

THE INTIMACY DANCE OF STINGERS AND CLINGERS

Dr. Patricia G. Webbink



**The Intimacy Dance
of
Stingers and Clingers**

by Patricia Webbink, Ph.D.

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Dr. Pat Webbink makes a useful and original contribution to the field of psychology. Her concepts go beyond the usual self-help literature to propose a broad framework that puts in perspective the overarching dynamics governing all intimate relationships. This clear and easy-to-read book transcends the often limiting stereotypes of gender differences in troubled relationships and offers a deeper and more accurate description as well as effective ways to heal relationship problems. Ever optimistic and wise, without being didactic, she opens the door towards creating fulfilling relationships and a balanced lifestyle. With humor, insight, and simplicity, Dr. Webbink revolutionizes our understanding of relationships. I recommend it!

-- Charles Whitfield, M.D.

Charles L. Whitfield, M.D. is a best-selling author in the field of psychological self-help (*Healing the Child Within*, 1987; *Boundaries and Relationships*, 1993; and *Not Crazy*, 2011).

This groundbreaking book helps people understand themselves and the way they relate to others. It also provides fresh insights for those looking to improve their relationships. Soon “clingers and stingers” will be household words and define relationships in a new way. This book gives hope to those entrenched in painful relationships by showing a way of breaking the chains of destructive behavior patterns. Hats off to Dr. Webbink for her brilliant and insightful work!

-- Helen Bonny, Ph.D.

Dr. Helen Bonny was a leading innovator in the field of music therapy and author of *Music and Your Mind* (Barcelona Press, 2004).

*Dedicated to my beloved son, Andrew, who has had helped me on
the theoretical aspect of this book since his middle-school days.
He is a constant inspiration for me.*

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Introduction

This book is a product of forty years in my practice of psychotherapy observing hundreds of clients. In case after case, I see clients, who for years have had relationship problems, make dramatic improvements. In this book, I propose a new way to understand the dynamics of intimate relationships so that the next dance you take may be one of harmony.

As you begin to understand the choreography of “clinger” and “stinger” patterns of behavior, you can become empowered to identify and understand dynamics in your relationships. You can better understand motivations for your behaviors and perceive the effects that your partner’s intimacy pattern has on you.

Years ago, a client left a draft copy of this manuscript on his bed stand. His wife found it, began reading, and could not put it down. Introduced to the book’s ideas and techniques, the couple began, for the first time, discussing their feelings. They were

amazed that they were able to repair their emotional relationship and, in addition, revive their sex life.

Because this approach has proven so effective in clients and workshop participants, I have the mission to share these insights and the tools that facilitate them with you. I want to help you discover your natural intimacy pattern and that of your partner, so that you can understand repetitive patterns in your life and create the kinds of relationships that you want.

Many of us feel that life is too busy for fruitless encounters or courtships that end in disaster or, at the very least, a waste of time. By examining the underlying pattern dynamics of your past and present relationships, you can learn to select potential mates by a process rather than trial and error. With a new understanding of yourself, you can recognize “automatic” responses and bring them under your control. Understanding clinger/stinger dynamics will give you the potential to save a troubled relationship or will give you the strength to leave an impossible one. You can also become

aware of your own intimacy needs and be empowered to create a harmonious partnership. You can transform your life.

A sequel to this book, *Stingers and Clingers in the Dance of Love: 8 Steps to Harmony in Relationships*, will be released in the near future.

Chapter One

Discover Your Pattern in the Dance of Intimacy

On the Dance Floor with April and Michael

April knows the bride. Michael knows the groom. Glancing at each other through the reception crowd, their eyes seem to say, “You are kind of cute, and it is a wedding, after all.” April watches Michael approach, weaving his way towards her with a composed stride. She hesitates before finding his eyes once more; somehow they seem to her brighter than all the rest. His eyes graze her bare shoulders, then slowly climb upwards towards her face. Against her better judgment, April allows herself to look deeper and longer, but abruptly looks away when she feels a stab of pain. Memories flash through her mind of the last six months during which she had endured the gradual loss of her most recent relationship.

Cutting through the ring of wary college friends encircling April, Michael greets her with an exaggerated bow, and then breaks into a wide smile as he gestures towards the dance floor.

April had sworn she wouldn't date for at least six more months, doing her best to focus on her daily routine: walk the dog, go to the gym, do work, cross museums off the "to do" list, do more work, dance with girlfriends . . . but no, not with men, not for a while. Yet, these sparkling eyes and goofy, gracious bow were now destroying her resolve. She reluctantly basks in Michael's warmth and his subtle cologne. He is leading—a relief after dealing with two other partners who had wandered around the dance floor like lost boys.

Guiding her into their next full turn, Michael feels the knots in April's back dissolve. He executes a practiced spinout and anticipates, waiting a few beats, the question that always came next: "How did you learn to dance so well?"

April's three closest friends stand nearby, quietly watching Michael as he deftly moves her across the floor. Midway through the song, Michelle, April's college roommate, observes with horror, "Oh no, here we go again!" All three friends suffered through April's long string of previous, disastrous relationships.

They had even adapted a title for the whole cycle: “The Ecstasy and the Agony.” Her last boyfriend, Joshua, had been just like Lee. Lee had been just like Joseph, Joseph like Tony, and Tony like Sam--her first love. Those first three wonderful months, her friends would be forced to hear endlessly about how “perfect” he was. A couple of weeks later, they might ask each other, “How did we miss this guy? He must be amazing!” Inevitably, however, there she would be--their beautiful blue-eyed friend, in tears on the couch, in tears in class, in tears and drunk after midnight, asking them each, in turn, “What went wrong?”

After Joshua, the three of them finally had their fill. During a five-hour intervention dinner in Cynthia’s apartment, they revealed that her nickname at the fraternity house was “the leech.” They reminded her of how, during the weeks after she had first met Joshua, she had lost herself in him. She forgot plans she made with friends, cancelled a ski trip, and sat home, instead, waiting for him to call all night. Michelle pointed out that she invariably bought a batch of wedding magazines only a few weeks

into each of her great romances; her friends expected her to rent a moving van after the second date. April tried to argue, but they had worn her down; she finally had to admit that she too quickly idolized each of the men she dated. Now, her friends watch helplessly as she relaxed in the arms of this new dark-haired man. They knew that the worship would begin anew.

Meanwhile, Michael's oldest friend, David, leans over to the best man and says, "Watch this, the 'Master of Disaster' is on the move." The title was well-deserved. In May, June, and July of his second year in a Chicago law firm, Michael had managed to disrupt the lives of three of the firm's most promising Ivy League female summer clerks. Somehow it didn't matter that they were at the top of their classes, tough as nails, and independently wealthy. If there was a vulnerable bone in her body, Michael found it and broke it with his erratic comings and goings. Dangerously charming, Michael was an addiction to these women. Whoever she was, within a week, she would be hooked and find herself religiously waiting for his call. He never meant to hurt anyone; it

bothered him when David told him about the firm's nickname for him. Michael defended himself, saying that he needed "space." He told his friends, "I like women and enjoy dating them, but I just haven't found the right one."

April and Michael dance to the next song, and the next, and the next. April's imagination runs wild. She believes she is falling in love; she wishes she could spend the rest of her life on the dance floor with Michael. She tells Michael what a wonderful time she is having. Fantasies of eloping float through her head, and she wonders if maybe she should move in with him first.

Michael, however, feels relieved when the band finished its final number. He has had enough for one night and remembers all the things he still has to do before bed. He has enjoyed himself and feels attracted to April, but beneath his charming exterior, he feels vaguely anxious about her movements towards him. He doubts he has adequate time for pursuing a relationship. When the music stops, he cuts their conversation short, explaining that he must leave. April suggests they exchange phone numbers and again

emphasizes how much she has enjoyed the evening. Michael reluctantly assents.

April goes home elated. She brushes away the insights gained from the interventions of her friends and is convinced that this time will be different. She cancels a dinner date with one of her friends and skips a racquetball lesson, so that she can stay home and fantasize about what she will do with Michael on their first date. Michael, on the other hand, deliberately keeps himself extra busy--spending long hours at work, swimming more laps than usual, and catching up on unread email. He wonders now and then if he should call April, but resolves that he is not ready for a relationship. He does not realize that by the time he feels ready, April will probably have moved on.

Does this sound familiar? Have you ever been part of an interaction like this one? Two people are attracted to each other and enjoy being together, but they are unable to make a

relationship work because of a mismatch--one person's neediness clashing with the other's fear.

Why is it so often the case that, "You only hurt the one you love," when everyone wants a fulfilling intimate relationship? Why is it such a struggle to initiate and maintain a good relationship? In this brief encounter between Michael and April, we see the basic steps of an intimacy dance that are repeated by couples in varying scenarios again and again. Yet, neither partner understands the other, and both are unaware of the impact that they have on one another.

The first step to improving your relationships is to discover your intimacy pattern in the dance of love. You can do just that by using the simple Clinger-Stinger (C-S) Scale below. It is a good idea that you rate the items in the C-S Scale so that your assessment is free from any bias that might result from getting acquainted with this book.

This easy-to-score measuring tool helps people describe aspects of themselves that relate to intimacy patterns. The items on

the scale were selected on the basis of my clinical experiences plus the findings in empirical studies.

After rating how true each statement is for you, calculate your index number and determine where you stand on the clinger-stinger continuum. Your position on the continuum will illustrate how moderate or extreme your intimacy pattern might be. You will discover, as you read this book, the full implications of your specific intimacy pattern--its benefits and pitfalls for personal growth and relationship dynamics.

A Word of Caution

Please do not use your score to fuel negative self-criticism. There are no “right” or “wrong” intimacy patterns. Understanding the clinger-stinger categories will assist you in getting what you want out of life and in relationships. It will help you realistically transcend the initial illusions of infatuation so that you can assess more what to expect from a partner--and what to expect from

yourself when in a relationship. An understanding of your personal pattern and that of others should be used as a tool for self-awareness, not for passing judgment on yourself or others.

The C-S Scale

For each of the statements below, please indicate how well they describe you.

Write the appropriate number by each statement.

This questionnaire is designed to determine how you may relate to other people in close social relationships. It was developed for personal self-assessment.

- 4 = This describes me very much.
- 3 = This describes me somewhat.
- 2 = This describes me only a little.
- 1 = This does not describe me at all.

1. ____ My partner tends to be in my thoughts most of the time.
2. ____ I am afraid of being alone.
3. ____ It is my highest priority in life to be in a long-term relationship.
4. ____ It is extremely important for me to live with a partner.
5. ____ When I am sad, I like to be with others and be comforted by them.
6. ____ I want a relationship that will last forever.

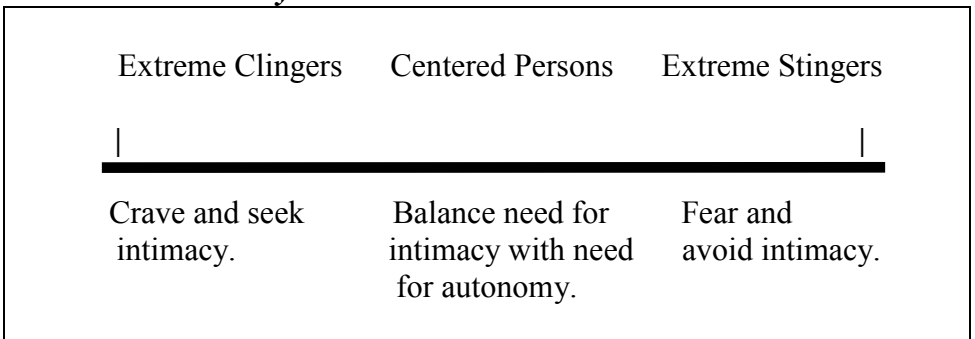
7. ____ Many of my partner's closest friends are also my closest friends.
8. ____ I feel good when someone "enters my world."
9. ____ I like to share my feelings with others.
10. ____ It is important to me to have close relationships.

Add up your answers from 1-10 and write the number here: ____

This last number is your Clinger/Stinger index number. Circle where you stand on the continuum below.

Clinger 40 38 36 34 32 30 28 26 24 22 20 18 16 14 12 10 **Stinger**

The Intimacy Line



As stated in my previous book, *The Power of the Eyes* (1986),

Although we are complex beings with many levels of mental, spiritual, and physical reality, only certain socially prescribed aspects of ourselves are exposed to each other's scrutiny. Generally, we keep close to us what is deep or dark or wounded or passionate. Our innermost thoughts and emotions are not casually displayed. However, there are usually some persons in our lives—"intimates" like family, lovers, close friends—with whom we can dare to be whole, to unveil our inner being, and to reveal our truest nature. And the most profound intimacy comes when they reveal their essence to us, as well (p. 83).

Each of us has within ourselves a particular intimacy pattern that surfaces when we engage in a close relationship. The potential range of these intimacy patterns is represented most accurately as a continuum (see "*The Intimacy Line*" above). The magnitude of a person's need to be close to others determines where she or he resides on this continuum.

On the far left are the extreme clingers--persons whose desire for intimacy and union is so great that they strive to merge completely with their partners. Moving gradually to the right on the Intimacy Line, we find those whose motivation to be intimate

is more moderate, yet still predominates. In the middle of the line, we find “centered” people whose desire for intimacy balances an equally strong desire for independence. Moving further to the right, away from the center, we are on the stinger side. Finally, at the far right of the continuum, we find the extreme stingers – those who avoid intimacy altogether and desire total independence.

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Chapter Two

Gotta Dance: Being a Clinger

In my 40 years of working with clients in psychotherapy, I have discovered that it is a conflict of “intimacy pattern” that is at the heart of many relationship struggles. A person’s intimacy is a distinctive pattern of behavior, thoughts, and emotions that emerges when he or she becomes involved in a close relationship. To a certain degree, most of us fall into one of two primary, categories: “clingers” or “stingers.” Those I call “clingers” share characteristics with April and crave closeness. Because of their strong desire for deep closeness, extreme clingers often lose their sense of self in their quest to become one with another person. Those I call “stingers” are like Michael and strive to avoid the entanglements of intimacy. Extreme stingers, often distance themselves from potential partners or end up pushing them away. When a stinger and a clinger enter into a long-term relationship together, after a period of time the stinger will often feel smothered or crowded and experience a desperate need for personal space,

while the clinger will often feel rejected and perceive such a partner as cold, uncaring, and distant.

The Clinger

As soon as her husband and children leave the house in the morning, Susan picks up the phone. She feels anxious about being alone, so she chats with friends and family members throughout the day to avoid feeling isolated. Susan loves to talk. She is also a sympathetic listener, which makes her a popular confidant. Her children bask in her affectionate and devoted attention.

Despite what many would consider a fulfilling life with family and friends, Susan rarely feels peaceful. Sometimes she gets so caught up in the lives of others that she forgets her own needs, however, when her husband Al comes home, her needs rush to the surface.

After the usual exchanges about their day during dinner, Al retreats behind his newspaper. Even though they conversed briefly while eating, Susan feels neglected and needs more. She wonders,

“Why doesn’t he want to spend time with me? Something must be wrong with me.” She attempts to be affectionate and initiate conversation, but her husband seems to be absorbed by the news, adding to her feelings of rejection.

Some nights, Susan begs him to put away his activities and focus his attention on her; other nights, her emotions dissolve into feelings of unmanageable frustration, because he does not provide the affection and deep conversation she so desperately craves. When Al rolls over after his usual quick kiss goodnight, she wonders if he is having an affair. Night after night, she has difficulty falling asleep, as she fights her insecurity and fear of abandonment.

Above all else, the need to be close to a partner, to share the deepest parts of oneself with him or her, to be part of a devoted, lasting companionship motivates clingers like Susan. They actively seek close relationships and affection. For them, physical and emotional intimacy is the essence of living. Clingers focus on creating intimacy, sometimes crowding and

overwhelming their partners. The more extreme the clinger, the more frequent the expression of affection and the more likely that such expression will spill into inappropriate boundary violations (e.g. expressing affection physically when the partner does not wish it).

The more extreme clingers feel painfully isolated and incomplete without closeness. When they lack intimacy and affection, they feel empty and depressed. These feelings debilitate clingers' motivation to pursue their life goals and often undermine their self-esteem.

Some clingers try to satisfy their need for closeness by creating networks of friends. Clingers often have closer friendships than stingers, not necessarily more friends, but deeper relationships with them because they share more intimately about themselves. They also devote much time and energy into cultivating and maintaining their friendships, and thus build a strong system of social support. If an intimate relationship fractures, clingers usually have an extensive supporting and

nurturing network. Extreme clingers, however, are likely to waste a lot of time and energy socializing with people who are truly not good for them. In this way, they undermine their ability to accomplish more valuable goals in life.

Other clingers may bury themselves in their work as a way of coping with being alone. Despite these efforts, clingers without a romantic partner may still struggle with feelings of isolation and incompleteness.

Many clingers have highly developed interpersonal skills and are sensitive, thoughtful, generous, and kind. They are often emotionally supportive of others and are thanked for being integral to others' successes. When these qualities do not divert into constant neediness and demands, clingers can make appealing romantic partners. It is unfortunate for such clingers, however, that their efforts to create and maintain a harmonious life for their partners often leave them with little energy for their own personal growth and the accomplishment of other life goals.

Settling for Less

Clingers often believe that a romantic relationship will make all the pieces of their life fall magically into place. Such clingers imagine that they will pursue other life goals once they begin a serious relationship. However, it is more often the case that clingers who are in a relationship keep postponing their aspirations year after year, allowing their careers or interests to take a back seat to the needs of their partner. Since clingers feel they need to hang onto their partner above all else, they often allow him or her to make all decisions. In this way they avoid “rocking the boat” such that they may maintain a secure relationship.



W. P. 11/11/11

Clingers often settle for unsatisfactory relationships, craving contact and connection intensely, and they feel that a hurtful relationship is still better than no relationship at all. When they suffer from low self-esteem along with a deep-seated fear of loneliness, clingers are likely to seek the immediate gratification of having someone, *anyone*, nearby. Believing they are fortunate to have a romantic relationship, they sometimes lack the initiative to insist on a more satisfying one. Clingers commonly make the mistake of trying to improve their relationships by giving more and more of themselves. Unfortunately, for example, when they are involved with a stinger, this sincere attempt at connection may make the clash of intimacy patterns greater.

A clinger's insecurity may also manifest itself in attempts to be in control in the relationship. In this way, the clinger tries to preserve a sense of self-worth, unconsciously compensating for feelings of dependency and vulnerability by attempting to take charge of the couple's interactions. However, the clinger's tendency to want to spend a lot of time with a partner is not

necessarily an attempt to control; it can be a way of expressing interest, caring or love. In any case, such behavior often makes the stinger want to run in the opposite direction.

Extreme Clingers

For many stingers, however, an evening of solitude at home may feel like a rare treat, whereas for an extreme clinger it can be a very difficult experience. Indeed, fear of being alone sometimes drives clingers to obsession or addiction. For extreme clingers, the need to merge is so overwhelming that they are unable to accommodate their partner's need for space. One extreme clinger went so far as to keep a small chair next to the toilet so that he could be with his spouse during the one time when most people expect complete privacy!

On the dance floor, an extreme clinger may make up for a lack of intimacy by dancing too close and lingering too long with a partner. In this circumstance, clinger becomes so deeply intimate that their dance partner becomes overwhelmed with the situation. This clinger smothers the partner to the point that the partner

retreats, sensing the inappropriateness of the situation. The clinger then feels rejected and doesn't understand what he or she did.

You can observe clinger-stinger dynamics on any dance floor, be it at a nightclub or at a wedding. You can notice how physically close the partners are and how long they stay together, both of which may correlate with their ability to sustain intimacy. The clinger is often very concerned with how other people perceive his or her dancing and whether he or she is accepted by others. This can really hamper the experience of dancing and is something important for clingers to work on. It is not easy to pretend that one not is a clinger, even if one tries to hide it.

Extreme clingers are easily manipulated because they are emotionally dependent on their partners. They may also become intensely jealous, imagining the loved one to be unfaithful. The fears and obsessions of a "pathological" clinger may drive them to stalk, injure, or even kill the one they love. Some relationships end when the partner must acquire a restraining order in order to protect themselves from harm of a pathological clinger.

Examples of extreme, pathological clingers are often depicted in popular films. In *Fatal Attraction*, the “other woman,” Alex Forrest (played by Glenn Close), will not let go of Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas), the married man who wants to end their brief affair. She spends her days following him, becoming so obsessed that when he tries to distance himself from her, she endeavors to murder him.

A similar pattern is seen in *Sleeping with the Enemy*, where Martin Burney (Patrick Bergin), a clinger, is an obsessively abusive husband. His wife, Laura Burney (Julia Roberts), lives in constant fear of his violence and waits for a chance to escape. Finally, she fakes her own death and flees to a new town with a new identity. When Martin finds out that his wife is not dead, he stops at nothing to find her and attempts to kill her.

The manipulations of an extreme clinger are humorously portrayed in the movie *The Cable Guy*. Chip (Jim Carrey), the cable guy, is obsessed with Steven Kovacs (Matthew Broderick), a man whose cable he has recently installed. As he concludes his

work at Steven's house, Chip casually asks him to make plans with him for the next day as if they were already friends. Steven, because he is a nice guy, goes out with Chip and tries to be friendly to appease him. In another scene, Steven checks his messages to discover that the cable guy has called him at least four times in the span of a few hours. Because Steven doesn't call him back right away, Chip jealously cuts his cable. In order to get his cable reinstalled, Steven has to agree to hang out with Chip the next night.

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Chapter Three

Dancing Optional: Being a Stinger

Let's take another look at Al and Susan, the married couple from Chapter Two, this time focusing on Al.

Al's first thoughts of the day are about work. While shaving in the morning, he plans his day and prepares for its challenges. It feels nice to have his family around him in the house, but he looks forward to the office, where he can settle in his desk chair, and accomplish the tasks he has set out to do. He prides himself on all that he can provide for his family now that he has risen in his field and has a higher salary and status.

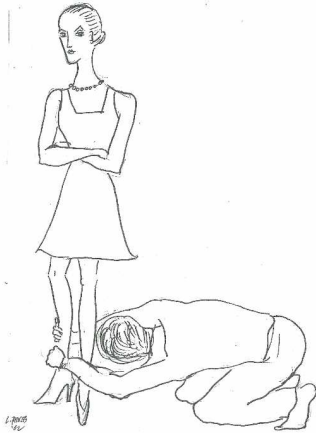
Al loves his wife, but it is difficult for him to express his feelings. When he comes home at night, he wants to be able to read the paper and go through his email. Susan's attempts to engage him in conversation are futile and annoy him. Al feels crowded, and the feeling increases as she becomes more strident in her attempts to gain his attention. Sometimes he responds harshly, but

Al believes that this is the only way to stop what he perceives as invasive behavior. He is more comfortable being alone or at work, where he doesn't have to deal with emotional demands. Although he used to enjoy sex in the early years of their relationship, he now tries to avoid it much of the time.

Al finds it much easier to express affection towards his children. He is more able to accept their simple needs and his responsibility to nurture them. They only demand his outward attention, but Susan seems to want something more. She seems to want to know his thoughts on everything, frequently asking that he express affection towards her. She becomes upset if she senses he is hiding something. Al feels like Susan is trying to possess, control and invade him, and that he must battle to defend his space.

Behind Walls

In order to cope with the anxiety that arises when they are in intimate situations, stingers often distance themselves from their



inner lives. While clingers find it easy to talk about their feelings, stingers have trouble expressing them. Stingers feel too vulnerable, intimidated, and ashamed to be so candid about their innermost emotions. They believe that

emotions are private and should not be shared.

As a relationship continues, stingers may need love at their deepest levels, but they often feel too vulnerable to express it. They are not likely to put loving feelings into words or behavior. A hallmark of stingers is the preference for communicating love through helpful actions, rather than affection. If something is broken, they will fix it; if there is a physical emergency, they will be there immediately. But clinger partners, as in *Fiddler on the Roof*, will still wonder, “But do you love me?” The words, the looks, the touch, those little something extras embodying tenderness that clingers treasure are just not there. When one

clinger spoke of the day her stinger companion finally proclaimed his love for her in a skyscraper hotel, she said, “I thought the roof would cave in, because he had never said those words before. I was afraid he never would!”

When it comes to their relationship with pets or children, stingers may allow their affectionate side to emerge. There is nothing more frustrating to a clinger than to see his or her stinger partner fawning over a child or the family pet--speaking in baby talk, hugging, stroking, grooming! When stingers find it difficult to express loving feelings to their romantic partners, they can be affectionate to animals because they pose no emotional threat. Stingers can give unabashedly to a pet with no fear of being consumed. There is no need to fear being weak or dependent; a pet owner is in a position of higher authority in relation to the pet. Similar displays of affection may also manifest between stingers and young children.

Stingers feel that being intimate gives another person control over them. They usually perceive dependency as a

weakness and assume that people will inflict emotional pain if they spot vulnerability. The stingers' primary concern is to maintain a sense of control, and they check vigilantly for any chinks in their armor.

When stingers have problems in relationships, they often say that they feel owned, controlled, caged, smothered, or suffocated. Some go as far to say that they are feeling devoured or engulfed by their partner. Except for the period of initial infatuation, when a relationship is new and less threatening, stingers find it difficult to be close to another. If they perceive that their protective wall is at risk of being breached, they may lash out and sabotage the relationship to prevent their deepest fear from being realized.

Being in a relationship usually requires some moments of compromise. At times, the needs of the individual are sacrificed for the unity of the relationship to succeed. For stingers, though, sustaining a relationship feels like more than the occasional

compromise. They feel they will eventually be overwhelmed by the emotional requirements of another.

The stinger is like a snapping turtle. With its shell, it is constantly striving to protect it from engulfment. While the shell serves well as protection, it prevents the turtle from being able to move freely and reach out with openness. The shell is also a weapon; its hard surface is able to hurt others. Stingers snap with cold, stinging comments; these are also effective at keeping people at a distance.

Many stingers try to obtain validation through their work and other activities, rather than through interpersonal relationships. They are often workaholics and loners, who spend long hours in front of computers or engaging in other solitary projects. A classic stinger is an achievement-oriented person who is distant and businesslike; he or she uses work and other activities to avoid intimacy. The stinger's underlying fear of closeness, especially when combined with workaholic tendencies, makes it difficult for her/him to see relationships as anything more than a social

obligation or, at best, a source of entertainment when solitary occupations become boring. Unable to relish the joys of intimate companionship, stingers may go through the motions at a social gathering, or be helpful to their friends. Their inner world, however, feels stiff, tense, and unable to flow with these simple pleasures.

Moderate stingers may have many casual acquaintances, but no intimate friends. Even in their close friendships, stingers are far less likely to be self-disclosing and are more emotionally guarded than clingers. The extreme stinger may depend exclusively on one friend for emotional support. Thus, he or she is unlikely to have a viable support system in times of crisis. The more centered stingers, however, can be loyal, patient, and faithful to friends. In the context of a non-romantic--and thus, less threatening--relationship, they can even be outgoing, caring, and sensitive. Because a friendship does not require the deeper intimacies of a lover-relationship, it feels safer. It is easier to keep a friend at arm's length, and most friends do not demand intimate

discourse anyway as they may feel it is none of their business.

This is perfect for the stinger!

Sam and John have been friends for many years. Sam, a stinger, hardly ever calls John. John, a clinger, has learned to accept that Sam cares deeply about him but is never going to be the one to call. Years before, they had lived together very happily. Sam had moved out of town to get married. When John suffered from a critical illness, out of all of his friends, it was Sam who offered to fly across the country, take time off from work, and come to care for him. Their friendship has lasted for many years and has survived many trials in each of their lives.

Sam rarely reaches out and calls John, but when John really needs him, Sam is there. Situations that require support seem to be the key, rather than the relationship itself. Sam is able to offer support to John because of a problem or issue, and John doesn't demand affection.

It's important to note, however, that the extreme stingers' coolness and unemotional priorities can be the undoing of

friendships. In case after case, I observe that when close, caring attention is needed by a friend or lover, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for the extreme stinger to help.

Sue and Joan had been good friends for a long time. When Sue became pregnant, she asked Joan to be her birthing coach. Joan, an artist who happened to be a stinger, accepted. During labor, however, Joan left in the middle of Sue's painful contractions to go to an art show. It took Sue a long time to tell Joan how hurt and angry she felt. When she did, Joan was defensive and made excuses for her untimely departure. She was unable to recognize or acknowledge the depth of pain that her abandonment had caused. After this confrontation, the two women drifted apart. Although the friendship did not formally end, they eventually lost contact with each other.

There are those who admire stingers' autonomy and their respect for other people's boundaries or personal space. Stingers try not to intrude on the private affairs of others, and expect the same from those around them. However, extreme stingers can

appear to be arrogant and insensitive to others' needs. These stinging qualities are often unintentional and motivated by unconscious fears. Among acquaintances, many stingers are sociable people whom others like to be around because of their self-assurance and undemanding nature.

Extreme Stingers

Not surprisingly, Hollywood exploits the character of the stinger on-screen in a plethora of movies. Actor Sir Anthony Hopkins has excelled at portraying extreme stingers, for example, as the butler in *Remains of the Day* (1993).

In *Remains of the Day*, James Stevens (Anthony Hopkins), the butler, falls in love with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton (Emma Thompson). Both are stingers, but Stevens' reserve and fear of intimacy is far more intense than hers. She tries everything short of direct confrontation to encourage open communication with him. Beneath the veneer of their social position and British reserve, it becomes evident that they really do love one another.

However, his formality, distance, and habit of hiding behind a mask of manners and decorum, finally drives her to leave. She marries a man whom she loves far less but who responds to her need for a fuller relationship. Stevens and Miss Kenton never reveal to each other their true feelings. They go on leading separate lives while still secretly loving one another.

Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn), the main character in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), is another example of an extreme stinger. She is so threatened by becoming too close with another, that she even hesitates in creating a lasting connection with her pet. She refuses to name him and simply calls him "Cat."

In order to maintain her status of a popular socialite, Holly is adept at giving each male acquaintance the feeling that she adores him and loves spending time with him. However, when her friendship with Paul Varjak (George Peppard) introduces real and meaningful emotions, she does everything in her power to avoid it. She goes so far as to become engaged to another man. Paul confronts her and explains how she avoids intimacy with an

eloquent description of her stinger personality. Holly finally comes to realize that she cannot live without Paul. She is able to let go of her emotional defenses and discovers how wonderful intimacy can be. For many stingers, however, it is often too late by the time they are ready to open up; their partner has given up and moved on.

In the movie, *Something's Gotta Give* (2003), 63-year-old Harry Sanborn (Jack Nicholson) is a playboy, womanizer, music label executive, who learns a little lesson about love in his later years. He has a reputation for dating women a third his age. He takes Marin (Amanda Peet), his latest fling, to her mother Erica's beach house, where he suffers a heart attack and is left in the care of Erica (Dianne Keaton).

Both Harry and Erica are stingers. Erica is a celebrated playwright who creates romantic scripts. She has been alone for a long time and has not kissed a man in many years. Though Erica has not allowed herself to fall in love in a long time, she falls prey to Harry's charm. Harry, himself, is befuddled, as he has never let

himself truly fall in love with anyone either; he has only used women. Erica is less of a stinger than Harry and falls in love with him completely. Harry, on the other hand, has never dated anyone over the age of thirty; he does not grasp the idea of commitment, nor does he want to.

There is a charming scene where Harry and Erica are chatting online. Harry initially types on the computer, "I miss you," but then erases the words and types something else more superficial. Erica had, in fact, hoped for that response in which he expresses his longing for her; she never gets it.

After having a near death experience, Harry has a different perspective on life. He re-visits all of his past girlfriends. Many of them shut the door immediately and will not even speak with him. He visits Marin, who is now pregnant; she introduces him to her young husband. Harry asks about her mother, and Marin says that she is in Paris, celebrating her birthday. Harry remembers plans he once made with Erica: if they still knew each other after six months, they would go to Paris together to celebrate their birthdays

together. Harry takes off to Paris and finds her sitting in a café. He tells Erica about how he visited all of his ex-girlfriends and reflected on his life.

In the middle of their intense conversation, Julian Mercer (Keanu Reeves), a young doctor who has been smitten with Erica, re-joins her at the table. Julian invites Harry to stay for dinner with them, and Harry, of course, is mortified. He has lost his true love. He says farewell to them as they take off. We are transported to a scene where Harry is standing on a bridge in Paris; he is in tears, saying that he now is “the female.” He finally recognizes that she is the love of his life, and he has lost her.

The story has not ended, however. Julian sees that Erica is still in love with Harry, and he releases her. In a beautifully romantic scene, Harry and Erica profess their love of each other. These two singers are transformed by the loss of each other. Unlike many unlucky singers, they are given a second chance.

Sexual Illusions

The bedroom is sometimes the only place where stingers shed their usual restraint. Sex can be their only means of close communication. They pride themselves on their prowess as lovers. However, their contrasting inability to communicate in any other way can be baffling and extremely frustrating for their partners. Stingers' enthusiasm for sexual expression, especially in the beginning of a relationship, often misleads their partners into believing that the stinger will be readily available on an emotional level as well. As the relationship progresses and such stingers become alarmed by their partners' expectations for emotional closeness, their fear of even sexual intimacy increases until it becomes overwhelming. To control their anxiety as the relationship progresses, such stingers may eventually avoid sex.

Like sexuality, dancing is another way that stingers might express intimacy. While on the dance floor, the stinger is often able to be very close and loving, holding the partner tight, appearing to be very receptive and open. As in the example of

April and Michael in the opening of this chapter, one can easily be deluded by a stinger's dancing behavior, thinking that there is a future in the relationship when there isn't. As in the act of lovemaking, when stingers might be able to shout out, "I love you!" then afterwards act as though nothing happened, the same can occur with dancing. The stinger can be free in the moments on the dance floor in public, yet afterwards, act as though it did not happen. The stinger is unable to acknowledge the level of intimacy that was previously there.

More extreme stingers cannot stay with a dance partner very long, although they can be warm and supportive when they are dancing. The partner of the stinger may be shocked by the sudden departure that does not fit with the apparent intimacy of the situation. Perhaps some stingers position themselves during sexual intercourse, such that they are able to avoid eye contact. This can be another means of avoiding intimacy.

Although stingers find it difficult to express affection, many do yearn for satisfying relationships, albeit inwardly. The

problem is that as soon as a relationship progresses from flirtation and attraction to love and intimacy, stingers change from being warm and open to being uneasy and guarded. They may crave the attention and affection that they receive in a relationship, but they are afraid of giving it themselves. The extreme stinger may depend exclusively on one friend for emotional support. Thus, he or she is unlikely to have a viable support system in times of crisis. Extreme stingers could be outgoing and talkative but still be unwilling to reveal insecurities about themselves or problems in their lives. These inner barriers, usually the result of past traumas or problematic relationships early in life, prevent the stinger from engaging fully in a relationship. Unconscious fears of becoming vulnerable to emotional pain or to being controlled by another can cause them to push away otherwise compatible partners and friends.

Commitment and Intimacy: An Inverse Relationship

Despite their fears, most stingers feel some need for a relationship in their lives. Being attracted to someone can be such a

powerful experience for the stinger that it leads to commitment. However, once stingers have attained the object of their desire and taken the leap into a committed relationship, their subconscious fears emerge. They start inventing ways of being emotionally unavailable to their partner. Thus, for stingers, there is an inverse relationship between commitment and intimacy. The greater the commitment, the less likely they are to be emotionally and even sexually available to their partner. The phrase “the honeymoon is over,” aptly describes stinger avoidance behavior. An intensely sexual premarital relationship begins to wane after the marriage ceremony and honeymoon. This, of course, can apply to non-marital relationships when the stinger moves in with his or her partner or spends regular time with the partner.

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Chapter Four

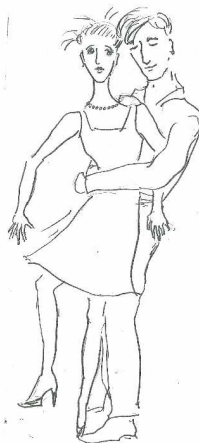
Fancy Footwork

Perhaps you believe you have finally found the perfect partner. Perhaps you have already exchanged messages, phone calls, and shared a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. Yet on that very first evening when your potential partner comes over for dinner, should you then place the C-S test before him or her? Probably not! At times like this, asking someone to take the C-S test may be inappropriate or impossible. This final chapter assists you to identify intimacy patterns without administering this test. Moreover, the concepts presented here will help you understand how your *own* personal intimacy pattern is likely to play out when you get close to that someone special.

Personal Boundaries

In the dance of love, as partners become closer, the risk of losing balance and stumbling multiplies. As someone enters your

most intimate personal spaces, they may stir within you your deepest psychological dynamics. Getting close to another human being is a challenge in managing personal boundaries.



Simply put, boundaries define personal space. You can get a sense of how guarded you are with personal space by answering the following questions: When living with someone, do you prefer to have a your own room? Do you at times prefer to be alone to sleep, relax, pursue hobbies, work? Or, is your major goal togetherness? Do you prefer to merge finances, to keep them distinct, or to have some shared accounts and some separate?

Boundary issues get increasingly more complex as we explore their mental, emotional and spiritual implications. Do you find yourself constantly worrying about the people you love, feeling somehow responsible when something goes wrong in their lives? Or, do you help when asked and then feel at ease; you

respect your partner's right to live her or his own life and make her or his own mistakes? Are you able to maintain a feeling of connection with your loved ones despite physical distance between you? Are you overly sensitive to the emotional states of others to the point of feeling disrupted by them? Or, do you feel isolated or disconnected from others?

In his comprehensive book, *Boundaries and Relationships* (1993), Dr. Charles Whitfield defines boundaries as “where I and my physical and psychological space end and where you and yours begin.” He points out that setting certain “healthy” limits helps to prevent “unnecessary pain and suffering.” When we respect boundaries, we “protect and maintain” our integrity and well-being, and that of our partner. This is the ideal towards which we all need to strive--that is, to be “centered,” instead of stingers or clingers.

Applying Dr. Whitfield's analysis within our framework of intimacy patterns, we discover that a centered couple provides a model for healthy boundaries and a balanced relationship. Respect

for oneself and respect for another guides a successful relationship between two centered persons. Centered partners do not cross the line by the uninvited invasion of personal space; they do not harm the relationship with mistreatment, abuse, or chronic self-sacrifice. Centered partners have the ability to keep perspective in the midst of emotion and are always wary of where the lines are drawn.

Although maintaining a certain amount of personal space is part of balanced living, stingers are found to be overly protective when it comes to boundaries. Indeed, they tend to spend as much time as possible unconsciously “hiding out,” whether it be in an isolated room of the household, behind a newspaper, in front of the television, glued to the computer, biking fifty miles, or engaged in a solitary activity. In a sense, stingers drop out of the partnership.

There is, however, a subset of stingers who are generally not adept at keeping detached. These stingers are unable to set limits. The root of this anomaly is found in their inability to express feelings. Locked in an invisible prison of inner isolation, they walk through life without any of the enjoyment that might

come from free flowing give-and-take or the concurrent gifts of companionship. They do what is asked of them-- coolly and detached, of course, but they do it. When demands become too much, stingers are likely to become irritable and lash out with impatience and crankiness rather than say, "I am tired and need to get some rest and be alone."

While these are instances of stingers, the more common condition is that of *clingers*--those who do whatever the partner requests, no matter the personal cost. They will do anything to keep the relationship and do not wish to rock the boat by asking for consideration of their own needs. Their boundaries tend to be too malleable and, in the most extreme cases, non-existent. It is difficult for them to sense where one person's personal space ends and the other's begins. Extreme clingers are needy; they desire to merge with or become one with a partner. They want their partners to become part of them and want to involve themselves in every aspect of their partners' lives. They do not want any boundaries

separating them from their partners, as is often expressed in their need for closeness.

Stingers tend to be very careful about intruding on another person's affairs. They maintain a distance between themselves and others. They are especially wary and feel uncomfortable when their partners overstep boundaries. If boundaries are not rigid and not clearly defined up front, they threaten being overwhelmed, invaded, hurt, or possessed.

In contrast, a clinger is likely to give advice and pry into another person's personal life, causing a partner to feel invaded. Such clingers also expect this type of behavior from their partners. This is a form of *codependency*, a connection between two people with psychological boundaries that are inadequate or non-existent (Beattie, 2008). Some clingers obsess over the problems of someone they love and habitually worry about them. They feel responsible for them, try to protect or try to change them, and may even blame their partner for their own unhappiness. As sung in the Broadway musical, *No, No, Nanette* (1940), "I want to be happy

but I can't be happy until I make you happy too." (Lyricist Vincent Youmans).

It is possible for codependent stingers to switch in and out of their usual state of rigid boundaries into the opposite state. This "out of character" change may occur in a time of severe crisis. Codependent clingers, similarly in a crisis, may suddenly create a wall or otherwise harden their boundaries, retreating behind them for protection. The implications for identifying intimacy patterns are clear, but a superficial snapshot at any given time may render a false reading. For example, nearly everyone thinks they want a relationship. A stinger may say, "I want to get married and have children," however, the stinger is not willing to do what is necessary to sustain relationships. So, they emulate the behaviors that make them seem more clinger-type, but the reality is that they will not make the accommodations for a successful and mutual relationship.

Tip!

We must determine an individual's position on the Intimacy Line by examining boundary-related behaviors *over time*. This is important to identify a valid clinger or stinger pattern accurately.

Affection and the Communication of Feelings

Are you affectionate?

In the dance of intimacy, clingers and centered persons generally tell their partners how they feel and can express their love openly with touch. Clingers actively seek close relationships and affection. For them, physical and emotional intimacy is the essence of living. The more extreme the clinger, the more frequent the expression of affection and the more likely that such expression will spill into inappropriate boundary violations (e.g. expressing affection physically when the partner does not wish it). Centered persons are sensitive to their partners' needs and wishes for "space," as well as the appropriateness of the time and place.

When trying to gauge someone's intimacy pattern according to how much they express affection, timing is critical. At the beginning of a relationship, when they are on the chase and less consumed with fear, stingers are warmer and more open. At this time, stingers are more able to respect boundaries and be more independent. When stingers first fall in love, they do not appear to be afraid of intimacy or displays of affection; the uninformed clinger, unfortunately, is given the wrong impression. During the "chase phase," where they are actively trying to snag their partner, stingers might behave romantically, express affection, and focus intently on their partner. Stingers may behave flirtatiously, acting as if they yearn for closeness, especially when the object of their affection appears hard to get. When their overtures are consistently met with positive responses and the relationship is "in the bag," however, stingers are likely to change and appear uncaring, distant or reserved. Perhaps it was a clinger involved with a stinger who coined the phrase: "the honeymoon phase is over."

Look at the case of Cecelia, who is a stinger, and observe how she is able to compartmentalize and shut out her feelings.

Cecelia is married and having an affair with Tim, a clinger, who is also married. While Cecelia has no problem coming home after a liaison and putting on a facade for her husband and children, acting as if nothing is going on, Tim is tortured by the separation from Cecelia, frets about the dual life he leads, and does not present the same nonchalant mask to his wife and children. Each morning, Cecilia talks passionately with Tim on the phone and then returns to the rest of her day with remarkable ease. Tim is not able to compartmentalize as she does . He cannot get Cecilia out of his mind. Moreover, he has not made love to his wife in a long time, as he feels that he is really in love with Cecelia.

Often during these morning calls, Tim senses that Cecelia's attention drifts away from him, even before the conversation ends. She has already begun the process of tucking away her feelings: it is as if "she stuffs him into a drawer" and

will let her feelings out again only when they speak the next morning or see one another in secret.

Cecelia has not been close with her husband for quite some time. Having an affair with a married man allows her to express her passionate side without a real commitment. There is little or no chance that the affair will evolve into a residing relationship where they live with one another. Daily intrusions on her personal space would cause her to withdraw, as she has with her husband.

As we have seen, clingers and stingers express affection in completely different ways. Clingers tend to be more open and vulnerable, while stingers are more private and self-protective. Stingers might express their need for closeness through some form of artistic expression, such as writing, painting, or photography, where they are able to reveal themselves in a more detached way. The solitude and task-orientation of the stinger pattern can contribute to a life in the creative arts, in contrast to the sociable, people orientation of the clinger pattern. It is not that stingers are

more artistic than clingers, but rather, they express their creativity in different ways. A stinger poet may express desire for closeness and love through beautiful poetry on paper. A clinger, on the other hand, would probably share those feelings more directly through conversation and contact. Since relating to people is a clinger's top priority, it is quite difficult for them to withdraw into solitary arts.

Sexuality

There is an old saying familiar to many women that the only time you have a man's full attention is in those moments immediately before and during sex. This observation is apt for stingers; the pleasure of sex sometimes surpasses their rigid boundaries. Making love may be the only time stingers express verbal and physical affection and allow for closeness and interdependency. Therefore, it is easy to see how sex might become addictive for partners in the stinger-clinger dance.

For many stingers, especially those who are just starting a new relationship, making love may be the only setting where they

free their inhibitions and allow their walls to be permeated. Clingers, who are partnered with stingers, are often frustrated by the lack of affection in words and touch. Sex is one of the few times they get the reassurance and physical closeness they crave.

The stinger is usually focused on sexual prowess as it relates to control over his or her lover. Being in control feels safer. Stingers also tend to be ardent, active lovers. While many stingers might become annoyed at always having to initiate sex, it nevertheless provides a sense of achievement--the legendary "notch on the bedpost." However, threatened by the intimacy of the situation, the stinger may have a "hit-it-and-quit-it" attitude and leave the partner's bed immediately after sex. The clinger lover will, of course, be disappointed by this, for he or she would relish the closeness of cuddling in bed after making love.

In the mid-1980s, before the prevalence of AIDS, Gregory had many lovers and loved to brag about his sexual prowess. He seduced many women by describing, in detail, the sexual delights

that were in store for them. By any standard, he was not classically “handsome,” yet he made up for that with his ability to flirt and please women sexually. By making sex an art form, Gregory successfully maintained several women as lovers, all simultaneously and without commitment to any one of them.

As a stinger, Gregory felt in control when he made love. However, he held no real emotional ties to anyone—not even family members—and spent the better part of his life, then and now, more or less by himself.

Long-term sexual relationships are perilous to stingers. Sexual encounters with the same person over time may prompt a fear of engulfment. The ongoing nature of same relationships, combined with the intense intimacy of sex, increases the stinger’s anxiety. At some point, the anxiety reaches unbearable levels. Like prey stalked by a lion, the fight or flight response takes over. They feel threatened, as if they are losing control and their individuality. This sets off the stingers’ inner emotional alarms.

Often, stingers will react to the perceived threat by withdrawing sexually. In a stinger-clinger relationship, this initiates a downward spiral. The stinger's retreat stirs more emotional demands and evokes cries for reassurance from the clinger partner. The clinger increases expression of her/his need for love and appears as an even greater threat to the stinger, who withdraws further.

Clingers, while sometimes passive in regards to sex, nevertheless are likely to plan and orchestrate grand attempts at intimacy. They, for example, may set up a "love nest" in the bedroom, cook a romantic dinner, or wear a sexy outfit. Of course, these efforts are often met with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm by a stinger partner.

After many calls and e-mails, Marie finally arranges a baby-sitter for her children in an effort to get some private time with her partner, Sean. On their weekend getaway, however, Sean spends their time alone exploring the hotel's 300-channel satellite

TV system. This toy takes precedence over the opportunity to make love. When Marie suggests that Sean spend the time with her and not with the TV, he laughs and continues flipping through the channels. Marie feels hurt and rejected; she feels that she has wasted valuable energy arranging their private getaway. Sean, upon noticing her expression, claims that there has been a misunderstanding; he was just kidding, he assures her. Yet when Sean reaches for Marie, she recoils.

Still, though, Marie desperately desires intimacy. When it is time for bed, this seems to her the final opportunity. Her partner follows her into the bedroom, turns on the television again, and immediately falls asleep. This was only one of a long series of disappointments for this clinger in her relationship with her husband.

An extreme stinger might go so far as to ignore her/his partner for days after an intense sexual experience. Indeed, some stingers become verbally abusive after sex. This is incomprehensible to the clinger. When this extreme behavior

occurs, the clinger feels punished for intimacy and may become phobic about sex or shows of affection, feeling inadequate, blaming him/herself, and fearing rejection, abuse, or withdrawal.

Withdrawal from sexual interaction often has little impact on the stinger's sense of self-worth. With clingers, it is just the opposite. They are likely to wonder, "What is wrong with me?" or "Is she or he having an affair?" A clinger's self-image and self-confidence are fragile elements that are easily eroded since they are dependent heavily on the approval of others. Clingers with no insight into the root causes of stinger behavior assume they are being rejected sexually because they are unattractive or sexually inept or, perhaps, that there is a better lover waiting somewhere.

If it weren't for sex, Sally and Joe would be utterly incompatible. There was such sexual chemistry between them that they had a hard time keeping out of bed. In a few instances, they achieved a rare form of orgasm in which they felt as one, neither of them knowing where one body began and where the other ended

and unaware of who was giving to whom. This incidence of total sexual union is rare and, for most, non-existent.

Immediately after sharing one of these experiences of “total orgasm,” Sally (the stinger) gets up and starts washing the dishes left in the sink, because neither could wait to make love after their meal. Joe (the clinger), however, lays paralyzed and incredulous to see that Sally could leave his side immediately after such an intense experience. Joe wants to savor the intimacy and wants to linger in bed, to cuddle, to enjoy the sensual moments of touch. Sally just rolls out of bed as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

Some stingers never actually get into the bedroom. They are riddled with fear—fear that emerges as uncertainty. “Should I make love to this person? There might be somebody better, someone with less drama, or someone older, younger, more attractive, smarter, not as intelligent, skinnier, with more meat on his/her bones?” The permutations are endless, because the

rationalization process serves as a protective mechanism. These stingers truly believe in their excuses right up to when they are faced with a loss, and even then, they may fail to question their beliefs.

Centered persons delight in the intense closeness of sexuality, because they are self-confident and loving partners. For them, sexuality is an expression of love between two equal, consenting adults who rightfully respect each other. Sex is not “required”; it is a treat. It is two people who delight in the mutuality of giving and receiving pleasure. The centered person is able to move into that place of deep merging with another and then re-emerge with her or his sense of individuality intact. He or she is not threatened, but affected by the opening of personal boundaries that she or he has just experienced.

Reactions to Conflict

Extreme clingers and stingers can sabotage intimacy with missteps and missed cues. Stingers tend to withdraw when there is

conflict; clingers are more likely to appease. In a conflict between the two, as the stinger withdraws, the clinger tries harder and harder to reconcile. Unfortunately, the clinger's efforts to alleviate tension between them might only push the stinger farther away. As one clinger eloquently expressed to her stinger lover:

I was giving you all the emotion and love and attention that I wanted from you...and when you rejected my behavior, I tried harder and only worsened the situation, losing myself in a sea of confusion and anguish. I was trying to do or say anything to hang onto the concept of you and me--forever in blissful companionship, and, yes, love. I now see how impossible it was. The fear of losing you was so overpowering that I stopped believing in myself . . . I stopped listening to myself, my emotions, my feelings, and my thoughts. So great was my fear of doing something that would make you angry, I started to second guess you and try to tell you the things you wanted to hear.

Stingers use various ways to avoid conflict. One method is simply the 'head-in-the-sand' approach, in which the stinger purposefully remains blissfully ignorant of the situation. Another way is to respond to the clinger's emotional expressions with silence. In turn, the clinger will probably react with intensified emotion and immense frustration.

Conflict is not easy or comfortable for anyone. However, the centered person recognizes that no two people will agree on everything all the time. He or she neither denies conflict nor feels overly threatened by it. A centered person considers conflict an opportunity to negotiate differences that may have been simmering beneath the surface for a while. And while resolution of the conflict is ideal, acceptance of certain differences may be required and compromises necessary. Open communication is vital. A centered person understands that it is the process of respectful communication rather than the actual resolution that is the most critical for the dance.

Anger

The way anger is expressed varies between the clinger and stinger. In many cases, those who tend to vent a lot of anger are likely to be clingers. Conversely, those who are more indirect about anger are likely to be stingers. In a codependent clinger/stinger relationship, the clinger may rant and rave about

how victimized she or he is and how the stinger is responsible for all her or his pain. This outcry might be met with silence, that is, with no acknowledgment of the other person's feelings. In contrast, the stinger may indirectly do something that is designed to hurt their partner. The stinger refuses to take any responsibility for her or his passive aggressive actions.

As long as the stinger does not acknowledge anger, she or he must let it out indirectly. Stinger attacks may appear to be calculated and ruthless, and yet, stingers often are not aware of subconscious anger and also the impact that it has on the other person. The stinger will thus take no responsibility for their punitive or thoughtless behavior. For example, a stinger woman cut down her husband's prized cherry trees while gardening. When she was confronted about it, she only said that she wanted to make room for sunshine. In another case, a stinger mother was hospitalized for a week before she called her daughter to inform her. She explained that she knew how busy her daughter was and

did not want to disturb her. Needless to say, the daughter was furious.

The stinger can use anger as a way of avoiding intimacy; the clinger can use it to fuel a sense of entitlement. As the cognitive psychologist, Albert Ellis, would say, this sense of entitlement is an instance of “MUSTurbation”--“You, you louse, must treat me well or you’re worthless and deserve to roast in hell” (Ellis quoted in Mishlove, 2010). When the clinger expresses anger, the stinger feels endangered and withdraws, so as to protect her or himself from attack.

Sometimes the withdrawal of the stinger rouses so much anger in the clinger, that she or he becomes violent or verbally abusive. Of course, such extremes of expression and cruelty only push the stinger further away. So, invariably, the cycle continues. In order for the clinger to calm down, the stinger needs to reach out in a positive manner. This, of course, is the last thing a stinger is inclined to do.

The centered person treats anger as she or he treats other emotions: as a feeling that conveys a message. Anger is a powerful emotion that says, "Something has got to give here." The centered person will take a few deep breaths and perhaps some time alone before blurting or bellowing. A centered person has a sense of why he or she is feeling angry and can plan a constructive way to discuss what is going on. She or he may even decide that a change in her or his own attitude is required. No one should deny anger; the skill is in channeling and expressing it in a way that does not cast blame or hurt the other. This process requires self-awareness, self-discipline, and patience. It also requires both self-love and respect for the partner.

Jealousy

Due to their insecurity, clingers tend to be jealous and possessive. Strangely enough, some stingers appear this way at times as well. Stingers often assure themselves and their partners that they are not the jealous type. Admitting the very human emotion of jealousy would reveal how much their partner truly

means to them. Such disquieting feelings are at odds with the stinger façade of invulnerability and control. Moreover, feeling jealous also means the stinger requires reciprocal fidelity from his or her partner. The stinger, theoretically at least, does not want to put chains on his or her partner lest that partner reciprocates with these demands. If they are able to, they just cope by hiding their feelings.

When one stinger's marriage became unworkable, she finally had to admit her jealousy.

Alice's husband tells her that he is in love with her best friend, Jenna. Alice, a stinger, magnanimously insists this does not bother her and, shockingly, gives her husband permission to sleep with Jenna. He naïvely believes her and pursues the new relationship. Meanwhile, Alice does everything in her power to woo her husband away from Jenna, even using her children as a weapon—something that Jenna cannot compete with. Eventually, Alice admits to herself that she is jealous. She becomes openly

upset with her husband's infidelity and leaves him, taking the children.

Centered persons deal with jealousy by addressing the root causes through self-reflection. This kind of self-analysis often reveals that the feelings arise out of personal insecurity or the sense that someone outside of the relationship is getting something that you want and are not getting.

With respect to insecurity, the centered person can explore the source of her or his feelings and work on rebuilding self-confidence. To address unmet needs, the centered person can ask their partner for what they are lacking. Of course, if the partner is in fact having an affair or offering affection to others, the centered person is able to act on her or his values about monogamy and loyalty rationally. No one can truly “possess” another, but if monogamy is important, centered people can end the relationship without questioning their own self-worth. Then again, there are

those precious few who do not mind that their lover has another partner.

The centered person's goal is to create a schedule that meets the needs of self, friends, family, and lovers. But, by being aware of all these needs, by remembering that one cannot be all things to all people, and by allowing for some spontaneous flow in her or his life, the centered person can truly embrace their potential for wholeness. As I have shown, certain characteristics distinguish one style from another. They are summarized in the following chart.

Summary: Key Characteristics of Intimacy Patterns

	Extreme Clingers	Centered Persons	Extreme Stingers
Personal Boundaries	Boundaries too flexible or non-existent; overly involved in others' lives, difficulty distinguishing self from other.	Healthy boundaries (i.e. flexible and adaptable, but not allowing abuse).	Overly rigid boundaries, very careful about intruding on another's space; hiding out in own space, afraid of engulfment.
Sharing of Feelings	Affectionate; seeking closeness through verbal expression at any time.	Affectionate in intimate situations.	Generally cool and reserved, reluctant to say "I love you," except during "The Chase" (i.e., during courtship).
Sexuality	Desperately yearning for sexual intimacy.	Sexual intimacy is an expression of love in a romantic relationship between equals.	The loving, sexual self is revealed during the beginning of a relationship but cools later. Sexual addiction involving detached sex with varying partners possible.

Jealousy	Easily jealous, especially when unable to fulfill needs for intimacy. Selfish: "If I can't have you no one can."	Explores the source of jealous feelings, e.g., feeling insecure or not getting needs met. Could practice non-monogamy if has the time and energy.	"Not the jealous type." Able to practice non-monogamy (more than one relationship at a time.)
Conflicts	Fearful of conflict. Appeasing, attempts to reconcile differences, emotional expression.	Uses conflict as an opportunity to deal with differences. Works toward constructive, open, communication	Avoids conflict, withdraws.
Anger	Vents emotionally, often as "victim," blaming other. Extreme clingers may be verbally abusive and even violent.	Works toward constructive communication after inner reflection on feelings.	Passive aggressive, indirect.

While not without any fears or anxieties in relationship, centered persons can manage such feelings by getting perspective on them and working through them. Their lives are not run by fear. For them, time alone is solace for the soul, a time to be with oneself without the impingement of others' needs and demands. It is a time for rest, renewal, the inner journey, reading, writing, making art, time with nature. Solitude is rich with potential. The centered person is not dominated by the need to control relationships or life. Secure within herself or himself, she or he is able to let the experiences of life come and go, learning from them. She or he is able to look at her or his own feelings with loving acceptance, to learn from them and then release them.

Some moderate clingers learn from previous relationships and wait for more appropriate partners in order to avoid being hurt again. They try to take care of their social needs by creating a network of friends. This emotional support system acts as a safety net, saving them from succumbing to the seduction of a potentially hurtful lover.

The ideal of the centered intimacy pattern can be used as a guide for enjoying a balanced relationship. In order to maintain balanced boundaries, determine appropriate limits, and become centered, each person must be self-aware. With an understanding of the patterns of the intimacy dance and by letting go of the hurtful choreographies of the past, the opportunity to co-create a new, harmonious dance of love comes. Like the fresh, unbroken whiteness after a snowfall, the dance floor opens before us as a pattern-free space, available to the inspirations and needs of the moment.



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