

The Fantasy Bond

with Dr. Lisa Firestone



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Learning Objectives:

1. Become familiar with the concept of the fantasy bond, an imaginary connection formed with their partner that relieves anxiety yet interferes with real relationships
2. Learn how methods or defenses formed to deal with pain and anxiety in childhood later come to limit people as adults in their ability to develop and sustain attachments
3. Learn to help people identify the negative thoughts they have toward self, partner, and the relationship in order to provide targeted interventions
4. Apply techniques to identify and challenge destructive thinking in clients

Four Parts to This Webinar:

Part 1:
What is a
fantasy bond?

Part 2:
Why fantasy
bonds form

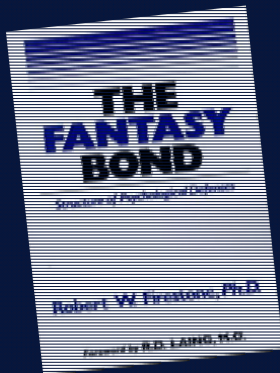
Part 3:
How fantasy
bonds affect us
and our
relationships

Part 4:
Breaking free
from a fantasy
bond

Part 1:

What is a Fantasy Bond?

Definition of Fantasy Bond



A Fantasy Bond is an illusion of connection, originally an imaginary fusion or joining with the parent. We use the term Fantasy Bond to describe both the original imaginary connection formed during childhood and the repetitive efforts of the adult to continue to make these types of connections in intimate relationships.

- The fantasy bond describes an illusion of connection that is substituted for feelings of real love and connection.
- Forming a fantasy bond is an often unconscious act of self-parenting and self-protection, in which a person becomes pseudo-independent, the helpless child and the all-powerful parent at once.

Origins of a Fantasy Bond

- Illusion of connection we originally form with our parent to help relieve early anxiety and emotional pain
- Process of self-parenting - see and treat ourselves the way we were seen and treated by our primary caretakers, both punishing and soothing ourselves
- Fantasy bond extends to our adult relationships
- Defenses we form limit our capacity for real love and closeness

Three States of Fantasy Involvement

- The individual with extreme propensities for fantasy and imagined fusion who moves toward increased isolation and withdrawal from other people
- The individual who, to varying degrees, uses elements reality to reinforce and support an ongoing fantasy process rather than really investing in relationships and career
- The individual who lives a realistic committed life, whose actions correspond to his or her aspirations and abilities

Extensions of the Fantasy Bond

The Fantasy Bond is often extended beyond our parents, romantic partners, and children. We can develop a fantasy connection with:

- Siblings or other relatives
- Country
- Religion
- Work
- Sports team
- Social issue, cause, or political party
- Groups

Part 2:

Why Fantasy Bonds Form

Separation Theory Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought



The Fantasy Bond

Primitive defense mechanism that we developed in early childhood as a way of maintaining an illusion of safety and security at those times that were frustrating, hurtful, or frightening.



Memory of being at one with the parent.

- Infants have a natural ability to comfort themselves by using images and memories of past feeding experiences to ward off the anxiety of being temporarily separated from their mothers. Fantasy helps reduce feelings of hunger and frustration.
- The bond compensates for (or substitutes) inadequacies in the early environment.
- In an attempt to cope with the emotional pain and restore a feeling of comfort, the infant merges with its mother in its imagination, magically believing itself to be one with her.

Existential Issues

“The fantasy of being connected to another person gives us a sense of immortality, a feeling of living forever, but robs us of day-to-day life. The addictive and compelling nature of the bond lies in the fact that it denies death and relieves our anxiety about the future. The drawback is that it creates a powerful resistance to living a free, independent existence in harmony and genuine closeness with our loved ones.”

- Robert Firestone, *The Fantasy Bond*

Division of the Mind

Parental Ambivalence

Parents both love and hate themselves and extend both reactions to their productions, i.e., their children.

Parental Nurturance

Parental Rejection, Neglect, Hostility

Parental Nurturance

Self-System

- Unique make-up of the individual
- Identification with and incorporation of parent's positive attitudes and traits
- The effect of experience and education

Personal Attitudes/Goals/Conscience

Realistic, Positive Attitudes Toward Self

Realistic evaluation of talents, abilities, etc...with generally positive/compassionate attitude toward self and others

Goals

Needs, wants, search for meaning in life

Moral Principles

Behavior

Ethical behavior toward self and others

Goal-Directed Behavior

Acting with Integrity

Parental Rejection, Neglect, Hostility

Other Factors: accidents,
illnesses, death anxiety

Anti-Self System

- **The Fantasy Bond** (core defense) is a self-parenting process made up of two elements: the helpless, needy child and the self-punishing, self-nurturing parent.
- The degree of defense is proportional to the amount of damage sustained.

Anti-Self System

Self-Punishing Voice Process

- Self-critical thoughts
- Self-destructive thoughts
- Suicidal thoughts

Self-Soothing Voice Process

- Self-soothing attitudes
- Self-aggrandizing thoughts
- Suspicious or paranoid thoughts toward others
- Self-sabotaging thoughts
- Violent thoughts

Part 3: How Fantasy Bonds Affect Us and Our Relationships

“As humans, we are torn between pursuing an assertive goal-oriented life, and depending on passive-dependent machinations that assure us of a fantasy bond. How we resolve this basic conflict determines whether we have a free-flowing, changing existence or a static, rigid, defensive posture. The primary fantasy bond is the core defense underlying our resistance to change. It is the major barrier to a full, rich existence.”

~ Dr. Robert Firestone, The Fantasy Bond

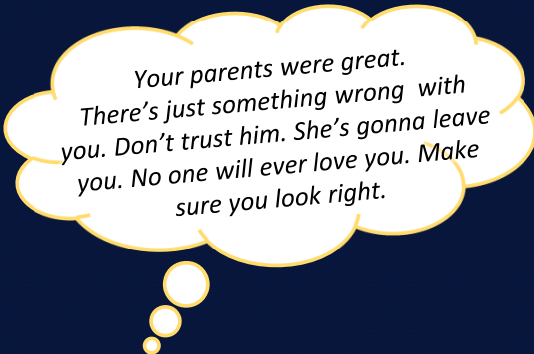


Ways We Maintain Fantasy Connections to Our Family

- Idealization of parents and family
- Maintenance of a negative self-image
- Projection of negative parental qualities and behaviors onto others
- Recreation of negative family dynamics in adult relationships
- Reliving your parents' life rather than living your own
- Maintaining psychological defenses that were adaptive as children but that limit us as adults

Language of the Defense System

The critical inner voice refers to a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward our selves and others. The “voices” that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our maladaptive behavior. It affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, and most importantly, our personal and intimate relationships.



*Your parents were great.
There's just something wrong with
you. Don't trust him. She's gonna leave
you. No one will ever love you. Make
sure you look right.*

The critical inner voice supports our fantasy bonds:

- Coaches you about yourself and others
- Warns you to not get too close or to cling
- Keeps you from real relating
- Fosters attitudes and behaviors that support the fantasy bond
- Maintains idealization of parents, as you continue to find fault with yourself and those close to you

Examples of "Voices"

He's your better half.

You'll always be alone.

No one else would like you.

You can't live without her.

You deserve a drink. You've been working hard.

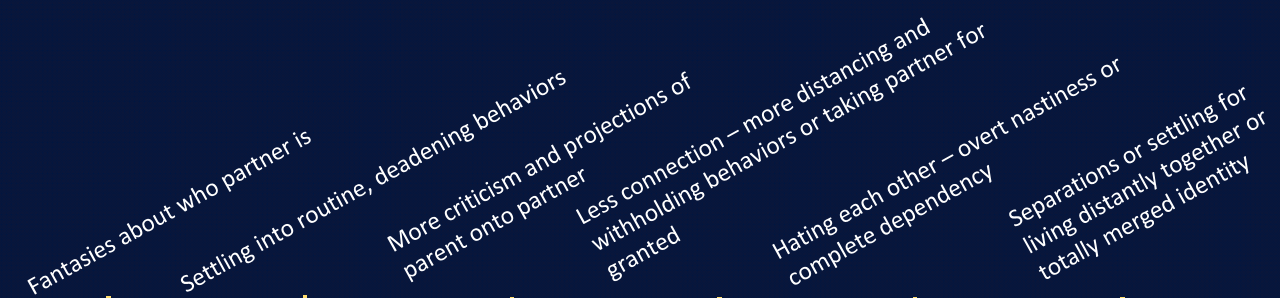
Your kids are making you look bad.



Do You Have a Fantasy Bond?

- Withholding from your partner
- Acting like a parent or child
- Putting partner up on a pedestal
- Becoming hypercritical toward your partner
- Focusing on form over substance
- Feeling like you can't do things on your own
- Less eye contact and physical affection
- Loss of independence

Fantasy Bond on a Continuum



Couple Interactions Chart

Interactions in an Ideal Relationship	Interactions in a Relationship Characterized by a Fantasy Bond
Nondefensiveness and openness	Angry reactions to feedback
Open to trying anything within reason	Closed to new experiences
Honesty and integrity	Deception and duplicity
Respect for the other's boundaries, priorities and goals, separate from self	Overstepping boundaries. Other seen only in relation to self
Physical affection and personal sexuality	Lack of affection; inadequate or impersonal, routine sexuality
Understanding--lack of distortion of the other	Misunderstanding-distortion of the other
Noncontrolling, nonmanipulative, and nonthreatening	Manipulations of dominance and submission

Factors That Contribute to Relationship Distress

- Selection
- Distortion
- Provocation

Part 4:

Breaking Free From a Fantasy Bond

To break free from a fantasy bond we must:

- Leave our own inward world and challenge our self-nourishing and punishing habits
- Redirect our energy toward taking chances on finding satisfaction in the external world through goal-oriented behavior

Identifying Your Defenses

What are the ways you adapted to your early environment and to your parents' treatment that helped you as a child, but that now limit you in your adult life?

Identifying Negative Traits

What negative behaviors or undesirable traits of your parent(s) do you recognize in yourself? Are there negative behaviors or traits that you are re-enacting in your current relationship, for instance?

Admit the Existence of Fantasy Bonds

Do you have a fantasy bond with a parent?

Idealize your parent?

Don't see how a parent hurt you?

React in child mode?

Limited based on parent's limitations?

Fear surpassing or being different from parent?

Hear parent's voice in your head?

Admit the Existence of Fantasy Bonds

Do you have a fantasy bond with your partner?

No longer engage in loving actions?

Withhold, punish or criticize your partner?

Have rigid behavior patterns?

Relate as a unit?

Take your partner for granted?

Feel like you can't live without partner?

Admit the Existence of Fantasy Bonds

Do you have a fantasy bond with your child?

Feel embarrassed
by your child?

Feel the child reflects
on you.

Make up for
things you
didn't get as a
child?

Feel sorry for
your child?

Need reassurance
from your child?

Feel your child is
the only one
who loves you?

Steps of Voice Therapy

1. Identifying What Your Critical Inner Voice is Telling You
2. Recognizing Where Your Voices Come From
3. Responding to Your Critical Inner Voice
4. Understanding How Your Voices Influence Your Behavior
5. Changing Your Self-Limiting Behaviors

Corrective Suggestions

It is helpful to think of corrective suggestions for yourself to challenge:

- Self-nurturing habits
- Dependency behavior
- Inwardness
- Destructive bonds
- Provoking behaviors
- Withholding patterns

It is also important to think of suggestions for how you can:

- Explore your new, independent identity
- Overcome fears

Corrective Suggestions for Breaking a Fantasy Bond

- Move toward independence and respect for those close to you and establish true equality. Disrupt reciprocal patterns of dominance, submission, and defiance
- Develop a non-defensive posture toward feedback and an open and honest style of communication
- Move toward increased interaction with others—extend circle of family and friends to provide better reality testing

Breaking a Fantasy Bond in Your Relationship

The Firestone Voice Scale for Couples

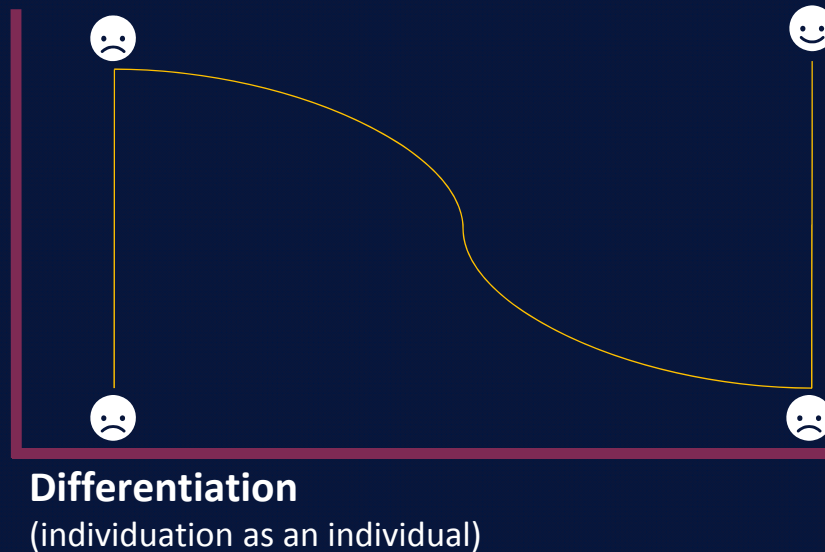
Circle the frequency with which you experience the following critical inner voices:

0 = Never 1 = Rarely 2 = Once in a While
3 = Frequently 4 = Most of the Time

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 0 1 2 3 4 | It's a man's job to take care of a woman. |
| 0 1 2 3 4 | You're never going to find another person who understands you. |
| 0 1 2 3 4 | Men are so insensitive. They're so opinionated. They don't want you to have your own views about anything . |
| 0 1 2 3 4 | Don't get too hooked on him (her). |

Differentiation and Linkage

Linkage
(emotional
closeness)



Actions that counter a fantasy bond:

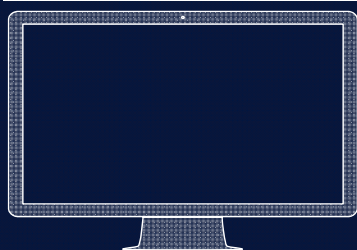
1. Express love in a way your partner would experience as loving.
1. Be affectionate.
2. Slow down. Be kind and present.
3. See partner for who they are.
4. Make eye contact.
5. Try something old.
6. Try something new.
7. Break routine.
8. Avoid passivity and control.
9. Talk as an "I" instead of a "we."
10. Be aware of your critical inner voice.

Goals for Your Relationship

- Goals I have for my relationship
- Actions to take to achieve my goals

Steps of Differentiation

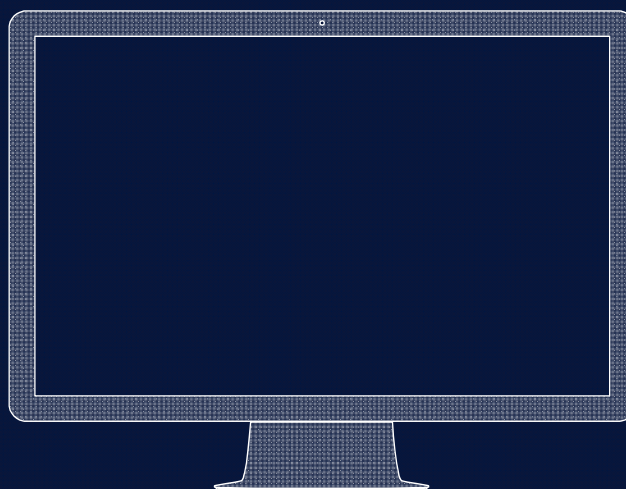
- Differentiate from self-punishing voices
- Differentiate from undesirable traits in your parents that you see in yourself
- Differentiate from the defensive reactions you had (as a child self) and self-soothing voices
- Formulating and learning to live by your own values – who do you want to be?



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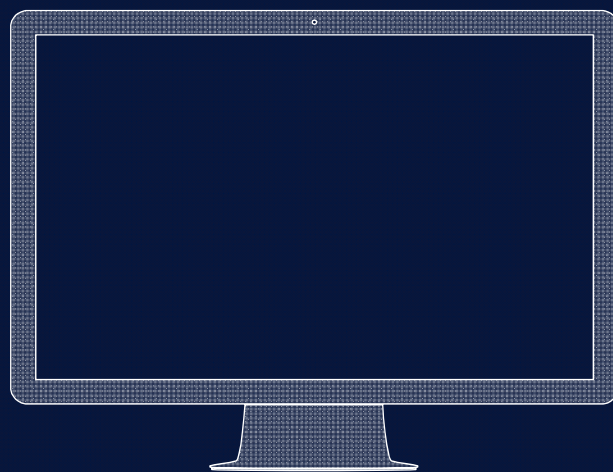
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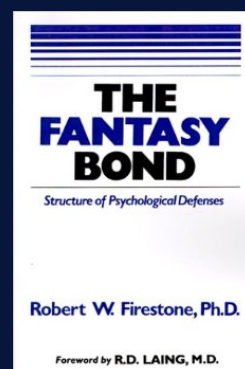
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Thank you!

Any questions?

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