

# DISORDERS OF THE SELF

From time to time, everyone needs others for reassurance, gratification, and support. However, some people are almost entirely unable to control, affirm, comfort, understand, or soothe themselves. They focus on others to feel protected, cared about, powerful, or important. In the process, they lose themselves and develop personality traits that impair relationships and employment. This sad state of affairs solidifies by late adolescence or early adulthood, as seen in the following:

- Others are seen as the source of problems. When relationship issues arise, the concern is “Why is my partner doing this and how can I change her?” rather than, “How am I contributing to this problem and why do I tolerate it?”
- Others’ standards are wholeheartedly endorsed or rejected outright without developing a personal set of values, interests, and goals. This makes people vulnerable to criticism, easily influenced, or unable to amend the beliefs with which they were raised.
- Feelings are managed by splitting positive and negative emotions. Loving images of others are protected from periods of rage by flipping perceptions from loving to cold, on-the-pedestal to in-the-gutter, or protective to attacking.
- Self-perception is also split—“When I’m good, I’m very good (superior, obedient, powerful), and when I’m bad, I’m awful (unlovable, worthless, nothing).” Feelings change from euphoric to hateful, grandiose to ashamed, or safe to alienated without warning.
- A “false self” is created by rejecting parts of oneself. There is a push to always be compliant, perfect, superior, charming, in control, or self-reliant instead of being a multifaceted human with imperfections, needs, and strengths.
- The “pleasure principle” is used to avoid painful emotions instead of struggling to control, think about, or express them. This is accomplished by evading disturbing topics, denying difficulties (even to oneself), or acting them out. Insecurity can be acted out by clinging or not allowing others to express differences.
- When feelings are noticed, they are hard to identify. There may be a vague sense of uneasiness, physical concerns, or lethargy. Anger and resentment may mask other emotions. Any depression may be experienced as detachment, and love is confused with feeling dependant on, admired by, or safe with others.
- Expression of feelings is tailored to expectations and demands of others. Instead of having internal dialogues about the pros and cons of an issue, time is consumed ruminating with monologues explaining, justifying, or complaining to others.

## CAUSES OF DISORDERS OF SELF

Problems can range from personal styles to true disconnection from the self, in which people are at the mercy of others for satisfaction and fulfillment. Any disorder is due to a combination of:

- Temperament based on physical tendencies to overreact to stimuli and back away or strike out, or to underreact and turn inward for interest or outward for excitement.
- Character that results from adjustments to caretakers who can be nurturing, firm, overprotective, demanding, critical, withholding, indulgent, or negligent. People acquire varying abilities to be self-directed, cooperative, open, and to transcend difficulties.

## IDENTIFYING PERSONAL STYLES AND PROBLEMS

In 1994, the American Psychiatric Association (*DSM-IV*) identified 10 disorders that create problems with relationships and careers. They can be simplified into five patterns.

### Personal Styles

**Directions:** Circle the letter for each item that best depicts your feelings, behavior, and history and underline words that are especially descriptive. Force yourself to make a choice and if none of the options seems accurate, have others rate you.

<p>1. I feel best when I am:</p> <p>A. Loved or cared for.          B. Noticed or valued.          C. Achieving, asserting myself, or special.          D. Safe from rejection/attack or alone.          E. Getting what I want.</p> <p>2. It is easy for me to feel:</p> <p>A. Resentful, helpless, abandoned, moody.          B. Confident, special, sensitive, or slighted.          C. Critical, criticized, or betrayed.          D. Awkward, private, rejected, or indifferent.          E. Powerful, carefree, or little remorse.</p> <p>3. I often act:</p> <p>A. Too nice, clingy, gullible, or like a martyr.          B. Proud, boastful, or emotional.          C. Controlling, rigid, skeptical, or demanding.          D. Shy, aloof, or like a dreamer or drifter.          E. Devious, aggressive, or competitive.</p> <p>4. At my best I am:</p> <p>A. Tactful, nice, passionate, or caring.          B. Lively, affectionate, confident, assertive.          C. Dependable, cautious, or perceptive.</p>	<p>D. Discreet, loyal, objective, or curious.          E. Bold, courageous, or charming.</p> <p>5. I tend to think others are:</p> <p>A. Special, awful, unfair, or strong-willed.          B. Obligated to me, inattentive, or impolite.          C. Disorganized, not trying, or attacking.          D. Judgmental, dangerous, or unusual.          E. Weak, challenging, or in my way.</p> <p>6. As a child I was:</p> <p>A. Too nice, sneaky, or argumentative.          B. Noticed for my talents, abilities, or looks.          C. Responsible, dependable, but shamed.          D. Shy, a misfit, or rejected by peers.          E. A troublemaker or rebellious.</p> <p>7. My parents:</p> <p>A. Were too helpful, overprotective, undependable, or controlling.          B. Pushed my abilities, were self-involved.          C. Expected a lot or were attacking.          D. Were rejecting, ridiculing, uncaring, cold, distant, or gone a lot.          E. Hostile, abusive, weak, or absent.</p>
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### Discover Your Personality Type:

Notice which letter-choices you picked most often. The more your answers favor one letter, the greater the chance that you have a distinct style:

Choice A indicates dependent or erratic personalities who attach to others to avoid feeling helpless or abandoned but may distance if closeness becomes suffocating. They often choose strong or overbearing partners or people who need “fixing.”

Choice B indicates dramatic, inflated personalities who seek attention or exaggerate their self-worth to keep from feeling unloved or unimportant. They often seek partners with superior traits or who will adore and admire them.

Choice C indicates compulsive or guarded personalities who strive for perfection or watch for criticism and betrayal to prevent uncertainty. They may choose free-spirited partners who represent their suppressed side or people they can control.

Choice D indicates avoiding, isolated, or eccentric personalities who withdraw rather than risk rejection or harm even though they (unconsciously) crave connection. If they have relationships, it is with very accepting or nondemanding people.

Choice E indicates defiant personalities who try to rule everyone around them (including their partners) because they never learned to soothe or govern themselves.