

The Instinctual Approaches and Integrating the Blindspot Instinct: Part 1

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Instinct and the Enneagram

The Enneagram is an instrument that helps us to see what keeps identified with the patterns of personality and offers a map for how to be more present and conscious in relation to these patterns. The Instinctual Drives are central to what keeps us identified, and in the language of many spiritual traditions, “asleep”. Having a more conscious relationship with our instinctual life is the first step to greater presence and awareness.

When we’re entranced in personality patterns, the Self-Preservation, Sexual, and Social Drives aren’t allowed to function freely from their innate instinctual intelligence. Each Instinct becomes filtered through the personality’s unconscious emotional associations. This limits how the three instinctual drives are expressed, causes suffering, narrows experience of meaning and selfhood, and runs the risk of identity crises as our life circumstances change or when we have experiences outside a fragile comfort zone. We are robbed of the full aliveness that is possible for each drive and, rather than operating according to what makes us more alive and healthy, our behavior becomes a habitual series of reactions to deep instinctual fears. Therefore, the Instinctual Drives can be thought of as gatekeepers between self-forgetting and inner freedom.

Instinctual Stacking

When the Instincts are run through the filter of Personality, they become structured in an order of prioritization called the Instinctual Stacking. The instinctual drives are motivations to meet specific biological and emotional needs, so our stacking determines where our energy and motivations lie and which instinctual needs are given more priority and psychological weight.

Our Instinctual Stacking reflects how our Instincts become “Stacked” in order of psychological priority. One Instinct receives the majority of our attention and energy, called the dominant instinct. Our dominant instinct determines our Instinctual Type. A Self-preservation Type is someone whose attention, energy, and identity is primarily organized around enhancing and maintaining the well-being of the body. A Sexual Type is someone whose identity, energy, and attention is primarily organized around pursuing attractions and being attractive. And a Social Type is someone whose identity, energy, and attention is primarily organized creating and maintaining relationships.

A secondary instinct remains somewhat neutral, as a support for the dominant and as a kind of respite from the time given to the dominant instinct. The third instinct is neglected. This third instinct is called the “blindspot”, because we are blind to the cost of neglecting it as well as unaware of how to get more deeply in touch with it.

The instinctual imbalance of the Stacking is at the core of the egoic identity and narcissism. As a first step in working with the instinctual drives, trying to resist or oppose the dominant instinct is challenging. The imbalances of Personality that lead to a Dominant Instinct have so much energy behind them that it would

be like trying to dam a river. So a powerful first step in working to be present is in balancing and integrating the blindspot instinct.

Becoming Aware of Sensation

A condition of our habitual state of consciousness is that we are all in a greater state of dissociation from our bodies than we realize. The Instinctual Drives arise from the body, and as such, they are experienced through the body, through sensation. When these drives are filtered by Personality, we react to the Instincts emotionally and mentally, while being relatively unaware of how our bodies are responding instinctually. Therefore, any approach to the Instinctual Drives begins with sensation, with connecting to the signals, energies, and feedback within the body.

Increasing our awareness and sensitivity with sensation is no small task. It requires a great deal of patient practice, curiosity, and motivation. We know the mind through perception and thought and we know the heart through feeling and emotion, but the body and the instinctual drives are experienced through physical sensation. Tune in to sensing the contact of your feet against the ground, the sensation of clothing on your skin, the expansion and contraction of the diaphragm as you breathe, and possibly even the sensation of your blood pumping. Sensation isn’t the mind thinking about parts of the body. It’s the body being sensitive to its own physical state. One easy way to tune into sensation is by making a fist and squeezing hard – that’s sensation.

Take notice of the contrast between your habitual state and what it’s like to bring awareness to sensation. Deepening our breath and breathing more deeply brings us into an immediately greater sensitivity to our bodies where we will find the body’s support for our inner work, grounding in the moment, and a great deal of material for our inner work. Breath, physical practices, and sensation-based meditation practices are invaluable and necessary means of deepening embodiment and increasing our sensitivity with sensation. Undertaking this aim takes a great deal of practice.

Integrating the Blind Spot Instinct

Transformation has to come from inside. Each Instinct has distinct qualities of attention, boundaries, and excitation that facilitate the tracking and meeting of its specific needs that we have identified and refer to as the **Instinctual Approaches**. These qualities of attention are employed whenever the respective instinctual drive is engaged. The Approaches are literally qualities of sensation and attention we use in “approaching” resources of instinctual regulation, be they objects or people. Attuning to and becoming more skillful with the Instinctual Approaches brings us into greater contact with the intelligence and energy of the Instinctual Drives and out of emotional reactions to them or mental concepts about them.

Adopting behaviors or strategies that we see in people who have our blind spot instinct as a dominant instinct is trying to address the blindspot from the “outside in”. We might temporarily change behaviors, but that wouldn’t make for an authentic change in our relationship to ourselves and our bodies.

The approaches represent practical ways to work with the Instincts through sensation and quality of attention. Rather than trying to clumsily adopt behaviors or characteristics that feel unnatural to us, we can learn to tune in to the authentic and vitalizing energy of our least developed instinct. We can express and integrate our blindspot instinct on its own terms, revealing how enlivening, powerful, and satisfying the instinct we habitually forget to give attention to can be.

The Approaches also help get around the problem of the mind trying to work on the body by placing our attention on the body sensing the body. By doing so, we can become more skillful in our self-regulation, relationships, and self-awareness, directly experiencing how instinctual energy wants to flow through us when it's not bound up in the issues caused by psychological identification. There is no other way to effectively integrate the blindspot other than awakening our direct sensation of it.

- **Integrating Self-Preservation**

The **Self-Preservation Drive** is the drive of creating and sustaining our well-being, situations and resources that support the thriving and development of ourselves and others. The Approaches of attention and energy that the drive employs to meet those needs are:

Grounding – Rooting to one's center and place of balance through the body.

Sensing – Sensitivity to one's own state through the senses and signals of the body. Attention is on physical feedback and impressions.

Pragmatism – A through-line of attention orienting to processes and progression. Sensible, pragmatic, and enduring attention.

The body language of these Approaches is typically a sense of containment within one's physical atmosphere; it can range from grounded to self-contained to a kind of rootedness.

People who are "blind" in Self-Preservation generally have a difficult time listening to what their bodies need and caring for themselves practically and financially. If Self-Preservation is our Blindspot, we might view it as a kind of heavy drudgery. Integrating the Approaches can reveal the foundation for lifeforce and intelligent, concrete action that a vital Self-Preservation Instinct really is.

Often, in taking care of themselves, people blind in Self-Preservation will put their attention on anything but the body's actual, present state. Merely deepening presence and contact with the body and actively checking in on how behaviors, routines, food, and things like quantity and quality of sleep impact the body goes a long way to experiencing the Self-Preservation Instinct as enriching and supporting everything that matters to us.

- **Integrating Sexual**

The **Sexual Drive** is the drive of sexual attraction and of seeking and attracting creative and enlivening complementary energies. The Approaches of attention and energy that the drive employs to meet those needs are:

Pursuing – Locking on to what attracts with focused energy and attention. Letting what's extraneous fall away. "Tunnel vision" on the object of desire.

Magnetism – Displaying oneself, while vacillating between pushing and pulling back attention and energy to create interest, tension, and preoccupation. Provocative display to draw attention, attract some and repel others.

Intensification – Amplifying and galvanizing energy and excitation with the aim of dissolving or penetrating boundaries. Bringing a quality of activating urgency that encourages the surrendering of boundaries in self and other.

The body language of these Approaches is typically a galvanized, penetrating quality of attention, or pulled back and withheld.

People who are blind in Sexual generally have a difficult time sensing what turns them on, and getting beyond familiar boundaries and comfort zones. If Sexual is our Blindspot, we might perceive its energy as dangerous and narcissistic. Integrating the Sexual Approaches can help to give ourselves permission to discover and pursue what really turns us on.

Attuning to what arouses and enlivens the body's energy via sensation helps integrating the Sexual drive. Often, those who are sexual blind don't take into account the sexual responses of the body for fear of being led toward people and experiences that may cause them to act out irresponsibly, shamefully, or recklessly.

Integrating the Sexual Drive doesn't mean going along with its every impulse, but it provides a wealth of information about what makes us feel more alive and what we can do to feel more vital and creative. The Sexual Drive supports us in finding possibility where we didn't anticipate it.

- **The Social Drive** is the drive to connect, to engage, and to contribute to others. The Approaches of attention and energy that the drive employs to meet those needs are:

Availability – Opening personal boundaries to invite and receive others. Attention is fanned outward and open, with easefulness about what enters and leaves our field of attention. Includes being receptive to the inner life of others.

Signaling – Sensing my impact on others and sensing the flow of exchange and conveying feelings and intentions appropriately to the situation with in body language. This is allowing relatedness to impact and express through the body.

Navigating – Sensing the layers, boundaries, and nuances of social environments and circumstances, opening to an "overview" sensibility. This brings texture to social contexts that help in recognizing the mechanics of interpersonal dynamics, knowing one's place, role, or relationship within them.

Someone who is blind in Social generally has a difficult time being with other people and understanding how they impact others. If Social is our Blindspot, we may stereotype its energy as exhausting small talk and aimless hanging out. Through the Approaches, we can directly experience it as an enlivening contact that connects us with others.

Sensing and noticing how the presence of others impacts us on a physical level takes interpersonal reaction out of our “heads” and into the present moment. Those who are Socially blind often don’t see how closed off their energy and boundaries are to other people, nor do they realize how being closed off drains their energy and makes it difficult to relate to others from a place of openness. Attuning to the Social Approaches helps Social Blinds to realize that interpersonal interaction is a foundational part of an enjoyable, mutually supportive, and meaningful life, enabling them to contribute their gifts to others and receive other’s gifts in turn.

Identification with the Instinctual Drives is the core of what limits consciousness and keeps us acting out personality patterns from a place of suffering. Therefore, engaging with the Instinctual Drives is pivotal for inner transformation and awakening. Integrating the Approaches of the Blindspot help us to have a fuller experience of our instinctual life, which includes being able to attend to the often-neglected or underserved Instinctual Needs of our Blindspot with skillfulness, intelligence, and pleasure.

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