

Breathing Together

AN AQAL GUIDE TO SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS

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This article explores an Integral approach to significant relationships. A significant relationship can be a reliable context for both horizontal translation and vertical transformational development. The development process is explained through the metaphor of the climber(s), the ladder, and the view. The author suggests a differentiation of the shadow into dark and bright aspects and discusses how partners are sometimes powerfully drawn to each other's bright/dark shadow within the context of a significant relationship. Consideration of quadrants, states, lines, types, cycles, and phases add to a more integral understanding of human relatedness. A psychograph of levels and lines of individual development and a "mutual discourse graph" are proposed as tools for assessment of significant relationships. The author will show why and how the future development of this approach will be beneficial to significant relationships and psychotherapists alike.

At the very base of men and women's consciousness lies the ultimate Wholeness. But—and here is the rub—it is not, in the vast majority, consciously realized. Thus, the ultimate whole is, for most souls, an Other...a psychological Other. It is ever-present, but unrealized; it is given, but rarely discovered; it is the Nature of human beings, but lies, as it were, asleep in the depths of the soul.

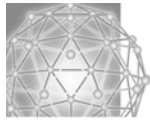
—Ken Wilber¹

Overview

A significant relationship (SR) is a human social structure comprised of two individuals who each agree to exclusively associate over time for the fulfillment of some mutual needs. They are a reservoir of great joy and deepest pain. Love begins in the mind, intermingled with both dreams and fantasy: the hope of being understood, known, and truly accepted; the hope of being safe and making another safe, of belonging; the hope of deep passion; the hope of a lasting and transforming bond.² But hope collides with the realities of life. Because the needs of two partners are going to be different, frustration, annoyance, anger, and disappointment often arise. Negative, unfair judgments erode the once flowing acceptance; a sense of loneliness can seep into increasingly distant lives.

A central feature of the Integral approach is its ability to consider complex phenomena by avoiding the pitfalls of ontological reductionism. Because you cannot have an inside without an outside, or a singular without a plural, thinking about SR within the AQAL framework provides new ways of analyzing the many complex aspects of relationship. With this understanding we have the opportunity to transcend and integrate the numerous partial views of SRs.

An Integral approach to SRs is an attempt to cover as many of the bases as possible. Keeping this in mind, this article is intended as an initial outline for further discussion and continued



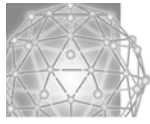
development of an AQAL consideration of the complexity of human relatedness. Included for thought are: the climbers or the two self-systems, ladder or altitude, view, shadow(s), polarity of SR, quadrants, states, lines, types, cycles, phases, and SR assessment. These various elements will be considered in the context of the following fictitious SR illustration. Thus, I will discuss an Integral approach to SRs using the following scenario as a background for the entire paper to demonstrate each of my main points.

Illustration of a Significant Relationship (SR)

William and Barbara argued frequently during the first five years of their marriage. At Barbara's insistence, they began couples therapy. They both held a belief that the *truth* about them could be discovered. They also believed the postconventional notion that right and wrong comes from within and is guided by self-transcending principles, suggesting that they were probably at an Orange altitude of development. (See "View" below.) William seemed to overpower Barbara with his anger and sarcasm. He was tall and rather slender with a short beard and deep brown eyes. He had been a history professor for nine years before changing fields to become an artist and self-employed businessman. William organized exhibitions where he sold his own art and that of other artists, as well as antiques and collectibles. Barbara was tall and slim with blonde hair and blue eyes. She worked as a successful interior decorator. Barbara was interested in self-improvement and in working on the relationship, realizing that she was not satisfied with her life. Both William and Barbara had recently become interested in spirituality and had begun some initial meditation practice. They were also interested in exploring their shadow material. (See "The Shadow" below.)

William reported that he feared emotional closeness and was rigid in his thinking. He had a history of hostility toward his wife or anyone with whom he had been in a SR. William would become controlling, verbally abusive, and emotionally distant from his partner. He would transform from a caring lover to a "control freak," criticizing everything that his partner did. At this time the main object of his criticism was Barbara. William admitted during an individual session that he had dated his students while he was a professor and this is how he had met Barbara. After living with one female student for two and a half years, they moved together from Seattle to New York. One day he came home to find a note from her. She had just walked out of his life permanently, taking her personal property with her. Her only explanation was that she had never wanted to move to New York in the first place. He was hurt and angry but became engrossed in his new teaching position. Soon William became overly friendly with a married student, Barbara, who had two teenage daughters. As a graduate student in her late 30s, Barbara had aspired to become an "intellectual." Her then husband, James, a down-to-earth computer salesman, hated reading and would rather watch a soccer game or tennis match on TV than participate in any form of intellectual discussion. Dissatisfied with her marriage, Barbara distanced herself from her husband and unburdened herself of her problems by talking to her professor friend, William. He gave her a soothing shoulder to cry on. Over time their relationship deepened and eventually Barbara divorced her husband and married William.

While understanding and supportive throughout their friendship, William suddenly built emotional walls. Barbara described the change this way, "William became a stranger with dark moods and a really bad temper, and he was secretive and private." Barbara moved into William's house after selling her own. According to their prenuptial agreement, she had no rights to his house or any of his belongings. William reminded her that his house was fully paid for, and Barbara had to ask permission to decorate or move her own things around. This greatly disturbed



Barbara because she was an interior decorator! The only rooms she could even minimally redecorate were the kitchen and her side of the bedroom. The living room and other areas, including the bathroom, were off limits. It was *his* home, and Barbara felt like a guest. While her older daughter was away at college, her younger daughter, Suzanne, had intense verbal arguments at home with William when she wouldn't comply with his rules. One day he locked her out of the house. Following this, with Barbara's help, Suzanne moved to her father's house in a nearby section of the city.

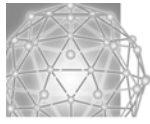
When asked to discuss his childhood, William immediately remembered being bitten by a dog as a young boy. He was surprised by his parents' businesslike attitude as they drove him to the hospital. He was hurt by their lack of emotion. A number of years later he overheard his younger brother mention that their mother really had been frightened, but as she had run to the bathroom crying, having seen William bleeding from the dog bite, their father yelled loudly, "Control yourself." William was glad to find out about this incident because it meant to him that his mother cared. As a teenager William would protest his family's quiet dinners because he wanted to discuss matters of current interest. When he persisted, his father would pull off his belt and put William "in his place."

When Barbara was asked to talk about her growing up, she could not remember receiving any compliments at all from her mother. The oldest of four children, Barbara played substitute mother to her siblings, as her mother was often quite ill. Although Barbara did a lot of housework, cooking, and cleaning, her mother did not think that Barbara did a "good enough" job of taking care of the other children or her school work. Barbara's father was somewhat more supportive but mostly he was unavailable. Barbara remembered having spent hours in front of the mirror on her prom night. She wore a white formal dress. Her mother said, "Barbara, you look so pale and sickly. I'm sure your classmates will look much healthier." Barbara was distraught. Her mother was quite critical and shaming of her in other situations as well.

Barbara and William repeated family-of-origin roles in their SR. William tended to take care of a woman in a controlling way (like his father), and Barbara was dependent and in need of approval. As a trade-off the relationship worked, but the lack of emotional closeness was obvious. Their money remained separate in individual accounts, although there was a joint account for groceries. They ate out often, usually at William's favorite restaurant. Each paid their own tab.

During an individual session, Barbara reiterated that William had changed after their marriage ceremony, "William had been a caring, loving confidante with whom I could share my secrets and problems, but now we are strangers living in the same house."

William was warm toward outsiders until they became more significant to him, at which point he would hide behind his professorial stance. William explained that his tears, fears, and shame were laughed at while he was growing up, so he learned to keep his feelings under control and to strive for control in SRs. Even the expression of positive, nurturing feelings became too threatening and vulnerable to him. For her part, Barbara carried a sense of defeat and inferiority from her early family experience into the SR.



Understanding Significant Relationships

The sliding, shifting, and contextual nature of an individual's relationships demands for a clearer understanding of the dynamic and multi-layered aspects of SRs. The many disciplines of psychology, cultural studies, theology, sociology, neuroscience and others can now be pursued within a framework (AQAL) that connects and situates their disparate findings and revealed truths. Integral Methodological Pluralism (IMP) introduces an integrative dimension that no other approach can claim for understanding SRs.³

Consideration of SR interactions leads us directly to the concept of intersubjectivity, which is a topic Ken Wilber has discussed at some length in several of his books.⁴ An SR is in a sense the movement of experience from subjectivity to intersubjectivity, as well as from individual to social. Let us consider one of Wilber's Twenty Tenets with respect to SRs. For example, Tenet #2 states that an individual has four drives. Within a stage (level), in respect to horizontal *translation*, one has drives towards agency (self-preservation) and communion (self-adaptation). At any stage, with respect to vertical *transformation*, one's drives are Eros (self-transcendence) and Agape (self-immanence).⁵

Discussion: William and Barbara develop individually within the context of the SR and intersubjectively as a couple. William is initially embedded in his autonomous self as "subject." Barbara is initially embedded in her communal self also experienced as "subject." William's vertical development tends toward communion, while Barbara's tends toward autonomy. How William and Barbara flow with the tension between Eros (reaching beyond) and Agape (embracing and preserving) will greatly impact their vertical development.

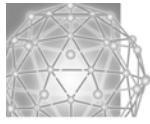
Ladder, Climber, View

Integral Psychotherapy offers a helpful metaphor for understanding the evolutionary development of human experience and consciousness. The ladder represents the altitude (stages, levels, or waves) of development that every human being must sequentially climb. Everyone starts at the beginning, there are no exceptions, and no rungs can be skipped. The climbers represent each human being, or each *self-system*, who climbs the ladder. The view represents the perception each climber has of their experience and the world from the different altitudes.⁶ As we will see, rungs are preserved, while the views from the rungs are negated. Let us now look at how Integral Psychotherapy makes a major contribution to the understanding of SRs.

The Climber

An SR by definition requires two individual human partners or two climbers. The climbers are individual self-systems. Each self-system is defined as both the sum total of one's inner experience and the individual personality structure. It has affective (feeling) and cognitive (thought) elements, as well as conscious (aware) and unconscious (unaware) elements. Self-systems attempt to evolve to increasing levels of complexity, wholeness, and maturity, but they require support in order to do so. If essential needs are not adequately met, or if there is resultant trauma, growth and development of the self-system may be impeded.

The self-system is our "boundary" or what we identify with in contrast to the rest of the world. It is an organizing principle that metabolizes content from all aspects of life. The three main aspects of the self-system are: the actual self (formerly proximate self; subject); false or accurate



self (formerly distal self; subject becomes object); real self (formerly antecedent self; Witness of all subjects, objects, and processes).⁷

In addition to the three aspects of the self-system it is particularly helpful to consider the “drive toward autonomy” by looking at SR partner levels of “differentiation of the self.” Individuals at lower levels of differentiation deeply depend on the approval and acceptance of others and either swiftly adjust what they think, say, and do in order to please, or they inflexibly assert what others should be like and pressure them to conform. A bully depends upon approval and acceptance as much as a chameleon, but bullies push others to agree with them rather than agreeing with others. Individuals at higher levels of differentiated “self” have become aware of their realistic dependence on others, thus generally remaining calm and clear headed in the midst of conflict, criticism, or rejection in order to differentiate between reasonable, rational, and logical thinking and thinking that is charged with emotions. Having transcended and included the lower levels of development, they can either support a partner’s perspective or reject it without polarizing. Thus, there exists the capacity to maintain objectivity.

Discussion: William and Barbara each have a separate self-system. They both possess a proximate self (subjective self) and experience their “I” separate from the “We” of the SR. It is the part of the self generally represented by the “climber.” The two partners also each possess a distal self, where subject is becoming more object. William and Barbara each possess an antecedent self, which is the always already empty Witness to all of their experience. It could be said that both partners are unconsciously working out their issues of self-differentiation. For example, William’s “controlling” behavior is a result of his subjective sense of “dependence” on Barbara (which he has not yet transcended).

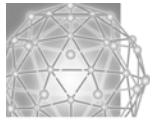
The Ladder

The Ladder represents the enduring structures that are reintegrated in the self-system following transcendence. These also represent perspectives we retain but whose exclusivity we always negate. The ladder simply represents the developmental structure, which the climber(s) ascend. The climber(s) climb one rung of the ladder at a time by transcending and including the previous rungs. In the context of SR, I would like to suggest that the ladder morphs into what can be viewed as a double helix stairway, a double spiral that retains the rungs of the individual ladder. The spiraling, curving, sometimes interconnected; mostly interlaced nature of the double helix stairway provides a caldron for growth.

Discussion: Barbara and William as individuals are each climbers within the structure of a double helix stairway and are each responsible for their own development, as impacted by the intersubjectivity of the SR. This structure does not necessarily require that Barbara and William be at the same altitude, although this will impact their developmental dynamics.

The View

Like most of our views in life, “view” in the AQAL sense is a temporary structure, a replaceable moral position, for example. If a climber’s view is from the rung of the Impulsive (Magenta) stage most of their life is governed by their impulses. They assert their budding sense of self by being somewhat oppositional even though they recognize their partner as a source of need gratification. “Good people give to me, rude ones don’t.” Their dualistic simplicity is characterized by “all or nothing” thinking. The impulsive individual may often appear confused, anxious, and overwhelmed. SRs at this stage are mostly about basic life needs.



A climber on the rung of the Self-Protective stage (Red) displays an egocentric view, with personal gratification, control, and domination becoming more central. Needs gratification is often central for men, while women may be primarily looking for safety and status. SRs can be quite difficult at this stage as the partners are highly dependent on each other, while often denying this need. This dependency can cause issues of conterdependency and shame.

The climber's view from the Conformist (Amber) stage is generally focused on the burgeoning need to be accepted and liked. At this point in development, SRs are often primarily for the purpose of procreation, but with the added elements of duty and acceptance, and for the first time genuine mutual resonance has some value. Conformists identify with and seek out partners with whom they share the same tastes, attributes, beliefs, expectations, and perspectives as determined by their social group (family, church, etc.), which can cause conflict when one partner begins to transform to a more complex stage.

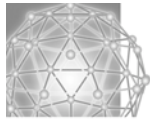
When the climber's view is from the Conscientious (Orange) stage of development individuals begin to seek out what feels "right" to them. SRs at this stage are built around self-expression and forming alliances. Because of their genuine interest in trying to figure out whom others are and the associated need *to share* one's own experience, empathy may begin to emerge. SRs at this stage have the potential to become more intense and meaningful.

A climber's view from the Individualistic stage (Green) finds emotions, equality, and egalitarianism of central focus. They are more aware of their own emotional life and want to have emotional needs met in their SRs. Partners at this stage want to be able to express feelings and to experience an emotional connection with their partner. SRs can become a major life concern at this stage.

When a climber reaches the Autonomous (Teal) stage, the view is from an expanded time frame and wider social networks. Cognitively, they can comprehend multiple interconnected processes including SRs. They may notice different conflicting aspects or polarities in themselves at different times and in different context, and are capable of accepting and integrating previously disowned parts of the self. They are capable of taking more responsibility for the mutual resonance in the SR. They consciously and actively create meaning for themselves and their partner through self-actualization and self-determination within constantly shifting contexts. There may sometimes be an impatience with their partner's "slow development" or "unwillingness to grow."

As an individual reaches the Construct-Aware (Turquoise) stage, the ego becomes transparent to itself. This has a powerful impact on an SR because the realization that constant judging of what is good and what is not creates tension and unhappiness in SRs. As Construct-Aware partners see through the filter of the symbolic construction and mapping of reality, they are now aware that communication works to maintain the ego's supremacy while at the same time they appreciate the vital function it plays in their SR.

Unitive (Indigo) and Transpersonal (Violet) stages present a completely new way of viewing human existence. The new view has a Kosmic perspective with individuals experiencing themselves and others as part of ongoing humanity. There are currently almost no SRs at these extremely high levels. There *are*, however, state-stage identifications within SRs that serve as a window into deeper dimensions of SRs. For example, if one partner is Green altitude, identified with their subtle body, and the other partner is Orange altitude, identified with their causal body,



the dynamics of the SR can be much more complex than a mundane SR. Indigo and Violet are altitudes that correlate with, respectively, Illumined Mind and Intuitive Mind. There is little evidence, other than Cook-Greuter's *Ego-Aware* self identification, that this altitude is being achieved in any stable way.

Yet, we can see how a complex state-stage identification across an SR might operate. Subject and object are integrated with more depth and more complexity: feelings of belongingness and feelings of one's separateness are experienced without excessive tension as changing perceptions of many potentials of being. The partners respect the essence in each other and therefore do not need them to be different than they are or "just like me." Thus partners accept themselves and others "as is" in a non-controlling way. They display an accepting, unassuming presence; a more fully empathetic, non-interfering ability to interact. On the other hand they often act as catalysts in shaping each others' lives. They are capable of intense, non-demanding SRs regardless of the other's development, age, gender, or any other identification. Partners at this stage have an integrated sense of unique identity as participants in the evolution of the Kosmos and no longer view the SR as something separate from the Kosmos itself.⁸

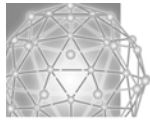
Discussion: Barbara seems to have a center of gravity in the Conformist towards Conscientious (Amber-exit moving into Orange) stage. She wants to experience a more satisfying life and realizes that she needs to take responsibility for this, although she sometimes continued to blame her husband(s) for her lack of satisfaction. She aspires to become more intellectual and is initially attracted (in part) to William's intellect. William appears to have a center of gravity of Orange with some unintegrated Self-Protective (Red), which now tends to become more prominent within the SR. I will return to a further discussion of the couple's development below.

The Shadow

The *shadow* is composed of negative *and* positive aspects of ourselves that we do not accept as part of our makeup, or dis-identified parts of our proximate self. They therefore appear in consciousness as "not self" ("I'm not angry, but my husband sure is," or "I am so impressed with him, he is the most incredible person on the planet").

Integral psychotherapist Willow Pearson suggests that it can be helpful to consider how the "shadow" (unconscious) plays out in our climbing of the developmental ladder and the transformation of the self-system.⁹ We are continually bound by our limited perspective of our self and our experience. Yet we may also get a glimpse of a larger perspective. Beneficial as this larger perspective may be, it is difficult to maintain without adequate structures of consciousness. Thus much of our experience has been repressed and becomes a "shadow." "Shadow is the hidden proximate self. It gets split off into third person."¹⁰

This shadow has two primary and related aspects to be discussed here. The first aspect of the shadow is referred to as the "repressed submergent unconscious" or "dark shadow." This includes our memory or the associated feelings of past experience(s) that have been left behind because they were too threatening to our sense of self. Contact with the thoughts and feelings attached to these experiences causes severe emotional distress and self-dissonance. One common way we attempt to defend against unacceptable feelings is to repress them from our "conscious self." Thus they are no longer available to our awareness.



The second aspect of shadow invokes a “height” or “upward” emergent direction referred to as the “repressed emergent unconscious” or “bright shadow.” This bright shadow dynamic can be seen in our willingness to project our “brightness” into other people, placing them on a pedestal (idealization). The bright shadow can also point to one’s potential for which the structures of consciousness have yet to develop.

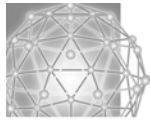
Partners are sometimes powerfully drawn to each other’s bright shadow/dark shadow within the context of an SR. Initially, as partners are attracted to each other, the partners may project onto their partner some of the bright shadow material of Eros, or “a reaching beyond to what is yet to be within them.” One or both partners may represent each others’ bright shadow. It is also possible for the dark shadow to dominate although not as frequently in the early attraction phase. This shadow attraction is usually found in the initial and early phase of a SR as fantasy abounds and in the case of the bright shadow all seems rather wonderful. Often you will hear someone describe their partner as “my better half.” Over time, as fantasy is replaced with more relative reality, the partners begin to project less bright shadow, which then opens the possibility of increased dark shadow projection as substitution. In other words, the dark shadow fills a space voided by the loss of the bright shadow in order to maintain a bonding emotional charge. A pattern may develop with one partner projecting dark shadow with more intensity than the other partner. This is a time of power struggle in an SR as partners may begin to polarize in conflict so as not to separate when bright shadow is a less powerful projection. The major point is that both bright shadow and dark shadow are always at play in the SR but we are generally conscious of only a hint, if at all.

Perhaps one of the most reliable ways to discover shadow material and the associated pattern of defense mechanism is within the context of SRs. It may also be true that in SRs lies the greatest challenge and potential source of working through the ownership of shadow material. SRs hold the potential for criticism, destruction, dissolution or affirmation, healing, and deeper commitment. The acceptance of one’s own projected shadow material offers both partners a royal road to healing and growth.

Discussion: William initially was attracted to Barbara’s creativity and vulnerability. Barbara was attracted to William’s intellectual achievements and self-assured personality. He had repressed his own creativity and vulnerability and projected potential bright shadow material on to his partner. She, while in touch with her desire to become more intellectual, repressed this part of herself as well as, thus projecting her potential bright shadow material onto William. At first, William listened intently to Barbara and the attraction and fantasy grew for both. However, as William began to experience deeper emotional connection, his fears increased and his dark shadow material began to emerge in full force. William was fearful that “others” close to him would “control” his life, unconscious of his own propensity to “control.” Barbara experienced William’s fearful controlling as critical and distancing and began feeling that she was “not good enough.” She recognized this feeling was a repeat of how she felt as child when her mother was critical and her father was unavailable and that she too could be critical and distancing, thus revealing the shifting dynamic of bright shadow/dark shadow.

Polarity of Significant Relationship

Couples in SRs regularly get stuck in complementary relations, which can be characterized as a projection of partner 1’s dark shadow material resulting in partner 2 taking a “polar opposite” or



complementary position. If partner 2 is projected to be “the lazy one,” then partner 1 becomes “the active one”; if partner 2 is “the victim,” then partner 1 is “the victimizer.” Polarities become split between the two partners, and the more each partner fastens to a particular position, the more rigidly the other is fixed into the opposing, complementary position.¹¹ Partners often become prisoners of the coercive projective power of each other’s dark shadow, each becoming hopelessly defined by the other.

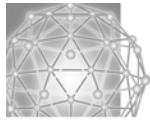
Benjamin has developed a seesaw metaphor that captures the dark shadow dynamic that I am presenting.¹² Consider an SR as a seesaw with partner 1 in the up position and the partner 2 in the down position. While staying on the seesaw the only choices they have are to move toward each other or back closer to the end of the seesaw, adjusting their weight on the fulcrum. As long as they stay on the seesaw they do not have many options. They can stay on their side of the seesaw or they can reverse sides. They could equally move toward the center to a more middle position, which seems like a more effective possibility, however it maintains the same rigidity of dualistic structure as a single line with two polar opposite positions. The partners cannot both be up or down and they remain fixed in one rigid complementary pattern of relating. Both partners on the seesaw mirror each other inversely; they are flip sides of each other, and they inhabit reversible perspectives. This structure exhibits the mutual experience of the dark shadow projection.

When partner 1 and partner 2 get stuck in complementarity, each subjectively experiences “you are doing this to me; you are forcing me into this position.” At the same time there often exists a bright shadow connection of mutual attachment that also represents its own polarity. An alternative to this dualistic complementary structure exists in the possible addition of the “third (3),” to borrow from psychoanalysis.¹³ The SR must find a way to get out of the polarity of the 1-2 position by opening up space for a more flexible mutual resonance. There exists a 3rd psychic possibility, which creates a transitional space, a space to breathe, an unanxious space of “play” to be upheld in spontaneous relating to each other that recognizes the dynamic of the shadow.¹⁴ I am also referring to the 3rd as the awareness of the antecedent self, within which polarity can be transcended. An SR provides a rich opportunity for partners to develop awareness of the 3rd and the potential for a loosening of the polarity.

Discussion: Both William and Barbara found themselves rather hopelessly defined by each other. They seemed unable to find their way out of the polarity of the SR dialectic dualism. Instinctively, they were looking for a third way, an objective space where third-person dynamics could be shared, including meditation activities. As the meditation activities became part of their lives, William began to report a lessening of his fears. Barbara reported experiencing William as less controlling and more flexible, as well as an increase in her self-confidence. The couple was beginning to find some relief in their SR as they began to embody each others’ perspective and increasingly became able to find value in opening to first-person emotions, second-person sharing, and third-person understanding.

Using the Quadrants

Here is a great way to use the quadrants for helping to bring levity and clarity into an SR therapeutic occasion. Do the following quadrant exercise for each partner: for the interior of the individual, or Upper-Left quadrant, explore “What I think, feel, intend, intuit, imagine, know, etc., and how I understand what my partner perceives or experiences, including their frame of reference and their worldview.” For the interior of the collective, or the Lower-Left quadrant,



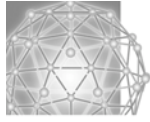
notice “What meaning I share with my partner and what are the qualities of the relationship (autonomy, agency, attraction, conflict, mutuality, out of sync, simple, rich, deep, shallow).” For the exterior of individual, or the Upper-Right quadrant, examine “What you actually do in the SR, including the behaviors, the actions, the questions, and the suggestions.” Finally, for the exterior of the collective, or the Lower-Right quadrant, recognize your part in the shared behaviors contained in the SR, including any written or oral marital contracts, lists of chore duties, as well as agreements about the shared home space, experience of sexual satisfaction, and together time.

<p>UPPER LEFT</p> <p>WHY I DO</p> <p>Personal Values</p>	<p>UPPER RIGHT</p> <p>WHAT I DO</p> <p>Expressed Personal Values</p>
<p>LOWER LEFT</p> <p>WHY WE DO</p> <p>Collective Values</p>	<p>LOWER RIGHT</p> <p>WHAT WE DO</p> <p>Expressed Collective Values</p>

Figure 1. All-Quadrant View of Intersubjectivity in SRs

I suggest figure 2 represents an AQAL view of the intersubjectivity of the SR. Considering partner 1 and partner 2 individually in terms of *Why I Do?* and *What I Do?* provides important information about each of their personal needs and values and how they each express them within the context of the SR. It offers increased awareness of their mutual needs and values and how they express them in the context of the SR. The process of exploring these needs and values helps partners not only become clearer about themselves but also helps them better understand the “other.” It becomes easier to point out where and why the SR is “out of balance” and opens a conscious discourse for identifying options and solutions.

Discussion: William discussed his understanding of why he was controlling and the fear that he experiences when he gets close to another person. He talked about what had happened in his childhood that had led to his fears. Barbara discussed her understanding of why it was so difficult for her when she felt controlled and what had happened in her childhood that had led to this. Both were able to recognize more “distal” aspects of themselves and their partner as this exploration unfolded and they listened to each other’s childhood experiences. They both became more aware of their developmental limitations on the one hand and their opportunity and



capacity for development within the SR on the other. An increase in empathy also became evident. Together they discussed how they understood their mutual needs and values and why they did what they did together in the SR. They also began to observe what they did together in a more conscious manner and began to talk about what might happen differently. This represents real transformational growth.

States

Phenomenal (e.g., emotional) states of consciousness are immediate and profound, and are one of the most important parts of AQAL in terms of SRs. These states are what frequently arise out of the SR's intersubjectivity and result in both pleasant and unpleasant subjective experiences. Being more "distally" aware of the emotions arising out of an SR is of enormous benefit to both partners. It is through following their more powerful emotions that partners can become aware of the shadow aspects of their self-system.

Discussion: As he got closer to Barbara, William experienced anxiety, the phenomenal state of fear, when he was in his normal waking state of consciousness. Barbara experienced anxiety and the phenomenal state of abandonment when William became controlling. She began to discover ways to respond without feeling these old emotions, which further developed her distal self. That is, Barbara could now better call upon the part of her self that observed the situation while in the midst of it. William, too, began to lose some of the emotional charge attached to his experience of fear and thus shifted it more distal self.

Lines

Historically, the best way to generate a "psychograph" is to have an individual take a number of psychometric tests for different lines. This can take quite some time and is beyond the interest of many. Currently, there are some efforts to develop more effective tests that could generate a more integral psychograph. Nevertheless, a therapist can use a psychograph as a clinical tool to map out "where" they think their patients are located on the spectrum of their lines of development. Within a few sessions, it often becomes obvious the general developmental range an individual has on any number of important lines.

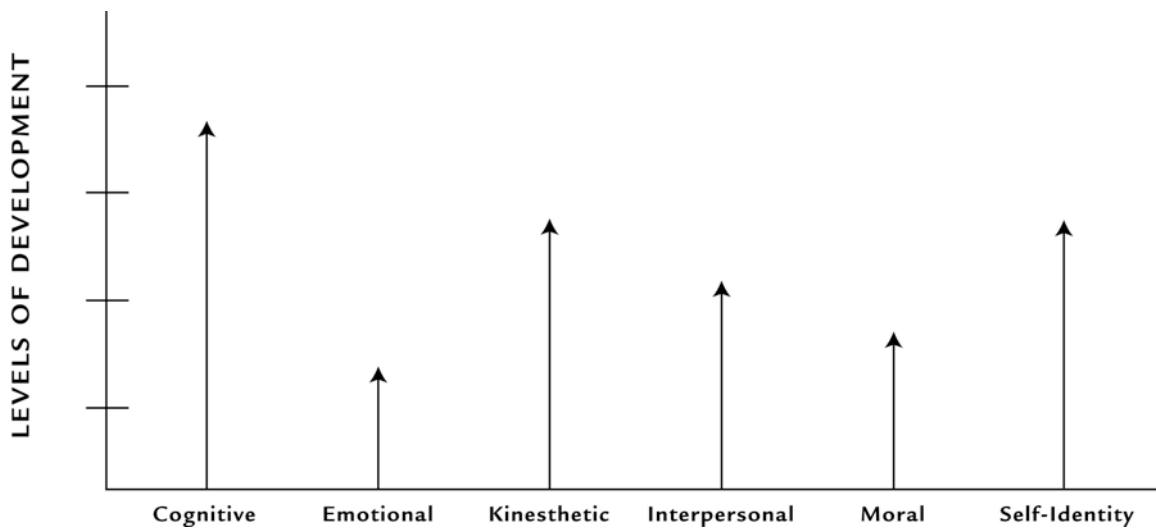
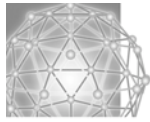


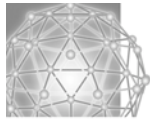
Figure 2. Lines of Development/Psychograph

Discussion: William and Barbara both have rather uneven areas of development. William’s cognitive development seemed fairly high, however he had some serious “blind spots” or some distorted thinking. His moral and interpersonal development lagged considerably. Barbara’s cognitive development also seemed relatively high and she was working hard to continue this growth. While she seemed to have a moderate level of emotional development, her needs line seemed less developed. Both partners found growth in the self-identity line as they began to realize that their closeness was not determined by the other’s experience and a new kind of bond or connection became possible.

Types

Types in SRs can be especially useful for partners’ understanding of difference. In the context of types, the judgment that one type is “better” or “worse” really does not make much sense. In the AQAL model of SRs, value distinctions are essentially a non-issue in the horizontal components of quadrants, types, and states. However, we may aspire to higher levels of consciousness (vertical) or to rid ourselves of lower level shadow elements, and wish this also for our partner. The AQAL model of SRs reflects the human evolutionary drive toward more complexity. Thus, we also seek satisfying mutual discourse within our SRs and typically wish for our partner to seek more complexity, too.

Discussion: William and Barbara found the utilization of masculine and feminine types particularly helpful in understanding the different ways they interacted with each other. Men and women have different styles of thinking and doing things. Difference does not mean that one is better than the other. Therein lies the rub for SRs: to understand that our partner is different without placing judgment. William and Barbara began to suspend their judgments of each other by reminding themselves that their partner is different and by considering the meaning of what the other was attempting to say.



Cycles

Cycles in SRs can be helpful in understanding the intersubjective dynamic between partners. The partners within an SR will, for example, find themselves in one of three basic intersubjective experiences: mutual resonance (love), conflict, or withdrawal. When both partners are experiencing mutual resonance, all is well. When one or both partners are experiencing conflict, there is continued discourse (effective or not) in an effort to resolve the conflict. When one or both partners are experiencing withdrawal, there is minimal discourse and increased likelihood of dissolution or dysfunction. If the discourse is increased to sufficiently transcend the conflict, an SR may return to mutual resonance.

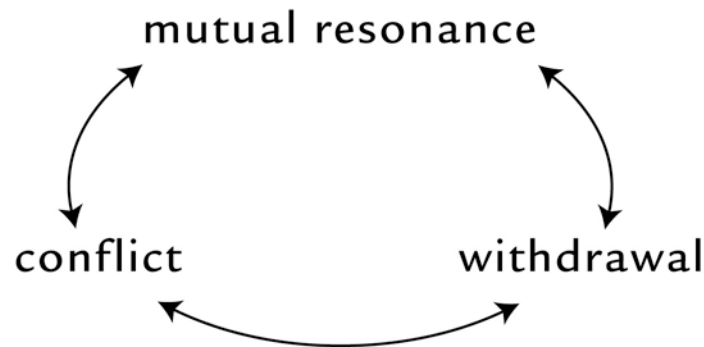


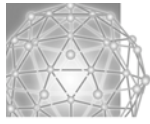
Figure 3. A Cycle of Significant Relationships

Discussion: Both William and Barbara experienced mutual resonance early in their SR. However, as William and Barbara spent more time together and his Red level dark shadow elements emerged, both began to experience conflict. When a couple is in the conflict part of the cycle they are still connected, although they often feel uncomfortable. It is when one or both of the partners begin to withdraw that disconnection and distance is experienced. I see the withdrawal aspect of the cycle as potentially most dangerous if the partners get stuck there. However, withdrawal can be of value as a time-out for intense emotions to subside.

Phases

I have created a model timeline that I have found useful for measuring the phases of relationships. These phases of SRs refer to the age of the SR and are to be applied flexibly to reflect phases. I have found that movement through the five phases follows a fluid yet often predictable cycle, with usually some overlap between phases. I have somewhat arbitrarily applied the terms Initial (0-6 months), Early (6 months-2 years), Middle (2 years-5 years), Advanced (5 years-10 years), Mature (10 years and more). There are many ways of thinking about phases, which describe various aspects of an SR (e.g., intersubjective dynamics, maturity levels). This model timeline can be developed further in the future.

Discussion: William and Barbara were in the late Middle Phase of their SR when they entered treatment. This is a typical time of struggle in SRs when the issues of difference and dependency can take front stage.



Assessment

An Integral approach to assessment attempts to look at as many perspectives as possible. Assessment of an SR pays attention to the individual partners, as well as the SR as a whole. It should be noted here that Integral assessment is ongoing since SRs are a dynamic, complex system. Psychographs such as the ones below, as well as may be used to assess the individual development of partners and the SR as a whole.

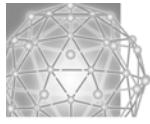
This psychograph of individual development offers increased understanding of the partners' individual contours so that they can more confidently deal with their strengths and weaknesses, as well as an appreciation of the potential complementarity and wholeness of the SR. Each partner can assess themselves and each other in the cognitive, self-identity, morals, needs, and values lines. (See figure 2.) The sharing of the assessment is not meant as a competition but rather a source of improved awareness and understanding. The partners' discussion of this psychograph may lead to clarity and direction for future growth.

I also propose the Mutual Discourse Graph for assessing the SR as a whole. The partners can measure both the breadth and depth of their areas of mutual discourse. Some major categories include: work discourse (sharing tasks that bond in affirming ways); emotional discourse (sharing significant experiences and feelings that impact one another); intellectual discourse (sharing ideas and opinions); crisis discourse (coping with problems and pain together); spiritual discourse (sharing contemplative experiences, a relationship with God, prayer, or other religious practices); aesthetic discourse (sharing an appreciation of beauty and creativity); sexual discourse (sharing with another in physical intimacy).

Discussion: William and Barbara discovered that the mutual discourse in their SR was quite out-of-balance. The couple realized, for example, that while their intellectual and recreational discourse had some significant depth and are important to both, Barbara wished that William would connect more around the aesthetic line. William wished Barbara would make sexual discourse more of a priority. Overall, the couple used their psychographs and mutual discourse graph to both better understand themselves and gain an increased appreciation for their differences.

Summary

Discussion: Increased awareness of mutual discourse, self-system, shadow, and dependency issues were all factors in the increased overall mutual resonance for this couple. Over a period of a year and a half, William and Barbara worked in therapy both individually and as a couple. As a result they each reported an increased level of satisfaction and mutual resonance in their life together and in their lives in general. Some of the couple's increase in mutual resonance started with understanding their own family histories and diligently working on their own self-system issues. This eventually led to more openness and a broader range of communication and activity together. The actual behaviors involved in creating a new home, and then being appreciated for those behaviors, solidified Barbara's gains. As William became more experientially aware of his rigidity, Barbara was more able to open up and be more expressive and expansive. As Barbara felt better about herself, William was encouraged to be more flexible.



An Integral approach to significant relationships is a reliable model for understanding and promoting both horizontal translation and vertical transformational development. The evolutionary human development process is best understood through the metaphor of the Climbers or the two self-systems, the Ladder or structure of development of altitude as a double helix stairway, and the View from the various altitudes. The shadow, including the dark shadow (repressed submergent unconscious) and the bright shadow (repressed emergent unconscious) play out disproportionately in SRs. The possibility of overcoming the polarity dynamic of SR is provided through increased awareness, which can begin to loosen up the duality. Consideration of altitude, lines, cycles, phases, and the quadrants adds to a more integral approach to SRs. Assessment techniques using the tools of a psychograph of individual development and a mutual discourse graph help SR partners increase awareness and growth.

Colleagues have asked me what is actually done differently from other couples treatment models when using an Integral approach to SRs. "What is the therapist listening for that might be different from other models?" My own therapy practice has had a rather revolutionary or perhaps evolutionary impact on how I work in the therapy room with both individuals and couples. I find myself increasingly thinking more about each individual's self-development and how that plays out in their significant relationship. I also find myself "going around the quadrants" in order to include and understand as many aspects of the partners/couples experience as possible. I find that the material that partners and couples bring into the room seems more readily understandable within the context of AQAL and an Integral approach. I find myself, at times, being somewhat more "educational" with couples, explaining some of their experience from a developmental/evolutionary perspective. They seem to enjoy this interaction because it offers a rational new framework for them to understand their experience, I think. Perhaps most significantly, the tools offered by Integral Theory, Integral Psychology, and Integral Practice have provided me as therapist an increasingly "non-anxious" presence, which seems to be valued by the couples I work with. I believe that an Integral approach to Significant Relationships offers valuable benefit to the clinical practice of both psychotherapy and psychology. My hope is that this article will serve to stimulate more discourse around the ways the Integral model can support our understanding of and engagement with relationships.

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NOTES

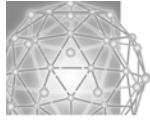
¹ Wilber, *The collected works of Ken Wilber* (Vol. 2), 1999a

² Pfeiffer, *Creating real relationships: Overcoming the power of difference and shame*, 1999, p. 1

³ Rentschler, "AQAL glossary," 2006

⁴ Wilber, *The collected works of Ken Wilber* (Vol. 4), 1999b

⁵ The Integral approach considers both the tension between autonomy and communion as well as the tension between Eros and Agape. For example, what is it that the partners seek to either reach beyond or preserve? Often it is a particular altitude of development, which unfolds from impulsive, to self-protective, to conformist, to conscientious, to individualistic, to autonomous, to integral and beyond.



⁶ See Cook-Greuter, "Ego development theory and stage descriptions," 2005

⁷ Wilber, "Conference call series," 2007

⁸ See Norbu, *A cascading waterfall of nectar*, 2006

⁹ Pearson, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2006

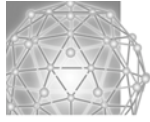
¹⁰ Wilber, personal communication, Sept. 10, 2006

¹¹ Periodically, the split may be reversed with no real change in the dualistic structure of the complementarity. The sadistic partner may periodically become masochistic while the masochistic partner may become sadistic, hence their original roles are reversed, but the dualistic structure remains split between sadistic and masochistic. See Benjamin, "Afterword," 1999, p. 203

¹² Benjamin, "Beyond doer and one to: An intersubjective view of thirdness," 2004

¹³ Benjamin, "Beyond doer and one to: An intersubjective view of thirdness," 2004

¹⁴ Winnicott, *Playing and reality*, 2005



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