

An Introduction to the Affect Pattern Chart

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Just below this brief introduction you'll find the Affect Pattern Chart, which I set up a few decades ago to help me understand the role of each affect in the personality of any patient I encountered. I really did make copies of this chart, which I placed in the folder that held session notes about that person. Like most of the stuff we learned early in our school experience, the real key to learning was simplicity and repetition.

Despite that I had been trained to ferret out signs of the Freudian Drives, I was unable to make any headway in the doing of therapy with that information.

Prior to my immersion in the world of affect, and later of script theory, I concentrated on themes that seemed important in each person's life. Important to me then were the signal events that forced them to mobilize defenses, and the ways their parents dealt with difficult situations of any sort. Of course I paid strict attention to the issues or conflicts that had brought them to psychotherapy, but I became increasingly interested in the emotions that accompanied those situations, and how my patients felt about their emotions.

Frankly, I found myself truly confused not only by those emotions, but by the effect of their emotions on others, and the effect of others' emotions on them. In order to deal with the overwhelming mass of new information that had started to float into my own awareness, I set up this chart as a grade school level record of this complex new data.

Within a week or so of starting to use the Affect Pattern Chart in my therapy work, I learned to put a name to whatever was going on in my patients and at what level of intensity. At first the avalanche of data I was tasked to evaluate overwhelmed me, but slowly I began to form ways of dealing with patients through which I paid intense attention to their affects and their affective life. Strangely, my patients grew increasingly interested in my new hobby and began to identify the affect going on in them at many moments in our sessions.

From time to time I bump into former patients in ordinary situations (supermarket, the opera, just walking around the city) and am often surprised when one of them hails me and says "Hey, Don! I'm still monitoring my affects whenever I find myself upset. It really helps to put a name to whatever has taken me over for the moment!"

Every once in a while, Silvan would shake his head in perplexity and say to me “Well, I never once thought how this set of ideas might be used. This is really interesting.”

And after all these year, I still agree with him. I hope you will afford yourself the small amount of time required to print a sheaf of Affect Pattern Charts, and to marvel at the amount of information they will give you about the inner world of your patients.