Love/Sexuality Survival Style

I thrive on being admired.

I can be rigid (black & white).

I reject before being rejected.

Open heart = Broken heart.

I had to perfect myself to get my parents' love.

Sexual conquest is exciting to me.

I have a lot of pride.

There is something fundamentally flawed in me.

I am very competitive.

Emotions are a sign of weakness

It's better to look good than feel good.

Relationships are hard.

Common Themes



- Highly energetic, attractive and successful.
- Self worth is based on looks and performance. Highly accomplished, admired and put together compensating for feeling fundamentally flawed inside and not worthy of love.
- Two important time periods in the development of the Love Sexuality survival style: **Four to six years old and roughly twelve to fifteen**. Need to perform or perfect to be loved.

- Parents reject, shame or punish a child's emerging affection/sexual expression.
- Rigid, armoured heart so "I'll never let anyone hurt me again."
- Fathers may withdraw their love when their daughter's body develops.
- Usually develops when a child's affectionate, sensual, natural, and innocent expressions were rejected, misinterpreted, or sexualized by caregivers.
- Rest and surrender are resisted, instead energy focused on getting things done.

Common Themes

- Doing and performing as a way of avoiding feelings which are associated with pain.
- Romantic subtype in adults: Are open hearted, but disconnected from their sexuality.
- Sexual subtype in adults: Sexuality centered on conquest and performance, not on heart connection. Break off relationships when their heart starts to open.
- This is about an original heartbreak/rejection that is carried forward into adult life.
- The objectified child and teen starts to objectify themselves.
- The sense of being fundamentally flawed begins to develop. There must be something wrong with me! Body dysmorphia.
- Can have OCD-like behaviors.



Moving to Resolution

- Don't avoid the topics of love and sexuality.
- Work SLOWLY to support client's tender & vulnerable feelings.
- Explore how doing and perfecting helps clients avoid their vulnerability and underlying hurt (adaptive style).
- Identify the confusion, disappointment, loneliness and pain present in spite of their success and achievements (asked for therapy after all).
- **Help them understand that love based on looks and performance is not love at all.**
- The central thread of healing (contract) is exploring letting go and surrendering to their feelings (which can feel out of control), opening one's heart and letting in love.
- Striving for an idealized self reinforces shame-based image of feeling flawed and unloveable. Doing as way to avoid hurt.



Moving to resolution



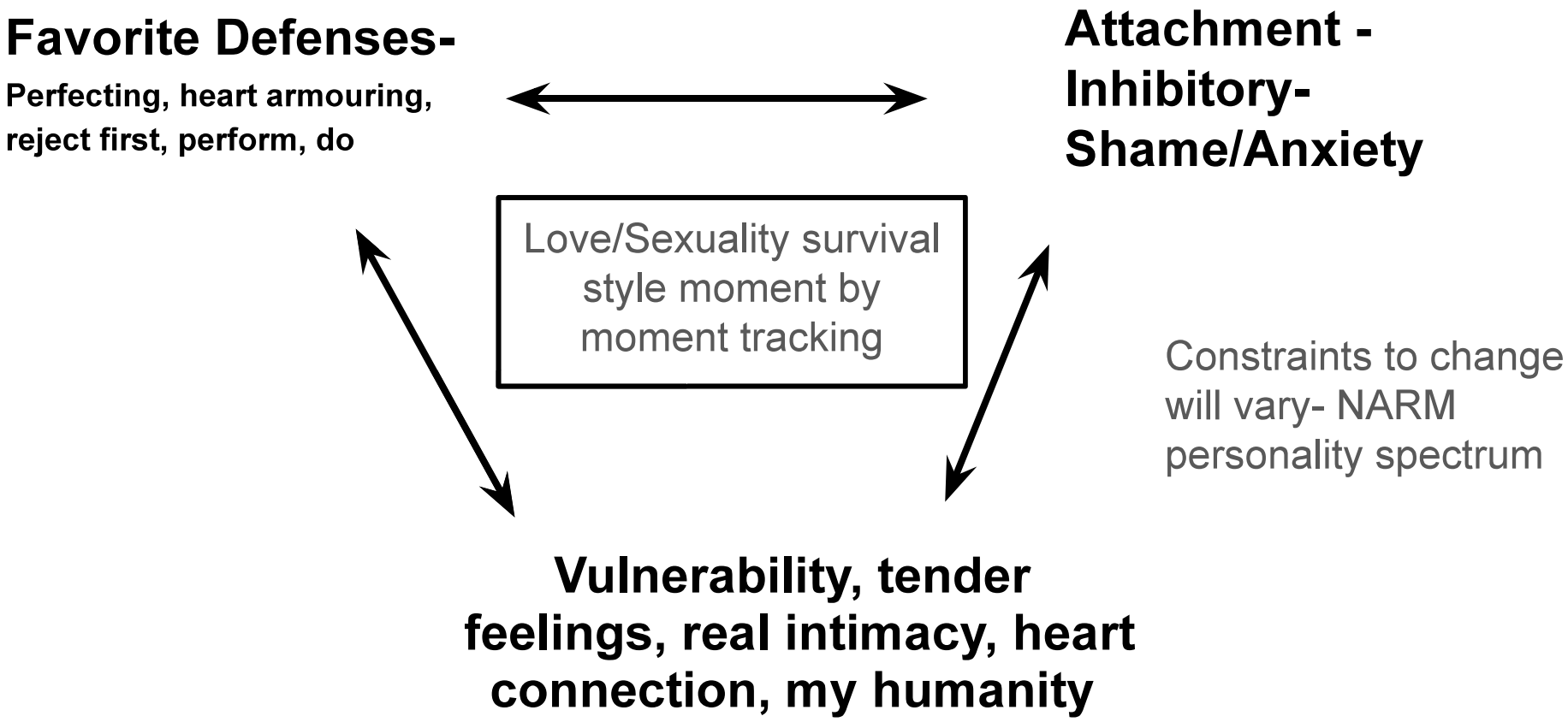
- Deepen into bodily awareness, away from self-objectification.
- Have them see the part they are playing in perpetuating this style (agency) while holding compassion for why they assumed this part (ATTEMPT TO EARN LOVE!)
- Work through core dilemma: I want heart connection but I fear it (individual/couples). I want love that I cannot receive.
- Ask for a time when they gave into (surrendered to) their heart feelings: New born child or pet they deeply loved. Help them let go into LOVE.
- What is the core affect (grief/anger) that can now be processed with dyadic regulation:
  - “Why did love have to be so conditional?!”
  - “I was never loved for who I really was.”
  - “All the lost time.”
  - “Perfecting myself never got me the love I really wanted!”
  - “All the energy I spend to perform and perfect… and for what?!”

A Vignette



A woman in her late 40s came to me after a series of failed relationships. She reported overlooking “red flags” in partners, feeling depleted, overwhelmed and hopeless that she could have a fulfilling relationship. She recalled rejection and dismissal as a young girl by her father when she was affectionate and open hearted. She learned to perfect herself as a way to try to earn love (ADAPTIVE).

Her contract was to learn to give and RECEIVE love. But receiving love meant being vulnerable and integrating parts of her that she had shamed and banished long ago: Her feelings, playfulness, and open heart. The core dilemma started to emerge: I want heart connection but I fear it. Anger toward her father SLOWLY came into view/emerged: “This wasn’t about me. This was about his discomfort.” Also, deep grieving for disconnecting from her heart long ago. Client recognized when she slipped into her child consciousness in and outside of session and then tended to her inner child: “You don’t have to perfect or perform to be loved; you can be loved for who you truly are.”


Favorite Defenses-
Perfecting, heart armouring, reject first, perform, do
Attachment - Inhibitory- Shame/Anxiety
Love/Sexuality survival style moment by moment tracking
Constraints to change will vary- NARM personality spectrum
Vulnerability, tender feelings, real intimacy, heart connection, my humanity

Deconstructing a specific experience

Orient client to a specific event emblematic of broader pattern to access deeper dynamics, unresolved emotions and limiting identifications.

Pay attention to moments of connection and disconnection. Help clients have moments of direct experience rather than their reactions/old strategies.

Example: Female client feels overwhelmed at work and feels that she letting people down (high stress).

Initially reports stomach dropping, tightness in chest, “I’m failing at my job.” I ask her to bring up the image of a face of someone she respects at work.

She immediately starts to cry (a **direct experience**)! Can we slow down with that? Exploring further, she realizes that the pressure and judgment are coming from within herself.