

INSECURITY THROUGH DEPRESSION + IDENTITY, VALUE/WORTH

INSECURITY > ANXIETY > FEAR > WORRY ----- ANGER > DEPRESSION

Key points:

1. **Emotion is energy.** There is “good” emotion/energy and “negative” (not bad) emotion/energy. Good emotion gives us our quality of life (i.e. puppies, Starbucks, roller coasters, holidays), and negative emotions give us energy to accomplish a task or fix something (laundry or dishes need to be done, you had an argument with a loved one, you have a big project at work, etc.). We only have so many emotional resources! Like time and money, there is a limited amount, and we feel “burned out” when we are spending too much emotional energy and we don’t have enough recovery time. The problem arises when we have too much emotion. Too much “good” emotion is over-stimulation (substance abuse, dopamine from cell phones/video games, for example). “Negative” emotion is what we experience when we are experiencing overwhelming emotion (anxiety, depression, anger, for example). We need counseling when our emotions are getting in the way of everyday living.
2. **In light of the above, the goal is to have the right brand/type of emotion (to be discussed later) & the right amount of emotion.** I often use a scale of 1-10. If we experience a “10” level of emotion, it would seem to be too much, but it may be the right amount of emotion; it all depends on the situation. If our 3 year-old grandchild wandered out into the street, what is the appropriate amount of emotional energy for this situation? Obviously, a “10”, based on the severity of the situation. A “1” level of emotion isn’t always good, because in some situations, having that degree of emotional energy would technically be apathy because the emotional intensity is too low based on the potential consequences (teenagers and homework; avoidance of conflict)
3. **All negative emotion is exposing something in me.** We will dive into this more below. If it sounds at first hearing to be negative, think the opposite. When negative emotions occur in us, our thoughts and focus turn to the external entity causing the negative emotions. Normally, that external entity is another human being. We process what they did “wrong”, and then we start processing their character, and then their motives. By the time we arrive at motives, we are really burning through a lot of emotional energy. Worse than that, I’m also saying the resolution to our emotions rests in that external entity changing. See the problem? There may be a very legitimate point or issue to address with that person, but what I am saying is we first must figure out all that is being exposed in us first before we just vomit our first blush response on that person. When we do that, as we all have, we know we cause damage on the relationship, because they are receiving an amount and type of emotional energy they don’t deserve. And in true form, once we do that, they return the favor by boomeranging the emotional energy right back at us.

Now we turn to the list of emotions: Insecurity, Anxiety, Fear, Worry, Anger, and Depression. There are of course many more emotions, but most are synonyms to the ones below.

As I stated, my goal is to equip clients with emotional management skills. I not only want to equip you to work through your current negative emotions (back to the point of peace and stability), I also want to equip clients to become very *effective* with their emotions. I wrote my dissertation for my PhD on Emotional Intelligence and it is a tool I use when I coach executives.

Finally, focus on the specific definitions of the emotions below. The response/action plan to the emotion is in the definition.

Insecurity: The “lowest” of the negative emotions, but it is the **richest** because it contains very powerful information about “what’s going on” with us.

Definition: Insecurity is something we don’t like about ourselves (which isn’t actually the insecurity because every human being ever doesn’t like something about themselves. Well, except for narcissists. They love everything about themselves. What makes it an insecurity is that we don’t want that thing pointed out or exposed.

A defining moment for me with this was when I was about 14 years old. I was working at a hamburger joint and a number of my friends were working there as well. Believe it or not, I used to be a very sarcastic teenaged boy (but obviously have matured since then, as you can tell). I teased one of my female co-workers so bad one time I made her cry. Don’t judge me. Worse than that, while she was walking away crying, I yelled out, “You wouldn’t get so ticked off if it wasn’t true!” Yes, I am a jerk. I own it. The defining moment came when I turned that point on myself and said to myself, “Wow, Greg. Every time you get defensive, angry, butt-hurt when someone cuts you down, it’s because it’s true.” I then stepped back and started observing people and conversations and saw the same pattern everywhere. If a person attempted to cut down another person, but the attack was preposterously false, the person receiving the comment would just look at them, most likely saying in their head, “What an idiot”.

A plethora of examples came to me when I worked as the Director of the Residential Treatment Center at Cedar Crest Hospital in Belton, TX. RTC’s were facilities that were utilized for teenagers who had multiple admissions into an acute mental health facility for suicidal or homicidal ideation, and were still not stabilizing. Almost all of these teens had trauma in their background and/or loss of relationship with one or both of their bio-parents. While I oversaw both the boy’s and girl’s units, I mainly worked with the teenage girls. I loved that work and loved working with those girls. I had no problem with all of the cattiness and emotionality, and actually was energized by it. I had a huge heart for these girls. I would often be on the unit, and a girl would cry out to me, “Dr. Greg, she is pushing my buttons!” To which I would reply, “Well then uninstall your buttons. The issue isn’t that she is pushing your buttons, it’s that you have buttons to push.” Another girl would be upset because she was called a derogatory name by another girl. I would say to her, “The issue isn’t she called you a _____, it’s that you agree with her.” Finally, one time the girls were riled up and I gathered a few of the more intense ones together and gave them permission to say whatever they wanted to me to attempt to “trigger” me and get me upset. I even gave them permission to swear. They readily took advantage of the open door I gave them and would say things like, “Dr. Greg, you have a big nose, your hair is thinning, you have a dad bod, and you are so ADHD extra!” (Girls would often tell me I was “extra”. Initially, I would reply to them and say, “I have no idea what that means, but it sounds like a compliment, so thank you.”) After their rant, I would simply say, “Girls, everything you said is absolutely true. I own it. Now what?” Even the most intense of them would be stopped cold and say, “Uh, I don’t know. That’s it.”

So the issue isn’t that my flaws are pointed out, the issue is my ownership of them. I find these three categories of insecurities:

- **It’s true, and I’m not ready to own it, so I defend myself and attack them back to divert attention from it.**
- **It’s not true, but I believe it to be true. These are insults that aren’t “provable”, like being called ugly or stupid.**
- **Someone is criticizing you to others, and you are insecure and threatened by the impact they will have on other’s opinions of you.**

What is being exposed? Go deep! Don’t let yourself off the hook until you get to the core. Inception levels 6 and 7: If you haven’t ever watched the movie “Inception” you need to. It is an incredible mind-bending movie, but it has so many wonderful insights. The movie is based in a guy (Leonardo DiCaprio) who hooks up a machine to someone who is sleeping that forces him to fall asleep as well. However, this machine allows him

to enter into the dreams of the other person. That person sees Leonardo as just another character in the dream, but Leonardo has full awareness and consciousness in the dream and uses the opportunity to influence the decisions of the person who is dreaming. The majority of the movie is centered around trying to convince an insecure son of an oil magnate to break up his father's company after he passes away. As the movie evolves, Leonardo has to keep having the person go to sleep in their dream and go another level deeper. A "dream within a dream within a dream". They eventually go six levels down.

The application to insecurity is illustrated when I was speaking to a woman whose husband lied to her and she was obviously upset. To lovingly provoke her I said, "Who cares if he lied to you? He eventually told you the truth." We went back and forth in a Q & A form, when eventually I said. At Inception level 6, the real issue is that you are upset because him lying to you is just another sign that is exposing your insecurity that you actually love him more than he loves you. Inception level 7 is that you can understand why...

Whenever we are experiencing negative emotions, we are being exposed somehow. It absolutely may be legitimate (like we have negative emotions because our child is in danger), but no matter what we have to get to Inception levels 6 & 7 to discover what our true insecurities are, that may reveal that we are having some serious self-depreciatory statements filling our minds.

Anxiety: The definition of anxiety is the emotion produced by trying to control something you can't control. We have two columns in our life: the "control" column and the "no control" column. The "control" column is stress, while the "no control" column is anxiety. More deeply, because there is so much about our lives we don't have control over, it seems as if 90% of the "control" column is how we respond to the "no control" column. Key: this is the first example of having the right brand/type of emotion from the three opening points above. Oftentimes I have clients say they have anxiety, but my immediate question is: "What are you trying to control that you can't control?" When answered, the response frequently is actually something we can control. Stress has the same feeling as anxiety, but it's the emotion (energy) produced with things we actually do have control over. Household chores, homework, other responsibilities. If it is truly something we have control over, we need to burn that emotion (energy) fixing the problem in the control column. That is what the energy is there for! Burn the energy on the item you have control over to bring it to resolution. I often call myself a word "Nazi" because words are so powerful, it is crucial that we label our emotion correctly. When our frontal lobe (the critical thinking and "final say" portion of our brain says "I have anxiety", the rest of our brain doesn't debate, it just responds accordingly. Our mental model's response to anxiety is very different than if our frontal lobe declared we are experiencing stress. It is crucial we label our emotion correctly. When you truly do have anxiety, ask "**What am I trying to control that I can't control?**" If you are truly trying to control something you can't control, then we need to unpack that in our session, not here. The question then becomes, "**Why are you actually trying to control what you can't control?**"

The second choice of the "brand/type" of emotion is knowing the difference between fear and worry.

Fear: Something is coming in our direction that we don't want to happen, and the key word is probability. The probability of it occurring is high enough that we need to burn energy creating a strategy to either keep it from happening or minimize the consequences of it when it does happen.

Worry: Something is coming in our direction that we don't want to happen, but the probability is so low that it is actually a lie. There is a saying: "80% of what we worry about will never come true." Fear would be the 20% of things that could very possibly come true, worry would be the 80% that we have lied to ourselves about and whipped ourselves up into a frenzy.

I again point back to #2 of the opening three points. The goal is to have the right brand/type and the right amount of emotion. The #1 reason I see emotion get "inflated" is because of lies. When the situation logically and rationally only requires a "2" or "3" level of response, and we add a lie, we quickly find ourselves at a "6",

“7”, or “8” because of a lie. **Emotions do not produce themselves, they come from sentences in our minds.** These sentences are our opinions or interpretations of the situation, or our prediction of the outcome. If any of those sentences aren’t true, our mental model produces emotional energy to respond to that sentence the frontal lobe created. It doesn’t debate, it just obeys. That emotional energy can’t get burned off because the sentence isn’t true. There is nowhere to burn it off. So many of us are so weighed down with the emotion created by lies.

This is a good point to address homework that is required between sessions. What I need you to do is

- Read this document several times.
- List experiences of negative emotions you have between sessions, regardless of how small. This will give us the live examples to train in emotional management.
- Become self-aware of lies you are telling yourself and either delete them or start replacing core lies with truth.

There are two kinds of lies:

- “Bye Felicia” lies. These are sentences that run through our mind that are so ridiculous, we can simply thought-stop and deny/delete the lie and say, “Bye Felicia!”
- Other lies are sentences we have said repeatedly to ourselves and are more “core” and nestled in our mental models. Even though we know they aren’t true, they have taken hold and we not only respond emotionally to them, we sometimes act on them. These lies can’t just be deleted, they must be replaced. Write the lie down, and underneath it, write a paragraph of truth to replace it. Even if there are negative statements in that paragraph, it’s okay. The goal is not “positive”, it’s truth. For example:

Lie: *“I will never be successful.”*

Truth: *“I have not put forth the effort and discipline up to this point in my life like I should have. The truth is that I can start now and if I want to be successful, I need to own the fact that it is my choice and it also my choice to be unsuccessful. I can absolutely be successful and will make a plan to start the process.”*

For those of us who are Christians, I also like pointing out that demonic forces are constantly shooting arrows of lies at us. Satan has one tool. He doesn’t have a toolbox, he has a holster. He is a liar and the father of lies. These lies always come in three categories: *Me, He, and We*. Lies I believe about myself (I am worthless), lies about God (He doesn’t care), and lies about our relationship (God is not paying attention to what is going on in my life). If you have heard about the movie *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson-directed movie from 2004), the opening scene is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. While He is praying, Satan appears and starts talking to Him. If you notice what Satan says, you will see lies cast at Christ in these three categories. His lies never change. “For we are not unaware of his schemes.” – 2 Corinthians 2:11.

Next: Anger and Depression

I put a dotted line between worry and anger because there is a switch from reactive to proactive, from victim to aggressor, from underdog to overdog (or whatever 😊). If someone comes to me and says, “Dr. Stewart, I’m insecure, I’m anxious, I’m afraid” then I want to come alongside them and comfort them. If someone comes to me and says, “I’m angry!” then I will step back and make sure I’m not the reason. There’s a switch within a person that basically tells them that they aren’t using enough energy, or the right type of energy, to make what they don’t like about the situation to change, so they greatly increase their emotion (energy) to try and dislodge it from being stuck, or to completely alter its course.

Anger: The definition of anger is using a high amount of negative emotion (energy) to force the situation to change or to change the trajectory of the situation to have a different outcome. Every creature uses this “technique”. A barking dog, a cat with its back hunched and hissing, a rattlesnake shaking its tail, etc. Anger is the result of a blocked goal.

1. What goal are you trying to achieve that is being blocked? Normally, it is a tangible, physical goal. Turn that goal into an emotional goal. **Every behavior we do ultimately is trying to achieve an emotional goal. What is your emotional goal? Is it respect, significance, security, safety, acceptance, a higher quality of life? The “gold” is in the emotional goal. That is far more important than the tangible goal. The emotional goal is normally good and healthy, the issues arise when we choose a wrong, unhealthy, irrational, or unwise path.**
2. Because the object of our anger is outside of us (and outside of our control), we have to still go through the process of figuring out what is being exposed in us. Drag the process below the dotted line. What are you afraid of happening/not happening (is that rational)? What is the worst that can happen if that happens? (It’s not your emotion (“I’ll get angry”). What actually bad happens to you? And then ask, “And what is the worst that can happen to you if that happens? Keep asking that question until you get to the rational/irrational line. At some point, the answer becomes very improbable or irrational.

I³ (I-Cubed)

Information – Interpretation – Intensity

Information: the story, details, facts, data. What is going on?

Interpretation: negative, neutral, positive

Intensity: On a scale of 1 to 10. Intensity is emotion, emotion is ENERGY (key: emotion is nebulous, hard to define, but if you define emotion as energy, you understand that the emotion is produced either as a good experience as you are experiencing a high moment [quality of life]; or negative emotion is produced to accomplish something or change something). Emotion is energy. ***Most things that cause us a lot of negative emotions are intangible, meaning it is probably relational. We get offended by people, or when things don’t go our way. Technically, nothing bad is happening other than our offense. In this case I have tried desperately to apply the technique: “Nothing bothers me, unless it should.” Instead of starting out being upset and working my way backwards to the right emotion, I try to begin at “apathy”, and then after examining it, wisdom, logic, rationality, etc. dictates that I need to address it. Then, I can increase my level of emotion, energy, intensity, up to the right amount. How much energy do I need to address this? The amount of energy is obviously related to what actual verbal/behavioral response is the most wise, rational, logical, etc.***

Key: Treat each “I” like the Panama Canal. Each “I” is a lock that needs to go through a process before the next lock is open.

Information: Do I have all of the information? If not, it is “illegal” to have any interpretation, opinion, etc. until you have all of the information. Which logically means it is illegal to have any emotion (intensity) as well.

Interpretation: the most common response that propels this whole formula is a negative interpretation (hence the emotion). The Interpretation is your mental model’s “formulas” that gives your frontal lobe it’s opinion of the situation, person, etc. Before you can open the Intensity “lock” you must ask yourself, “Is there any other way of looking at this?” This forces your mind to look at the information from alternative points of view, instead of your first blush, self-serving, self-absorbing, and may I say, neurotic, opinion of the information. This applies to all of us, not just you! BTW, if you were triggered by that last sentence, you may want to go right now to the “insecurity” section and ask yourself if it’s true, but you simply don’t want to own it! Once you ask yourself the question, “Is there any other way of looking at it?” you will most likely

come up with both an neutral interpretation/opinion and a positive interpretation, or you may not. Either way, you need to go through the process to ensure you are interpreting the information at objectively and truthfully as possible.

Intensity: As with #2 above (right brand/type of emotion and right amount). Same process.

Examples of likes/dislikes

Information: mint chocolate-chip ice cream

Interpretation: positive

Intensity: if a "1" – I'll have some if it's offered; if a "10" I need to have some every day

Information: Dallas Cowboys

Interpretation: negative

Intensity: If a "1" – I like the Houston Texans better; if a "10" – I burn one of their jerseys every game day.

Examples of negative experiences

Information: someone is gossiping about me at work

Interpretation: negative

Intensity: How much intensity-emotion-energy does it deserve? What is the worst that can happen? You having a negative emotion is not what bad happens. The negative emotion is produced is an energetic response to your thoughts on what problem you actually need to solve. Also, you need to ask, "What does this thing mean to me? If someone criticizes you, then what does that mean? Disrespect? Exposing a weakness? Someone spreading gossip about you? You need to figure out exactly what your intensity is supposed to solve. A lot of times we believe lies about the situation which escalates or exaggerates the intensity, the emotion, the energy.

Depression: you're still very angry, but you have lost hope and grace.... lost hope that the environment will change, and lost grace toward yourself because you have tried everything and yet things are still the same. You start attacking yourself and you have lost respect for yourself because you have no power.

Process:

1. Master the Past/Present/Future process in order to 1) decrease the amount of emotional energy you are burning every day, so you can burn the right amount of energy on the present.
2. The present: immediately build self-awareness on what lies you are believing. It's impossible to solve a "lie". There is no resolution to it, and it's consuming a whole lot of emotional energy!
3. Build self-awareness on what negative emotions you are experiencing every day and try and drill down into what you are insecure or anxious about, and afraid of or worried about.

A psychologically flexible person is characterized by a set of attitudes and skills: they are generally open to and accepting of experiences, whether they are good or bad; they try to be mindfully aware of the present moment; they experience difficult thoughts without ruminating on them; they seek to maintain a broader perspective when faced with a challenge; they continue to pursue important goals despite setbacks; and they maintain contact with "deeper values," no matter how stressful a day might.

Identity, Value/Worth, & Pursuit:

A number of the emotions above are impacted by the perception we have of ourselves at our core. It actually serves as a filter in the I cubed process above, changing our interpretation and intensity, both intrapersonally and interpersonally.

Identity, Value/Worth: What is your identity? The first thing that normally comes to mind when we hear that word are facts about ourselves, who we are, what we do, where we live, etc. However, those facts are not just benign, or neutral, we have feelings about those facts, good or bad, and those feelings define our value and our worth.

Pursuit: I believe naturally and passively, our identity, value, and worth come from how pursued we feel by others. As children, if we feel our parents have pursued us (they love us, like us, cherish us, etc.) then our value and worth is high. Conversely, we can immediately see a connection between our struggle with value and worth if we feel our parents were uninterested, abusive, neglectful, or in some cases, simply didn't want us and we were raised by a stepparent, ended up in foster care and/or adopted by others. Later, during our adolescence, if (enough) of our peers pursued us, we have high value/worth, and the opposite happens if we don't feel pursued by peers. Then later it's significant others, then our spouse, etc. High pursuit = high value/worth; low pursuit = low value/worth.

I strongly, emphatically, advise my clients to completely remove from the equation the correlation between pursuit by others and our value/worth. It is unhealthy and emotionally deadly to put that kind of pressure on other human beings. As humans, we fail each other, and I will not place my identity, value, and worth in the hands of other people. We obviously still want to pursue and be pursued, and that is good and healthy. However, we need to differentiate between needs and wants. No one can meet my emotional needs; they can meet my emotional wants. It doesn't change the desire of wanting to be pursued by others, it changes the degree of impact on us if our expectations are not met. I love my wife more than my own life, but she can't meet my emotional needs. I do want her to meet my emotional wants. If she doesn't at times, we talk about it, but here is the key: *If my wife doesn't pursue me like I want her to, it's disappointing not devastating.*

We have done a great disservice to ourselves and our relationships when we are expecting other humans to meet our needs. How many of us actually feel all of our emotional needs are met in our relationships? Exactly. So we are walking around, frequently devastated, when we feel like our needs aren't being met and we feel like we have this gaping "need" hole inside of ourselves. Nope.

So where should our identity, value and worth come from? I propose three areas, in the form of the triangle.

God: Ultimately, our identity, value, and worth comes from our creator. If you don't either believe in God or have a relationship with him, then the other two components need to assume all the responsibility. If you believe in God and have a relationship with Him, do you feel pursued by Him? For Christians, I encourage you to frame God through your relationship with Christ. He is our First Love and our Fiancé. He pursues us harder than we could ever pursue.

Our Success: The definition of success is the achievement of our personal and professional goals, whatever they may be. If we feel successful, or the trajectory of our life planning is pointed in that direction, we feel good about our value and worth.

Pursuit of Self: When you are at your best (not some future best, but the best you that you have already lived) in each of your roles (parent, spouse, employee, friend, etc.), do you like you? When asked, each of my clients so far have said "yes". THAT is who you are. Who we are at our core (Identity, Value/Worth) is who we are. This is illustrated by the triangle below. What about our mistakes and failures? Often people struggle being defined by their failures, but doesn't the simple fact that you hate it when you make those mistakes and can't stand it when you fail by definition tell you that is not who you are? There may be a lot of work to do in

addressing our mistakes, failures, bad habits, etc. But because it is not who we are at our core, it also is simply disappointing, not devastating. It may have devastating effects, but it is not our identity by definition. The goal of this entire section is to clearly define how so many of our negative emotions develop (relationships, mistakes), which drives the daily emotional management process above (Insecurity through Depression), as well as show that we control our Identity, Value/Worth, and it does not rest in our failures, and is not reliant upon other people pursuing us.

