

# THE MATRIX OF IDENTITY

by Glennys Lawton

*...the family imprints its members with selfhood. Human experience of identity has two elements: a sense of belonging and a sense of being separate. The laboratory in which these ingredients are mixed and dispensed is the family, the matrix of identity.*

- Salvador Minuchin  
*Families and Family Therapy*

## ATTACHMENT and SEPARATION

The *matrix of identity* that Salvador Minuchin refers to is the laboratory of the family, the womb where the sense of self gestates. The family is designed to be the sanctuary, where the emergent and fragile identity is kept safe; where we learn to feel protected enough to explore our boundaries and eventually secure enough to leave. In astrological imagery this touchstone is the IC, the gateway to the 4<sup>th</sup> house, which symbolizes the environmental atmosphere of the familial home and the imprints the family of origin impress upon our inner security. Childhood patterns, roles and our sense of safekeeping are interred in this astrological landscape. As the root system of the family, 4<sup>th</sup> house imagery (the sign on the cusp, the ruler of the IC, planets in the 4<sup>th</sup> and the Moon) are the emotional foundation stones which suggest the extent to which a secure base can be formed. In turn this influences the degree to which feelings of safety are internalized, informing the developing ego strength that allows security in separateness. In an archaic context the IC is where we begin, like Winnicott said, "Home is where we start from"<sup>1</sup>. Home or the 4<sup>th</sup> house is also where we belong and its astrological extensions reveal the level to which a secure base provides the tools to forge a 'sense of belonging and a sense of being separate'.

*A Secure Base* was the title of one of John Bowlby's more popular books.<sup>2</sup> In it Bowlby outlines his attachment theory that basically asserts that secure bonding develops the capacity to explore beyond the perimeter of the family. Attachment theory rests on the premise that if the individual experiences a strong place of safety then mastery over the environment follows. Attachment behaviors are developed by day-to-day care giving, through the continuity of familial rituals and patterns, and in the fortification of the family circle. In the shelter of a safe nest, the fledgling learns to be able to tell the difference between protection and intrusion. With adequate protection the child develops enough strength for exploration, knowing that the shelter of the guardian is within reach. A supportive survival instinct is

fashioned from the container of the family, where the child learns to distinguish between the sounds of safety and the sounds of danger. Hazard signals are developed which alert a physiological response to flight, away from danger and back once again to the safe haven of familial protection. Theoretically, as this secure sense is internalized the child distinguishes protector from predator and begins to gain a sense of self, distinct from the family refuge, represented by the 4<sup>th</sup> house. In astrological terminology the child crosses the cusp into the 5<sup>th</sup> house where the sense of self is first consciously experienced and shaped. The 5<sup>th</sup> house cusp is the threshold where identity is encountered and can be forged through the transitional movement back and forth between security and separateness. It is the border zone where leaving home is mastered and the experiment with transferring loyalty and attachment from family to other loved ones begins.<sup>3</sup>



Attachment behavior endures throughout the life cycle. Internalizing the capacity to differentiate the sounds of safety and sounds of danger develop the faculty to recognize when it is safe to leave, knowing we can always return to a secure base. But in order to develop this base we also need the approval to leave. The watchful eye of the parent must also be an encouraging glance. Under the shelter of parental protection the caretaker facilitates an amalgam of the encouragement to explore and the safety of homecoming. When feeling safe enough to investigate and leave, the child's return is hopefully greeted with praise and applause. Psychologically this capacity to explore outside the matrix of the family can only come from feeling secure within its precinct. Astrologically this suggests that the capability to leave home successfully into the exploration of our creative potentialities, the 5<sup>th</sup> house, is drawn from the resources embedded in the 4<sup>th</sup> house. Astrological wisdom suggests that in order to gain a sense of self, as distinct from the familial terrain, we first need to integrate the 4<sup>th</sup> house legacy.

John Bowlby's model of attachment theory asserts that the facility to be separate is based on the premise of how the mix of attachment was experienced in the early years of family life and his research led him to formulate the following attachment styles:

**1. SECURE ATTACHMENT**

*Care comes when child calls*

A secure base develops when an atmosphere of safety in early childhood promotes exploration past the boundaries of familiarity. Encouragement to explore further, together with welcoming applause on our return, supports our ability to meet the challenges of the unknown. In part, it is the memory of parental applause that 'brings us home' safely in adolescence. Surety of where one belongs facilitates the ability to leave. The sense of home is internalized and not projected out onto a place, an individual, a community or a lifestyle.

**2. ANXIOUS RESISTANT or ANXIOUS AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT**

*Protection is sometimes available, sometimes not*

With this attachment style bonding has been compromised by feelings of ambivalence, anxiety and disassociation. Bonding rituals have been unsafe, irregular or neglectful. The ability to separate or leave is compromised by uncertainty, feeling that if separation occurs return to safety may not be possible. Not enough surety of belonging has been internalized to know that separation will be successful and satisfying.

**3. ANXIOUS AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT**

*Care giving is not present*

Attachment and bonding is avoided as a means to protect against feeling ignored or rejected. The child becomes self-contained and develops a sense of guarded self-reliance. Attachment is dangerous as it renders us vulnerable to disapproval and hurt. However, if we can't connect, we can't separate. We can't leave what we haven't experienced; in turn, this influences our ability to engage in life outside the familial boundaries.

Separation is intimately linked to bonding. The ability to separate without destructive emotional undertones is a product of secure attachment. Following on from the trinity of attachment styles three groups of separation are categorized:

- **BOND - SEPARATE**

Secure attachment facilitates a sense of belonging and feelings of nourishment, which assist healthy separation. The ability to separate functionally can only occur if we have been encouraged to explore beyond what is familiar and to have been acknowledged and highly praised for our adventures. A secure base supports the exploration beyond what is familiar, helping create mastery over the environment, an essential component of secure development.

- **BOND - CAN'T SEPARATE**

The attachment style promotes dependency and symbiosis; the inability to separate has been complicated by rigidity and the pressure to conform. A chaotic atmosphere engenders fear and anxiety at any juncture of separation as no safety net or secure base has been developed. When astrological archetypes prone to enmeshment, chaos or rigidity (Neptune, Pluto & Saturn) are in difficult aspects to the Moon, the tendency towards this style of attachment is heightened. The Neptunian attachment style may constellate fears of being unable to survive outside the family circle or the fear that those we leave will be weakened by our departure. Pluto signals the dread of betraying those we leave or being betrayed by those we trust outside the familial environs. Plutonic attachment may also indicate the hold of a familiar secret that keeps its members from leaving. Saturn in difficult aspect to the Moon may evoke guilt when we feel we are not acting in a responsible manner toward those we leave, self-criticism about being able to go it alone or even fear at how we may manage.

- **WON'T BOND - CAN'T SEPARATE**

An inability to bond promotes disconnection. When attachment has not been successful then the individual instinctually feels separate, removed and unconnected. Separation has been compromised by the inability to attach. The urge for space and distance is heightened in defense of the lack of attachment. Astrologically the archetype of Uranus in difficult aspect to the Moon may reveal this attachment style. Even the simplistic astrological statement of the Moon in Air could identify this dynamic.<sup>4</sup>

By now it is apparent that this matrix of identity is broadly shaped by the astrological archetypes of the Moon (*the sense of belonging*) and the Sun (*the sense of being separate*) as well as their derivatives. The Moon and its natural habitat of the 4<sup>th</sup> house are the harbor where the identity feels safe, connected and in the right place. The Sun and its playground of the 5<sup>th</sup> house are the stage where the experience

of being separate promotes creative self-exploration. As both an astrologer and family therapist I have often remarked on the similarity between astrologers and family therapists. Like family therapists, astrologers are used to working with family systems; not only do we honour the individuality of each planet, but speculate on how they operate together in the system of the horoscope. The horoscope itself is systemic in that the planets reveal systems; for instance Venus might symbolise a sister, an aunt, the feminine dowry in the family, while Mars could be a brother, father's anger or the masculine spirit of the family. Embedded in the 12<sup>th</sup> are stories of ancestry while hidden in the depths of the 8<sup>th</sup> are the plumb lines of familial inheritance. Like psychology, family therapy both challenges and compliments traditional astrological theory encouraging us to expand our astrological parameters and ways of thinking. I have found that attachment theory has greatly added to my ways of thinking about the Moon and the 4<sup>th</sup> house. One of these ways is to consider attachment styles in an astrological context, suggested by aspects to the Moon, planets in the 4<sup>th</sup> or ruling this house.

I would suggest that aspects to the Moon reveal the psychodynamic structure of attachment. The planet aspecting the Moon needs to be honored and acknowledged in each individual's style of attachment. The more forceful aspects like the conjunction, square, quincunx and opposition may suggest an attachment difficulty first experienced in bonding rituals with the primary caretaker, then re-experienced in adult difficulties with intimacy. Planets in the 4<sup>th</sup> house will describe the climate of the family home and the attitudes and influences of the family of origin that shape the individual's sense of inner security. These archetypes influence the construction of a secure foundation stone for life. Planets in the 4<sup>th</sup> house suggest emotional imprints and patterns impressed upon the psyche through participation in the family atmosphere. These planets suggest influences and attitudes in the early ambience of the family home that shaped the degree to which an individual feels safe in the world. The planetary ruler of the 4<sup>th</sup> house shows what additional resources may be available to help build a secure base and an ongoing sense of safety.

Following is a planetary guide to aspects to the Moon from the viewpoint of attachment theory. I am only looking at aspects to the Moon from Mars out, as this is the first planet outside the Earth's orbit, symbolically lying outside the matrix of the family. Superior planets exert an enormous impact on attachment and separation, as by nature they exist outside the familial container. When in aspect to the Moon, the familial approach to the particular archetype will shape the attachment style and affect the development of autonomy and separateness. Aspects between the Moon and the Sun, Mercury and Venus are of course also vital to acknowledge. They certainly reveal heritage and vital signs in the

family of origin. However, unlike the other planets they are bound to the orbit of the Earth and not separate from this familial matrix, as the other planets are. Therefore I have concentrated on the superior planet's aspects to the Moon to illustrate astrological attachment styles and the way that these may lead to adult separation and relationship issues:

## ASPECTS TO THE MOON: ATTACHMENT BEHAVIOUR



**Attachment:** Reactionary, Vigilant

**Relational and Intimacy Issues:** Mastery vs. Frustration, Love and Anger, Fight or Flight

When Mars aspects the Moon the interchange between individuality and belonging is highlighted in the family. The lunar connection to the militant archetype underscores the dilemma between violation and protection, creating a need for vigilance. In the family a strong focus on independence may override the development of security. Concentration on self-sufficiency, standing up for one's self, being tough and striving forward may be triggered as a reactive defense to attachment. With this aspect the child is sensitive to the antagonistic feelings and seething resentment that permeate the familial atmosphere. Unexpressed anger, rivalry and ill feelings may compromise safety; therefore a passive-aggressive pattern of behavior may solidify to protect vulnerability. With the more demanding aspects between these two planets I am alerted to the possibility that an aggressive and provocative personality masks insecurity and defends intimacy. At some level I would also be watchful for a complex pattern of sexually acting out when vulnerability or dependency is stimulated.

When the attachment is secure, the parents have encouraged the expression of appropriate desires, self-assertion and using the will to achieve positive outcomes. The child feels able to express their individuality and their anger and still feel they are loved and part of the system. Their capacity to explore outside the system has not been compromised by unresolved feelings of anger or rivalry in the family. The child is better equipped to differentiate between their own desires and the needs of others, not feeling that they must act in the way others demand to feel safe and acceptable. However when attachment has been compromised, an atmosphere of passive-aggressiveness exists which clouds the ability to express anger in a healthy manner and leaves the child going after what they want in a covert or under-handed way. Caught in the fight-or-flight syndrome, the child indiscriminately reacts, especially when an inauthentic demonstration of closeness masks aggression and hostility. Love and

anger may feel split and the child may have internalized a family blueprint that anger is exclusive of love, learning that rivalry or anger at loved ones is inappropriate. This dynamic renders the adult adrift in the unresolved familial complex of resentment, feeling bound to a system where they cannot be themselves. An inability to sustain an enduring bond is rooted in the complex of not managing to be independent in an intimate association.

4

**Attachment Behavior:** Liberal and Extensive

**Relational and Intimacy Issues:** Entitlement, False Hope, Cultural Mismatches

One of the tasks of this astrological combination is to extend the sense of safety and belonging, not only beyond the family circle, but outside the culture as well, to feel safe on foreign soil. The archetype of Jupiter is the antitheses of the Moon in many ways, bringing the poles of familiarity vs. foreignness, home vs. the world, feeling vs. conceptuality, instinct vs. culture into focus. The functionality of the innate urge to explore and question is shaped in the family environment and through its attitudes and beliefs. While it is common for this aspect to literally correlate with a parent who was born overseas, a multi-cultural, religious or bilingual family, having lived or been schooled abroad, psychologically its essence stresses cross-cultural needs. Religious and cultural beliefs, academic and innovative education, human values, and hope and optimism in the future play a large role in the child's security and attachment. How this was accomplished in the family of origin influences the degree of safety the child feels in the world. In an adult context this suggests that the mystery of intimacy is discovered in foreign territory.

When the attachment has been secured in a familial atmosphere that prizes tolerance, open-mindedness, education and cross-cultural experiences, the child internalizes his or her sense of belonging, independent of familial or cultural beliefs. Encouraged to think beyond the square and accept all cultures and religions, the child develops the natural capacity to explore appropriate ways to extend their experience beyond the family circle. The child matures confident in their beliefs and the future. However, when the familial atmosphere is polluted by prejudice, dogma, inflexible beliefs and rigid cultural attitudes, the consent to form personal opinions and beliefs are withheld, compromising the sense of well being. The ability to adventure outside the safety zone of the family is impaired, often defended by a sense of entitlement. Confined by inflexible attitudes the child is unsupported in a vision of themselves and encouraged to fear what is foreign, the outside world and the future. When the

family encourages the child to hang onto its limited religious and cultural way of thinking, hope for the future is compromised. Natural visions of faraway places, the excitement of foreign landscapes or the dreams of frontier studies are contaminated with fear. With this combination it is imperative that belonging or intimacy is forged in a wide-open space that encourages tolerance, exploration and differences.



**Attachment:**

Conditional or Rigid

**Relational and Intimacy Issues:**

Earning love, the need to be taken seriously, fear of rejection, self-reliance, lack of optimism

Rules and regulations are an important feature of family life. With this aspect the potentiality that laws impede the natural course of attachment is heightened, leading to a rigid or conditional attachment style. When parental values and rules are at the expense of the young, then the individual may be prone to serving a system not of their choice, but controlled by external authority. The ability to perform, set goals and be self-sufficient is an integral part of the family atmosphere. The family ethos encourages the child to be a contributing member of society, follow tradition and respect authority. Often the weight of this aspect feels burdensome as the inner pressure to perform is fuelled by the need to be loved. Acceptance may be gauged by performance. Therefore with this aspect the child may withdraw rather than reach out. Rather than feeling contained within the safety of the familial environs, boundaries isolate the child, severing him or her from feeling close and included. Being self-sufficient masks feelings of rejection and exclusion. Often with this aspect the child feels that love is measured or controlled, meted out with good behavior and top marks. Performance and acceptance become entangled in feeling safe. Hence the ability to leave is compromised if the person feels responsible in any way for those left behind.

When attachment is secure, regulations and the consequences when rules are broken help the child set appropriate limits and goals. Boundaries ensure the child feels safe; therefore a child may be empowered through appropriate controls and regulations. Predictability in family life encourages the child to feel in control and helps them manage the gaps of aloneness. Regularity is a vital ally to secure development; however, if this engenders fear and anxiety then the rigidity of the family system suffocates individuality. Hierarchy is essential in early childhood but its grip must loosen if we are to develop a healthy sense of personal autonomy.



Therefore the functional expression of the Saturn - Moon aspect helps differentiate appropriate usage of boundaries, not experiencing rules and limits as a withdrawal of love. However when the family atmosphere is cold and distant, the child's fear of rejection and anxiety at doing the wrong thing increases. The child feels controlled and imprisoned through the enforcement of strict rules. Lacking the appropriate boundaries the child is unable to be in control, feeling limited and stuck. A lack of adequate fostering or authoritative guidance adds to the child's isolation in the family. Insularity and isolation are confused with containment. In an adult context intimacy is impaired through fear of rejection and an exaggerated sense of responsibility for another's feelings.



**Attachment:** Marginal, Peripheral and non-personal  
**Relational and Intimacy Issues:** Abandonment, Disenfranchisement

Chiron is not a planet in the astronomical sense, but as a celestial wanderer it fits the ancient tradition of a planet. Like most other counselling astrologers I have found its influence to be essential in revealing dimensions of character not necessarily embraced by the other planets. In many ways Chiron is marginal to the herd of planets and metaphorically parallels the feelings of being an outsider. In aspect to the Moon it highlights the sense of feeling displaced. Often this feeling is literalized through the experience of dislocation, abandonment or relinquishment. For many clients I have seen this actualize as their mother's post natal depression, familial separation, adoption or emigration, that uncomfortable feeling of being a stranger in a strange land. However this presents in the outer world, it suggests the process of attachment has been bruised by feelings of exclusion that infect the family atmosphere. This archetypal union is complex in that it combines feelings of marginality with the need to be accepted, often resulting in the child feeling excluded or disenfranchised. Often the task of this aspect is to find the apex of security, not at the center of the system, but on its fringe. The fate is to wander, to be displaced, before the sense of belonging can be established. If the family is the outsider in the society, then the individual is at risk of leaving as safety is sustained through identifying as the outsider. It is the family wound which may cripple the young person's ability to leave the enmeshed family unit. Often with this aspect the familial myth suggests that the pain of living has been great, wounding the will and the spirit that promotes adventure and exploration outside the family and culture.

When the child feels secure, he or she learns to be heroic in the face of being foreign and marginal in the system. The parents encourage a healthy sense of feeling different and demonstrate freedom in not being part of a system. In this way the child develops the self-esteem to be secure in a foreign environment and develops the ability to be compassionate and caring about others who suffer the same sense of disenfranchisement. However when there is not enough parental support, the child feels orphaned from their family unit. The sense of attachment may have suffered due to a parental wound. A parent's spirit may have been broken and the shade haunts the family atmosphere, leaving the child feeling helpless and unprepared to become part of a greater community.



**Attachment:** Unique, Erratic and Disengaged  
**Relational and Intimacy Issues:** Freedom vs. Closeness, Non Committal, Disconnection

Disengagement and separation are themes that resonate when the archetypes of Uranus and the Moon combine. The possibility of a fractured or dislocated family atmosphere or the lack of an unconditional bond is suggested, whether perceived or real. Individuality and independence are important hallmarks in the family. Urges to adventure, take risks and be emotionally self-sufficient are aspects of family life that would be valued in this family matrix. Surprises and unexpected change will also be part of the familial landscape.

When attachment is secure, the child is encouraged to be a unique individual in the family system and is given enough space and freedom to pursue what is important. The child is prepared for the possibility of sudden change and develops other support systems outside the family unit; especially peer groups and others with common interests. The facility to be individualistic and risk taking is sensibly supported and encouraged.

However when the familial atmosphere is polluted with anxiety and tension, the child feels disconnected and separate from the family. Unprepared for sudden changes the child becomes anxious that something unexpected will disrupt the status quo, contributing to becoming hyper-vigilant to intuit what may happen in the future. The parents are seen as emotionally unavailable, unstable or absent leading to an erratic attachment style where the child feels unable to settle down and needs to keep moving to feel safe. A cold family climate or an unconscious memory of feeling abandoned or cut off from security emphasizes the need to be disengaged, so that freedom and separateness are at the

expense of closeness and togetherness. When the safe container of childhood has been punctured by a sudden or unresolved severance, then our own ability to sustain adult relationship and our adult family will be compromised. The urge to leave, restlessness, anxiety and lack of commitment permeate the ability to forge adult attachments.



<b>Attachment:</b>	Idealistic and Universal
<b>Relational and Intimacy Issues:</b>	Loss of Identity, Lack of Boundary, Fantasy vs. Reality

The ideal of the family is important. Creativity, spirituality and a heightened sensitivity of others are aspects of family life. Emotional understanding, compassion for others in the family and the community at large as well as the urge to serve others are all part of the family ethos. Unspoken rules, ideals and expectations influence the language of the family. The need to bond, be close and merge is highlighted. Therefore themes of enmeshment, sacrifice, relinquishment and illness may dominate the familial inheritance when these two archetypes clash.

When the bond is secure, the child feels they are protected and looked after, encouraged to be creative and imaginative. The family atmosphere is fluid and the child feels secure without visible structures and limits. The family gives confidence to the child to improvise in the moment drawing security from their own inner creative resourcefulness. Imaginative thought is encouraged and the child develops a healthy relationship with their inner world of fantasy and the outer world of reality, as they feel understood and accepted. However if bonding rituals are enmeshed the child may feel looked over and invisible in the family unit, as the need to sacrifice their independence and will for the sake of the unity of the family is an unspoken rule. This may be due to an illness or tragedy in the family that demands the surrender of the child's individuality to attend to the family. A lack of boundary discourages the development of a private or inner self. A parent may be ill, weak or victimized yet uses this to wield power confusing the child's ability to be accepted and understood in his or her own right. If the sense of self is sacrificed for the family the child feels misunderstood and not met. Being entangled in the familial web places the individual at risk when leaving home, feeling compelled to stay to care for others, attend to the parent's needs or remains on peace keeping duty. The danger at becoming psychologically stranded is increased and the individual may become ill or languish in a twilight zone to avoid the process of separation.



**Attachment:** Charismatic, Compulsive  
**Relational and Intimacy Issues:** Trust, Power

The family system is confronted in dealing with powerful issues of loss and grief as well as taboos and secrets. Power and influence are issues or they have been in the familial past and these affect the integrity of the family. The familial need for honesty, trust and cohesion are strong due to the ancestral denials and unexpressed grief that infiltrate the current family climate.

When safe, the child feels protected from harm and part of a tribe that is bound by trust. Emotional honesty in the family encourages the child to be intimate and truthful about what they feel. Negative feelings may be expressed without fear of judgment or reprisal and are not allowed to pollute the atmosphere. Grief and loss are acknowledged as part of the life cycle and the child feels better equipped to be able to let go and move forward with life.

However if the familiar atmosphere is polluted with secrets, shame or unexpressed grief, the young feel unable to be close or intimate with others for fear of exposing the secret and betraying the family. In this case separation may be accomplished in a Persephone-like way through being snatched, abducted or seduced into another atmosphere of control and dominance. Power and control may be mobilized to suppress a secret. The child may develop in an atmosphere of secrecy and dishonesty instilling a sense of shame into the self, unable to differentiate between what is private and what is secret. Power may also be abusive in that it keeps the child from expressing who they are. Powerlessness induces rage and therefore the family atmosphere may be polluted with rage and brutal feelings. The child feels unprotected and vulnerable to attack, learning to mistrust the world at large. When the family is bonded together through an inappropriate secret or shame the risk of difficulty with separation is heightened and anyone outside the familial unit is cast in the role of enemy. Transferring loyalties to someone outside the family constitutes betrayal, leaving the individual in fear of being disinherited.

The Lunar statement in the horoscope suggests not only how we bond most effectively but reveals how that bond may have been met in the atmosphere of the home, directly shaping the way we are able to develop the capacity to separate and be independent of the family. While family therapy articulates the process of attachment and separation in depth, astrology aids in amplifying and placing this in context for each individual.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, WW Norton & Co., Inc. (London: 1986).

<sup>2</sup> John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, Routledge (London: 1988). John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth are the pioneers in delineating attachment styles.

<sup>3</sup> For an exploration of the process of leaving home, see Glennys Lawton, *Leaving Home*, published in *Apollon*, and now republished as an article on [www.AstroSynthesis.com.au](http://www.AstroSynthesis.com.au).

<sup>4</sup> See Brian Clark, *The Sibling Constellation: The Astrology of Brothers and Sisters*, Penguin Arkana (London: 1999).