationship that maximally fosters continuing individuation for both partners. Unlike fusion where difference is avoided, in dialogue it is sought and affirmed. Partners aim toward an ideal of responding to the other as a whole and truly *other* person and not merely as a part of their own experience. Their *ability* and their *decision* to respond to the other in this way provides an optimal context for the increasing individuation of each. Where difference and change are felt as threatening and responded to as betrayal, individuation is crippled. Where they are accepted and valued, individuation is enhanced. The cycle is completed in that each partner's increased individuation makes him/her more capable of accepting the otherness of the other. Partners in a dialogic relationship are more willing to accept individual responsibility for their own lives. They try to accept and respond to unpredictability, to see themselves and to act, over and over, as separate, self-directed individuals.

Several theorists have discussed the process through which a person's or a couple's individuation is facilitated. Searles (16) points out that in psychotherapy, once the patient and therapist have formed a "therapeutic symbiosis," the patient's individuation often begins, in a sense, in the intrapsychic experience of the therapist.

... the therapist comes to sense, time after time, newly emerging tendrils of differentiation in the patient, before the latter himself is conscious of them. In responding to these with spontaneity as they show themselves, . . . the therapist helps the patient to become aware that they are a part of him. (p. 314)

Bowen (3) has identified the process of a couple's joint individuation out of fusion as a coordinated sequence marked by a series of "controlled emotional crises." The "differentiating one" makes a move toward individuation; the other tries to lure, manipulate, threaten or bully him/her back into the predictable pattern of fusion. When s/he can withstand this pressure, can resist the impulse to remain in the old predictable way, the chain reaction is interrupted. The

other can no longer maintain his/her own fused stance and is forced, if the relationship is to be maintained, to re-align him/herself at a more highly individuated level. When one partner refuses to respond solely as the "sick" one or the "nurturant" one, the other must give up his/her own limited role as the "healthy" one or the "one who is fed."

The rigid, predictable patterns displayed in fused relationships reflect transactionally the partners' experiential avoidance of difference. Partners hope to derive security from the exclusion of everything new and different, which contributes to the sense of constriction and stagnation in the relationship. In dialogue, difference, otherness, unpredictability, and change are accepted. Even a dialogic relationship will inevitably develop predictable or patterned interactions that contribute to the security and continuity, the sense of being "at home," in the relationship. However, patterns will be more flexible, more responsive to spontaneity and change because they are not compelled to constantly serve the function of eliminating difference and change.

Security in the relational mode of dialogue derives not from rigid predictability but from what Boszormenyi-Nagy (2) has referred to as the "structural requisite" of trust. He recognizes that a necessary prerequisite for a successful dialogic relationship is each partner's sensitivity to the other's needs. He goes further, however, to insist that what must follow this is a willingness on the part of each partner to offer him/herself temporarily as an object for the self-delineation of the other.

What is referred to here . . . amounts primarily to helping the Other to be delineated as a subject opposite to oneself as an object of the Other's needs. Since offering oneself as an object to the Other amounts to "giving," the act of mutually trusting the Other is an important structural requisite of the dialogue. The trust, i.e., the anticipated reciprocity on the part of the Other, removes the emotional flavor of being used or taken advantage of. The atmosphere of trust changes the economy of "giving emotionally." (pp. 56-57)

Boszormenyi-Nagy uses the concept of trust in a way that illustrates the interpenetration of intrapsychic experience and interpersonal transactions. Trust is the experiential expectation that the other will cooperate in transactions that facilitate the partner's own self-delineation. It is based on past transactions and "predicts" future ones. Both partners' willingness to serve as object for the other in the expectation that the other will do the same is, for Boszormenyi-Nagy, the core of dialogue. The form this mutual trusting takes, transactionally and experientially, is that of a constant *alteration* of subject and object roles between partners.

As the "dialogue of needs" becomes established, it becomes one of the greatest sources of relational security and trust. Its accomplishment permits the posing of real demands, i.e., of transiently/non-reciprocal kinds of object-role assignments, in the knowledge that the Other will subsequently feel free to demand the same "in return." The structure of dialogue is not based on a constant complementation of needs. Instead, it is a contract for the free exchange of both partners' non-complementary need assertions, based on their reliance on the over-all mutuality

These factors—the transactional structure and psychological experience of trust, the complementarity of the poles of (the now differentiated) "I" and "We," and the optimal satisfaction of self-delineational needs—contribute to the psychological and relational stability of the relational mode of dialogue. This does not imply a guarantee of longevity for these relationships. Quite the contrary, dialogue is based on the acceptance by both partners that there are no "guarantees" for the assumption of a relational guarantee is, in fact, the unrealistic promise never to grow or change that characterizes fusion. It does suggest that dialogic relationships are relatively free of the inherent anxiety and ambivalence, as well as the various forms of discord and symptomatology they can take, that characterize ambivalent fusion. Dialogue describes a relational structure that is highly conducive to both partners' continuing growth. The possibility that they will grow in ways that might lead them to end the relationship always exists. However, a variety of forces combine to produce a dynamic counterweight to this potential for growing apart. These forces include the partners' feelings that their relational needs are, to their satisfaction, optimally met in the particular relationship, their needs for relational continuity and stability over time, and their sense of commitment to one another.

What we have already said concerning other relational modes and the different relational patterns seen in couples applies equally well to the relational mode of dialogue. It is neither pure nor static. The mature stage of human development is *largely characterized* by increasing individuation and by the formation of close, differentiated relationships. Mature relationships will be *largely characterized* by those features we have described as dialogic. But features that characterize less mature forms of relationship will always be present to varying degrees at varying moments. In Seattles' (17) words:

Individuation is not a once-and-for-all, irreversible process. . . . A healthy adult . . . lives a daily and yearly life which involves, in its most essential ingredients, experiences—whether measured in moments or phases of his life—of symbiotic relatedness and re-individuation. (p. 250)

Summary

Psychotherapists who are guided in their work by psychoanalytic and family-systems perspectives have been troubled by the seemingly unbridgeable gap between theories of individual dynamics, on the one hand, and relational dynamics, on the other. They have sought a common language that would permit a cross-fertilization of phenomenological and transactional concepts. Recently a number of different theoretical systems have begun, independently of one another, to focus on the phenomenon of fused relationships and the related concept of individuation or differentiation. This convergence of interest may represent the first stages of an emerging paradigm-shift in the conceptualization of psychopathology and psychotherapy, one that seems to qualify as a significant first step toward such a common language. This paper represents one attempt to weave some of the strands of these different theoretical systems into a coherent

reader should bear in mind that significant areas of disagreement among theoretical systems have been avoided and consideration of many crucial theoretical questions, such as the application of these concepts to family systems with more than two members, has been omitted. Although well advanced in some respects, the theoretical perspective described here is, in terms of its own differentiation, from its "parent" systems as a distinct theory of human personality and relatedness, still in the infant stage.

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1. How does Karpel make his claim for the usefulness of the article?
2. For what other literary works in this section might Karpel provide a useful interpretive frame?

The Story and the Article

1. What is the nature of Leroy and Norma Jean's relationship? How would Mark Karpel categorize it? What part of the relationship is Karpel's schema unable to account for?
2. Sociologist Nancy Chodorow thinks it likely "that from their children's earliest childhood, mothers and women tend to identify more with daughters and to help them differentiate less, and that processes of separation and individuation are made more difficult for girls. On the other hand, a mother tends to identify less with her son, and to push him toward differentiation and the taking on of a male role unsuitable to his age, and undesirable at any age in his relationship to her."¹ How does this theory help explain some of the elements in the story?
3. What role does the Civil War battlefield in Shiloh play in the story? How does it bring together some of the elements offered by the analyses of Karpel and Chodorow?

Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and the Feminine Personality," in *Women, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, 43-66 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 48.

DRAMA



AUGUST WILSON

AUGUST WILSON (1945-), child of a biracial family, voraciously read the works of black authors in the public library of the poor community in Pittsburgh where he grew up. His first play was staged in 1981, but he was catapulted to fame by the success of Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, which was produced at Yale and later staged in New York in 1984. Wilson's work with Lloyd Richards, dean of the Yale School of Drama, established him as the pre-eminent African-American playwright. Joe Turner's Come and Gone opened on Broadway to great acclaim and was voted Best New Play of the Year by the New York Drama Critics' Circle. The Piano Lesson was also honored by the Drama Critics' Circle and garnered his second Pulitzer Prize for Drama. He is the recipient of other awards as well, continuing to distill the experiences of his childhood and youth and his understanding of the American scene. He has set himself the task of writing a ten-play cycle that chronicles each decade of the black experience in the 20th century and focuses on what Wilson sees as the most important issue for blacks in each of these periods. His second play, Fences, about an embittered Negro League baseball player, won him