

Embodied Polarity: A Jungian Framework for Therapists Working With Anxious/Avoidant Couples

**A Polarity-Based Training in Attachment and the
Navigation of Space**



Helping Couples Move from Anxious/Avoidant to Secure

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PREFACE

This training manual is linked to the concepts I explain in *Embodied Polarity*. In my book, I introduced polarity as a structural principle of the psyche, which explains the dynamic tension between opposing orientations that generates movement, development, and meaning. Polarity is not just a metaphor. It is the foundation of how humans navigate space, tension, and differences.

The anxious vs. dismissive dynamic is one of the clearest expressions of this basic relational architecture. I have chosen not to include the fearful avoidant (disorganized) attachment style here. To understand how the dynamic shows up in that “style”, just consider it as the ongoing switch between avoidance and anxiety.

Despite how it is treated in traditional therapy, this attachment cycle is not a pathology, nor a sign of incompatibility. It is a very clear evidence of the polarity between the immature masculine and immature feminine: it reveals the interplay between these two orientations that regulate safety in fundamentally different ways.

The intensity of this dynamic is not evidence of dysfunction, but of tension. When we look at relational conflict in general, we quickly recognize that there is a universal pattern underneath: some version of a push/pull dynamic. There is always one partner who will push harder for closeness, and another who will feel a stronger drive toward space. This dynamic is most evident in the dysfunctional drama of the Anxious/Avoidant “dance,” but all couples experience this tension to some degree as they negotiate the terms of their relationship. That is an unconscious and energetic process, but it always connects to that collective need for safety, space, and connection.

The couples who can learn to playfully move between those conflicting needs of space and connection are the ones who experience the deepest levels of growth and intimacy.

That process is driven by polarity, and it requires an increased tolerance of discomfort.

As I repeat throughout *Embodied Polarity*, tension is not an obstacle to intimacy, but the foundation of development. That reframing is essential in this work, because it shows that this particular attachment pattern has tremendous potential. To get there, couples need help navigating the space between them. That is where the polarity framework comes in, as it helps partners deepen their capacity for growth and intimacy.

This training is designed as a companion to *Embodied Polarity*. In this module, I want to expand the theoretical framework into a more focused exploration of the anxious/dismissive polarity, offering both conceptual clarity and embodied practices. The aim is not to “fix” attachment patterns or to achieve a particular relational outcome. My aim is for you to help couples understand the basic (energetic) architecture of their orientation. After all, that is what drives their particular dynamic and the patterns they repeat. This way, they can start to recognize the somatic strategies that shape their relational behavior, and to develop the capacity to hold tension without collapsing into their default coping strategies: pursuit or withdrawal.

The chapters that follow are written for therapists, coaches and teachers working with attachment and relational dynamics. The appendix provides practical tools, somatic practices, and reflective exercises that support the developmental process described throughout the text.

My hope is that this manual will offer you a clear, grounded, and embodied understanding of the anxious/dismissive polarity specifically, as many couples are stuck in that dynamic. Within the polarity framework, the basic rule is not to just approach this immature dynamic as a problem to solve, but as a polarity that actually invites partners toward greater integration, maturity, and relational depth.

Onward & Upward!

Eva Hund

INTRODUCTION

Attachment is often approached as a behavioral problem. The general cure presented to struggling couples? Learn to communicate better, regulate more effectively, express needs more clearly, and find ways to soothe one another.

While these skills have value, they do not touch the deeper energetic exchange that actually shapes relational dynamics. You cannot solve an energetic problem by working only on its surface-level symptoms. The anxious/dismissive dynamic does not arise from poor communication or incompatible personalities. It is caused by the partners' unconscious and embodied orientations. In order to help them work through this dysfunction and the challenges of their particular patterns, they have to gain insight into their specific masculine and feminine (energetic) orientations.

In *Embodied Polarity*, I describe polarity as the structural tension between opposing orientations: this is the tension that generates movement, development, and psychological depth. So, polarity is not just a nice or trendy metaphor, but the root architecture that shapes our interaction with differences. In short, it shows how we navigate space.

How Does this Show Up in the Anxious/Avoidant (push/pull) Dynamic?

The anxious/dismissive dynamic is one of the clearest expressions of this architecture. It is not a pathology, or a fixed trait, but an attachment polarity: a predictable interplay between two orientations that regulate safety in fundamentally different ways. The anxious preoccupied partner seeks external validation, whereas the dismissive avoidant partner is oriented toward autonomy for safety.

You can see how these two coping strategies clash. The beauty in these (challenging!) relationships is that they can actually be transformed to turn these reciprocal needs and gifts into shared leadership.

Secure attachment cannot be achieved by addressing behavior alone. It emerges when both partners learn to navigate that space with more maturity, awareness, and shared responsibility. This navigation is not primarily cognitive, but somatic. Awareness is the starting point for change, but only has a true effect on the relationship when it is paired with somatic/embodied practice. This is the basic premise of my book.

Somatic and embodied intelligence is the capacity to feel the movement of one's own system — toward, away, or into some form of collapse — and to remain oriented rather than reactive. Secure attachment is not a state one partner achieves individually. It is a co-created dynamic that arises when both partners can hold tension without collapsing into their habitual strategies. This is why we heal IN relationship, and not on our own, in a vacuum. In other words, we are hurt in unhealthy attachment, but we also heal through connection.

Moving Away or Toward Connection for Safety: Conflicting Needs

The anxious preoccupied orientation moves *toward* connection to regulate safety. The dismissive orientation moves *away* from connection to regulate safety. These movements are not chosen strategies, but learned coping mechanisms that are ingrained early on in development (childhood wiring). Both of these are unconscious strategies encoded in the nervous system. Think of them as a train track. We can barely steer off course, once we have been set in motion.

When these two opposed orientations meet, they activate a polarity. This is the reason behind their initial attraction, but also the root of their dysfunctional patterns.

The resulting cycle is not a sign of dysfunction, but most couples fall apart before they can get a taste of their tremendous power and potential together.

This training is designed to help create clarity around those energetic patterns. It offers a clear, grounded, and embodied understanding of the anxious/dismissive polarity, drawing directly from the theoretical framework I present in *Embodied Polarity*.

Remember, the goal in polarity work is not to eliminate tension or to achieve some static form of “security.” The greater purpose of this work is to help couples develop the capacity to remain present in tension: to navigate space consciously, experience moments of shared leadership, and to develop enough maturity to stay curious and open in the midst of conflict.

The chapters that follow explore the basic architecture of (masculine & feminine) orientation, the developmental logic behind the anxious and dismissive poles, the predictable cycle they create, and the somatic practices required to interrupt that cycle. In *Embodied Polarity*, I explain that polarity drives these attachment patterns and that avoidance is always a masculine strategy, whereas clinginess/neediness is always an immature feminine coping mechanism. Where I refer to “anxious preoccupied”, I am therefore always speaking of the partner holding the feminine pole AT THAT MOMENT. That is not necessarily the female partner, nor is it a fixed identity. Couples move in and out of these orientations, or modes. The “dismissive avoidant” partner is always representing the masculine pole at that moment. This is not a label, but an explanation of the space they occupy. Keep that in mind as you work through this module.

The appendix provides practical tools for working with these dynamics in real time. Together, they form a coherent framework for understanding secure attachment not as a personality trait, but as an embodied practice that emerges automatically as couples learn a more mature navigation of space.

This is the work that shapes secure attachment. Let’s begin!

The Basic Architecture of Polarity and Attachment

1.1 Polarity as a Structural Principle

Polarity is the foundational structure through which the human psyche organizes itself around tension. It is not a metaphor or a poetic device, but the foundation of our energetic dynamic: two opposing orientations (masculine & feminine) generating movement, differentiation, and depth. Polarity is the dynamic interplay between those forces that pull in different directions. This tension is not a problem, but a major source for both individual and relational development.

In my book, *Embodied Polarity*, I describe polarity as the structural principle that shapes both the internal world and the relational field. Every psychological system contains opposing movements — toward and away, expansion and contraction, autonomy and connection. These movements are not random, but organized responses to tension. They form the basis of our orientation. Our default mode is determined by many factors, but it is established in childhood. This is what pushes us to lean more toward either the masculine or the feminine pole. That becomes incredibly clear in our relationships, as we start relating to someone else. This is where we start the energy exchange: we are attracted to partners who embody reciprocal traits. This is a huge source of tension, but it also provides a gift. After all, they provide the energy that we lack in ourselves. The interaction that results pushes us in and out of masculine or feminine responses.

Polarity becomes visible when tension increases. Under pressure, the system reveals its primary movement, or default mode, as I prefer to call it. This

movement is not chosen, but somatic. It is our body's attempt to maintain coherence and establish a baseline sense of safety.

1.2 Attachment as Orientation

Attachment theory describes patterns of behavior that emerge in response to relational stress. In attachment work, therapists usually focus on the following types, or attachment styles: secure/insecure, dismissive avoidant, anxious preoccupied, disorganize (also referred to as fearful avoidant).

In my book, I show that all of these attachment styles actually show a deeper or predominant masculine or feminine orientation. Think of orientation as the directional movement that our system makes to regulate safety. It is not a personality trait, or a preference. It is an embodied response to triggers. And this shows up very clearly in relationship dynamics: this is how couples get stuck in push/pull patterns and they experience a loss of connection.

The anxious orientation moves *toward* connection.

The dismissive orientation moves *away from* connection.

These movements are not conscious decisions. They are deeply wired into the nervous system. When triggers show up in relationships, this is how the body attempts to maintain a sense of safety and stability. One partner feels an immediate impulse to cling, for example, and the other feels an urge to pull away. This is felt in the physical body, and it is experienced as a sense of urgency, which is almost impossible to ignore.

So, attachment behavior is basically an expression of orientation: *Do I feel safe leaning away, or leaning toward the other person?*

This preference is established in childhood, in our first interaction with our caregivers.

Simply put, this unconscious orientation is the basic architecture beneath our attachment.

Understanding orientation, then, allows us to see attachment not as a set of traits, but as a dynamic system responding to tension. This also gives us a powerful tool to work with these dynamics.

1.3 The Somatic Architecture of Orientation

Our orientation is expressed through the body. This also means that we can often feel these impulses much more clearly than we can put them into words! That is how couples end up lost in translation: they try to communicate their way out of these conflicts, while they should be more sensitive of the energetic exchange that is taking place beneath the surface.

In order to help couples get there, they need to learn to pay attention to their somatic responses:

- Breath patterns
- Posture
- Muscle tone
- Direction of movement (toward vs. away)
- Patterns of contraction or expansion
- The direction of their attention (internal vs external focus)

These somatic patterns are consistent across individuals with similar (masculine or feminine) orientations. Therefore, they are not learned behaviors, but adaptive responses to early relational environments.

The anxious orientation contracts and moves forward.

The dismissive orientation expands and moves backward.

This is not symbolic, but literal and observable. They just mark the body's attempt to regulate intensity, space and connection. We can often observe these impulses in each other much more than we can recognize them in ourselves. And that energetic sensitivity (to one another) is what determines our dynamic within relationships.

In practical terms, this means that we can sense something in our partner (physically and energetically) that we cannot put into words, but have an automatic embodied response to. This is what makes us flinch, or sigh, or feel tense in our bodies. That response activates something in our partners, and round and round we go.

1.4 Polarity as Untapped Potential

Polarity generates tension. And that tension, in turn, generates development. Unfortunately, we have a negative association with tension. We are wary of conflict, and prefer to avoid tension altogether. As a result, we tend to withdraw right when our relationships need connection.

This is the core principle of *Embodied Polarity*. Without tension, there is no movement. And so, without movement, there is no growth or life force (Eros).

Some couples experience this loss of tension when they focus on total harmony and try to occupy the same space. This results in a relationship that looks neutral and peaceful, but is dying on the inside. Couples stuck in that dynamic end up feeling more like roommates than lovers.

The opposite, the strong tension experienced by anxious/avoidant couples, is equally challenging. The good news is that couples can work through this tension to achieve a deeper sense of intimacy.

It may sound strange, but it is so important to stress that the anxious/dismissive polarity is actually a huge catalyst for growth. It brings to the surface the unconscious strategies each partner uses to regulate safety. This dynamic, regardless of how unhealthy and immature it is, actually forces partners to face their unhealed patterns. This is the intelligence behind attraction: we are matched to transform these wounds, so that we can offer our deepest gifts. These are always reciprocal: we allow our partner to access something that they have lost in themselves, and vice versa.

This push/pull struggle actually manifests what each partner is still holding back, or stuck in. It makes it very clear what they have yet to develop in themselves AND what they can offer the relationship container.

This exposure is not comfortable, of course. In fact, most couples will feel a deep urge to get out of this dynamic. But it is necessary to emphasize that this challenge presents tremendous potential.

The polarity framework pushes couples to the edge of their personal capacity: what can they tolerate, as they navigate space & connection together?

Can they find a way to stay curious? How can they use their wiring and their natural impulses to be more playful together? That is where real growth happens. And that process will leak into other areas of life.

1.5 Why is the Anxious/Dismissive Polarity So Intense and So Hard to Get Out Of?

The intensity of the anxious/dismissive dynamic is not evidence of dysfunction. It is very important to stress that. It simply shows the intensity of polarity. These two orientations are attempts to regulate safety in opposite ways:

- The anxious orientation moves *toward* to feel safe.
- The dismissive orientation moves *away* to feel safe.

These movements activate each other's core wounds:

- The anxious orientation fears *abandonment*.
- The dismissive orientation fears *engulfment*.

It is very clear to see how each orientation's attempt to regulate safety actually destabilizes (or triggers) the other partner. This creates a self-reinforcing loop of tension: these partners experience very strong attraction, but they also clash. I explain this dynamic in the book, but it comes down to the basic principle that our wounds are deeply connected to our gifts. These

partners are just playing out collective, unconscious patterns. The intensity is structural, not personal. Still, many couples end up giving up after too much conflict. The ones that push through it find ways to break that energetic pattern underneath their tension.

Contrary to popular belief, this specific polarity (anxious/avoidant) is not a sign of incompatibility. It is a marker of difference: these partners are stuck on two opposite sides of the spectrum. They are stuck in immature masculine and feminine coping strategies.

The only way out of this is for them to transform that energetic tension so that they can commit to growth and shared leadership. In other words, they need to discover that their tension hides particular gifts: if they can tap into this potential, they can shift the whole dynamic and move toward mature ways of relating.

1.6 What is the Role of the Nervous System in Attachment?

The nervous system determines our “default” orientation, as we have already established. It is the root programming that sets us up with a specific (deeply ingrained) preference for interaction. This wiring pushes us to relate a certain way, but we are unconscious of most of these modes. We may feel that we are more comfortable with closeness or space, but we often lack the awareness of how this affects our interaction with others.

These strategies are formed early, often before language, and shape the unconscious architecture that determines our relational behavior. Choose the term that makes most sense to you, the general idea is the same:

mode/orientation/architecture/preference. The key concept to remember is that we all move back and forth on a spectrum: one side of this invisible line is masculine and the other is feminine. We are never fixed on one side, but we certainly have a default identification with one of these. As fixed as this wiring may seem, we can move in and out of masculine or feminine space based on the energetic exchange we experience with others.

We are always responding to energy and evoking a reciprocal response in our partner:

An immature masculine-leaning partner will automatically evoke an immature feminine response in their lover, and vice versa.

- The *anxious orientation* relies on sympathetic activation: mobilization (activating), urgency, forward movement.
- The *dismissive orientation* relies on dorsal activation: withdrawal, numbing, backward movement.

Please note that these responses are not conscious choices, but physiological imperatives ingrained in our nervous system: our body sets us up for one of these impulses in a moment of tension. When we are not conscious, we resort to our default mode: this is an *immature* response to a trigger, and it shows up as a reflex.

Understanding the nervous system allows us to see this inner orientation not as a flaw, but as an adaptive strategy. In other words, our anxiety or avoidance is there to protect us. It serves a function. The problem is that our nervous system does not have a “time consciousness”: It does not distinguish between the past, present or future. In moments of tension, we are essentially transported back to an earlier experience of that familiar wound. As such, we respond to our partners from that childlike defensiveness: we feel an urge to resort to our creature comforts. This reflex response is so quick, we can do very little to stop ourselves from acting out of that impulse. We may be deeply involved in development work, individually or as a couple, and still find it extremely difficult to control these trigger responses.

This also reveals why behavioral interventions alone are insufficient. You cannot change orientation through cognition. Of course it helps to understand the pattern, to gain awareness about triggers, needs and desires. But you absolutely must work with the body if you want real change. That is where embodiment work comes in as a necessary aspect of the polarity framework.

Embodied awareness is the wisdom that can help couples experience real transformation together.

They have to share a commitment to rewiring their nervous system. This is hard enough to do in personal development work, but even more challenging in the context of interaction, where one person's "parts" meets the other with all their inner dynamics.

1.7 Orientation Is Not Identity

Orientation is often mistaken for identity. People say, "I am anxious," or "I am avoidant," as if these orientations define who they are. But orientation is not a marker of identity. It is simply an unconscious strategy. It is the system's best attempt to maintain a sense of coherence and stability in the face of tension.

Identity is who you are. But your masculine or feminine orientation reveals your energetic movement.

This distinction is essential; I cannot stress this enough. Whenever this orientation is mistaken for identity, people become trapped in their patterns. When, on the contrary, our default orientation is understood as a strategy, we can change how we relate (to ourselves and to our partner).

Needless to say, the more flexible we are, the better equipped we are to move with that orientation. This is how we can actually affect the direction of energy within relationships and learn better ways to connect. We can change our orientation, and, in fact, we often do so. Every time our partner chooses to move away from their default spot on that spectrum, we are forced to move, as well. That is simply how energy operates, as I repeat throughout *Embodied Polarity*. Sure, we may identify with some of these preferences, but they do not define who we are. One person may have a deep need for closeness and connection, but this preference is always dependent on the context. It is not fixed.

1.8 Summary

Polarity is the structural principle that shapes the human psyche. And orientation is the somatic expression of polarity: it reveals how our energy shows up in our interaction. Attachment behavior is deeply linked to that orientation. So, the anxious/dismissive dynamic is a polarity, not a pathology. Its intensity simply reflects the opposing strategies the two orientations (masculine vs feminine) use to regulate safety.

Understanding polarity allows us to see that attachment dynamic much more clearly. And within that basic structure, we can zoom in on orientation to work with polarity more effectively. The chapters that follow explore the two orientations in depth, revealing their developmental logic, embodiment, core wounds, challenges, and gifts.

CHAPTER 2

The *Anxious Preoccupied* Orientation: Its Depth, Wound, and Root Cause

2.1 The Core Orientation: Moving *Toward*

The *anxious preoccupied orientation* is defined by a primary movement toward the other. Again, this movement is not a preference or a personality trait, but a somatic strategy for regulating safety. When tension increases within a relationship, the anxious partner's system contracts and moves forward, toward the partner. It is marked by a deep need for external

validation. This forward movement is an attempt to restore connection, which the system interprets as the source of stability.

The anxious orientation is highly attuned to relational shifts. This partner is wired with a kind of internal “alarm system” and alertness for signs of abandonment or a lack of connection. It perceives changes in tone, expression, or presence with heightened sensitivity and is hyper-alert. While this partner is hyper-alert, their sensitivity is not a flaw. It is a form of depth perception: an ability to detect subtle changes in the relational dynamic. But without proper containment, this depth becomes overwhelming to their partner, who is much less aware of these subtle changes in the dynamic. It is very important to note that this sensitivity needs to be reframed as both a challenge and a gift. There is something valuable in that level of awareness that can really benefit the relationship, but it often shows up as an obstacle to connection. After all, their partner feels activated and defensive, when their lover is constantly on the look-out for signs of danger, rejection or deceit. It can be incredibly tiring and frustrating to keep validating the anxious preoccupied partner.

2.2 Root Cause

The root cause of the anxious (preoccupied) orientation is directly linked to an early environments where connection was inconsistent. This individual’s system learned that closeness was necessary for safety, but not available, at least not consistently so. Without that reliable source of external validation, this reinforced a response of “I need to get this need met! I must try harder to get the love and safety I need!” This created a paradox: connection is essential, but connection is unstable or unavailable. In this particular response to that lack of connection, the child internalized the notion that connection is not steady and must, then, be fought for and chased.

This individual’s system adapted by becoming vigilant. Note: this is not the only possible response to that lack of attunement and emotional connection.

It is the feminine-oriented response: a push for intensity and connection. This individual is wired for hyper-alertness: screening the other person for signs of closeness or connection, or possible threats of rejection and deceit. It learned to monitor the relational dynamic very closely. Most notably, it learned to move (excessively) *toward* quickly when connection felt threatened, instead of retreating. In other words, the anxious preoccupied response to a lack of connection is always to try harder, to push for closeness and to protest at any sign of distance. Remember, this vigilance is not a cognitive decision, but an embodied adaptation. Something in their nervous system internalized the idea that closeness can only be achieved through effort (a stronger emotional call for attention, etc.)

The anxious orientation is not “needy.” It is highly responsive and sensitive. It is organized around the belief that connection must be maintained and pursued actively. This is the tantrum of a child who demands attention (even negative) when their caregiver is distracted. It is not a healthy coping strategy, but it is a default response to a lack of connection. “You don’t see me? OK! I must scream for your attention, then!” And it leaks into adult relationships, especially without a deeper awareness of this unmet need.

2.3 Somatic Expression of the Anxious Preoccupied Attachment

The somatic expression of the anxious orientation includes:

- Contraction in the chest and diaphragm
- Forward-leaning posture
- Rapid or shallow breath
- Heightened emotional intensity
- Narrowed (sometimes obsessive!) focus on the other
- Increased muscle tension in the upper body
- Flushing of the cheeks and neck

These patterns are not just expressions of insecurity, but of a nervous system that is dysregulated. Essentially, these physical symptoms or expressions are

the body's attempt to maintain coherence by restoring proximity. The body feels an urgency to act: an internal alarm system that suggest something is off. Frustratingly, this is often activated before it is necessary: this person feels a threat before it is present. Their nervous system anticipates rejection and abandonment and responds by immediately moving into "protest behavior". These will be explained at a later point, but can be summarized as any attempt to restore connection and gain a sense of closeness. The strong impulse to close the gap between partners.

The somatic expression reveals the anxious preoccupied person's core strategy: move *toward* the other person to stabilize. This is inverted in their partner (who moves away & inward).

2.4 The Core Wound

The core wound of the anxious orientation is the fear of abandonment. This fear is not cognitive, but somatic and energetic. Remember, that this is not a conscious fear, but a deep wound. It is often linked to childhood trauma, but not necessarily in the sense of the word we often associate with it. The trauma I am referring to here can seem insignificant and still have left this impact on the nervous system. Consider a child who is left to cry themselves to sleep, for instance. This is not necessarily a "highly traumatic" experience, but it can be unsettling to a nervous system that is in full development. In the same way, at an even deeper level, we are also wired by epigenetic factors (wounds and generational trauma passed down to us). In this case, it is even more difficult to identify the source of the issue.

The important thing to remember in polarity work is that the root cause, or reason, for the energetic mismatch is not necessarily an essential aspect for healing. We cannot always know exactly where a certain energetic response was "etched into our nervous system". Some of these wounds come to the surface, but most stay hidden deep within our Unconscious.

It is much more essential to realize that the energetic response is always rooted in either a stronger urge to move toward fullness (connection/movement/life) or stillness (space/autonomy/order). These are on opposite ends of the spectrum: the feminine is always oriented toward “everything,” whereas the masculine is always drawn to “nothing.” This is more than a spiritual and abstract concept: it seeps into our relational dynamic.

The more feminine-identifying partner will push for closeness more than the masculine-leaning lover. This is not related to gender, but to a much larger identification with either side of the spectrum. And this identification is directly linked to a wound: a shared fear of rejection, or abandonment. The only difference in how this wound is manifested in these partners is that the one has a feminine response (anxious preoccupied), and the other learned a masculine coping (dismissive avoidant). The wound is the same! But they both internalized this differently and learned an opposite strategy for safety.

This pain (abandonment wound) is encoded in the anxious preoccupied person’s body as a sense of urgency, a fear of disconnection, and a belief that the self cannot remain stable without the other. This results in over-attachment and hyperdependence. This partner lacks self-regulation strategies and seeks external validation.

The core wound expresses itself through:

- Hypervigilance
- Emotional escalation
- Attempts to secure reassurance
- Difficulty tolerating ambiguity
- Sensitivity to distance

The wound is not irrational, though it certainly feels that way for a dismissive avoidant partner. It is just the residue of early relational experiences where connection was unpredictable.

This partner carries an internal conviction that they are fundamentally unsafe and unheld. They feel unseen, despite their partner's best efforts. After all, somewhere along the line they learned that connection was unsteady. They concluded that they must earn it, somehow, or lose it altogether.

2.5 Collapse Pattern: Protest Behavior

When the anxious preoccupied partner is highly triggered, their whole system collapses into escalation. Don't think of escalation as aggression, though it may definitely look like that. It is a desperate attempt to restore connection through a "fight" reflex.

The collapse pattern (also known as protest behavior) includes:

- Emotional flooding
- Overexpression
- Attempts to close the distance
- Difficulty regulating intensity
- Loss of internal reference

Escalation is their system's attempt to prevent abandonment. But escalation often triggers more withdrawal in the dismissive orientation, reinforcing the polarity cycle. Think of the term "protest behavior" as their desperate attempt to hold on to the other person and protest against the distance. Even the slightest threat of abandonment feels unbearable and will incite this sense of urgency. This is highly triggering for their partner, who will automatically (through this energetic exchange) be pushed even further into their avoidant orientation.

And, worse, this protest behavior results in more self-abandonment. The anxious preoccupied person, through this focus on their partner, actually becomes self-abandoning in the process. This is a kind of re-traumatizing: through their fear of (external) abandonment, this partner actually ends up rejecting aspects of themselves. They struggle with self-regulation, always outsourcing safety to their partner (who does the very opposite).

They scream (sometimes literally) “Stay with me! Hold me/ See me!” but they abandon themselves in the process, turning all of their focus to their partner. This protest behavior often comes across as hostile, even. After all, as I explain in Embodied Polarity, *any form* of contact is better than distance. If that means they have to throw a tantrum, or push buttons, they do so. It is clear to see how this type of protest behavior leads to conflict within this relationship dynamic.

2.6 Core Gift

The core gift of the anxious orientation is depth, or openness (or responsiveness). This depth includes:

- Emotional attunement
- Open expression
- Sensitivity to nuance
- Capacity for intimacy
- Ability to feel deeply
- Strong relational presence

These gifts are often overshadowed by the collapse pattern that I describe above. With enough containment and safety, the anxious orientation becomes a source of emotional richness and relational depth. Unfortunately, most couples who are stuck in this dynamic end up calling it quits before they can get a taste of “the good stuff.”

The more the couple can manage to reframe their differences as a deep gift, the better they can actually develop these qualities. This is an exercising in “bending their energy.” That sounds esoteric, but is not. It simply means that a partner can find a way to redirect their energy by fine-tuning, or amplifying a certain trait.

Consider this example:

If an anxious preoccupied partner is aware of their hyper-sensitivity, they can use that new awareness to amplify that trait in a moment of closeness or

connection. That is hard to do in the midst of conflict, of course. But the more they can practice a full embodied expression of that openness (or sensitivity), the more they can help their partner see this as a gift. This is a beautiful way for them to help their (more dense) partner see the world through their eyes; they can develop the habit of actively expressing what they experience. This will help them invite their partner into their rich world of more emotional depth.

This can even happen in the midst of a heated argument, as I explain in my book. They can be both fiery and deeply loving at the same time: their fierceness may be intimidating, but there is a depth of emotional connection in that expression. They can sense something that their partner is mostly unaware of, and they can choose to offer that sensitivity as a conscious gift.

The anxious preoccupied partner has a deeper understanding of the emotional subtext and layers of energy as they show up in the relationship. This can be either a burden, when it is fear-based and simply reactive, or a tremendous gift, when it is an authentic response to what is taking place moment to moment. The only way to develop that capacity is through openness and responsiveness. That means this partner needs to develop discernment around their reactivity and practice open expression, or embodiment, in the present moment. I describe that work at length in *Embodied Polarity*.

2.7 Growth Challenge: Containment

The primary growth challenge for the anxious orientation is inner containment, or a sense of internal safety and self-regulation. Containment is the capacity to hold emotional intensity without collapsing into triggered pursuit and urgency (or closure). To put it more simply: the ability to stay open in the midst of tension. It is not about suppression, but about developing a sense of inner structure. That is very challenging for the anxious preoccupied partner, as they are so sensitive to complexity and so quick to draw connections. This

tendency is often expressed as some form of assumption, or jumping to conclusions.

Within the polarity framework, this practice looks like a conscious attempt to stimulate their inner masculine orientation. This is very hard to do when they are leaning so heavily toward their immature feminine, but it can be done (with enough awareness).

The more the anxious preoccupied partner can learn to self-regulate and offer themselves the safety of masculine containment (structure/grounding), the more this will evoke that same maturity in their dismissive avoidant (masculine-leaning) partner. This is a beautiful expression of polarity practice. But it is also the hardest discipline, and this is where the help of a framework really comes in. They need constant reminders to focus on their internal sense of safety every time they are tempted to reach for external validation.

Containment allows the system to:

- Remain with itself (awareness of their physical experience)
- Regulate intensity internally
- Differentiate between fear and reality
- Stay grounded in tension
- Maintain connection without urgency

Containment transforms their orientation from reactive to responsive: there is a huge difference between a triggered reaction and an *embodied response*.

The anxious preoccupied partner needs to learn the difference. They can distinguish between the two by noticing a sense of urgency in their system, versus the still “inner voice” of intuitive wisdom or the gift of open expression.

The more the anxious preoccupied partner can invest in themselves, the more they will learn to self-regulate and invite connection from their partner. This is the best way to reverse the cycle: this is how partners can turn the whole dynamic around. The opposite works for the dismissive avoidant partner, as we will see later on.

If the anxious preoccupied partner can manage to self-regulate, this will lessen their “energetic demand” toward their partner. That creates a sense of relief and will re-establish their intimacy. After all, a needy partner evokes withdrawal, whereas a regulated and confident partner invites closeness.

2.8 The Anxious Orientation in Relationship

Within relationships, the anxious orientation actually brings depth, presence, and emotional availability. But without containment, it can quickly become destabilized by distance, ambiguity, or withdrawal. That is how the most beautiful traits, which were so attractive to their partner, can turn into big irritators. Depth then turns into hyper-vigilance, and emotional availability becomes some form of smothering and high demand.

This can be very challenging and frustrating for both partners, as the anxious orientation often interprets neutral behavior as rejection. They are constantly on edge, anticipating danger and abandonment. Their partner, in turn, feels attacked.

This partner has a tendency to escalate in an attempt to restore connection, which naturally overwhelms the dismissive orientation.

How is this a Universal Tension?

This dynamic is not personal, but structural: the abandonment wound is so deeply ingrained into the nervous system that it comes out in varying degrees and at different times.

We all play out this dynamic in some form, when we are triggered. And some couples really struggle to move out of this pattern: that tension somehow gets locked into their system, and their energy gets stuck in that state of either anxious preoccupied clinging or dismissive avoidant withdrawal. But all of us have experienced some degree of this basic tension in our relationships. This is the space where we navigate our needs for space and connection, and that tension can get really intense.

In other words, these patterns are universal and collective energetic dynamics. This is why we can all connect to stories repeated in dramatic movies about love-hate relationships: we all negotiate the space between us, and try to find a balance in what we give and receive within our relationships. With enough containment, the anxious orientation can actually develop into a powerful relational force, capable of intimacy without collapsing too much into dependence. The aim, of course, is healthy interdependence and co-regulation. But it is much harder to get there when default patterns take over and we resort to our nervous system's default protective strategies.

2.9 Summary

The anxious preoccupied (immature feminine) orientation is a somatic strategy organized around the movement *toward* connection and over-reliance on the other person. Its core wound is abandonment. Its primary collapse pattern (protest behavior) is some form of escalation and a demand for external validation. Its core gift is depth. Its developmental task and challenge is to gain a deeper capacity for inner containment. Understanding this orientation allows us to work with it rather than against it. That awareness is the beginning point of growth and a catalyst for embodiment practice.

CHAPTER 3

The Dismissive Avoidant Orientation: Autonomy, Withdrawal, and the Architecture of Distance

3.1 The Core Orientation: Moving *Away*

The dismissive orientation is defined by a primary movement *away* from the other. This movement is not avoidance in the moral sense. It is a somatic strategy for regulating safety. When tension increases, the system expands and withdraws. This withdrawal is an attempt to restore internal coherence.

The dismissive orientation values autonomy above all else. It experiences emotional intensity as overwhelming. Distance becomes the primary means of maintaining stability.

3.2 Root Cause

The root cause of dismissive avoidant orientation emerges from early environments where emotional intensity was either overwhelming, intrusive, or inconsistent. Their nervous system learned that closeness was destabilizing. It adapted by reducing emotional bandwidth and increasing self-reliance. Strangely, they may have experienced an upbringing similar to their anxious partner's, but their response marks a different attachment mode. Whereas the anxious preoccupied partner's strategy revolved around self-abandonment and a push for external validation, the dismissive avoidant partner adopted the opposite approach: their nervous system got stuck in "flight" mode. Their approach to dealing with a lack of emotional attunement is marked by self-reliance: "If they cannot meet my needs, I must fend for myself!" Of course, this is also an unconscious defense mechanism. But it is internalized as a need for autonomy, which hides a deeper fear of rejection and abandonment. The dismissive avoidant partner anticipates abandonment. Their deep fear of never being enough manifests as a refusal to even make the effort. That is, of course, a generalization, but this is one of the ways it is read by their anxious preoccupied partner, who puts in too much effort.

Where one partner errs on the side of hyper-independence, the other errs on the side of hyper-dependence. Both wounds are rooted in some form of emotional neglect (great or small), or overwhelm.

The dismissive orientation is not “cold.” It is protective. It is organized around the belief that autonomy is necessary for safety. Some dismissive avoidant individuals were emotionally smothered, or burdened, in childhood. One of their caregivers may have been emotionally volatile, or placed an excessive burden on the child to keep the peace. In that case, it is very clear to see how the child would internalize that burden as something to avoid in the future.

Both of these are forms of emotional neglect: in the one case, the parent withholds emotions, and in the other, they dump emotions. The result is the same: that child internalizes a profound discomfort around emotional expression. They end up equating a lack of “drama” or emotional intensity as love. Space feels familiar and safe, and autonomy becomes a primary drive. Still, somewhere hidden in their unconscious, they are desperate for emotional connection. They have lost access to it, but they long for it. This explains the strong appeal of the emotionally intense anxious preoccupied partner. But that attraction fades the moment they reach their threshold for connection and intimacy.

3.3 Somatic Expression of the Dismissive Avoidant Attachment

The dismissive avoidant partner embodies a baseline sense of flatness. This can sometimes be interpreted as a type of relaxedness, or non-chalance, which can appeal to a more tightly wound anxious partner. Note that these somatic aspects are linked to their general expression of a sense of detachment.

The somatic expression of the dismissive orientation includes:

- Expansion in the chest and upper torso
- Backward-leaning posture
- Breath holding or shallow breath
- Reduced emotional expression
- Withdrawal of attention
- Numbing or flattening of sensation

These patterns are not expressions of disinterest. They are the body's attempt to maintain coherence by creating space. Everything about their physical appearance and energy actually exudes a sense of spaciousness. They are more grounded than anxious preoccupied individuals, who show a much more dynamic expression in their energy.

Remember, dismissive avoidance, as a masculine Shadow trait, is marked by a drive toward stillness and non-motion. As charming as this can be to the more dynamic anxious preoccupied lover, this quickly becomes a strong trigger. It can be interpreted as aloofness and shallowness, though there is much more happening underneath the surface. The dismissive partner is equally anxious underneath that detached appearance, but their focus is turned inward. It is important to note that their anxious partner scans for signs of disinterest, and feels a strong reaction to the avoidant's postu

3.4 The Core Wound

The core wound of the dismissive orientation is the fear of engulfment. This fear is not cognitive or conscious, but somatic and (mostly) unconscious. It is encoded in their body as overwhelm, shutdown, or a sense of losing autonomy. As a result, they feel an ongoing impulse to defend their personal sense of space and independence, which provides them an illusion of safety. It is important to note that this self-reliance is not selfish, though it can certainly be interpreted as such by their partner, who is desperate for deeper connection. The dismissive avoidant-leaning individual developed a sense of autonomy in response to a lack of emotional attunement and safety. In other words, their hyper-independence is not *offensive*, but *defensive*, though it is often misinterpreted as a lack of interest. In order to relate to a dismissive avoidant partner, we must remember that their avoidance is a coping mechanism.

The core wound expresses itself through:

- Withdrawal

- Emotional distance
- Difficulty tolerating intensity (or “drama”)
- Preference for independence
- Reduced relational bandwidth
- A deep need for peace and stability (fear of conflict)

The wound is not a rejection of the other (more anxiously attached) partner, but it often looks that way. Rather, it is a protection of the self, but it actually keeps them from experiencing the connection they long for at an unconscious level. This distinction is essential. The more they pull their walls up, the more they will inevitably reject their partner and reinforce within themselves that they are alone. Their system sets them up to reinforce that limiting belief.

As they have never learned to process emotional intensity, their default response to conflict is to tune out and withdraw. This can show up in many ways: numbing through mindless activities, gaming, competitive sports, or porn. Anything at all that helps them feel that nothing is required from them: the key aspect here is that they soothe through *detachment*. Do remember that this is not gender-bound, though more men identify with that masculine orientation. This is due in part to the way they are socialized and programmed to manage emotions, and in part to other factors.

The immature masculine partner fears that they will never be enough. Nothing they do will ever be enough for their “demanding” lover, so they might as well quit trying altogether. When something triggers this fear of inadequacy and shame, they retreat into their shell. When that withdrawal inevitably infuriates their anxious preoccupied partner, this confirms the dismissive avoidant’s deepest unconscious fear: they must be unloveable and eventually end up alone. That pain is too much to bear, so they put up a wall in anticipation.

3.5 Collapse Pattern: Protest Behavior

When the dismissive avoidant - orientated partner is pushed toward their limits, their nervous system is bound to collapse into withdrawal. This is triggered most by emotional intensity and conflict. Their system simply has a lower threshold for emotion. Think of the root of the term “emotion” : “energy in motion” and remember that the masculine is always oriented toward stillness, resolution and order. Motion, then, is inherently uncomfortable to the masculine-identified partner. This is why the feminine partner often pushes their buttons: they embody the opposite of stillness. The feminine is an expression of movement, change and energy, and, as such, causes a strong reaction in the masculine partner.

I explain this spiritual principle in some detail in my book, but the important aspect to remember here is that any form of emotional expression, especially when it reaches a certain intensity, can push an immature masculine partner into further withdrawal.

They do not mean to put up a wall and shut out their well-meaning partner, but their system cannot handle that level of emotional energy. It has never learned to co-regulate in the midst of conflict, so they do what they do best: they cling to the comfort and safety of their personal space. In *Embodied Polarity*, I explain that this creature comfort is an illusion of safety: pseudo-freedom. There is no true freedom in the escape of their withdrawal, but they always go for the substitute. This feels more comfortable than having to stay present in the midst of tension and conflict.

Withdrawal is not disconnection, per se, but a defensive strategy to prevent overwhelm. This collapse pattern includes:

- Emotional shutdown
- Cognitive distancing (detaching, down-playing and minimizing)
- Reduced presence
- Numbing

- Avoidance of engagement

These forms of withdrawal often trigger further escalation in the anxious orientation, reinforcing the polarity cycle. The more the avoidant partner retreats, the more the anxious partner is pushed toward pursuit. It is not hard to see how couples get stuck in this loop.

Note that this insecure attachment dynamic is a direct inversion of their masculine & feminine gift: it is the mature masculine partner's gift to focus externally and provide a sense of deep presence and safety. It is the mature feminine partner's deepest relational gift to relax and open into herself.

Simply put, insecure attachment prevents us from stepping into our authentic purpose. The only way to restore the dynamic is for both partners to pause and develop the discipline to stop protest behavior and drop their guard. If the anxious partner can manage to stay open, the avoidant partner is invited into deeper connection. Alternately, if the avoidant partner can learn to stay present in emotional intensity, the anxious partner can relax.

3.6 Core Gift

The core gift of the dismissive orientation is stability, or depth of presence.

This stability and presence includes:

- Emotional steadiness
- Clarity
- Capacity for autonomy
- Ability to remain grounded
- Strong internal reference (deep purpose)
- Unwavering presence
- Integrity

These gifts are often overshadowed by their collapse pattern. But with deeper engagement and an increased capacity for presence, the dismissive partner's orientation really becomes a source of clarity and steadiness in relationship.

That is a deeply nurturing gift for the feminine , who will respond by relaxing and offering the gift of open expression.

The dismissive avoidant partner, when stuck in a trigger response, will do anything to move away from conflict and intensity. This often results in an instant loss of connection, at least temporarily. That prevents them from showing up with their deep gift. In fact, they may not even be aware of what they could offer their partner, if they were brave enough to just stay present. This is the challenge: to move out of this push/pull cycle, both partners need the awareness to see that their wiring hides a deeper gift. But that this gift requires courage: they must be willing to offer safety in the midst of tension. When they do, their anxious partner will respond by opening up and relaxing. The avoidant's fear of inadequacy is linked to a kind of emotional clumsiness. They may have learned to manage their emotions by suppressing them. This lack of emotional intelligence keeps them from connecting with their partner, who will make bids for deeper intimacy. The avoidant registers that desire as a confirmation of their own (emotional) inadequacy: "I am failing her/him" (the anxious partner). And, as long as the immature feminine partner insists on a form of emotional expression that matches her own, she will confirm that shame in him. In doing so, she misses out on the deeper gift that he could offer her: emotional regulation, after all, is not the same as emotional expression.

3.7 Growth Challenge: Engagement

The main developmental task, or challenge for growth, of the dismissive orientation is engagement. The best way to understand that engagement is as the capacity to remain present in relational tension without withdrawing. It is not emotional intensity, but a consistent form of availability.

Every time the dismissive avoidant partner manages to stay present and engaged, the anxious preoccupied partner feels a sense of safety and relief that allows for full expression and openness. It only takes one partner to

initiate a healthier response for the other to follow suit and drop their guard. This takes continued practice and discipline.

Engagement allows the system to:

- Stay connected without losing autonomy
- Tolerate emotional intensity
- Remain present in conflict
- Expand relational bandwidth
- Maintain contact without overwhelm

Engagement transforms the masculine orientation from distant (immature) to grounded (secure). This does not mean that they must connect *like* their anxious-leaning partner: their engagement simply offers a sense of stability and groundedness that the anxious partner responds to and needs. The more the anxious-preoccupied partner embodies a sense of openness, authentic yearning and vulnerability, the more the avoidant is invited to engage. Healthy feminine expression evokes stability in the masculine pole. And, alternately, safety invites openness.

3.8 The Dismissive Orientation in Relationship

Within relationships, it is the dismissive orientation that can be redirected to bring a sense of stability, clarity, and groundedness. Those qualities are highly nurturing for a feminine-leaning partner, who embodies a different set of traits. But this can only be achieved when the dismissive partner develops a greater depth of presence. Without that level of awareness and embodied practice, they become destabilized by their partner's intensity, emotional expression, or demands for closeness.

The dismissive partner often interprets their lover's pursuit as intrusion. It may withdraw to restore their own sense of inner coherence, which then triggers more escalation in the anxious orientation. Their self-protection feels off and hostile to their more sensitive anxious partner.

When enough engagement is developed, the dismissive orientation actually becomes a powerful relational force that is capable of deep presence without collapse. But it can only do so by resisting the deep, unconscious urge to escape the feminine.

3.9 Summary

The dismissive orientation is a somatic strategy organized around the movement *away*. Its core wound is engulfment. Its collapse pattern is withdrawal. Its core gift is stability. Its developmental task is engagement. Understanding this orientation allows us to work with it rather than against it.

CHAPTER 4

The Polarity Cycle: Escalation, Misinterpretation, and the Logic of Tension

4.1 A Predictable Sequence

The anxious–dismissive polarity follows a predictable sequence when tension increases. This sequence is not random, but structural and it is set to repeat itself until something is done to redirect the energy between both partners. Each orientation activates the other’s core wound, triggering a self-reinforcing loop.

The cycle unfolds as follows:

1. A moment of tension or ambiguity arises (a “trigger”).
2. The anxious orientation moves toward to restore connection.
3. The dismissive orientation experiences this movement as overwhelming and withdraws.

4. The anxious orientation interprets withdrawal as abandonment and escalates.
5. The dismissive orientation interprets escalation as intrusion and withdraws further.
6. Both orientations collapse into their default
7. coping strategies.

This sequence is not personal, as you see: it just maps the energetic logic and the polarity between two partners who are “stuck” on opposite poles.

It is very important to note that this loop can actually be inverted, or flipped.

When the anxious preoccupied partner takes more space (for whatever reason), this confuses the dismissive avoidant partner, who will respond by pursuing. In the same way, if a dismissive avoidant partner feels an impulse to pursue their anxious partner, they will energetically push their partner toward more avoidance. This is not their default pattern, but these “loop breaks” certainly happen from time to time.

4.2 The Logic Behind Their Escalation: Activated Nervous Systems

The cycle is driven by somatic, or nervous system responses, not conscious decisions. The anxious preoccupied partner contracts and moves forward, into a flight response. The dismissive avoidant partner, in turn, expands and retreats, taking on a flight response. These movements are their unconscious attempts to regulate safety.

The somatic logic is simple:

- Forward movement triggers the fear of overwhelm.
- Withdrawal triggers abandonment.

Each partner’s attempt to regulate destabilizes the other person, because it is a strong energetic expression. This means that the cycle is like a closed system of somatic & energetic reactions on opposite poles. The immature masculine evokes an immature feminine response, and vice versa. The only way to move

out of these unhealthy cycles is through a mature alternate response, which, in turn, will evoke healthier qualities in the other partner.

These immature expressions of energy keep couples stuck in escalation and cycles of conflict and (temporary) repair. But it is so important to note that the energetic exchange can be shifted.

4.3 Misinterpretation

The polarity cycle is fueled by misinterpretation. Each orientation misreads the other's strategy through the lens of its own wound. Each partner feels duped and victimized by the other partner's energetic expression, even though this is actually nothing more than a strong coping mechanism. This is how they stay stuck.

The anxious partner misinterprets withdrawal as rejection.

The dismissive person misreads pursuit as intrusion, because he/she is wired to be on the alert for signs of (emotional) engulfment. The dismissive avoidant person is terrified of dependence, because they learned early on that their caregivers were unreliable.

These interpretations are not accurate at all, but simply projections of the core wound that is still active within the nervous system.

The anxious partner is not truly being rejected.

The dismissive partner is not being smothered.

Both are attempting to regulate safety and triggering the other in the process.

The only way to deal with this misinterpretation is to offer clarity about the deeper need that sits underneath that defense strategy. Couples can help each other "translate" by learning to be vulnerable and open about the desires and fears that keep them stuck in these unhealthy protest behaviors. There is no way to get through that without letting down their guard to some extent.

4.4 The Cycle as a Closed System

The polarity cycle is a closed system because each person's orientation (masculine or feminine), and their coping strategy, reinforces the other's collapse patterns. The anxious person escalates to restore connection. The dismissive orientation withdraws to restore autonomy. These movements (protest behaviors) activate each other's wounds, creating a loop that just intensifies with each iteration.

The cycle continues until:

- One partner collapses,
- Both partners disconnect, or
- The system is exhausted (and they call it quits altogether)
- One person changes their "steps" in the dysfunctional dance, which would result in a redirection of the energy between them.

Without intervention, the cycle becomes self-perpetuating. This is, unfortunately, a destructive pattern that many couples are stuck in.

4.5 Developmental Function

The polarity cycle is not a sign of dysfunction. It is a developmental mirror. It reveals the limits of each orientation's capacity. It exposes the unconscious strategies that shape relational behavior. While these patterns are so painful and challenging for lovers, it brings to the surface the somatic patterns that must be worked with for integration to occur.

Seen from that perspective, the cycle is not a problem, but a really clear roadmap toward repair. Once couples can identify the pattern and their orientation, they can work with that energy and tension.

4.6 The Cycle as Developmental Mirror

The push/pull cycle reveals:

- When and why the anxious partner is overcome by a sense of urgency
- When the dismissive lover moves into withdrawal

- How each partner (in their orientation) loses internal reference, are dysregulated
- Where developmental work is required

The cycle is a mirror that reflects the system underneath their dysfunctional behaviors.

4.7 Polarity, Not a Pathology

The anxious/dismissive dynamic is often pathologized. The anxious partner is labeled “needy.” The dismissive partner is labeled “avoidant.” These labels obscure the deeper logic of the pattern: they are not random dysfunctions, but stuck in a very universal dynamic.

The dynamic is not pathological. These attachment styles are not identities, but they reflect each lover’s orientation and response to the specific dynamic.

Polarity is the interplay of opposing orientations. It is the foundation of development and interaction. The intensity of the dynamic is evidence of tension, not dysfunction. And, as I emphasize throughout *Embodied Polarity*, tension serves a purpose.

4.8 Hidden Gifts

Within the polarity cycle lie hidden gifts:

- The anxious preoccupied orientation brings depth, sensitivity, and emotional presence.
- The dismissive avoidant orientation brings stability, clarity, and groundedness.

When the cycle is interrupted, these gifts become available. Partners learn to tap into these gifts, and that mindset shift is empowering for both.

4.9 Summary

The polarity cycle is a predictable, somatically driven sequence of escalation and withdrawal. It is fueled by misinterpretation and reinforced by each partner’s core wound. The cycle is not a sign of incompatibility at all. This is

one of the first myths that therapists must address with the couple. Understanding the cycle allows us to interrupt it and work *with* the polarity rather than against it.

CHAPTER 5

Transformation: Working With the Polarity Rather Than Against It

5.1 Polarity as Orientation, Not Random Behavior

Transformation does not occur through behavioral change alone. Behavior is the surface expression of orientation. Our orientation is always connected to our response to this moment: as such, it is always changing and moving. It is the somatic movement that our nervous system makes in response to tension. Our inner orientation points out what we are using as a defense strategy to a sense of threat in the moment.

The anxious preoccupied orientation moves toward.

The dismissive avoidant orientation moves away.

Transformation requires working with orientation, not just behavior. It requires the capacity to pause the automatic response: to interrupt an energetic pattern. This pause creates space for a new orientation: when one partner changes their response, the other is bound to follow suit and also re-orient.

5.2 Four-Step Transformation Framework

Transformation follows a consistent developmental sequence:

1. Awareness

Recognizing the orientation and its somatic expression.

2. Agency

Pausing the automatic movement: reframing toward the gift (underneath the dysfunctional coping strategy). *“How can I OFFER safety? What can I do to regulate?”*

3. Embodiment

Developing the capacity to remain present in tension.

4. Integration

Achieving a sense of flexibility rather than collapse: recognizing *“I am not a victim in this. I do not have to be passive. We are both contributing to this dynamic and we can change the pattern.”*

This framework is not just a technique. Rather, think of it as a developmental process and a new perspective.

5.3 Working With the Anxious Orientation: Containment

The anxious orientation’s developmental task is containment. Containment is the capacity to hold one’s own emotional intensity without externalizing and resorting to pursuit (or looking for external validation).

Somatic Principles of Containment

- Grounding through the lower body
- Breath directed downward
- Softening (but not collapsing!)
- Redirecting attention inward
- Slowing pace and movement

Psychological Principles of Containment

- Differentiating the (old) fear from the (present) reality
- Naming experience without acting on it
- Allowing space between activation and action

Containment stabilizes the inner system and restores a sense of coherence within.

5.4 Working With the Dismissive Orientation: Engagement

The dismissive orientation's primary developmental task is engagement. Engagement is the capacity to remain present without withdrawing. This is a major challenge, as everything within the dismissive avoidant is wired to disconnect.

Somatic Principles of Engagement

- Softening the chest
- Allowing micro-movements toward the other
- Maintaining breath
- Staying in the body
- Remaining present slightly longer than comfortable

Psychological Principles of Engagement

- Recognizing withdrawal as a coping strategy
- Naming their overwhelm
- Allowing small increments of vulnerability (developing their capacity for closeness)
- Staying with discomfort long enough for adaptation

Engagement, even in small increments, restores their relational bandwidth.

5.5 Interrupting the Cycle

The polarity cycle cannot be interrupted through communication alone! It must be interrupted at the level of *orientation*: it is important to redirect the energy in the moment.

There is no manual for that: remember that ANYTHING that breaks their “autopilot” response is a positive stimulus for a new orientation. Every time we choose a new response, we are slowly rewiring our nervous system.

For the Anxious Orientation

Interrupt the default response at the moment of *escalation*.

For the Dismissive Orientation

Interrupt their default nervous system response at the moment of *withdrawal*.

Sometimes it can help to do the opposite of what feels like the natural response: for the anxious preoccupied partner to choose to withdraw instead of escalate things. Or for the dismissive partner to engage (even in a moment of conflict) instead of resorting to their default withdrawal. That sounds counter-intuitive, but it is the change of energy that causes movement of the whole system.

5.6 The Role of the Body

The body is the primary place for transformation. The nervous system must learn a new orientation (which results in new habits) before the psyche can actually integrate it.

Somatic transformation requires:

- Repetition
- Slowness
- Precision
- Awareness
- Incremental exposure to tension

Transformation is always subtle. It is best understood as the gradual expansion of our inner capacity. This takes tremendous discipline and commitment. It starts with awareness.

5.7 The Role of the Psyche

The psyche must reinterpret the core wound. This reinterpretation is not simply cognitive reframing, but an inner certainty that the coping strategy is

no longer necessary. *“I see what I am trying to protect, but I don’t need to anymore.”* This type of inner work is very well understood through the Internal Family Systems’ (IFS) lens: it revolves around our interaction with all of our inner parts.

For the Anxious Orientation

Proximity is not the only source of safety.

For the Dismissive Orientation

Autonomy is not threatened by closeness.

This recognition always emerges through experience and practice. Every time we manage to catch ourselves in a moment of urgency, we can tell our nervous system that we are safe here and now. The more we can do this together, the better we co-regulate and learn new patterns.

5.8 Integration as Capacity

Integration is the developmental aim. It is the expansion of our capacity. It is the ability to move toward or away from each other without losing a sense of inner coherence. Simply put: we learn to stay connected without losing our sense of Self.

Integrated orientation includes:

- Flexibility
- Presence
- Groundedness
- Emotional bandwidth
- Relational stability

Integration is not neutrality, but a sense of coherence: we are true to our Self WHILE we show up for our partner. This is the type of balance we aim for in polarity work.

5.9 Summary

Transformation requires working with orientation, not just surface-level behavior. It requires containment for the anxious orientation and engagement for the dismissive orientation. It requires somatic interruption of the cycle and continuous reinterpretation of the core wounds that are activated in each moment. Integration is all about the expansion of our capacity.

CHAPTER 6

Integration: Becoming a Whole System

6.1 Integration Is Not Security

Integration is the developmental aim of polarity work. We don't achieve it by eliminating all signs of an anxious or dismissive orientation, nor the achievement of a static state called "secure attachment." Security is about an inner state: it is evidence of our ability to co-regulate. Security can be disrupted by stress, conflict, or relational tension.

Integration is the ability to hold that tension without resorting to our familiar strategies. This is where polarity practice comes in. It is all about the capacity to remain with oneself and with another simultaneously. When this happens, we see an emergence of a new, flexible orientation: one that can move toward or away without losing the sense of Self.

Integration is not the absence of fear or about striving for perfection. It is marked by the ability to remain present in fear.

6.2 Evidence of Integration

Integration is not a psychological insight, but rather a structural shift in the nervous system's orientation. It becomes capable of holding those opposing

movements (feminine and masculine) without fully collapsing into one or the other (which we would call “polarization” instead of “polarity”).

Integrated orientation looks like:

- The capacity to move toward a partner without losing oneself
- The capacity to move away without really disconnecting
- The capacity to remain present in tension
- The capacity to differentiate between past and present
- The capacity to regulate internally rather than through strategy

Integration is not neutrality, but a kind of internal flexibility.

The integrated system does not abandon its orientation (masculine or feminine), but uses it for growth and intimacy. It recognizes its gifts and focuses on that.

6.3 The Somatic Experience of Integration

Integration is always felt in the body before it is understood by the mind. The somatic markers of integration are subtle but consistent.

Somatic markers include:

- A sense of internal spaciousness
- Breath that moves freely through the torso
- The ability to remain grounded in activation
- A reduction in urgency or shutdown
- A sense of being “in oneself” while in contact with another

The nervous system shows signs of remaining “organized” even when tension increases.

6.4 The Psychological Markers of Integration

Psychologically, integration manifests as clarity, differentiation, and the ability to remain oriented in the presence of relational complexity.

Psychological markers include:

- The ability to recognize one's orientation without identifying with it
- The ability to name internal experience without totally collapsing into it (or identifying with it)
- The ability to tolerate ambiguity
- The ability to remain curious rather than defensive
- The ability to hold multiple truths simultaneously

Integration is the emergence of a sense of psychological spaciousness.

6.5 Relational Evidence of Integration

Relationally, integration really transforms the polarity dynamic. We recognize this as partners who no longer slip into their predictable cycle of pursuit and withdrawal. Instead, tension becomes an opportunity for contact rather than a sign of rupture. Again, this is not a fixed state, but a gradual increase of mutual flexibility and tolerance.

Relational markers include:

- Conflict becomes informative rather than destabilizing (“What is this tension telling us? How can we use this conflict for deeper intimacy?”)
- Differences become tolerable rather than threatening
- Repair becomes possible without collapse
- Boundaries become clear without total rigidity
- Vulnerability becomes available without overwhelm

Integration does not eliminate polarity, but makes it generative (it helps us amplify our gifts and use our differences for growth).

6.6 The Developmental Process of Integration

Integration is not achieved through insight or intention. It emerges through a developmental process that unfolds over time. This process mirrors the four-step transformation framework described in Chapter 5 but extends beyond it.

The developmental sequence includes:

1. **Recognition** — Become aware of its orientation and collapse pattern.

2. **Regulation** — Develop the capacity to remain present in activation.
3. **Reorientation** — Learn to pause its automatic movement.
4. **Repatterning** — Develop new somatic and psychological pathways.
5. **Reconciliation** — Integrate the gifts and wounds of both orientations.
6. **Reorganization** — Become more flexible, adaptive, and coherent.

This type of integration looks like a total reorganization of the relational system.

6.7 Integration as Individuation

In *Embodied Polarity*, individuation is described as the process of becoming a whole system: the integration of opposing orientations within the psyche.

Individuation is not synonymous with self-improvement. It is about the individual's capacity to hold autonomy and connection simultaneously.

- *The anxious preoccupied orientation (feminine) represents the movement toward connection.*
- *The dismissive avoidant orientation (masculine) represents the movement toward autonomy.*

Individuation requires both: Neither is sufficient on its own.

From a Jungian perspective, this is the essence of individuation: our capacity to hold these internal opposites without fragmentation.

6.8 Integration as Embodied Maturity

Maturity is not emotional control.

It is not detachment or self-sufficiency.

Maturity is the capacity to remain oriented in the presence of tension.

It is the ability to hold that complexity without fully collapsing into our coping mechanisms.

This is our ability to remain in contact with our Self and the Other simultaneously.

Markers of embodied maturity include:

- The ability to tolerate difference
- The ability to remain grounded in conflict
- The ability to repair without defensiveness
- The ability to express vulnerability without losing autonomy
- The ability to receive connection without overwhelm

Integration is the foundation of embodied maturity.

6.9 Integration as Relational Freedom

When our inner system becomes integrated, relational dynamics really shift. The polarity cycle no longer dictates behavior. This frees us up to *choose* our orientation.

6.10 Summary

Integration is the developmental aim of polarity work. It is experienced as the emergence of a flexible, coherent, and embodied orientation capable of holding that relational tension without collapse. Its core characteristics include:

- A structural shift, not a psychological state
- Somatic coherence (internal balance) in the presence of tension
- Psychological clarity and differentiation
- Relational stability without rigidity
- The integration of the gifts and wounds of both orientations (masculine & feminine)
- The capacity to move toward or away without losing oneself
- The emergence of embodied maturity and relational freedom

Integration marks the beginning of conscious polarity. This is where personal development meets shared leadership within relationships.

AFTERWORD

The Work Beneath the Work

The anxious–dismissive polarity is often experienced as a source of frustration, confusion, or relational instability. But beneath the surface, it reveals something essential: the Unconscious system that shapes how we move toward and away from one another. These movements are not personal flaws. They are relational strategies: adaptive, embodied, and deeply human.

We often think of our stories as deeply personal, but our pain is always a reflection of universal and collective patterns.

This is an important shift in perspective!

The work of transformation is not the work of becoming “secure” in the conventional sense. It is the continued practice of becoming integrated. Integration is the capacity to remain oriented in the presence of tension. When we know how our masculine and feminine wounds show up in our relationships, we can also flip these and tap into the gifts they hide.

This kind of interpersonal capacity cannot be achieved through communication techniques or behavioral adjustments alone. It requires a deeper engagement with the somatic and psychological structures that organize our relational lives.

In *Embodied Polarity*, this inner work with the masculine and feminine poles is described as the developmental engine of the psyche: the tension that generates movement, depth, and meaning. The anxious–dismissive dynamic is one of the clearest expressions of this, despite its challenges. When approached consciously, it becomes an opportunity of profound development instead of just an Unconscious cycle. It reveals the edges of our personal

capacity, the reasons our systems experience a kind of shutdown, and the possibilities that emerge when we learn to remain present in the midst of tension.

This attachment-based training is an invitation to work beneath the surface. To recognize the movements of your own system and understand the layers that shape your relational patterns. To develop the capacity to remain with yourself and with another simultaneously. And to approach polarity as a path toward maturity, integration, and relational depth.

This is the ongoing practice of conscious orientation.

AUTHOR BIO

Eva Hund is the author of *Embodied Polarity* and the founder of the *Institute for Polarity*, where she teaches the psychological foundations of relational development. Her work integrates Jungian depth psychology, attachment theory, and embodied practice to offer clarity about the Unconscious layers that actually shape human connection.

With a background in education, relational dynamics, and polarity theory, she specializes in translating complex psychological concepts into grounded, accessible frameworks. Her approach combines theory with embodied practice, emphasizing that this work is devotional and empowering.

She emphasizes that transformation does not occur through behavioral strategies alone. Relational growth requires an understanding of the energetic and Unconscious patterns that drive dynamics.

She lives and works in the Netherlands and offers polarity-based resources, training and consultancy in English, Dutch & Spanish.

Worksheets, Somatic Practices, and Integration Tools

A1. Orientation Mapping Worksheet

Purpose

To identify your dominant orientation, your secondary orientation, and the somatic patterns that accompany each. This worksheet is descriptive, not diagnostic. It reveals how your system organizes itself around tension.

A1.1 Dominant Orientation

When relational tension increases, my system tends to:

(Select the statements that feel most accurate.)

Toward (Anxious Preoccupied Orientation)

- I feel a pull toward the other.
- I become more expressive or intense.
- I feel urgency to resolve the tension.
- I monitor the other's emotional state.
- I struggle to remain with myself.

Away (Dismissive Avoidant Orientation)

- I feel a pull away from the other.
- I become quieter or more internal.
- I feel overwhelmed by intensity.
- I withdraw attention or presence.
- I struggle to remain emotionally available.

My dominant orientation is:

A1.2 Secondary Orientation

Under prolonged stress, my nervous system tends to resort to :

- Increased pursuit
- Increased withdrawal
- Emotional collapse
- Cognitive detachment
- Somatic shutdown

My secondary orientation is:

A1.3 Somatic Indicators

When activated, my body tends to:

- Contract (chest, diaphragm, throat)
- Expand (chest, upper torso)
- Lean forward
- Lean backward
- Hold breath
- Over-breathe
- Lose sensation
- Become hyper-sensitized

My primary somatic pattern is:

A1.4 Relational Triggers

Situations that activate my anxious or avoidant tendencies include:

- Ambiguity
- Emotional intensity
- Withdrawal
- Criticism
- Silence
- Conflict
- Unpredictability

My primary triggers are:

A2. Nervous System Activation Map

Purpose

To identify the physiological cues that signal our internal activation, collapse, or withdrawal. This map supports early recognition and intervention.

A2.1 Activation Cues (Anxious Preoccupied Orientation)

Check all that apply:

- Tightness in chest
- Racing thoughts
- Urgency to speak or act
- Hyper-focus on the other
- Difficulty grounding
- Emotional flooding
- Fear of losing connection

My activation cues:

A2.2 Withdrawal Cues (Dismissive Avoidant Orientation)

Check all that apply:

- Numbing or flattening (expression)
- Reduced emotional bandwidth
- Desire to be alone
- Cognitive distancing
- Physical stillness
- Breath holding
- Feeling overwhelmed by closeness

My withdrawal cues:

A2.3 Signs of Collapse

Check all that apply:

- Loss of clarity
- Emotional shutdown
- Feeling “too much” or “not enough”
- Disorientation
- Loss of internal reference
- Somatic heaviness

My collapse cues:

A3. Somatic Practices for the Anxious Preoccupied (Immature Feminine) Orientation

Purpose

To cultivate containment: the capacity to hold emotional intensity without resorting to pursuit.

A3.1 Containment Practice (5–7 minutes)

1. Posture

Sit or stand with your weight in the lower body.

Try to lengthen the spine.

2. Breath

Inhale through your nose.

Exhale longer than you inhale.

Let the breath move downward into your pelvis.

3. Self-Containment

Place one hand on the lower ribs, one on the lower abdomen.

Feel the boundary of your own body.

4. Orientation Shift

Gently redirect your attention from the other back to yourself.

Mind you: this is not about moving away from them, but *back* to your Self.

5. Internal Statement

“I can stay present with myself even when I feel activated.”

Repeat until that sense of urgency and panic feels less intense.

A3.2 Boundary Expressions

When you feel the impulse to pursue, use one of these expressions:

- “I notice I’m feeling activated.”
- “I’m going to take a moment to ground myself.”
- “I want to stay connected, and I need a moment to return to myself.”

A3.3 Reflection: What is the Underlying Fear Beneath Your Pursuit

Complete the sentence:

“When I feel distance, I fear that _____.”

Then ask:

“What is my earliest memory of this sensation?”

A4. Somatic Practices for the Dismissive Avoidant Orientation

Purpose

To cultivate engagement: the capacity to remain present without withdrawing.

A4.1 Engagement Practice (3–5 minutes)

1. Posture

Sit or stand with the spine upright but not rigid.

Allow the chest to soften slightly.

2. Breath

Inhale gently into your upper chest.

Exhale.

3. Micro-Engagement

Turn your torso or head toward the other person.

Don't exaggerate this, but just enough to signal your intentional presence.

4. Internal Statement

"I can remain present without losing myself."

A4.2 Stay Ten Seconds Longer

When you feel the impulse to withdraw:

- Pause
- Stay physically present for ten more seconds
- Breathe
- Notice the sensation of overwhelm without acting on it

A4.3 Reflection: What is the Fear Beneath Your Withdrawal

Complete the sentence:

"When emotional intensity increases, I fear that _____."

Then ask:

"What part of me learned this?"

A5. Polarity Cycle Mapping Worksheet

Purpose

To identify your position in the cycle and the specific movements that escalate it.

A5.1 My Position in the Cycle

When tension increases, I tend to:

- Pursue
- Withdraw
- Escalate
- Shut down

My primary position:

A5.2 My Partner's Position (if applicable)

They tend to:

- Pursue
- Withdraw
- Escalate
- Shut down

Their primary position:

A5.3 Escalation Sequence

Describe the last time the cycle occurred:

1. What triggered it?
2. What was your first *somatic* response? (how did your body respond to the trigger)
3. What was your first behavioral response?
4. What did the other person do next?
5. How did the cycle escalate?

A6. Cycle Interruption Practice

Purpose

To interrupt the polarity cycle at the moment of activation.

For the Anxious Partner

- “I’m feeling activated. I need a moment to ground.”
- “I want to stay connected. I’m pausing so I don’t escalate.”

For the Dismissive Partner

- “I’m feeling overwhelmed. I’m here, and I need a moment.”
- “I’m staying present. I just need a slower pace.”

A7. Core Wound Rewriting Exercise

Purpose

To transform the somatic narrative that drives the orientation.

Step 1: Identify the Core Wound

- “I am too much.”
- “I will be left.”
- “I am safer alone.”
- “Closeness is overwhelming.”

Write yours here:

Step 2: Identify the Somatic Truth Beneath It

What does your body believe?

Step 3: Offer a New Response

Not just a positive affirmation, but a grounded alternative.

Examples:

- “I can remain with myself even when I feel fear.”
- “I can stay present without losing autonomy.”

Write yours here:

A8. Embodied Polarity Intentional Dialogue

Purpose

A structured relational practice for couples or individuals exploring polarity dynamics.

Step 1: Naming Orientation

“I notice I feel an impulse to move toward you.”

“I notice I feel a strong urge to move away from you.”

Step 2: Naming Somatic Experience

“My chest feels tight.”

“My breath feels more shallow.”

“I feel myself withdrawing.”

Step 3: Naming the Core Fear

“I fear we are losing connection.”

“I fear that I am losing myself.”

Step 4: Naming the Intention

“I want to stay with myself.”

“I want to stay with you.”

LANGUAGE OF POLARITY: A GUIDE TO THE TERMS

Polarity

The energetic tension between two opposing but interdependent orientations.

Polarity is the dynamic interplay between masculine and feminine energies that generates movement, development, and psychological depth.

Orientation

The directional movement our internal (nervous) system makes to regulate safety: *toward, away, or into collapse*. Orientation is somatic, not cognitive!

This is often Unconscious.

Anxious Orientation

A movement toward the other to regulate safety. Characterized by contraction, urgency, and emotional intensity. Its developmental challenge is (inner) containment (or self-regulation).

Dismissive Orientation

A movement away from the other to regulate safety. Characterized by expansion, withdrawal, and reduced tolerance for emotional intensity. Its developmental challenge is engagement (co-regulation).

Containment

The capacity to hold emotional intensity internally without reaching out to the partner in pursuit of external validation. Containment is a form of self-holding and regulation.

Engagement

The capacity to remain present without withdrawing. This looks like availability, but does not compromise their sense of personal autonomy.

Collapse

A loss of structural integrity under tension. For the anxious orientation, collapse appears as escalation; for the dismissive orientation, as withdrawal.

Core Wound

The somatic fear that drives the orientation's reactive pattern.

Anxious: fear of abandonment.

Dismissive: fear of engulfment.

Somatic Architecture

The physical patterns — breath, posture, tension, movement — through which orientation expresses itself.

Relational Field

The energetic and psychological space between two people. The space in which polarity becomes visible.

Polarity Cycle

The predictable sequence of pursuit and withdrawal that emerges when the partners with two opposite orientations (immature masculine & feminine states) activate each other's wounds.

Activation

A state of heightened arousal in the nervous system. Leads to escalation (anxious) or overwhelm (dismissive).

Regulation

The process of restoring internal coherence. True regulation is somatic, not cognitive.

Integration

The capacity to hold tension without collapsing into strategy. A flexible, coherent orientation.

Individuation

The process of becoming a whole system: integrating opposing orientations within the psyche.

Energetic Problem

A relational issue rooted in orientation, not behavior. Cannot be solved through surface-level strategies.

Co-Led Navigation of Space

The mature, shared responsibility for managing distance, closeness, and tension in the relational field.

Embodied Polarity

My theoretical framework (and book) in which I describe polarity as a somatic, psychological, and relational structure.