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DIFFERENTIATION-RELATEDNESS
OF SELF AND OBJECT REPRESENTATIONS

Diana Diamond, Sidney J. Blatt, David A. Stayner and Nadine Kaslow

Yale University

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Differentiation-Relatedness Scale
of Self and Object Representations

Diana Diamond, Sidney J. Blatt, David Stayner
and Nadine Kaslow
Yale University

Clinical theory and research has focused increasingly on the role of early caregiving relationships in the development of representations of self and others (cognitive-affective schema) that organize and guide subsequent interpersonal experience. These relatively enduring representations of self and others are expressions of the development of increasingly mature interpersonal relatedness and the gradual consolidation and emergence of a differentiated, cohesive self-definition or identity (Blatt, 1974, 1990; Blatt, Wild & Ritzler, 1975; Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971; Loewald, 1960, 1978; Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962; Stern, 1985). Representations or internal working models (IWM) of early caregiving experiences establish templates or prototypes that are central to the emergence and consolidation of a sense of self and patterns of subsequent interpersonal and subjective experiences (Ainsworth, 1985a, b; Bretherton, 1985; Bowlby, 1988; Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985). Research on the mother-infant interaction in the early months of life (e.g., Stern, 1985) demonstrates how patterns of engagement and disengagement in the early relational attunement between caregiver and infant interact with inborn capacities to facilitate the development of representations of caregiving interactions. These formulations from the study of infant-mother interaction in the early months of
life and from the study of patterns of attachment and separation in the second year of life are consistent with research and theory in social cognition that has also increasingly focused on the development of cognitive schema of self and others that organize subsequent interpersonal and self perceptions. These cognitive schema function as heuristic prototypes that are the basis for social interaction and behavior (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Horowitz, 1988; Markus, 1977; Westen, 1991).

Blatt and his colleagues, integrating developmental psychoanalytic theory and the cognitive developmental perspective of Piaget and Werner, suggest that representations of self and other develop epigenetically and become increasingly accurate, articulated, conceptually complex cognitive structures of self and others linked to each other by affective valences (Blatt, 1974; Blatt & Blass, 1990; Blatt & Lerner, 1983; Blatt, Wild & Ritzler, 1975; Behrends & Blatt, 1985; Blatt & Behrends, 1987; Kernberg, 1985, 1994). Higher levels of representations evolve from and extend lower levels, thus new representational modes become increasingly comprehensive and effective.

Representations of self and others are integral to the development of the cognitive structures or schema established in interpersonal interactions throughout the life cycle, beginning with the earliest experiences of the infant in the caring relationship with the mother. These cognitive-affective schema unfold and develop as the child matures and experiences various perturbations and demands throughout the life cycle. When these perturbations are not severe, the child alters existing cognitive structures to accommodate the experienced perturbations, leading to the development of new, more mature, levels of cognitive-affective schema. This process usually unfold in a natural, well-defined, developmental sequence; new, more mature, cognitive-affective schema and
representational structures more effectively organize, shape, and guide interpersonal and self experiences. When perturbations are severe, persistent, and overwhelm the child's capacities to accommodate, however, the development of these cognitive-affective structures may be compromised (Blatt, 1991, 1995).

The evolution of representations of self and other reflect two independent, but inter-related, developmental lines: a) the development of a consolidated, realistic, essentially positive, increasingly differentiated and integrated self-definition and identity, and b) the development of the capacity to establish increasingly mature, realistically satisfying, empathically attuned, reciprocal interpersonal relationships. The dialectical tension between these two developmental lines of self-definition and relatedness creates a fundamental dynamic that is central to the development of mature personality organization and healthy psychological functioning (Blatt, 1990, 1991; Blatt & Blass, 1990; Blatt & Shichman, 1983). An increasingly differentiated, integrated, and mature sense of self is contingent upon establishing satisfying interpersonal experiences, and, conversely, the establishment of increasingly satisfying interpersonal experiences is contingent upon the development of a more mature self-definition and identity. In normal personality development, these two developmental processes evolve in an interactive, reciprocally balanced, mutually facilitating way throughout the life cycle (Blatt, 1990; Blatt and Blass, 1990; Blatt and Shichman, 1983; Jordan, 1983; Miller, 1984; Surrey, 1983; Stern, 1985). New representational structures coalesce in this mutually facilitating interaction between the development of an increasingly cohesive and essentially positive sense of self and increasingly reciprocal, empathically attuned relatedness to others (Blatt & Blass, 1990, in press; Blatt & Shichman, 1983).
A. Clinical assessment of object representation.

1. The Rorschach and other projective techniques

Considerable research has been conducted during the last 15 years on the clinical assessment of self and object representations. Both Blatt and Mayman, and their respective colleagues, developed methods to operationalize and systematically assess the development and impairment of self and object representation (for reviews see Blatt & Lerner, 1983; Stricker & Healy, 1990; Westen, 1991). Mayman (1967) examined primarily the thematic content of representations in projective test data and evaluated the extent to which human figures are described as differentiated, rich, alive, and involved in interactions which are benevolent and reciprocal. Mayman and his colleagues evaluated these dimensions in Rorschach responses (Mayman, 1967; Urist, 1977), dreams (Khron & Mayman, 1974; Hatcher & Khron, 1980), and early memories (Mayman & Faris, 1969) and found that these ratings correspond to independent clinical judgments and to independent estimates of clinical progress in the treatment of psychotic patients (Ryan & Bell, 1984). Their findings support the construct validity of levels of object representation assessed through thematic content as a "salient, consistent, researchable personality dimension" (Khron & Mayman, 1974, p. 465).

Blatt and his colleagues, focusing more on structural dimensions of self and object representations, developed methods for assessing degrees of differentiation, articulation, integration and affective valence in human and quasi-human responses on the Rorschach. In a longitudinal assessment of object representation in Rorschach responses of normal subjects from ages 11-12 to 30, Blatt, Brenneis, Schimek & Glick (1976) found significant increases with age in the number of "accurately perceived, well-articulated, full human figures
involved in appropriate, integrated, positive and constructive (benevolent) interaction". Rorschach responses of these normal adolescents at ages 17 to 18 were also compared with those of adolescents in a long-term psychiatric facility and an unexpected but highly significant finding indicated that when patients fail to maintain realistic thinking, their representations are at a higher developmental level than the unrealistic thinking of normals (Blatt et al., 1976). These findings, replicated and extended by Ritzler and his colleagues (1980), clarify the role of restitutional or idyllic fantasies in psychoses and particularly in schizophrenia. This method for assessing the developmental level of realistic and unrealistic human representations on the Rorschach also discriminated among various diagnostic groups (Blatt & Lerner, 1983) including inpatient from outpatient borderlines (Lerner & St. Peter, 1984), narcissistic from borderline pathology (Farris, 1988), schizophrenic from borderline patients, (Spear, 1980; Spear & Sugarman, 1984), psychotic from nonpsychotic patients (Ritzler et al., 1980), neurotic outpatient borderline, inpatient borderline, and schizophrenic patients (Lerner & St. Peter, 1984), and opiate addicted from nonaddicted subjects (Blatt, Berman, Bloom-Feshbach, Sugarman, Wilber, & Kleber, 1984; Blatt, McDonald, Sugarman & Wilbur, 1984).

The methodology developed by Blatt and colleagues to assess object representation in responses to the Rorschach has also been used to investigate changes in object representation over the course of treatment. Independent estimates of clinical improvement correlated with a significant decrease in unrealistic representations of the human figure in inpatients (Blatt & Ford, 1994; Blatt, Ford, Berman, Cook & Meyer, 1988) and a significant increase in realistic representations in the human figure in outpatients (Blatt, 1992; Kavanaugh, 1985) over the course of long-term, intensive therapy. Blatt (1992)
found that outpatients whose character structure and psychopathology focused primarily on issues of interpersonal relatedness rather than self-definition (anaclitic patients) had significantly greater improvement in the structural dimensions of their object representations on the Rorschach in long term psychotherapy than in psychoanalysis. And the reverse was found with patients whose character style and pathology focused primarily on issues of self-definition (introjective patients), they had significantly greater improvement in the quality of their object representations if they were in psychoanalysis than in long-term psychotherapy.

Several groups of investigators have begun to operationalize Mahler's stages of separation/individuation to assess representations of early caregivers and of the self (Kwawer, 1979; Ipp, Kohlers & Lerner, 1986) and to evaluate Rorschach responses for themes of separation/individuation (Coonerty, 1986). The Rorschach scale developed by Coonerty (1986) significantly discriminated schizophrenic from borderline patients—schizophrenic patients had more pre-separation/individuation themes, than borderline patients who had significantly more themes at a somewhat higher developmental level expressing primarily issues of narcissism and reapproachment. Diamond, Kaslow, Coonerty, & Blatt (1990) extended Coonerty's original scale for evaluating Rorschach responses by adding higher developmental levels of object constancy and interpersonal relatedness.

2. Spontaneous descriptions of self and others.

Blatt and colleagues (Blatt, Wein, Chevron, & Quinlan, 1979; Blatt, Chevron, Quinlan, Schaffer & Wein, 1988) also developed procedures for evaluating both the content and structure of open-ended descriptions of self and significant others (e.g. parents, significant other, and therapist). Integrating psychoanalytic developmental theory (e.g. Fraiberg, Anna Freud, Jacobson,
Mahler), with cognitive developmental theory (e.g. Werner, Piaget), Blatt (1974) postulated five levels in the development of the concept of the object -- sensorimotor, perceptual, external iconic, internal iconic, and conceptual. Blatt and his colleagues (1979, 1992) not only developed procedures for assessing the conceptual level of spontaneous descriptions of significant figures, but they also specified ways of assessing qualitative dimensions of the descriptions (affectionate, ambitious, malevolent-benevolent, cold-warm, constructive involvement, intellectual, judgmental, negative-positive ideal, nurturant, punitive, successful, weak-strong). Factor analysis of these qualitative dimensions yielded three basic factors: benevolence, punitive, and striving (Quinlan, Blatt, Chevron & Wein, 1992). Conceptual level was significantly lower and there were significantly fewer nurturant themes in the representation of parents of depressed as compared to non-depressed young adults (Blatt, et al., 1979) and among psychiatric as compared to nonpsychiatric subjects (Bornstein & O'Neill, 1992). Nonpsychiatric subjects could be distinguished from borderline patients by the degree of differentiation and cognitive complexity (conceptual level) of their object representation (Marziali & Oleniuk, 1990). Independent estimates of therapeutic progress of seriously disturbed adolescent and young adult inpatients in long-term, psychodynamically informed treatment correlated significantly with changes in the conceptual level and the number of qualitative dimensions included in the representation of parents over the course of therapy (Blatt, Wiseman, Prince-Gibson, & Gatt, 1991). Changes in levels of object representation were also found to parallel changes independently reported in aspects of the transference relationship in a clinical comparison of a schizophrenic and a borderline inpatient in long-term, psychoanalytically-oriented, psychotherapy (Gruen & Blatt, 1990). In sum, considerable research
supports the construct validity of assessments of descriptions of significant others as an important dimension of personality organization and psychological functioning (Blatt & Lerner, 1983).

This manual presents a procedure for assessing the level of differentiation, integration, and relatedness of open-ended descriptions of self and significant others. The various developmental levels specified in this scale derive primarily from an integration of the developmental psychoanalytic theories of Mahler et al (1975), Jacobson (1976), Fraiberg (1969), and Kernberg (1966, 1976) with the theoretical formulations of Loewald (1960, 1978), Kohut (1971), and Stern (1985), in which psychological developmental is viewed as progressing toward increasing differentiation and integration (Blatt, 1974; Behrends & Blatt, 1985; Coonerty, 1986), and increasingly mature modes of interpersonal relatedness (Stern, 1985; Urist, 1977) based on mutuality and reciprocity.

The scale views psychological development as progressing simultaneously toward the emergence of a consolidated, integrated and individuated sense of self-definition as well as empathically attuned, reciprocal modes of interpersonal relatedness. The development of self-definition and interpersonal relatedness are assessed as two fundamental dimensions of personality development that exist in a creative, mutually facilitative, dialectical, tension (Blatt, 1990; Blatt & Blass, 1990, 1995; Jordan, 1986; Miller, 1984; Mitchell, 1988; Stern, 1985; Surrey, 1983). Differentiation and relatedness are understood as interactive "polarities" (Blatt & Blass, 1990, 1995; Blatt & Shichman, 1983; Sander, 1983) in an unfolding developmental process (see also Kegan, 1982; Mitchell, 1988; Ogden, 1986). The dialectical tension and interaction between these two developmental dimensions facilitates the development of increasingly mature levels of both self definition and reciprocally attuned relatedness. In
constructive psychological development, these representations of self and other become increasingly cohesive, differentiated, and integrated, and begin to reflect an increased sense of empathically attuned, reciprocal interpersonal relatedness.¹

In an investigation (Stayner, 1992) of the interrater reliability of this scale of Differentiation - Relatedness, five judges rated 90 descriptions of mother, father, therapist, and self given by seven inpatients at various times in the course of their long-term treatment at a small, private, psychiatric hospital. Judges differed considerably in their level of clinical experience and their familiarity with the developmental and psychodynamic conceptualizations underlying the scale. The judges included two experienced clinicians, a graduate student in clinical psychology and two psychiatric aides, one of whom had previous related research experience. The scale’s reliability was examined by comparing these five judges’ ratings across the 90 descriptions and deriving an intraclass correlation coefficient via a target (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). This coefficient was then adjusted statistically so that the resulting intraclass correlation coefficient reflected the degree of agreement which can be expected when the scale is used by a random sample of k judges with similar training and experience as those in the reliability study. An adjusted intraclass correlation coefficient of .83 was derived.

Initial validity studies are encouraging. The level of differentiation-relatedness rated on this scale, especially of the representation of self, correlated significantly with independent assessment of level of clinical

¹ Although designed to assess primarily open ended, spontaneous descriptions of self and others, this scale could also be used with data gathered through other procedures including the TAT, speech samples in which the individual describes the self or significant others, and other types of semi-structured interviews.
functioning. In addition, independent assessment of degree of therapeutic change correlated significantly with increases in the differentiation-relatedness scores for representations of mother, father, therapist and self (Blatt, Stayner, Auerbach, & Behrends, in press). These relationships between level of differentiation-relatedness of representations of self and other and levels of clinical functioning, as well as degree of clinical change, are independent of a wide range of sociodemographic (e.g., intelligence, age) and other clinical variables (e.g., length of hospitalization, age of onset) (Stayner, 1994).

Table 1 presents a brief definition of each of the 10 scale points in this procedure that reflect increasing psychological maturity. At the lowest levels, the scale reflects the compromise of boundaries in terms of basic bodily experiences, emotions, or thoughts. Subsequent scale levels reflect a unitary, unmodulated view of self or other as an extension or mirrored image of an other, or as organized around a unitary idealization or denigration of self and other, or around a split of disparate aspects of self and other into polarized extremes. Later scale levels reflect an increasing capacity to integrate disparate aspects of self and other with increasing tolerance for ambivalence and ambiguity (Kernberg, 1966, 1977).

Lower level representations are often rigid and fixed with an all-encompassing affect or point of view in which the individual appears to exercise little sense of control or volition. Higher level representations integrate multiple points of view and feelings in which the individual conveys a sense of control and choice. Higher levels also reflect increasing expressions of mutually reciprocal, empathic attunement, and participation in complex, interpersonal relations. Thus various levels of the scale assess an increasing capacity to simultaneously hold and coordinate disparate view or schemas of self.
and another with an increasing toleration for ambiguity and an increase use of affective, temporal, and a genetic dimensions in the representation of self and others.

Lower level representations may consist of a single, all-encompassing affective descriptor; at higher levels representations might include several affects, or contain a creative tension between conflicting affects which, at the highest levels are integrated in the symbolization of self or other. Similarly, lower level representations may be limited to a single, global time frame, such as "always" or "never", whereas somewhat higher level descriptions might reflect a less global, concrete emphasis on the past or the present; while at still higher levels descriptions might reflect an ability to contain past views and present experience, or an ability to integrate past experience in a way that opens up future possibilities. At lower levels, representations may not reflect a sense of agency over one's own experience but a sense of being controlled by external forces, or a sense of being overwhelmed or possessed by another. Higher levels representations may reflect a stronger emphasis on choosing and deciding; while at still higher levels representations may include a sense of choice within the constraints and limits of one's personal or environmental reality. Descriptions at the highest levels may reflect an appreciation of the complex, reciprocal interactions among past and present choices and an awareness of their consequences.

The scale also reflects a trend toward increasingly mutual, empathically-attuned, and reciprocal relatedness. At lower levels, the sense of relatedness in representations may consist of being pushed by or invaded by the other, as seen, for instance, in a description consisting of resisting the onslaught of the other who is experienced as bad and destructive. At higher levels, relatedness
may be expressed primarily in parallel interactions, in expressions of cooperation and mutuality, in increased understanding of the other’s perspective, and in increasing expressions of empathically attuned reciprocity. At the highest levels, descriptions also reflect an increasing sense of participation in complex relational matrices that co-determine perceptions, attributions, and the symbolizations of meaning.

In summary, higher ratings of descriptions derive from increasing differentiation and articulation; increasing coordination and integration of varied aspects of experience; and increasingly mutual, empathically-attuned relatedness including a growing awareness of the reciprocal influences and relational matrices that contribute to the creation of symbolization of self and other.

Themes reflecting these developmental trends are rated and the final score given to a description reflects the modal score, the score predominant in the description. One exception to this rule is observed: scores of level 1 are treated as special scores and outweigh others -- two indications of level one require that the description be rated as level one.
Table 1

Scale for rating degree of differentiation - relatedness in representations of self and others.

The 10 developmental levels of self and other representations are:

1. Self/other boundary compromise (physical)
   (basic physical cohesion/integrity of representations is compromised).

2. Self/other boundary confusion (intellectual, affective)
   (affective/intellectual boundaries are confused, fused, or comprised).

3. Self/other mirroring
   (consolidation and stabilization of representations based on mirroring).

4. Self/other idealization or denigration
   (consolidation and stabilization of representations based on unitary, unmodulated idealization or denigration).

5. Semi-differentiation
   (tenuous, semi-differentiated consolidation of representations achieved through primitive splitting and/or rigid adherence to concrete properties to achieve a tenuous cohesion).

6. Emergent, ambivalent constancy (cohesion) and an emergent sense of relatedness.

7. Consolidated, constant (stable) self and others in unilateral relationship.


10. Integrative, creative constructions of self and other in empathically and reciprocally attuned relationships.
Level 1. Self/other boundary compromise (physical)

Basic physical cohesion/integrity of representation of self or other is compromised.

Descriptions at this level are characterized by severely compromised physical boundaries in which basic bodily cohesion or physical integrity is lacking or breached. The body of self or other may be experienced and described as permeated by or merged with the physical presence or properties of another person or something in the environment. Thoughts and feelings may seem unbounded and lack a firm sense of being anchored in a physically defined, intact, cohesive bodily self, for instance: "...my thoughts are go'in out of my head, around the world." These descriptions tend to reflect a sense of relational barrenness and may depict infusions or broadcasting of people's thoughts and feelings, as opposed to interpersonal communication across intact personal boundaries. For instance, "my upstairs neighbor watches my dreams on her TV at night when I'm asleep."

Example #1: Paternal description.

"Caring. Wants me to be better. Says he'll be the happiest person when I come out of the telepathic wind. Nobody knows what that means. Smart people know. When my thoughts are go'in out of my head, around the world. He told me he'll be the happiest person when that stops -- he thinks of me everyday.

Example #2: Self-description.

"A good person-dealing with a lost of stress - like how to cope with stress - been tested a lot by Jesus Christ - pulled through a winner - save the world from going to hell early."
Inquiry:
(Early?) "All I have to do is to do one thing wrong and everyone will have to go to hell early - but I won't do that - so by not doing anything wrong I'm saving the world from going to hell early. I'm a good person and God says I'm one of his favorite sons and that's it. (Good Person?) "I care about people more than other people." (Stress?) "Just the stress that's about me every day. About being in the wind." (Wind?) "Being in the telepathic wind - when people say they can hear my voices, and my thoughts and my thinking . . . When I come out of the wind the hospital won't be here anymore. By the time you have read this - you'll have read the newspaper article about what happened to the hospital - just a little sample of what God - of God's power and un - how did I like know this? 'Cuz God told me an um by the time you read this I'll be a live God, a new born God - the power of Robert - that's it." (God?) "I'm not a God right now - but when I die - then - no, when I land out of the wind - when I land out of the telepathic wind- then I'll be a real live God and have all the powers of a God."
Level 2. Self/other boundary confusion (intellectual/affective)

Affective/intellectual boundaries of self or other are confused, . fused, or compromised.

Self and other appear physically intact but thoughts and feelings are amorphous, undifferentiated or confused rather than defined and distinguishable. For instance, a description may consist of a single, global quality, often an action or imagistic impression (such as "Busy," without any elaboration). The other may also be described by naming internal affective states which lack any reference to interpersonal experience or a sense of interpersonal differentiation (for instance: "Worried. Unhappy."). A description may also consist only of a flood of details which fail to portray a distinguishable person to whom one is related interpersonally. It may also reflect a confusion, vagueness, or loss of mooring related to feeling overwhelmed in the attempt to describe self or other (for instance: "It's too much for me. I don't know. Don't know.") These descriptions reflect a sense of being lost in unformed, undefined, affective-cognitive experiences, rather than a sense of agency (e.g., refusing to answer) or self reflection.

Example #1: Maternal description, admission

"Good Lord -- that's horrible. I can't without swearing. My mother she grew up in a really bad household where her parents didn't get along very well. Grandfather stayed down all the time and played poker. My grandmother was very upset and neurotic. She had a really hard time at school -- got sick a lot. Had no friends. Went through a long time wearing braids because her mother forced her to wear braids and long hair."
Finally cut hair in high school and had friends. Felt better about herself. But also went through a long time being sick, at home -- in bed -- ate vegetable soup all the time. Inquiry: (describe) I'm getting to that. Back to high school -- went to high school, went to college. She was going to be a teacher but decided not to go through last semester of college to teach -- to marry a man she didn't know very well. Was a drunken driver. She went from home -- back home to a bad marriage. Now that's down there I can say -- she's not very independent -- has no hobbies to do with other people. Depends on other people to do things for her. She's a very nervous person. She drinks a lot of coffee and tea, has poor eating habits and has a few close friends."

Example #2: Self description.

"Kind person, care a lot - one of nicest person in whole world - can feel it inside me - had minibike - trying to get together - couldn't because sick - sold it for very cheap price, kid at camp - will come home and see that minibike - I did that for him. I care about everybody. Have girlfriend in town - will teach her things - she'll turn out really pretty - have another girl more mature - that's how she'll turn out - teach each other to be with each other."
Example #3: Maternal description.

"I don't know."

Note: This kind of vague description with little inquiry poses particular scoring problems. The vagueness might be seen as an indication that the lack of differentiation of thoughts and feelings reflects an experience of being overwhelmed and flooded (Level 2) (e.g., "I don't know..." [Inquiry] ... "It's like trying to describe the fog - it's everywhere"), or as a semi-differentiated response resulting from defensive blocking (e.g., "I won't do it! I don't want to"), or as might occur in a repressive hysteric personality organization and defensive style (Level 5). Without access to additional clues such as verbal inflection and intonation, observations of non-verbal behavior, or elaborations obtained in inquiry, descriptions consisting of a non-descriptive phrase such as "I don't know," should be considered unscorable.
Level 3. Self/other mirroring

Representation is as an extension or mirror reflection of self or other.

Descriptions at this level focus almost exclusively on characteristics of self and other that are virtually the same or exactly identical, such as aspects of physical appearance or body shape or size. These characteristics are described as unequivocally alike and often lack contextual specificity or conditionality. The other is related to as a mirror, a self-completing object, or an extension of the self, through which a tenuous sense of consolidation and stability of the representation is maintained.

Example #1: Maternal description.

"Very pretty lady - she’s, let’s see . . . 5'4:, brownish colored hair, hazel eyes. She kind’a looks like me. Our noses are the same, and our beauty marks are in the same spots. Isn’t that weird? One day I checked, and we had them in the same spot. She has glasses like me. She wears contacts. We both love clothes. We fit into the same size . . . .
Level 4. Self/other idealization or denigration

Representation of self or other is described in unitary, unmodulated, idealized or denigrated terms.

Descriptions at this level are characterized by extreme, one-sided idealization or denigration of self or other. This all-encompassing quality lacks any reference to conditionality or any sense of qualification or modulation. Idealization and denigration may at times be included in the same description but will appear as separate static extremes (or part properties) of self or other, but will lack the oscillation between extremes that is seen at the next level (Level 5). (See example #4 below.) The other is related to by idealizing or denigrating, which seems to provide a tenuous sense of consolidation and stability.

Example #1: Paternal description.

"A dick -- 6'2", heavy, short black hair. Real nasty, a real tyrant, beady black eyes. (Why do you suppose he's like that?) Cause he's an asshole -- sucks dick for a living."

Example #2: Therapist description.

"Sweet, supportive, just really nice."

Example #3: Therapist description.

"An ass. I don't like him. (Why not?) I don't like his face. I just don't like him. Makes me feel uncomfortable. Talks with an accent."
Example #4: Self Description.
"Chris is very confused. Although not incapacitated by this, she is often frustrated. She is often annoyed and doesn’t like many people. She’s a bitch. Chris cries ALOT! I’m OK. I try hard. I love everybody. But I’m usually happy and don’t care much. I don’t like this hospital but realize we need to be here. I guess it’s OK. I’m very creative and don’t like drugs or drinking or anything antisocial. I’m a perfect little girl."

Note: Most immediately evident in this last description is the split between idealized aspects (I try hard . . . love everybody . . . usually happy . . .) and denigrated aspects (". . . very confused . . . often frustrated . . . doesn’t like many people . . . a bitch.") There is little or no oscillation between these polarized representations (as seen in descriptions at Level 5), but rather a marked isolation of disparate aspects of self experience (for instance, the denigrated self is called, "Chris"). Because of this, it is scored level 4 (Idealization or denigration) rather than as a semidifferentiated self at Level 5.
Level 5. Semi-differentiated, tenuous consolidation of self and other

Representation dominated by primitive splitting of experience of self or other into polarized extremes, or by rigid adherence to concrete properties to stabilize tenuous cohesion of self and other experience.

Descriptions at this level are most often marked by an oscillation between disparate aspects of one's experience of self and other that have been split into dramatically opposed, mutually exclusive polarities with an all-encompassing absolute quality. Extremes of relatedness might include, for instance, an overwhelming closeness versus an unbridgeable gulf or distance; invasive control versus abandonment; or intense rage versus idolizing love. Disparate aspects of self or others are experienced and grappled with but they are not integrated into a multi-dimensional modulated description. They are described in absolute, mutually exclusive terms, with little or no sense of contextual influences or temporal perspective such as placing one aspect in the past and the other in the present.

Example #1: Paternal description.

"He's got mood swings. Sometimes he's nice, sometimes he's real nasty. He can be pretty nice at times. That's about it."

Inquiry (Nice?) "Just a nice guy, nice to me". (Nasty?) "Loses his temper . . . gets angry".
Example #2: Self-description.

"I can’t describe myself... you describe me. It’s hard... no it’s easy. Vulnerable. Hurt. Lonely. Sort of happy. Getting more confident... no please write gaining confidence. Considerate."

Example #3: Self description.

"Depends on how I’m feeling. Sometimes I’m outgoing but other times I’m withdrawn. I don’t know."

Inquiry: (What else?) "I don’t want to describe myself. (Why?) Cause I get upset when I do." (Can you tell me what upset you?) "I’m either too conceited or too modest to answer that."

Relatedness in Level 5 descriptions may also oscillate between defensive distancing and over-identification with the other (for instance, abandonment versus engulfing closeness). This oscillation may also appear in a preoccupation with issues of control and autonomy, reflecting the intense struggle to preserve a fragile, vulnerable, emerging sense of self from the invasive control of the other (as compared to less threatened, more positive emphasis on self-directedness and autonomy, as seen in higher levels).

Descriptions at this level can contain an assertive, often abrupt and complete refusal to describe self or other or an unwillingness to continue the task of attempting a description. This refusal should not appear to be a momentary search for the words to describe one’s experience more precisely, but rather an active, defensive attempt to block the flow of the process to preserve
a rudimentary, fragile sense of differentiation and cohesion (such as, "No! I won't do it. I don't want to!"). This defensive dynamic may also appear as overtly intense conflict over what, or how much, to reveal in a description. This defensive blocking is seen as an assertion of will or agency, rather than an expression of the sense of confusion or loss of mooring, such as seen at Level 2, and therefore is scored as a semidifferentiated attempt to define the self on the object.

Example #4: Therapist description.

"I don't know her. I won't do it. I don't like her.

Unaware, without knowing it. Has too much faith in me.

(Refused inquiry.)

Descriptions at this level can also include an inordinate emphasis on, or limitation to, concrete, physical properties, bodies or body parts, often depicted in stilted, two-dimensional, sometimes grotesque, terms. This marked focus on physical properties or concrete characteristics is viewed as another expression of an attempt to stabilize tenuous representations of self and other. It should be noted that this type of concrete description might reflect a more basic cognitive or developmental style rather than the defensive blocking suggested here. Thus, this inordinate emphasis on concrete properties can serve both defensive and adaptive purposes, reflecting some combination of both defensive blocking and a more general cognitive style.

Example #5: Maternal description.

"She's got a car. She's um . . . I don't know how old.

. . . 36 or something. She's married to my Dad. She has green eyes (and?) her ears are pierced. She has a mouth.
She has two legs (laughing).

Example #6: Maternal description.

"Her looks or the way I think about her? (Both if you like.) Five feet seven inches. Blondish hair. She wears glasses. And she works. And . . . are you ready? . . . I don't think I like her. I don't know why."

Inquiry: (Anything more?) "No. Don't know too much about her. . . I'm losing my voice. (As a person?) "I don't know what kind of a person she is. I don't know her."

Example #7: Therapist description.

". . . She's very nice, lets me talk about whatever I want. Some of her fingers are different sizes (therapist has a mild birth defect on one hand) and she smokes. She has a nice pictures hanging on the wall in her office. We meet three times a week, I think."
Level 6. Emergent, ambivalent constancy, cohesion, and an emergent sense of relatedness.

Descriptions at this transitional level reflect an emerging consolidation of disparate aspects of self and other that are expressed in somewhat more integrated, stable representations. Descriptions are marked by a hesitant, equivocal, or ambivalent movement toward this integration and stabilization. Level 6 descriptions may consist simply of a list of appropriate, role conventional characteristics (but not only concrete properties or characteristics as in level 5) which do not seem to reflect a sense of the uniqueness of the individual. Self descriptions are often characterized by trial identifications or distinctions that also convey a sense of tentative movement toward a more individuated and cohesive sense of self. Relatedness includes an emergent and equivocal sense of tolerance for and ability to bring together divergent aspects of interpersonal experience.

Example #1: Self description.

"One thing I have now which I didn’t have in the past is self-confidence. I’m becoming a more social person. I care about myself. I worry about the way my room looks. . . . if a picture is crooked, I have a spaz attack. I don’t know if that’s good or bad. . . . I mean I get so caught up in wanting everything to be a model. I’m learning ways to control my temper and expressing my feelings, and I’m still writing in a journal. Most times I enjoy school. . . . I used to be petrified and hate it when I was in (her hometown). Maybe because it’s because I know everyone here. I think I want to be like my mother. . . . I don’t know if that’s good or bad. . . . I told my mother, and she said
it's bad. She said I have to be my own person... that's what
I'm working on. There were times when the only way I could act
mature was by thinking of myself as my mother... the person she
is... always dressed nice, clean, caring. I'm immature. That's
what I have to learn not to be. That's what I'm working on. Staff,
patients, and Mom are helping...."

Example #2: Paternal description.

"My father - um - about 5'10" - Do I have to describe him
physically? He has a little belly - a big (!) - belly, rather.
Can get very angry. Can be fun. Oh yeah, he has brownish-grey
hair and green eyes and wears glasses. Wouldn't it be easier
to tape this? Did you write that down? He's a father of 5
other children also. That's all to describe him."

Inquiry: (Angry?) "He has trouble controlling his anger - sometimes
he takes it out on other people - either verbal or physical." (Fun?)
"Yeah - I used to have a lot of fun with him - I used to joke about
with him - I mean he has his times when he can be serious but
sometimes he's fun." (Serious?) "Like there are times when you
know you can kid with him and other times when you don't fuck with
him at all."
Level 7. Stable, consolidated, self and others in essentially unilateral relationships.

Descriptions at this level reflect consolidated and stable representations of self and other in which thoughts, feelings, needs, and fantasies are differentiated and more modulated. At this level, representations, include an increasing tolerance and integration of disparate aspects of experiences of self and other. Characteristics and qualities are described more conditionally, with some references to temporality and environmental context. These descriptions are often marked by expressions of sympathetic understanding such as attempts to recognize and take into account specific situational factors that can influence another's, or one's own, behavior or viewpoint. Cause and effect relationships are depicted in relatively uncomplicated, largely uni-directional terms. Self descriptions often emphasize a positive self-assertion, in which the subject's own opinions, interests, and qualities are defined and articulated. Descriptions of others also tend to emphasize specific distinguishing qualities and characteristics.

Example #1: Self description.

"Lonely, insecure. Hiding behind a facade. Has common sense. Abnormal opinions. One of my abnormal opinions is that people who want to kill themselves should be allowed to kill themselves. . . and I wasn't referring to myself either. Mature. . . can be mature. . . haven't really acted that during the psych. testing. I sort of fooled around. Should have more confidence."

Example #2: Paternal description.

"Funny. Caring. Good-natured. Generous with me. Tries to be

Example #3: Self description.

"Describe myself... short - ha ha ha! Um - smart, rebellious, annoying - that's about it."

Inquiry: (Rebellious) "Because I climb walls! I'm kidding! You asked me that? Be serious! Don't like doing what I'm told - that's about it. Why would you ask me that? You could probably write a million reasons down." (Annoying) "Yeah, un - let's see - when people insult me I don't say that was a stupid thing to say - and I walk out - they could pull their hair out 'cause I don't say anything!"

Note (example #3):

Rather than a blocking of the process as seen at Level 5, this description includes an engagement with the tester and a more self-assertive, feisty and somewhat humorous (although still defensive in tone) quality, and thus is scored at level 7.

Example #4: Self description.

"Fat, but working on it. Blonde hair - green eyes - 5'7". Helpful to others sometimes. Hoping to live life to the fullest after discharge. Dependent on others to get through the bad times."
Inquiry:  (Helpful?) "I can talk to people sometimes, when they have problems and help." (Dependent?) "Too dependent on my primaries and ward group administrator."

Example #5: Paternal description.

"My father is 51 this December, he's about 5'10' - he's gained a lot of weight (hah!) Grayish brown hair and blue eyes. He's into always letting his kids know what his life was like, to make us further our education. That's really it."
Level 8. Cohesive, individuated, empathically related self and other.

Descriptions at this level reflect a cohesive, nuanced and related sense of self and other in which varied characteristics and qualities are recognized and increasingly integrated. Aspects of the self and others are emphasized that distinguish and define a unique sense of identity. These descriptions often express an interest in understanding and differentiating feelings and motivations through interpersonal contact and communication, often reflecting references to potential or experienced differences between intentions and actual behavior. These descriptions also include references to using one's own thoughts and feelings to emphatically appreciate and understand the other. Behavior is often depicted in ways that suggest a more complex, context-related, understanding of cause and effect and an appreciation that a given action may have shades of meaning depending on its context. These descriptions also include a positive emphasis on a complex balance of independence and dependence in relationships, on career and work choices, and on future directions and possibilities, that reflect the experience of an increasingly stable and cohesive sense of identity.

Example #1: Therapist description.

"I'm trying to think of a word, Tactful in approaching subjects... that wasn't the word I was thinking of... not blunt, can say things in a better fashion. She can put things in a better way that doesn't sound too intimidating or so cruel. She's sweet, generous has high morals. She's a nice person. Has high standards."
Example #2: Self description.

"I'm weird. One minute I can be nice and in a good mood, the next in a real bad one. A lot of times when others think I'm angry, I'm really sad, but it comes out looking like anger. I like a lot of privacy. I'm sensitive, I know that. I'm patient with some people, but with others I'm not at all... I guess I am with those I really care about. I get scared about things; I have a tough exterior, but inside I'm mush. I like people, generally guys with long hair - huh! I like to read and write. I love animals and little kids. I like heavy metal and punk."

Example #3: Self description.

"My name is... you know my name! 19... soon to be 20. Blonde hair, green eyes. Pretty healthy... physically and mentally. On the emotional aspects, I'm leaving (the hospital) in 26 days! I'm gonna for the first time be independent, on my own. I'm going to school in the fall - business! I'm nervous about all of it, of course! I hope it all comes through. And I know if I have a hard time, the proper channel to go through. I think I'm still very sensitive to other people and how they feel about themselves or me. I don't like to see them locked up or hurting like I was. That pretty much describes who I am. You can't really... you have to meet the person."
Example #4: Significant other description.

"I'd say M. (boyfriend) right now. . . I don't know why! Yes, I do. What do you want to know? He's someone special. I learned how to have a relationship with somebody, to argue and hate. . . and love. . . and still care. He taught me. . . we taught each other how to be close and not to be hurt. . . although I still feel it. . . he gives me a different feeling from other people. . . a good one. And he's standing by me leaving, helping me find a place, just being there for me whenever I need him. That's it."

Example #5: Paternal description.

"My father is a person who is very confused about what he really wants. He is a man with an abundance of talent, but never really uses the right one at the right time. He still has a whole hell of a lot of growing up to do. He needs companionship, but always hooks up with people who really want nothing from him but money, which leaves him with nothing. He has nothing to show for what he's tried to accomplish in life. I wish we were closer as I was growing up. I think things could have been a lot better for the both us. He needs to practically be kicked in the ass for motivation. I try but I can't do it all."
Example #6: Self description.

"Very quiet. Have a hard time socializing with others. I want to be liked by everyone. I try to be as creative as I can with my art work and with ideas I have. I like to be myself and not try to be someone else. I try to make a good appearance, when I'm going somewhere. Too much of a perfectionist with everything I do. I'm not as socially active as I'd like to be. That's it!"

Inquiry: (Quiet?) I don't initiate conversations, I usually talked to someone because they've started to talk with me. (Perfectionist?) try hard to make things look acceptable to others.
Level 9. Reciprocally related, integrative, unfolding self and other.

In addition to an integrated, cohesive sense of self and other, descriptions at this level are marked by reciprocal affective and intellectual exchanges between self and other, in which the behavior of one affects the other and each makes a unique contribution to the relationship. Descriptions at this level include experiences of empathic identification with the other's internal frame of reference and affective experience, while maintaining one's own distinct, intact sense of self. These experiences of reciprocal, intersubjective relatedness are often experienced as enriching and/or transforming the self. Descriptions at this level reflect an appreciation that one's sense of self and other is continually unfolding and being articulated in complex, interpersonal matrices.

Example #1: Paternal description.

"My father. He's 5'10", grayish brown hair, blue-green eyes, he's a heavyweight... big belly! My father's very overprotective of me... he's very insecure himself about letting me make my own moves and my own decisions. He is very caring but, by the way he shows it, he gets angry rather than say, "I get angry because I care." But he's trying to be very helpful with me right now, with my leaving. I've learned a lot about my parents in the last 6 months.

Example #2: Maternal description.

"My mother - has my name. Her description is about 5'8", grayish-brownish hair, green eyes, normal weight - little chubby. She is 49 years old. I've learned so much about my mother in the past few months I don't know where to begin.
She's very emotional. She doesn't want to let me grow up -- although she has to. She's caring and understanding of me and tries very hard to help me the best way she thinks is necessary. That's good enough - that's what I'm trying to say."

Example #3: Self description.

"um- I'm 19, I'm now on (name of the hospital unit). I think I've come a long way since I first got here. Sometimes I slip, then I remember everything I learned and I try to dig myself out of whatever I'm in. I'm trying to become as independent as possible. Um - I think I have a better outlook on what my future will be like - I can see it - which is better than before, when all I could see was black. Un - there isn't much I could say that you could write 'cuz people need to talk to me to find out who I am."

Inquiry: (Independent?) "Well, meaning getting a job in the community, finding an apartment, just trying to separate my adolescence from my adulthood as best I can." (Better outlook?) "I can see what I'm going to be doing - it's not as scary - well, it still is - it doesn't scare me as much as it used to."
Level 10. Intersubjectively creative, integrative, empathically and reciprocally attuned self and other.

In addition to an articulated sense of integration and reciprocal relatedness, descriptions at this level are marked by a recognition that one participates in and contributes to the construction of systems of meaning that are interwoven with one's experience of self and other. These constructions are supported by an understanding of reality as an unfolding interplay of objective and subjective experience, rather than a series of "facts" existing entirely apart from one's subjective participation. Self and other are depicted as creative constructions or narratives that emerge from intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences, and are understood to shape and organize one's perspective on and perceptions of self/other experience. Descriptions at this level reflect an appreciation of a conscious and creative participation in the intersubjective process of constructing meaning and the relational matrices that contribute to an evolving sense of self and others.

Example: #1: Maternal description.

"She's . . . kind of neurotic. . . she tries hard with her kids and her husband. She's basically a very nice person and I'd say she's wise from experience, from all she's been through. She doesn't like to hurt people but I think she can be hurt easily. She's organized and she's very practical but she's got problems. . . she knows what's going on now, she's smart about people and things. I understand my mother a lot better now than I did when I first came to the hospital, and I know that the way I see her now is a result of my treatment. In six months I may see her differently. . . "
References


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