

Imaging Your Marriage

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The **Individuated, Intimate Marriage** represents an ideal of two persons who function as autonomous individuals, accept and enjoy each other's differences, and share deeply each other's thoughts, feelings, fears, and hurts as well as joys and love. They do not have to be and think and feel the same way in order to be close, and they do not have to fight or withdraw in order to be accepted as individuals.

The **Centrifugal Style** (fleeing the center) is adopted by persons who *fear* they will be controlled, dominated, or misused by their partner. They maintain *emotional distance* and suffer from the lack of intimacy.

The **Centripetal Style** (seeking the center) is adopted by persons who *fear* they will lose the other or be rejected so they sacrifice much of who they are as individuals *trying to be the same* in thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. They suffer from the lack of individuality.

In the images the complete lines in the circles represents the degree of individuality; the dotted lines represent the lack of individuality. The *distance* of the circles from one another represents emotional distance and lack of intimacy, and the *merging* of the circles represents enmeshment or fusion but not true intimacy. The *encounter* of the circles represents that true intimacy is the interpersonal sharing of two autonomous individuals.

Theologically, the Centrifugal Style of marriage implies the **idolatry** or worship of the ego. In those marriages(**Competitive, Conflictive & Alienated**) spouses behave in egocentric ways, expect their spouses to serve their needs, and resist mutual trust out of fear of loss of control or dominance. The Centripetal Style of marriage also implies **idolatry**. In the **Fused Marriage** the couple worships the marriage itself and does not risk individuality for fear of rejection. In the **Dominant/Submissive Marriage** one spouse plays god and the other idolizes him/her. In the **Compromised Marriage** the spouses make an idol of harmony, they lack the courage to risk individuality and personal growth. In marital dysfunction then, the *fears* of possible rejection or engulfment are allowed such influence that both the *courage* to risk individual growth and the *trust* to share uniqueness and differences are diminished.

Systemically, couples locked by fear into these marital patterns become more and more anxious so that attempts at growth in individuality and/or intimacy are perceived as threatening and are resisted. Without therapeutic intervention the dance of love can become a rigid death march in which both are too frightened to risk change. The **marriage therapist** by hearing the unique fears of each spouse establishes **trust** and invites each to share their individual **images** of what the marriage is now and what they **hope** it will be.