

ETHOS UNIVERSE LAB

ARTICLE III

CLOSENESS WITHOUT CAPTIVITY

*Understanding Growth Intimacy Through Disorganized Attachment,
Autonomy, and Self-Expansion*

A Conceptual Integration and Proposed Measurement Framework



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WORKING PAPER - NOT PEER REVIEWED

Growth Intimacy is presented here as an original conceptual synthesis. The Growth Intimacy Attachment Map (GIAM) is a proposed research and reflective instrument; it has not been psychometrically validated and is not a diagnostic or clinical assessment tool.

Abstract

This conceptual paper develops Growth Intimacy as a relational framework for understanding how closeness, attachment security, autonomy, and self-expansion may coexist without requiring possession, fusion, or defensive isolation. Drawing on attachment theory, adult attachment anxiety and avoidance, secure-base and safe-haven support, Self-Determination Theory, autonomy in relatedness, relational thriving, Social Baseline Theory, and Self-Expansion Theory, the paper proposes that relational security becomes developmentally powerful when it supports both connection and differentiated agency. The framework is further situated within the Ethos of Love Compass - Purpose, Freedom, Truth, Courage, and Love - and the Jeju Principle, which treats significance as conceptually separable from possession, category, and guaranteed permanence. Growth Intimacy is defined as a form of relational closeness in which people become increasingly known, trusted, and emotionally significant while preserving sufficient autonomy, honesty, boundaries, and psychological safety for each person to continue developing as an individual. A developmental cycle is proposed in which responsiveness supports security; security supports autonomy and self-regulation; autonomy permits exploration; exploration enables self-expansion; and successful return and repair may deepen relationship-specific security. Ten testable propositions are advanced, and the Growth Intimacy Attachment Map (GIAM) is introduced as an event-based method of studying movement toward security, anxiety, avoidance, and Ethos-congruent responding across relational situations. The model is offered as a conceptual research program rather than as an established psychological theory.

Keywords: Growth Intimacy; adult attachment; disorganized attachment; fearful attachment; autonomy; relatedness; secure base; self-expansion; partner responsiveness; interdependence; Ethos of Love Compass; Jeju Principle; non-possession

Author Note and Scope

This article uses the phrase disorganized attachment cautiously. In adult self-report research, fearful attachment is often treated as conceptually overlapping with disorganization, particularly where approach and avoidance coexist, but adult disorganization can also refer to unresolved or disorganized states of mind assessed through narrative methods. These constructs should not be treated as perfectly interchangeable (Pollard et al., 2023). Accordingly, Growth Intimacy does not depend on assigning a fixed attachment label. Its central analytic question is dynamic: Under what relational conditions does a person's attachment system move toward security, anxiety, avoidance, or contradictory approach-avoidance?

The paper is theoretical and non-clinical. It does not diagnose attachment style or prescribe treatment. References to healing, earned security, or relational development are used in the broad psychological sense of increasing flexible, secure functioning. The Ethos of Love Compass and Jeju Principle are author-originated normative constructs from the unpublished Ethos of Love framework (Franchi, 2026); they are introduced here as theoretical components to be operationalized and empirically examined, not as validated psychological measures.

1. Introduction: When Connection Is Both Wanted and Feared

Human beings appear to have powerful motives to form and maintain enduring interpersonal bonds. The belongingness literature characterizes stable social connection as a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and Social Baseline Theory proposes that the human nervous system ordinarily anticipates access to social resources rather than treating radical self-sufficiency as the default condition (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan & Sbarra, 2015). Attachment theory likewise places proximity to responsive others at the center of safety regulation, first in infancy and later in close adult relationships (Bowlby, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Yet the proposition that people are relationally wired creates a difficult paradox for individuals whose attachment systems have learned contradictory lessons about closeness. Intimacy may be desired because it offers safety, belonging, and co-regulation, while simultaneously being experienced as risky because it exposes the self to rejection, dependence, control, engulfment, or loss. In such cases, the person may alternate between efforts to

intensify proximity and efforts to reduce it. The result can look inconsistent from the outside - pursuit followed by withdrawal, intense attachment followed by emotional detachment, or strong desire for partnership combined with long periods of isolation.

The central problem is not simply whether a person wants intimacy. It is whether intimacy can be experienced without either abandonment or loss of self becoming the organizing threat.

Growth Intimacy was developed to examine precisely this tension. In its shortest form, it means closeness without possession. In a more formal formulation, Growth Intimacy refers to relational closeness in which people become increasingly known, trusted, and emotionally significant while preserving sufficient autonomy, truth, boundaries, and psychological safety for each person to continue becoming themselves. The framework therefore asks not only whether a relationship feels close, but whether closeness increases or diminishes each person's capacity for self-regulation, exploration, choice, and growth.

This paper develops a research backbone for Growth Intimacy by integrating five literatures: (a) attachment theory and adult attachment regulation; (b) adult disorganization and fearful approach-avoidance; (c) autonomy and relatedness in Self-Determination Theory; (d) safe-haven, secure-base, and relational catalyst support; and (e) Self-Expansion Theory. It then converts the synthesis into testable propositions and a proposed event-based instrument for mapping attachment conditions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Attachment Theory: Safety, Proximity, and Internal Working Models

Attachment theory originated as an account of how human beings organize proximity to caregivers under conditions of threat and how repeated caregiving experiences shape expectations about the self and others. Ainsworth and colleagues' observational work elaborated patterns of secure and insecure attachment in childhood, while Bowlby's later writing emphasized the secure base: a relationship that provides protection when needed and supports confident exploration when threat is low (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended attachment concepts into adult romantic relationships. Contemporary adult attachment research commonly models insecurity dimensionally, particularly through attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Anxiety is associated with heightened concern about rejection or insufficient availability and can produce hyperactivating strategies such as monitoring, reassurance seeking, and intensified proximity attempts. Avoidance is associated with discomfort with dependence and emotional closeness and can produce deactivating strategies such as distancing, suppression, and compulsive self-reliance (Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

This dimensional model is important for Growth Intimacy because it moves analysis away from fixed personality boxes. A person may show different degrees of anxiety and avoidance across relationships or across moments within the same relationship. Partner-specific attachment security can differ from generalized attachment orientation, and perceived partner responsiveness has been associated with lower partner-specific anxiety and avoidance, especially among people who are generally insecure (Rice et al., 2020). The relevant unit of inquiry may therefore be the relational episode and the relational condition, not merely the person's global label.

2.2 Fearful and Disorganized Attachment: The Approach-Avoidance Problem

Adult disorganized attachment is not measured or defined uniformly. Pollard et al. (2023) identified important differences between narrative assessments of unresolved or disorganized states of mind and self-report approaches that often operationalize fearful attachment. Fearful attachment is typically characterized by simultaneous desire for closeness and fear of rejection, dependence, or intimacy, creating oscillation between approach and avoidance. The

conceptual overlap is meaningful but incomplete; scholarly work should therefore avoid collapsing all fearful behavior into a single disorganization construct.

For Growth Intimacy, the theoretically important feature is not the label but the conflict: the attachment system may activate a need for proximity while defensive regulation activates a need for distance. Under stress, anxious strategies can amplify interpersonal signals and increase reliance on others for regulation, whereas avoidant strategies can minimize distress displays and favor pseudo-autonomous regulation (Messina et al., 2023; Simpson & Rholes, 2017). If both tendencies are available, the person may experience relational movement as unstable: closeness may reduce abandonment fear but increase engulfment fear; distance may restore autonomy but intensify abandonment fear.

This creates the Growth Intimacy attachment paradox: a person may require enough connection to feel relationally safe and enough differentiation to feel psychologically intact. The challenge is not to eliminate either need. The challenge is to create conditions in which relatedness and autonomy stop functioning as enemies.

2.3 Relationship-Specific Security, Responsiveness, and Repair

Attachment security is not only a historical residue. Research on security enhancement suggests that responsive interactions, supportive partners, therapeutic relationships, and experimental security cues can increase felt security at least temporarily and, in some contexts, contribute to broader secure functioning (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). Rice et al. (2020) found that perceived partner responsiveness was associated with lower partner-specific anxiety and avoidance, illustrating how current relational conditions can matter even when generalized insecurity is present.

The implication is not that a sufficiently skilled partner can cure attachment insecurity. Rather, relationships may provide repeated micro-contexts in which expectations are either confirmed or revised. Successful rupture and repair, reliable boundaries, consistent return after distance, and responsiveness to expressed needs may gradually alter what the person predicts will happen when closeness or autonomy is exercised. This is compatible with the broader attachment proposition that internal working models are relatively stable yet open to revision through meaningful experience.

Psychotherapy research offers a parallel example. Jacobsen et al. (2024) examined earned secure therapeutic attachment and found that clients' attachment needs, therapeutic attachment, growing engagement, and growing autonomy can relate differently across the therapeutic process. The study is especially relevant to Growth Intimacy because it underscores that closeness and autonomy should not be assumed to rise together automatically. Support can become developmentally useful only when it remains attuned to the person's specific regulatory needs.

2.4 Autonomy Theory: Relatedness Without Loss of Self

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic psychological needs that support healthy motivation and well-being when adequately satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy in SDT is not synonymous with independence. It refers to volition, self-endorsement, and experiencing one's behavior as authentically chosen rather than controlled. A person can therefore choose deep interdependence while remaining autonomous.

This distinction is essential for attachment work. Avoidant self-reliance can resemble autonomy while functioning defensively. Conversely, intense dependence can resemble closeness while undermining self-direction. Kluwer et al. (2020) demonstrated that relatedness and autonomy interact in close relationships: stronger relatedness was associated with constructive accommodation particularly when autonomy was also high. Their work supports the proposition that healthy connection may depend on maintaining a sense of self while remaining emotionally connected.

Independence says, "I do not need you." Dependency says, "I cannot regulate without you." Autonomy-in-relatedness says, "I can need you without surrendering authorship of myself."

2.5 Safe Haven, Secure Base, and Relational Catalyst Support

Attachment relationships serve at least two complementary functions. As a safe haven, a relationship offers comfort, protection, and responsive support during distress. As a secure base, it supports movement outward into exploration, competence, and goal pursuit. Bowlby's secure-base formulation therefore does not idealize permanent proximity; it describes a system in which confidence in availability allows greater exploration (Bowlby, 1988).

Feeney and Collins (2015) extended this logic into a broader theory of thriving through relationships. Their framework distinguishes support during adversity from relational catalyst support during opportunities for growth. Supportive partners can encourage exploration, help prepare for challenges, recognize opportunities, and celebrate achievement without taking over the person's goals. Longitudinal work has provided evidence for these relational catalyst processes in personal goal pursuit and thriving.

Growth Intimacy adopts this secure-base logic but adds an explicit ethical criterion: support should increase capacity rather than unnecessarily increase dependency. A partner may co-regulate distress, offer reassurance, or assist in meaning making; however, if the relationship becomes the only mechanism by which the person can tolerate uncertainty, support can inadvertently become a dependency-maintenance system. The goal is flexible interdependence - not radical self-sufficiency and not relational outsourcing of the self.

2.6 Self-Expansion Theory: Intimacy as Enlargement of the Self

Self-Expansion Theory proposes that people are motivated to increase knowledge, resources, perspectives, identities, and efficacy, and that close relationships can become powerful vehicles for this expansion (Aron et al., 1991). Shared novel and arousing activities can increase experienced relationship quality (Aron et al., 2000), and contemporary review evidence supports the broader claim that relational self-expansion is associated with both relational and individual benefits (Emery et al., 2025).

Self-expansion adds a developmental endpoint that attachment security alone does not fully specify. A relationship can be safe yet stagnant. Growth Intimacy therefore asks what security is for. The proposed answer is that security frees cognitive and emotional resources for exploration and self-expansion. Closeness is not merely maintained; it becomes a context in which both people can acquire new capacities, perspectives, and possibilities.

At the same time, self-expansion introduces a risk relevant to fearful attachment: self-other overlap can become threatening when the person experiences closeness as engulfing. Growth Intimacy therefore distinguishes expansion from fusion. Expansion means that knowing another person enlarges the self; fusion means that the boundaries of authorship become unclear or coercively merged. Autonomy is the safeguard that allows self-expansion to remain growth rather than self-erasure.

3. Growth Intimacy as an Integrative Framework

3.1 Working Definition

Growth Intimacy is a form of relational closeness in which people become increasingly known, trusted, and emotionally significant while preserving sufficient autonomy, honesty, psychological safety, and differentiation for each person to continue developing as an individual.

In this model, a relationship can function as both a safe haven during vulnerability and a secure base for exploration. The relationship is considered developmentally healthy to the extent that support strengthens regulation, agency, competence, and self-expansion rather than requiring possession or creating unnecessary dependency. Growth Intimacy is therefore not maximum closeness. It is a dynamic balance in which closeness and freedom become mutually reinforcing.

3.2 The Central Diagnostic Question Is Conditional, Not Categorical

The paper proposes one organizing inquiry for attachment self-study and future research:

Under what relational conditions does my attachment system move toward security, anxiety, or avoidance?

The question deliberately shifts from identity to process. It allows three sources of information to remain visible at the same time: the individual's learned expectations, the partner's actual behavior, and the present context. This prevents two common errors. The first is pathologizing every distress response as a residue of the past. The second is attributing every distress response to current partner behavior. Growth Intimacy requires discriminating between internal alarm and external relational evidence.

3.3 Relational Conditions Hypothesized to Support Security

Relational condition	Growth Intimacy interpretation
Responsiveness	Needs and distress are met with attention, care, and proportionate support rather than contempt, dismissal, or coercion.
Consistency	Patterns of availability and communication are sufficiently predictable to reduce chronic ambiguity.
Autonomy support	Each person can say no, pursue separate goals, maintain other relationships, and make self-endorsed choices without relational punishment.
Boundary safety	Closeness does not require surveillance, forced disclosure, enmeshment, or access beyond consent.
Repair capacity	Conflict or misattunement can be acknowledged, understood, and repaired without making rupture equivalent to abandonment.
Truth and clarity	Uncertainty is addressed through honest communication rather than strategic ambiguity or coercive reassurance.
Exploration support	Partners encourage competence, purpose, novelty, and independent goal pursuit.
Growth recognition	Each person's development can be celebrated even when it increases differentiation or changes the relationship's familiar equilibrium.

Table 1. Proposed relational conditions associated with secure Growth Intimacy. These are conceptual dimensions, not validated thresholds.

3.4 The Developmental Backbone

Growth Intimacy proposes a cyclical mechanism rather than a static state. Responsive relational conditions reduce attachment threat; reduced threat increases the person's ability to act from volition rather than defensive urgency; greater autonomy and self-regulation allow exploration; exploration creates opportunities for self-expansion; and successful return, sharing, and repair after exploration can strengthen confidence that autonomy does not destroy connection. The cycle can then repeat at a deeper level of partner-specific security.

Proposed Growth Intimacy Developmental Cycle



Figure 1. Proposed Growth Intimacy developmental cycle. The model is a theoretical synthesis, not an established causal model.

3.5 Seven Psychological Backbone Principles

- 1. Belonging.** I am a relational being. Connection is not inherently weakness, and isolation is not inherently autonomy.
- 2. Security.** I can move toward you. Support and comfort can be received without making the relationship responsible for all regulation.
- 3. Autonomy.** I can remain myself beside you. Closeness does not revoke boundaries, choice, identity, or self-direction.
- 4. Exploration.** I can move away from you without automatically losing you. The relationship supports outward movement rather than enclosure.
- 5. Self-Expansion.** Knowing you can enlarge what becomes possible for me without requiring fusion.
- 6. Mutual Development.** We can participate in one another's growth through encouragement, challenge, celebration, and non-interfering support.
- 7. Self-Ownership.** My attachment system remains my responsibility. I can ask for help without assigning another person ownership of my stability.

3.6 The Ethos of Love Compass as the Normative Architecture of Growth Intimacy

The psychological theories reviewed above explain how people regulate attachment threat, preserve autonomy, use relationships as secure bases, and expand through connection. They do not by themselves specify the ethical orientation that should guide behavior when attachment becomes emotionally significant. Growth Intimacy therefore incorporates the Ethos of Love Compass as a proposed normative architecture. The Compass is not presented as an

established psychological scale; it is an author-originated framework that specifies what relational development is intended to protect (Franchi, 2026).

Where attachment theory describes relational regulation, the Compass describes relational orientation. Its five directions are North - Purpose; East - Freedom; South - Truth; West - Courage; and Center - Love.

North - Purpose. Purpose asks whether the relationship contributes to the becoming of both people. Security is not treated as the final destination of intimacy; it is valuable partly because it releases psychological resources for competence, contribution, exploration, and self-expansion. Purpose therefore shifts evaluation from 'Are we still together?' to 'What are we becoming through the way we are together?' This principle protects Growth Intimacy from becoming attachment maintenance without development.

East - Freedom. Freedom protects autonomy within connection. Its central question is whether love can preserve agency rather than convert significance into entitlement over another person's movement. Freedom permits boundaries, separate goals, privacy, other relationships, and self-endorsed choice. For anxious activation, another person's freedom may be misread as rejection; for avoidant activation, one's own freedom may be defended by preventing intimacy from becoming sufficiently important. Growth Intimacy proposes that freedom is not the absence of attachment but a condition under which attachment remains voluntarily chosen.

South - Truth. Truth requires relational reality to remain more authoritative than attachment fear. Attachment activation can quickly generate interpretations such as 'you are leaving,' 'you do not care,' 'you are trying to control me,' or 'I will lose myself.' Some interpretations may accurately reflect present behavior; others may be old predictions imposed on ambiguity. Truth therefore requires differentiation between event and interpretation, fear and evidence, memory and present reality, and desire and agreement. It also requires honest communication rather than strategic ambiguity, coercive reassurance, or concealment used to avoid accountability.

West - Courage. Courage concerns what happens after Truth reveals something uncomfortable. Under anxiety, courage may involve tolerating distance without compulsive pursuit; under avoidance, it may involve remaining emotionally present when vulnerability evokes withdrawal. Courage may also mean setting a boundary, admitting desire, receiving an unwanted answer, repairing after harm, or leaving an unhealthy relationship. In Growth Intimacy, courage is the capacity to act according to Truth, Purpose, Freedom, and Love rather than allowing attachment fear alone to determine behavior.

Center - Love. Love integrates the Compass. Purpose without Love can turn the other person into a development project; Freedom without Love can become emotional disengagement; Truth without Love can become cruelty; Courage without Love can become domination. Love keeps the other person's humanity larger than the function they perform in one's attachment system. The other is not merely a regulator, secure base, reassurance source, partner category, or protection against loneliness. Their freedom, dignity, truth, and becoming remain morally significant even when those realities generate discomfort.

**Love does not grant ownership over the person who becomes
significant to us.**

3.7 The Jeju Principle: Non-Possession Under Conditions of Uncertainty

The Jeju Principle establishes a boundary condition for Growth Intimacy: permanence is not the measure of significance, and relational category is not the measure of intimacy (Franchi, 2026). A relationship need not become permanent to have been profound, romantic to have contained intimacy, or possessive to prove that it mattered. The principle separates significance from permanence, intimacy from ownership, and love from guaranteed outcome.

This distinction is especially relevant to attachment anxiety. When attachment significance is equated with the need to secure continuation, uncertainty can become intolerable because possible impermanence is interpreted not only as loss but as evidence that the relationship lacked meaning. The Jeju Principle challenges that equation without asking

the attachment system to stop caring. It asks a more demanding question: Can something matter deeply without its meaning being converted into a right to control its duration, form, category, or future?

Jeju must also be protected from avoidant misuse. 'Nothing has to last' can become an intellectual defense against vulnerability, commitment, grief, or responsibility. The Principle therefore functions only when held together with the Compass: Truth asks whether impermanence is being accepted or defensively manufactured; Courage asks whether intimacy is actually being allowed; Freedom protects both people from possession; Purpose asks what development the relationship makes possible; and Love permits significance to remain real even when certainty cannot be guaranteed.

Can I allow this relationship to be significant without converting significance into possession?

3.8 Growth Intimacy as an Ethos System

The resulting architecture has three levels. First, the psychological mechanism: attachment security, autonomy, exploration, and self-expansion explain how relational regulation may support development. Second, the normative orientation: Purpose, Freedom, Truth, Courage, and Love specify how people should orient behavior when attachment is activated. Third, the Jeju boundary condition: significance does not create entitlement to possession or guarantee permanence. Together, these layers transform Growth Intimacy from a model of secure relating into a proposed relational ethos.

Attachment theory asks, 'Can I safely depend on you?' Autonomy theory asks, 'Can I remain myself while connected to you?' Secure-base theory asks, 'Can connection support my exploration?' Self-Expansion Theory asks, 'Can knowing you enlarge what becomes possible for me?' The Ethos of Love Compass asks, 'How should I orient myself while loving you?' The Jeju Principle asks, 'Can I allow this relationship to be significant without converting significance into possession?'

Growth Intimacy therefore seeks enough security that closeness is possible, enough Freedom that individuality survives, enough Truth that fear does not replace reality, enough Courage that vulnerability and uncertainty can be faced, enough Purpose that intimacy remains developmental, and enough Love that another person's becoming remains morally significant alongside one's desire to keep them close.

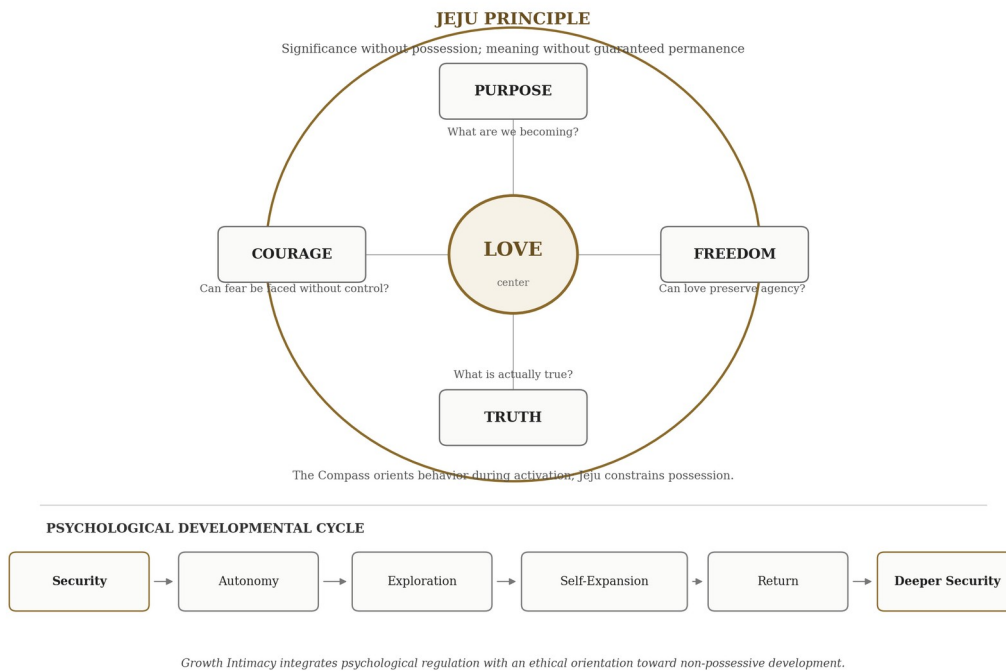


Figure 2. Layered Growth Intimacy Ethos architecture. The psychological developmental cycle is oriented by the Ethos of Love Compass and bounded by the Jeju Principle of non-possession. The figure is a proposed conceptual synthesis, not an established causal model.

4. Propositions and Testable Hypotheses

Because Growth Intimacy is presently a conceptual framework, the following statements are proposed as testable hypotheses rather than established findings. They are designed to specify where the framework overlaps with existing evidence and where it makes new predictions.

P1 - Responsiveness and state security

Within a given relationship, greater perceived partner responsiveness, consistency, and repair expectancy will predict lower state attachment anxiety and lower state attachment avoidance following relational stress, controlling for generalized attachment insecurity.

H1: Episode-level responsiveness scores on the GIAM will negatively predict episode-level anxiety and avoidance activation.

P2 - Autonomy-in-relatedness

The combination of high relatedness and high autonomy support will predict more secure functioning than either high relatedness with low autonomy or high autonomy with low relatedness.

H2: Autonomy support will moderate the association between relational closeness and secure responding, such that closeness is most strongly associated with security when autonomy support is high.

P3 - Security as a precursor to exploration

Partner-specific security will predict greater willingness to pursue independent goals, novelty, and exploration rather than greater behavioral dependency.

H3: Security Conditions Index scores will positively predict exploration behavior and self-expansion over time.

P4 - Self-expansion requires differentiation

Relational self-expansion will be most beneficial when the relationship also preserves self-concept clarity, autonomy, and boundary safety.

H4: Self-expansion will predict well-being most strongly when autonomy support is high; under low autonomy support, self-other overlap may be associated with engulfment or avoidance.

P5 - Repair as a security-building mechanism

Repeated successful return after conflict, distance, or exploration will contribute to increasing partner-specific security by disconfirming predictions that autonomy necessarily produces abandonment or that closeness necessarily produces engulfment.

H5: Longitudinal repair quality will predict reductions in partner-specific anxiety and avoidance beyond baseline attachment orientation.

P6 - Self-ownership protects against dependency

Self-regulation, reflective capacity, and willingness to communicate needs without coercion will strengthen the beneficial effect of partner support while reducing the risk that support becomes dependency maintenance.

H6: Growth Response Index scores will moderate the association between partner support and security, with stronger effects among participants who demonstrate greater self-ownership.

P7 - Growth Intimacy predicts thriving beyond security alone

A relationship characterized by security, autonomy support, exploration support, and self-expansion will predict individual and relational thriving beyond attachment security considered alone.

H7: A Growth Intimacy composite will explain incremental variance in goal progress, vitality, self-efficacy, and relationship quality after controlling for adult attachment anxiety and avoidance.

P8 - Fearful/disorganized dynamics are context-sensitive

Individuals high in both anxiety and avoidance will show greater within-person variability in state attachment responses across relational conditions than individuals low in both dimensions.

H8: Multilevel analyses will show larger within-person shifts between hyperactivation, deactivation, and secure responding among high-anxiety/high-avoidance participants, with GIAM relational conditions explaining a meaningful portion of this variance.

P9 - Ethos-congruent responding under attachment activation

When attachment is activated, responses that preserve Purpose, Freedom, Truth, Courage, and Love will be associated with greater subsequent security, repair quality, and developmental outcomes than responses organized primarily around control, avoidance, or immediate distress reduction.

H9: Episode-level Ethos Orientation scores will positively predict Growth Response and Return/Expansion scores after controlling for state attachment anxiety and avoidance.

P10 - Jeju non-possession as a moderator of attachment threat

The capacity to experience relational significance without equating it with entitlement to permanence, category, or control will weaken the association between attachment threat and coercive pursuit, possessive behavior, or defensive pre-emptive withdrawal.

H10: Higher Jeju Non-Possession scores will moderate the association between anxiety/avoidance activation and maladaptive action tendencies, such that activation is less strongly associated with controlling pursuit or defensive disappearance when non-possession orientation is higher.

5. The Growth Intimacy Attachment Map (GIAM): A Proposed Instrument

5.1 Purpose and Unit of Analysis

The GIAM is proposed as an event-based mapping tool designed to answer the question: Under what relational conditions does the attachment system move toward security, anxiety, or avoidance? Its primary unit is a meaningful relational episode rather than a global self-description. The instrument can be completed after attachment-relevant events such as delayed communication, conflict, requests for closeness, requests for space, reunion after distance, disclosure, boundary setting, goal pursuit, or repair.

The GIAM is not intended to diagnose attachment style. It is designed to generate repeated observations that can reveal patterns across time, partners, and contexts. In research, this structure lends itself to diary methods and multilevel modeling. In reflective use, it provides a disciplined alternative to treating every activation as proof of a fixed identity.

5.2 Proposed GIAM Structure

GIAM component	Content
A. Event and Context	Describe what objectively happened; identify relationship, context, distance/proximity change, and whether the event involved conflict, support, autonomy, or uncertainty.
B. Relational Conditions	Rate perceived responsiveness, consistency, autonomy support, boundary safety, clarity, repair expectancy, exploration support, and growth recognition.
C. State Attachment Activation	Rate anxiety, urge to pursue/reassure, avoidance, urge to withdraw/numb, somatic alarm, and perceived threat of abandonment or engulfment.
D. Self-Regulatory Response	Rate capacity to pause, mentalize, distinguish evidence from prediction, communicate directly, set or respect boundaries, and tolerate uncertainty.
E. Growth and Return	Record whether the episode ended in repair, increased clarity, preserved autonomy, exploration, self-expansion, or deeper trust.
F. Ethos Orientation	Evaluate the episode through Purpose, Freedom, Truth, Courage, Love, and the Jeju non-possession condition: whether the response supported development, preserved agency, followed evidence, faced fear, protected dignity, and resisted converting significance into control.
G. Narrative Meaning	Identify the automatic story, underlying need, alternative secure interpretation, and what was learned about the relationship or self.

5.3 Proposed Rating Items

For research prototyping, the GIAM could use a 1-5 scale (1 = not at all; 5 = very strongly) for the following episode-level items. Items are intentionally provisional and would require item analysis and psychometric refinement.

Relational Conditions

- The other person was responsive to what I actually communicated.
- The other person behaved consistently with prior expectations.
- I felt free to make my own choices without relational punishment.
- My boundaries and privacy felt respected.
- Communication was clear enough to reduce unnecessary ambiguity.
- I believed repair was possible even if we disagreed.
- The relationship supported my independent goals or exploration.
- My growth felt welcomed rather than treated as a threat.

Anxiety Activation

- I feared that distance meant rejection or abandonment.
- I felt an urgent need to restore closeness or obtain reassurance.
- I monitored cues for signs that the relationship was changing.

Avoidance Activation

- Closeness felt intrusive, engulfing, or dangerous.
- I wanted to withdraw, numb, minimize, or become unreachable.
- Depending on the other person felt unsafe or shameful.

Growth Response

- I paused before acting on my first attachment impulse.
- I could distinguish present evidence from an old prediction or fear.
- I communicated my need directly without coercion or disappearance.
- I could respect both my boundary and the other person's boundary.
- I could tolerate some uncertainty while remaining connected to myself.
- After the episode, I felt more capable of choosing how to respond next time.

Return and Expansion

- The relationship returned to connection without requiring surrender of autonomy.
- I learned something that expanded my perspective, competence, or sense of possibility.
- The episode increased trust that closeness and independence can coexist.

Ethos Compass and Jeju Orientation

- Purpose: My response supported what I and the relationship are capable of becoming, rather than merely ending discomfort.
- Freedom: I respected both my agency and the other person's agency without using closeness, distance, reassurance, or silence as control.
- Truth: I responded to the best available evidence rather than treating an attachment prediction as established fact.
- Courage: I was willing to face vulnerability, uncertainty, a boundary, or a difficult truth without automatically pursuing, controlling, numbing, or disappearing.
- Love: My response protected the other person's dignity and humanity rather than reducing them to a function in my attachment system.
- Jeju: I could allow the relationship to matter without treating significance as entitlement to a particular category, duration, permanence, or outcome.

5.4 Provisional Indices

Provisional index	Interpretation
Security Conditions Index (SCI)	Mean of the eight relational-condition items. Higher scores indicate a context perceived as responsive, autonomy-supportive, repairable, and growth-supportive.
Anxiety Activation Index (AAI-GI)	Mean of anxiety, pursuit urgency, and abandonment-monitoring items.
Avoidance Activation Index (VAI-GI)	Mean of engulfment threat, withdrawal/deactivation urge, and dependence discomfort items.
Growth Response Index (GRI)	Mean of pause, evidence discrimination, direct communication, boundary reciprocity, uncertainty tolerance, and learning items.
Return and Expansion Index (REI)	Mean of successful return, self-expansion, and increased confidence that autonomy and closeness can coexist.
Ethos Orientation Index (EOI)	Mean of Purpose, Freedom, Truth, Courage, and Love items. Higher scores indicate greater alignment between the person's post-activation response and the proposed Ethos of Love Compass.
Jeju Non-Possession Index (JNI)	Episode-level rating of the capacity to recognize significance without converting it into entitlement to category, permanence, control, or predetermined outcome. This is a provisional construct requiring independent validation.

Important: No cut scores, clinical thresholds, or normative interpretations are proposed. The indices are research scaffolds only.

5.5 Proposed Validation Program

Content validity: Expert review by attachment, relationship science, measurement, and cultural psychology scholars; cognitive interviews with diverse participants to assess interpretation and language.

Item development: Pilot a larger item pool, examine floor/ceiling effects, redundancy, and whether anxiety, avoidance, autonomy support, and growth responses separate empirically.

Factor structure: Use exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis for trait-like versions and multilevel factor analysis for repeated episode data.

Convergent validity: Compare GIAM indices with established measures of attachment anxiety/avoidance, perceived partner responsiveness, basic psychological need satisfaction, autonomy support, relationship satisfaction, and self-expansion.

Discriminant validity: Test whether GIAM relational conditions are empirically distinct from general relationship satisfaction and whether Growth Response is distinct from mere absence of distress.

Predictive validity: Examine whether repeated GIAM patterns predict later partner-specific security, goal progress, self-efficacy, conflict recovery, well-being, and relationship quality.

Measurement invariance: Assess whether the instrument functions comparably across gender, sexual orientation, relationship type, culture, and collectivistic/individualistic contexts.

Dyadic validation: Collect both partners' ratings and behavioral or observational indicators where feasible to reduce sole reliance on one person's perception.

Normative-construct validation: Because the Ethos Compass and Jeju Principle originate in a philosophical framework rather than an established psychological taxonomy, future studies should first test content validity, comprehensibility, factor separability, and incremental validity before interpreting them as psychological constructs.

Research should also examine whether the dimensions function similarly across cultures with different norms concerning autonomy, duty, permanence, and relational obligation.

6. Personal Work, Partnership, and the Problem of the "Right Partner"

The statement that human beings are relationally wired can be misheard as a demand that a person with attachment insecurity must find a psychologically sophisticated romantic partner in order to become secure. That interpretation creates both practical and ethical problems. It places an enormous burden on partner selection and can transform a romantic relationship into an unofficial treatment arrangement.

Growth Intimacy takes a dual-responsibility position. Partner behavior matters: consistency, responsiveness, honesty, boundaries, and repair can create conditions in which security is easier to practice. At the same time, the individual retains responsibility for learning to notice activation, distinguish prediction from evidence, regulate before acting, communicate needs directly, and tolerate outcomes that cannot be controlled. A partner can support this work but should not be made responsible for preventing every activation.

The partner is not the treatment. The relationship can be a developmental environment.

This distinction also protects the person with attachment insecurity from another harmful message: that growth requires tolerating objectively unhealthy behavior. Attachment work does not mean explaining away deception, contempt, coercion, chronic inconsistency, or boundary violation as personal triggers. Secure functioning includes improved discrimination between an old alarm and a present danger.

The practical aim is flexible interdependence. A secure person is not one who never needs reassurance, never needs space, or never experiences attachment activation. Rather, security can be understood as increasing flexibility after activation: the capacity to pause, communicate, choose, repair, receive support, and remain psychologically present without either compulsive pursuit or defensive disappearance becoming the only available strategy.

7. Discussion

Growth Intimacy attempts to synthesize a set of theories that are often discussed separately. Attachment theory explains why the availability of responsive others matters under threat. SDT explains why autonomy and relatedness are both necessary for flourishing. Secure-base and thriving models explain how close relationships can facilitate goal pursuit and development. Self-Expansion Theory explains how close relationships can alter and enlarge the self. The proposed contribution of Growth Intimacy is to place these mechanisms into one developmental question: Can closeness increase both security and individual capacity without making either person smaller or more dependent than necessary?

The Ethos integration adds a normative layer that relationship science alone does not supply. Attachment security can describe whether closeness is experienced as safe; autonomy research can describe whether choice is preserved; self-expansion can describe whether the relationship enlarges the self. The Compass and Jeju Principle ask a different question: what kind of use should people make of that safety, freedom, and significance? The proposed answer is developmental and non-possessive - security should create room for Purpose, Freedom, Truth, Courage, and Love rather than becoming a justification for control.

The synthesis produces a distinctive prediction: the strongest relational outcome is not simply high closeness or high security. It is a recursive cycle in which security enables autonomous exploration, autonomous exploration produces expansion, and the relationship's ability to welcome the expanded person feeds back into deeper security. In fearful or approach-avoidant attachment dynamics, the cycle may be interrupted at multiple points. Anxiety can inhibit

exploration because distance feels dangerous. Avoidance can inhibit safe-haven use because dependence feels dangerous. Fusion can undermine autonomy. Isolation can preserve autonomy at the cost of co-regulation and belonging. Growth Intimacy seeks the middle path in which connection and differentiation become compatible.

This framework also creates a bridge to broader Ethos work on development without dependency. The common ethical principle is that influence should be evaluated not by how tightly another person remains attached, but by whether the relationship increases their capacity to stand, choose, act, and grow. In intimate relationships, that principle becomes closeness without possession. In developmental relationships more generally, it becomes support without unnecessary dependency.

8. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

Conceptual status. Growth Intimacy is a theoretical synthesis, not a validated psychological theory. The proposed causal sequence could be wrong, incomplete, bidirectional, or moderated by variables not represented here.

A further limitation is epistemic: the Ethos of Love Compass and Jeju Principle are normative constructs derived from an authorial philosophy, not empirical findings. Their inclusion gives Growth Intimacy an explicit ethical orientation, but future scholarship must not confuse philosophical desirability with psychological validity. Each construct requires independent operationalization, cultural examination, and empirical testing.

Construct overlap. Several proposed dimensions overlap with established constructs such as attachment security, perceived partner responsiveness, autonomy support, differentiation, interdependence, relationship satisfaction, and self-expansion. Incremental validity must be demonstrated rather than assumed.

Disorganized versus fearful attachment. Adult disorganization, unresolved states of mind, and fearful self-reported attachment are not interchangeable constructs. The paper uses approach-avoidance as the central process while retaining this terminological caution.

Retrospective and self-report bias. The GIAM depends heavily on perception. A person's report of partner inconsistency or responsiveness can itself be influenced by attachment-related attention and interpretation. Dyadic, behavioral, and longitudinal data are therefore important.

Cultural variation. Autonomy is defined here in the SDT sense of volition rather than Western individualism, but expectations regarding closeness, family obligation, privacy, dependence, and self-other boundaries vary across cultures. The model requires cross-cultural testing.

Romantic relationship bias. Although the paper frequently uses romantic examples, attachment and Growth Intimacy may operate in friendships, family relationships, mentorship, community, and therapy. Romantic partnership should not be treated as the only legitimate context for secure connection.

Clinical boundary. The framework should not be used to diagnose trauma, attachment disorder, or mental illness. Severe relational distress, trauma symptoms, or safety concerns require assessment beyond a conceptual self-reflection tool.

Partner responsibility. The language of secure base and relational support can be misused to demand unlimited emotional labor from partners. Growth Intimacy explicitly rejects the idea that love requires one person to absorb or regulate all of the other person's attachment distress.

Nonlinearity. The proposed cycle is presented sequentially for clarity, but real relationships are recursive and nonlinear. Self-expansion can precede security, exploration can occur outside relationships, and secure responding can fluctuate over short periods.

9. Future Research Agenda

1. Diary studies: Collect GIAM entries after naturally occurring attachment-relevant episodes to model within-person shifts between anxiety, avoidance, and secure responding.

2. **Dyadic studies:** Compare each partner's perceptions of responsiveness, autonomy support, rupture, repair, and growth recognition.
3. **Longitudinal change:** Test whether repeated high-quality return and repair predicts partner-specific attachment change across months or years.
4. **Experimental work:** Manipulate autonomy support, responsiveness, or exploration support in controlled tasks to test short-term effects on state security and willingness to explore.
5. **Incremental validity:** Determine whether Growth Intimacy dimensions predict thriving beyond established attachment, satisfaction, responsiveness, and need-satisfaction measures.
6. **High anxiety/high avoidance samples:** Examine whether the model is especially useful for people who show simultaneous approach and avoidance tendencies and whether relational conditions explain rapid state shifts.
7. **Non-romantic relationships:** Test the model in friendships, family systems, mentoring, leadership, and therapeutic relationships.
8. **Cultural and identity contexts:** Study how interdependence, collectivism, minority stress, relational norms, and social context alter the meaning of autonomy, closeness, and expansion.

Test the Ethos of Love Compass and Jeju Principle as separable constructs: develop item pools, assess content validity and factor structure, and test whether Ethos congruence and non-possession add incremental prediction beyond attachment security, autonomy support, relationship satisfaction, and self-expansion.

10. Conclusion: Closeness Without Captivity

If human beings are deeply relational, then the solution to attachment insecurity cannot simply be permanent withdrawal from relationship. But neither can it be surrendering the self to a partner who is expected to provide permanent reassurance. Growth Intimacy begins from a different premise: connection and autonomy can be trained to coexist.

For the person who experiences approach-avoidance, this changes the central question from, 'What attachment style am I?' to, 'What conditions activate fear of abandonment, what conditions activate fear of engulfment, what conditions permit security, and what capacities help me choose my response when either alarm appears?' The resulting attachment map is more useful than a label because it reveals where change may occur: in the relationship, in the person's regulation, in communication, in boundaries, or in the interpretation of uncertainty.

The strongest version of Growth Intimacy is therefore not a theory that the right partner will heal the insecure person. It is a theory of reciprocal developmental conditions. The relationship offers responsiveness, truth, autonomy support, repair, and encouragement of exploration. The individual brings self-ownership, reflective capacity, communication, boundary responsibility, and willingness to grow. Together, these conditions may make possible a recurring developmental movement: security, autonomy, exploration, self-expansion, return, and deeper security.

The Ethos of Love Compass clarifies how this reciprocal development is oriented: Purpose asks what the relationship is helping each person become; Freedom protects agency; Truth disciplines interpretation; Courage prevents fear from silently governing action; and Love preserves the other's humanity at the center. The Jeju Principle then places a boundary around attachment itself: significance may be deeply real without becoming a claim of ownership over category, permanence, or outcome.

I can come toward you. I can remain myself. I can leave to explore. I can return. And our closeness does not require either of us to become smaller.

That is the central proposition of Growth Intimacy: intimacy reaches its most developmental form when attachment does not become captivity and autonomy does not become isolation. The measure of the relationship is not how impossible it becomes to function apart, but how much more capable each person becomes of living, choosing, loving, exploring, and becoming because the relationship exists.

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Appendix A. GIAM Episode Worksheet (Research Prototype)

This worksheet is unvalidated and non-diagnostic. It is intended for research development and structured reflection.

1. Objective event

What happened, stated as behaviorally and neutrally as possible?

2. Immediate body response

What did you notice in your body: urgency, tightness, agitation, numbness, shutdown, restlessness, calm?

3. Automatic meaning

What story appeared first: I am being left; I am being controlled; I do not matter; I should not need anyone; I will lose myself; something else?

4. Attachment movement

Did you move toward pursuit/hyperactivation, withdrawal/deactivation, flexible security, or a mixed approach-avoidance pattern?

5. Need beneath the defense

Did you need reassurance, clarity, space, choice, affection, information, repair, rest, or a boundary?

6. Evidence check

What evidence belongs to the present event? What interpretation may be a prediction rather than a fact?

7. Secure/autonomous response

What response would preserve both connection and self-respect if neither abandonment nor engulfment were deciding for you?

8. Ethos Compass and Jeju check

Purpose - Does my response support who we are becoming? Freedom - Does it respect both agencies? Truth - Am I responding to evidence or to the story my attachment system created? Courage - What action would I choose if fear were not making the decision? Love - Does my response protect dignity rather than merely protect me from discomfort? Jeju - Am I trying to control the relationship's category, duration, future, or permanence because of what uncertainty means to me?

9. Communication

What did you communicate directly? What did you avoid, demand, or assume?

10. Partner response

Was the response responsive, consistent, autonomy-supportive, boundary-safe, clear, and repair-oriented?

11. Outcome and learning

Did the episode end in greater security, anxiety, avoidance, rupture, repair, autonomy, or self-expansion? What should be remembered next time?

Appendix B. Construct Map for Empirical Testing

Construct	Growth Intimacy role	Possible comparator
Attachment security	Confidence in availability and capacity for flexible proximity seeking and exploration	ECR-RS or comparable partner-specific attachment measures
Attachment anxiety	Fear of rejection/abandonment; hyperactivation	ECR-R / ECR-RS anxiety
Attachment avoidance	Discomfort with closeness/dependence; deactivation	ECR-R / ECR-RS avoidance
Partner responsiveness	Feeling understood, validated, and cared for	Perceived Partner Responsiveness measures
Autonomy support	Volition, freedom from coercion, self-endorsed choice	Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction / relationship autonomy measures
Relational catalyst support	Support for growth opportunities and goal pursuit	Relational Catalyst Support measures
Self-expansion	Expansion of self-concept, resources, perspectives, or experience	Self-Expansion Questionnaire / relational self-change measures
Growth response	Pause, reflection, direct communication, reciprocal boundaries, uncertainty tolerance	New GIAM construct requiring validation
Return and expansion	Repair, successful reunion after autonomy, integration of growth	New GIAM construct requiring validation
Ethos orientation	Purpose, Freedom, Truth, Courage, and Love as a proposed normative orientation for post-activation behavior	New construct; compare with values congruence, autonomy support, compassionate responding, and relationship goal measures
Jeju non-possession	Capacity to experience significance without converting it into entitlement to relational category, permanence, or control	New construct; compare with attachment anxiety, possessiveness/jealousy, autonomy support, and acceptance of uncertainty

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