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## **Mapping Your Neural Dating Patterns**

### **A Free Worksheet from "Intentionally Single, Seeking Not Settling"**

Welcome to this guided assessment designed to help you identify how your brain's protection and connection systems influence your dating life. As we discussed in Episode 29, understanding the hidden neural battle happening inside your mind is the first step toward making conscious choices aligned with what you truly want.

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### **PART 1: RECOGNIZING YOUR PROTECTION SYSTEM TRIGGERS**

For each scenario below, rate how likely you are to experience the described reaction on a scale of 1-5: 1 = Never happens to me 3 = Sometimes happens to me 5 = Almost always happens to me

#### **Online Dating Behaviors:**

\_\_\_\_\_ After matching with someone promising, I find myself investigating their profile for "red flags" before agreeing to meet.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel a wave of anxiety or doubt when someone shows genuine interest in me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I've abandoned conversations or "ghosted" potential dates when things were actually going well.

\_\_\_\_\_ I find reasons to delay meeting in person, even when communication seems positive.

#### **Early Dating Behaviors:**

\_\_\_\_\_ After a good first date, I catch myself focusing on small imperfections or incompatibilities.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel uncomfortable or anxious when someone wants to make plans for a second or third date.

\_\_\_\_\_ I compare new people to past partners, often unfavorably.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel relief when plans get canceled, even if I was looking forward to the date.

### **Emotional Patterns:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I notice physical tension (tight chest, stomach knots, etc.) when thinking about dating.

\_\_\_\_\_ I rehearse worst-case scenarios about how a new relationship might end.

\_\_\_\_\_ I preemptively protect myself by keeping emotional distance, even from people I like.

\_\_\_\_\_ I find myself thinking: "Why bother? This probably won't work out anyway."

### **SCORING - PROTECTION SYSTEM ACTIVATION:**

- 12-24: Your protection system is relatively balanced
- 25-36: Your protection system is moderately activated
- 37-48: Your protection system is highly activated
- 49-60: Your protection system is in overdrive

My Protection System Score: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **PART 2: IDENTIFYING YOUR PROTECTION PATTERNS**

Review your responses above. Now, think about your last three dating experiences that didn't work out. For each one, answer the following questions:

1. What specific thoughts or feelings caused you to pull back or end things?

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2. Can you identify what past relationship experience(s) these thoughts/feelings connect to?

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3. What "evidence" did your protection system use to convince you to disengage?

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## PART 3: CONNECTION SYSTEM INVENTORY

Now let's assess your connection system's strength. Rate how often you experience these feelings or thoughts on a scale of 1-5: 1 = Never experience this 3 = Sometimes experience this 5 = Regularly experience this

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel genuine curiosity about new people I meet.

\_\_\_\_\_ I can imagine sharing my life with a partner without feeling trapped.

\_\_\_\_\_ I find myself looking forward to getting to know someone better.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel comfortable being vulnerable with people I'm dating.

\_\_\_\_\_ I can picture building a meaningful relationship at this stage of my life.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel hopeful rather than cynical about finding connection.

\_\_\_\_\_ I recognize and appreciate genuine compatibility when I experience it.

\_\_\_\_\_ I'm able to stay present on dates rather than mentally checking out.

### SCORING - CONNECTION SYSTEM ACTIVATION:

- 8-16: Your connection system could use strengthening
- 17-24: Your connection system is moderately active
- 25-32: Your connection system is healthy and engaged
- 33-40: Your connection system is highly responsive

My Connection System Score: \_\_\_\_\_

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## PART 4: MAPPING YOUR NEURAL PATTERNS

Based on your responses, complete the following reflection questions:

1. What specific experiences from your past have most shaped your protection system's responses?

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2. In what dating situations do you notice your protection system activating most strongly?

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3. What helps your connection system feel safe enough to engage?

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4. What's one specific protection pattern you'd like to manage better?

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## PART 5: STRATEGIES FOR CONSCIOUS OVERRIDE

Below are personalized strategies based on your assessment responses. Circle the 2-3 that resonate most with you:

### If Your Protection System Is In Overdrive:

1. **Practice Affect Labeling:** When you notice anxiety or doubt arising, say to yourself: "I notice my protection system is activating right now." This simple naming reduces amygdala activation by up to 50%.

2. **Implement a 24-Hour Rule:** When you feel the urge to cancel plans or withdraw, commit to waiting 24 hours before acting. This gives your prefrontal cortex time to engage.
3. **Use the "Alternate Perspective" Technique:** When your brain finds a "red flag," challenge yourself to generate three alternative interpretations of the same behavior.
4. **Create a "Past vs. Present" Inventory:** Write down how a current dating situation reminds you of past experiences, then consciously identify what's actually different this time.

### If Your Connection System Needs Strengthening:

1. **Daily Connection Priming:** Spend 2 minutes each morning visualizing positive connection experiences from your past (with friends, family, or former partners).
2. **Practice Low-Stakes Connection:** Build your connection "muscles" through brief, positive interactions with strangers or acquaintances daily.
3. **Compassion Meditation:** Research shows that loving-kindness meditation strengthens your brain's connection circuits in just 8 weeks of regular practice.
4. **Create a "Connection Evidence Journal":** Document moments when connection felt good and safe to counter your protection system's negative evidence file.

The strategies I'm committing to try are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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## CONCLUSION

Understanding the neural battle between your connection and protection systems is the first step toward dating consciously after 40. By mapping your specific patterns, you can begin to:

1. Recognize when your protection system is driving decisions
2. Validate its concerns without letting it take control
3. Consciously override automatic responses when they don't serve your deeper desires for connection

Remember: Both your connection AND protection systems serve important purposes. The goal isn't to eliminate your protection system—it's developed wisdom that keeps you from repeating painful patterns. Instead, aim to become the conscious mediator between these competing neural networks.

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## NEXT STEPS

I'd love to hear about your results and insights from this assessment! Please share your experience with me by:

- Emailing me at: [intentionallysinglepodcast@gmail.com](mailto:intentionallysinglepodcast@gmail.com)
- DMing me on Instagram: [@intentionallysingle](https://www.instagram.com/intentionallysingle)

Your insights help me create more targeted content to support your journey, and I personally read every message.

Thank you for completing this assessment! You've taken an important step toward understanding the hidden brain battle that's been influencing your dating life.

With warmth and support,

Lauren Jean

Host, "Intentionally Single, Seeking But Not Settling"

*Keep your heart open to possibilities*