

Making Love Last

Basic Truths

about Intimacy



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MAKING LOVE LAST

Creating and Maintaining Intimacy in Long-Term Relationships

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Basic Truths about Intimacy

Human beings are the most complex phenomena in the known universe and therefore the most mysterious. The cutting edge of Darwinian evolution is our unique human¹ capacity for mutual emotional responsiveness—for love and intimacy. If we are to mend our broken relationships or to build new intimacies we have to understand what we are dealing with in ourselves as a species. Fortunately, over the past two decades we have learned more than we have known since the beginning of time. But before I can suggest ways of creating, enhancing, or restoring our relationships and before I can coach you toward intimacy skill development I need to call your attention to some of the basic and astounding truths that our technologies have permitted us to learn about our fundamental intimate nature that will help us see where we need to go in creating and maintaining close emotional relationships.

Intimacy Truth One: Emotional Intimacy is a Human Genetic Imperative

Charles Darwin as early as 1872 spoke of emotions as having evolved through natural selection in mammals and primates to reach a special peak in humans, and that our full spectrum of emotions is critically important as adaptation to our complex human social environment of intimate interpersonal relationships (Darwin, 1872, 1965). In the study of evolution our latest research tool, the genome, the study of the alphabet and history of genes and DNA, makes great precision possible in identifying the relationships between species. Furthermore, genome studies allow us to study the direct lineage of all species. What is now absolutely clear is that we share common ancestors with the other anthropoids—the apes, monkeys, chimps, bonobos, and other pre-human hominids that also live in close-knit social groups. Genetics has established that human history begins in northeast Africa with an nomadic band of about 150 people who, when we first encounter them 60,000 years ago, are already walking upright, speaking, living in families, and performing religious rituals. The complex evolution of emotions from the mammals to the primates and to humans living in intimate social groups indicates that, whether we are aware of it or not, in intimate human contact we are striving toward emotional understanding of the personal inner life of others—even as we attempt to share with her or him our own inner emotional life. The unique evolution of our species has depended on the capacity for intimate emotional exchanges in

order for human groups to survive and multiply amidst a world of predators. Our genetic imperative is to seek intimate emotional relatedness with one another.

Intimacy Truth Two: Love is a Fundamental Human Drive

We are born into and live for a lifetime in an environment of mutual emotional exchanges from which we learn all the great lessons of life. For centuries poets, bards, and philosophers have written about love and intimacy in countless ways. The terms “love” and “intimacy” are intertwined but love is often distinguished from intimacy when the accent is on the wellbeing of the other. Whereas, intimacy is in focus when the accent is on an accrual of benefits to the self. Intimacy then describes an emotional relationship in which one risks with the expectation of gain. Contemporary science adds the new twist that human beings are genetically programmed to have access to what is going on emotionally “inside” of each other.

The person who has undoubtedly done the most comprehensive study of the web of human intimacy—of lust, love, and attachment—is anthropologist and sociologist Helen Fisher in two truly remarkable books, *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage* and *Why We Stray and Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*. After massive immersion in research data from around the world and reaching to before the beginning of human time, Fisher states: “I came to believe that romantic love is a primary motivation system in the brain—in short, there is a fundamental human mating drive” (Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, 2004). Summarizing her research Fisher says:

Romantic love is deeply entwined with two other mating drives: lust—the craving for sexual gratification; and attachment—the feelings of calm, security, and union with a long-term partner....Lust is associated primarily with the hormone testosterone in both men and women. Romantic love is linked with the natural stimulant dopamine and perhaps norepinephrine and serotonin. And feelings of...attachment are produced primarily by the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin....All three of these brain networks—lust, romantic attraction, and attachment—are multipurpose systems. In addition to its reproductive purpose, the sex drive serves to make and keep friends, provide pleasure and adventure, tone muscles, and relax the mind. Romantic love can stimulate you to sustain a loving partnership or drive you to fall in love with a new person and initiate porce. And feelings of attachment enable us to express genuine affection for children, family, and friends, as well as a beloved (Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, 2004).

Helen Fisher’s work makes clear that the long evolving web of intimacy that we humans are caught

in is comprised of a series of neurotransmitters running throughout our bodies—that in fact, we are driven to love. Knowing that love is not only our genetic birthright but that we are neurologically driven toward emotional intimacy in committed relationships reassures us that searching for intimacy is something we, and those around us, are fully equipped to do. For example, whatever differences there may be between men and women, when it comes to our human need for emotionally rewarding intimate relationships we are essentially the same. But now to Fisher’s web of intimacy—love, lust, and attachment—we can add technology’s latest discovery in the imperative to love—emotional intersubjectivity.

Intimacy Truth Three: Intimacy Drives Us into Each Other’s Inner World of Emotional Experience

There’s you and me and our relationship makes three. That is, as you and I start a relationship dance we quickly learn each other’s steps and counter-responses. We quickly learn what to expect from each other. We find ourselves taking the words out of each other’s mouths. Oddly enough, the relationship itself seems to take on a life of its own so that often we are responding to how the relationship is going as much as we are responding to each other. The ongoing life of the relationship itself can enliven or deaden spontaneous intimacy possibilities between the two relating partners.

At this point I need to introduce the psychological technical term “intersubjectivity” in order to describe the life of the relationship itself because of what intersubjectivity can show us about our emotional nature. Intersubjectivity has been a leading psychological concept for some years. Evolving technology has established that the drive toward intersubjectivity—the drive toward entering into each other’s inner worlds of emotional experience—is present at birth and is therefore innate (Stern D. N., 2004). Here’s the idea of intersubjectivity in a nutshell: I am a subject, an agent of my desires, thoughts, and actions. Over a lifetime I have created my own inner emotional world inhabited by people who have influenced me in various ways. You are a subject, an agent of your desires, thoughts, and actions with your own inner emotional world molded by important relationships in your life. When we two come together in an intimate relationship, two subjective worlds of experience join in what psychologists call an intersubjective engagement. When two worlds of emotional experience create an intersubjective engagement something new begins to happen so that the relationship itself has an impact on both of us.² When you get right down to it, this is why we search for an intimate relationship—so that we can feel the

powerful emotional impact of someone we love.

My favorite psychoanalyst, Jessica Benjamin from New York University, speaks of intersubjective engagements as “when both individuals experience themselves as being transformed by the other, or by what they create in conjunction with the other [and] a choreography emerges that is not reducible to the idea of reacting to the outside” (Benjamin, 1988). That is, in intimate relationships as two work toward being as fully candid and spontaneous with one another as possible, a relationship dance evolves that often comes as a surprise to both participants. This special evolving intersubjective culture of two—the unique ways of entering each other’s subjective worlds that we develop—constitutes the third participating force in the relationship.

My friend, Audrey Seaton-Bacon, a psychologist who works with couples, speaks of “you, me, and us.” She encourages the couples she works with to think of the relationship they are jointly creating³ and looking after as “their baby.” Considered this way, each member of the couple has the responsibility for being attentive to and nurturing the third, the relationship-baby that they are jointly creating. Paying close attention to the ways our relationship itself is evolving thus becomes a crucial task in creating and maintaining intimacy.

We start our intersubjective engagement by realizing that—despite how much we have in common—we are very different from each other. Therefore we must find ways of continuously processing—of talking about—those differences and how they impact both of us and our evolving relationship. To do this effectively we have to know something about how each of us has constructed our private inner subjective worlds in the first place.

Human babies are genetically programmed for emotional communication from the get-go. They eagerly search out opportunities for encountering and manipulating the emotional responsiveness of their caregivers. Further, the actual cells in the human baby’s brain and the brain chemicals running throughout its entire body *actually organize* in response to the relational opportunities available during the first two years of life (Schorer, *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self*, 2003). Thus, amazing as it may seem to many, we are not simply born with preformed brains that learn things as we grow up. Rather, each human brain is exquisitely sensitive to all relational opportunities available and actually re-

arranges its cells and its neuron cell pathways that run throughout the body to respond to the intimate relationship possibilities available to it. In the second year of life the brain solidifies what will be its future structure based on the neuronal pathways that have actually become engaged by relationships. Millions of unused brain cells are then systematically pruned out by each developing brain to make room for the development of those cell assemblies that are actually being used in the child's developing emotional relationships.⁴

But of equal importance to the actual pruning out of unused brain cells is the active blocking of countless brain pathways in direct response to painful emotional experiences. That is, whenever we are frightened by relational experiences the pathways open at that moment constrict in order to alert us to avoid those kinds of relationship situations in the future. Neuropsychologists Alan Schore and Steve Porges after having studied thousands of brains through new technologies report massive dampening effects on brain structures due to emotional neglect and trauma. I call these shutdown effects that develop in response to fear and pain “fear reflexes.” It is as if a sign were posted on channels of personal connections to other people that have been frightening or hurtful—“Never reach that way again” (Hedges, 2012).

All infants, toddlers, and older children experience body-mind fears arising from certain kinds relationship situations that are universal in childhood. I have identified “Seven Deadly Fears” that have been studied through a century of psychoanalysis (Hedges, 2012). Couples, by having a basic map of the universal relational fears, have the possibility of studying how each of the seven relational fears operates for each of them as the relationship itself develops. By studying fear reflexes together in the context of the developing relationship partners can work toward regaining access to those closed off channels of love that were genetically designed for intimate emotional resonance but that have been closed off due to developmental fears. I will discuss those seven relational fears later in the context of developing intimacy skills.

Thus, emotional intimacy necessarily involves a mutual active exploration of each others' separate and private subjective worlds of experience—and a coming to know the ways that we have learned to connect emotionally with each other as well as the ways we have learned to disconnect from feared intimate contact. From birth we are driven toward knowing what's going on inside other people and

toward spontaneously sharing what is going on inside ourselves. The psychological concepts of inner subjective worlds and of exploring each other's inner subjective worlds through intersubjective engagement allow us a way of thinking and speaking about the kinds of emotional encounters necessarily involved in human intimacy.

In order to repair rifts in relationships or to begin new relationships it is essential that we allow ourselves full access to our innate capacity for intersubjective emotional engagement by talking with each other frequently about what's going on with us and in the relationship as we see it evolving. Blocks to intersubjective engagement are caused by past injury and neglect that have produced fear reflexes that hold us apart from one another. Two can work together on repairing not only what negative interactions arise in the present relationship, but on discovering the chronic emotional blocks that have resulted from fear reflexes developed in past relationships.

Intimacy Truth Four: Intimacy Requires Oneness as Well as Separateness

Intimate relationships are characterized by oscillations we make between our need for "oneness" with another person and our contrary need for "separateness." On the "oneness" side infant survival depends on close emotional relatedness between infants and caregivers. Also, from an evolutionary standpoint humans had to band together physically and to depend on each other emotionally in order to survive and multiply as a species.

But just as adaptive mechanisms are required to insure the oneness of emotional attachment, adaptive mechanisms are similarly required to insure psychological differentiation and separateness (Slavin, 2007). We must emotionally merge with others in order to enjoy what they have to offer us. Then we must separate ourselves in order not to be engulfed by them so that we can integrate in our own ways what we have learned. How well I remember Dr. Gorman Smith, professor of my Education 101 class, begin by telling us to think of anything truly important that we had ever learned and we would know immediately whom we had learned it from! All the important lessons of life are learned from someone we have had an emotionally significant relationship with, even if that person lives in a book or has been long dead but left wisdom for us to enjoy and relate to. We enter into merged emotional contact with someone we admire and respect in order to take from them what they have to offer us.

In our quest for emotionally intimate relatedness we are forever oscillating between our need to enter emotionally into the subjective worlds of intimate others in order to develop our minds, and our contrary need not to get excessively sucked into the personal worlds of those needed others. Ongoing intersubjective engagement in which we each share with our relating partner our experiences of her or him and of the developments in the relationship as we see them allows us to experience both the sense of oneness and the sense of separateness that are necessary for human growth and development.

In our loving and intimate relationships we can expect to expand and grow by being in intimate emotional contact with our relationship partners. But in order to make use of our intimate relationships for expansion of ourselves we need to be able to come together, to merge, to identify with our partners and then to be able to separate, to differentiate, and to become independent from them in order to make those lessons our own. The intersubjective space created by the relationship itself can allow this process to develop.

Many of us have suffered in our relationships either because we or our partners were unable to come together in complete merged oneness—whether at the dinner table or in bed. And many of us have suffered because either we or our partners were so afraid of separateness or feelings of abandonment that the relationship became over-dependent and stifling. Intimacy requires that each couple establish ways of achieving a sense of merged oneness with each other as well as ways of achieving independent separateness.

Intimacy Truth Five: Human Brain Functioning Demands Intimate Relating

Whatever drives us toward love and intimacy must involve our brains. But until brain scans became available we had no way of knowing that our brains and the neuron cells taking brain messages to all parts of our bodies demand intimate relationships in order to function fully. Each human brain develops by being in intimate emotional contact with other brains. Our brains are not simply organs housed between our ears but function as the center of our entire being that extends not only throughout our bodies but into the far reaches of our complex human social environment. Yes, I said our brains extend well beyond our bodies into the bodies of other humans with whom we are in intimate contact!

There is no such thing as an isolated mind or brain. Human beings evolved and continue to function physically and mentally in an infinitely complex brain field that exists around us in all directions. How modern scientists have come to understand brain functioning is a fascinating story now being told by many neurologists and neuropsychologists.⁵ Six distinctly different ways of viewing brain and neurological functioning have emerged over time that we need to take a look at in order to grasp how complex our intimate relationships really are and how our brains depend on intimate contact in order to develop. Hold on, this next part is utterly astounding but will take a little patience on your part to get hold of—but believe me it will be well worth your time!

1. The Split Brain and Localization

Early brain studies were based on injuries to the head that were the result of wars or accidents. When an injury to a certain part of the brain produced a certain kind of deficit it was assumed that the missing mental function was localized in that part of the brain. For example, left brain functioning became identified as having to do with speech and logic while right brain functioning became identified as having more to do with physical activity and emotional regulation. The bridge which connects the two sides of the brain was known to be larger in women than in men and has been thought to account for women's generally greater capacities for multi-tasking. Much has been learned over the years and continues to be learned by studying contrasts in functioning between the right and left sides of the brain but the split brain and localization theory are quite limited in scope.

2. The Triune Brain

Paul MacLean, an evolutionary neuroanatomist and senior research scientist at the National Institute of Mental Health, has shown that the human brain is comprised of three distinct sub-brains, each the product of a separate age in evolutionary history (MacLean, 1997). Using MacLean's model, we can understand the brain as having developed in three evolutionary phases. The first is the inner layer of the brain stem, which controls automatic biological functions, such as the circulation of blood, breathing, sleeping, and the contraction of muscles. The second layer is the limbic system that is responsible for regulating our emotional life. The third layer is the large cerebral cortex, which controls the cognitive functions of conscious thought—observing, planning, organizing, responding, and the creation of new

ideas.

The first two layers of the brain are referred to as the “old brain”—the “reptilian” and “mammalian” brains. The third layer is referred to as the “new brain” or the “primate” brain. The old brain functions mostly outside of our awareness; its primary concern is self-preservation. It acts for survival. In the human species the new brain gets its information, not as in the lower species from the incoming data of direct perception, but from the images, symbols, and thoughts actually produced in the new brain. It is looking for the logic behind experience, the cause-and-effect relationships that help make sense of the sensory stimulation we receive from the human social milieu every day. It registers important subtleties that distinguish this person from that person. It helps us know that this person is not me, that now is different from then. It allows us to separate perceptions from actions. In these ways the new brain moderates the instinctual reactions of the old brain—an important evolved capacity that has the possibility of changing our human destinies.

This triune view of our brains has been very helpful to researchers in many ways. Intimacy writers emphasize the evolving capacity for social relationships and emotional intimacy that has come as a result of the evolution of our brains. What goes on in our relationships often reflects conflicts between different parts of the triune brain—for example, between our lower reptilian functions and our higher primate and human capacities. But useful as the triune theory of brain functioning has been for generating research, like the split brain theory it is extremely limited in scope.

3. The Re-entry Brain

Gerald Edelman won the Nobel Prize for his studies in human consciousness. Using stunning new technologies it was his genius to discover that more important to consciousness than the bridge that connects the two sides of the brain—in fact more important than any single part of the brain—are the ever-changing patterns of cell activity integrated throughout the entire brain by way of “reentrant reactions.” He demonstrated that every part of the brain is connected and re-connected to every other part of the brain by feedback loops. This means that each part of the brain at all times affects all other parts of the brain and the neuron pathways running throughout the entire body because they are constantly inter-connected. He speaks of consciousness as a “dynamic core...a process, not a thing or a

place, [which is] defined in terms of neural interactions, rather than in terms of specific neural location, connectivity, or activity” (Edelman & Tononi, 2000 p. 144). An interesting consequence for human intimacy is that “the exact composition of the core related to particular conscious states is expected to vary significantly from person to person”—a fact borne out experimentally by brain-imaging studies (Edelman & Tononi, 2000). This means that the very ways each person organizes experience of self, of others, and of relationships is highly idiosyncratic and ever shifting in different relationship situations over our life span. The re-entry view of the brain means that prior ideas about our split brain and triune brain are grossly over-simplified. All parts of our brains are now known to be coordinated at all times with our ongoing relationships and are governed by our core sense of self in intimate relation to other selves. But we have to deal with yet more complexities.

4. The Synaptic Brain

Ever since neuron cells—those long message-carrying brain cells running throughout our bodies—were discovered in the late nineteenth century it has been known that they have many ways of communicating with each other. The simplified metaphor is of tiny tendrils reaching out from each neuron cell toward other neuron cells and exchanging chemicals called neurotransmitters where the tendrils meet. As our knowledge of neurotransmitters has grown, we have discovered that there are many such chemicals produced in many places in our bodies. Neurotransmitters travel instantaneously from place to place in our brains and bodies creating our incredibly complex human nervous system. The metaphor now is more like a cosmic soup filled with billions of space ships (neurons) simultaneously sending out and receiving multi-billions of messages (neurotransmitters) through carefully selected channels and ports. Each message type is intended for only a certain set of doors in certain parts of the body that will let it in. *What neurotransmitters are produced and how they flow around our bodies is determined by different social situations and by our emotionally intimate relationships.*

Thus, whatever we mean by “my mind” resides in the incredibly complex system of neuron cell connections and neurotransmitter flows throughout our bodies that are caused by our interpersonal relationships. The basic hardware of the neuron system can be thought of as genetically-determined. But the software is installed by our individual relationship learning experiences early in life. That is, the people we are in intimate contact with participate in our actual brain functioning in ways so that we can

no longer claim our brains as simply and uniquely our own. We are relational beings inextricably tied to one another by the necessities of our neuron cells and neurotransmitter flows that are mutually stimulated in our relationships. In this way we actually come to share reciprocal neurotransmitter flows with those in long-term intimate relationships with us.⁶ Our partner walks into the room overjoyed and we immediately feel the effects of that joy. Or our partner has just experienced something devastating and we resonate deeply at the neurotransmitter level with the angst that he or she feels. Now we take another step into complexity.

5. The Cluster Brain

Perhaps the most complex of the many ways scientists have come to think about our brains has been outlined by M.-Marsel Mesulam in terms of a brain made up of “clusters of functions” (Mesulam, 2000). Rather than consider our brains as simply pided by parts that can be visibly seen and studied—such as right-left, triune, re-entry, or synaptic—the cluster approach considers how many complex functions we have evolved in various fields of influence around us over millions of years of evolution. Each species evolves based on whatever genetic hardware it inherits in combination with the impact of whatever environmental niche it can find to live in. That is, the telling features of our brains are not what can easily be seen and studied, but *clusters* of functions that are connected throughout our bodies to various *fields of external influence* such as our interpersonal interactions. Since as a species we had to develop group and family life in order to survive in a hostile world, crucial survival functions have evolved that use the overall emotional connective capacities of our entire brain and nervous systems in coordination with our intimate relationship possibilities.

In searching for the causes of our relationship confusions and stresses we are prone to point the finger at our partners or at ourselves. But the cluster view makes clear that there are many complex factors not only operating within our bodies and the bodies of our partners but in unseen fields of interpersonal and environmental influence—past, present, and future. For example, a couple may be struggling with sexual issues that are tied to sexual traumas passed down the generations. Or suffering with shame or expectations of abuse that have been transmitted transgenerationally by survivors of slavery, colonization, or holocaust. Or traumatized by threats of momentary military invasion. Only openness to infinite possibilities in relationships and a collaborative project with our partners to

continue defining and processing what emerges within, between, and around us at all times can allow us to live fully within the incredible possibilities of our human potential. But there is yet more.

6. The Transcendent Brain

Joseph Chilton Pearce has spent a lifetime studying the mysterious and miraculous in human life throughout the ages such as how the fakirs can walk through beds of coals without being burned. It is his achievement to put together an amazing story now emerging from brain research in his truly remarkable book, *The Biology of Transcendence: A Blueprint of the Human Spirit*. Earlier Paul MacLean had recognized that there was indeed a fourth brain but since the research technology of his time could not demonstrate that the prefrontal cortex “did” anything, he simply called it the “angel lobes,” noting that these prefrontal lobes had something to do with human higher functions, relationships, and morality. We now know that MacLean was on the right trail of what Pearce calls “transcendence” or “human spirit” in brain functioning.

Immediately behind the ridge of our brow lies the prefrontal cortex—long known as the third eye—the largest and most recent of brain additions. Behind the prefrontal lobes lies the rest of our neocortex. Neuropsychologist Allan Schore describes how the orbito-frontal linkage between the prefrontal cortex and the neocortex parts of our brain is entwined with the care a toddler receives and how this, in turn, determines the lifelong shape and character of that child's worldview, mind-set, sense of self, affect regulation, impulse control, and ability to relate to others (Schore, 2003, 2007).

The neurons of the prefrontal cortex interact with and govern many functions throughout the brain and the entire body having to do with emotionally intimate relationships. Pearce reports that the first growth spurt of the neocortex is in the months following birth when the establishment of relational patterns in the family are rapidly expanding. A second growth spurt occurs in mid-adolescence when social relationships in the peer culture are peaking. Our prefrontal cortex thus makes us unique among the species in our capacity to organize our brains around our intimate relationships. In fact, it turns out that we actually continue to reorganize and expand our brains and neurotransmitter systems around our emotionally intimate relationships for a lifetime.

But there is more to the story of the neocortex—the heart-brain connection. Electromagnetism is a term covering the entire gamut of most energy known today, from power waves that may give rise to atomic-molecular action to radio waves, microwaves, and X rays. Pearce first points out that a heart cell is unique in its capacity for pulsation, which is important for our study of emotional intimacy. Further, heart cells are connected by glial cells that both receive and transmit electromagnetic energy. Recall your biology lab experiment when the class dissected live frogs and removed the hearts that then kept beating outside the body for a while. The mysterious thing was that when one frog heart stopped beating another beating heart could be placed near it and it would begin beating again. We now have defibrillators in airports to help people with heart difficulties re-establish normal heart beats that have been disturbed by airport anxiety. In emergency rooms infants in distress are immediately placed heart to heart with nurses so that regulation can be rapidly restored. Tinker Bell, E.T., and Elliot the Dragon are repeatedly cheered back to life by the excited passionate shouting of children in movie theaters. Hearts in intimate emotional relationships share pulsations and electromagnetic signals.

Pearce reports that up to 70% of the actual cells in the human heart are actually neuron cells, the same kind of neurons found in our brains. These heart neurons are surrounded by electromagnetically sensitive glial cells and have direct neural connections with the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Pearce summarizes the recently discovered astounding heart-brain-body connections: “The heart’s electromagnetic field is holographic and draws selectively on the frequencies of the world, our solar system, and whatever is beyond. Through glial action our neural system selectively draws the materials needed for world-structuring from the electromagnetic fields as coordinated by and through the heart...The dialogue between our heart and brain is an interactive dynamic where each pole of our experience, heart and brain, gives rise to and shapes the other to an indeterminable extent” (Pearce, 2002 pp.70-2). Through emotional-cognitive connections the brain has direct, unmediated neural connections with the heart and our moment-by-moment intimate relationship experiences

Says Pearce, “Nature’s economical habit of building new evolutionary structures on the foundations of older ones has led to our current magnificent potential....We have within us this...three-way connection among our emotional-cognitive brain, our prefrontal lobes, and our heart-brain....Here in this set of connections lies our hope and transcendence....Whatever language or rationale it might take, our task is to discover—or rediscover—these three potentials and align them so that we come into

transcendent dominion over our life” (Pearce, 2002 p. 74). In context, I take “transcendent dominion over our life” to mean expanding our capacities for rich, rewarding, and mind-expanding intimate relationships.

Pearce is not the only current thinker to note that human nature is not simply biological but psychological, sociological, cultural, and spiritual. We can no longer imagine ourselves as merely inhabiting a solitary body or brain because human nature and human emotional life considerably transcend our bodies. As we struggle to make our relationships work better for us these cutting-edge understandings of our brains and our nervous systems make clear that two people can best relate to each other by acknowledging their inevitable intertwining with each other’s nervous system and then by learning to be aware of and to work with their dynamic reciprocal impact on each other. Media sitcoms lead us to believe that we are like independent billiard balls bouncing off of one another in stimulus-response fashion—but nothing could be farther from the truth. We are in continuous dynamic emotional connection with all of our intimates and these connections increase exponentially in long-term, committed relationships. Learning to work together with our magnificent potentials is our relationship challenge today—our best brain functioning requires it.

These six views of brain functioning that have evolved over the last century reveal a gradually growing awareness of how our total brain functioning expands out of our bodies and into our intimate relationships. And conversely, that our best brain functioning is derived from our intimate emotional exchanges with others. When our relationships are in trouble or need beefing up our best heart-brain-partner connections need fresh stimulation.

Intimacy Truth Six: Intimacy Starts in Infancy and Develops for a Lifetime

During the past two decades we have witnessed the accumulation of a large body of compelling evidence from infant research that has radically changed our conceptualizations of the way human beings develop and relate to each other.⁷ For example, we note that in real time a mother and an infant look at each other, smile and laugh, and both are perfectly, happy. But if the baby sees a video or a time-delay of his mother’s face instead of the real-time display, he quickly becomes distraught. Restore her via live TV monitor in real-time and his contentment returns. We may once have thought that it was her

beautiful face he was responsive to but we now know it is her real-time emotional life and her intentionality—her intention to relate that hooks him.

Infant research now indicates that babies during their first year of life:

- (a) show an innate tendency to express their emotion states automatically;
- (b) are sensitive to back and forth, face-to-face emotional communication;
- (c) can discriminate discrete facial patterns of emotional expression;
- (d) are dependent on their parent's emotional regulation for emotional self-regulation; and
- (e) are strongly influenced by their parents' emotional communications (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002 p. 157).

In considering intimacy we are interested in knowing how infant researchers define foundational emotional interaction patterns that lay the groundwork for later intimate exchanges. According to infant researchers Beatrice Beebe and Frank Lachman who report on thousands of hours in controlled environments watching babies and mothers interact, the first patterns of experience are organized in infancy as "expectancies of sequences of reciprocal exchanges" (Beebe & Lachmann, 2002 p.13). That is, the first memory systems of babies have to do with how they expect to interact emotionally with their caregivers in order to learn how to regulate themselves and then how to prompt their caregivers emotionally for what they need when they need it. Neuropsychologist Allan Schore after studying thousands of mother-child interaction situations describes how the mutual emotional regulation patterns of infant and mother give rise to similar patterns of mutual emotional regulation in intimate relationships later in life.

These so-called "expectancies of sequences of reciprocal exchanges" are primary memory templates or stored representations of experience that precede our later capacity to remember in images and symbols. These early presymbolic representations or memories derived from an infant's experiences with mother are defined by infant researcher Daniel Stern as "the expectancy of a temporal-spatial schema." In an effort to study the nature of these presymbolic representations or memory patterns first observed in infants, Stern did a frame-by-frame analysis of a boxing match between Mohammed Ali and Al

Mindenberger. He found that 53% of Ali's jabs and 36% of Mindenberger's jabs were faster than humanly possible visual reaction time. Stern concluded that a punch is not the stimulus to which the response is a dodge or a block but is a carefully conditioned hypothesis-generating or hypothesis-probing attempt by each person to understand and predict the other person's behavioral sequences in time and space (Daniel Stern, 1977 pp.87-88 cited in Beebe & Lachmann, 2002 p. 97).

All athletes will tell you that when they are functioning in top condition something in them takes over and they go "into the zone" where their reactions are no longer willful in the usual sense but derive from this magnificent capacity to read the situation and live "ahead of the game." In more usual social situations we too form temporal-spatial and emotional-arousal schemas of each other's behavioral flow in relation to our own but we seldom notice what we are doing. With our intimate relating partners we find ourselves taking the words out of each other's mouths and in bed our reactions are there before the other calls.

These brief glimpses into the expanding field of infant research make clear that even the earliest of interactions of baby with caregivers are emotionally determined and regulated into enduring patterns that set the stage for emotional relatedness in later intimate relationships. Infants are busy organizing an emotional-interactive world in the first half of the first year of life, prior to the emergence of symbolic capacity. Though we may not be aware of it, moment-by-moment emotional-interactive regulation in intimate relationships continues for a lifetime. When we struggle to understand our part in a relationship gone awry, we may find that one or the other or both of us are over-anticipating the other's reactions with knee-jerk rapidity and for any of a variety of reasons throwing the interaction off. The most common of these reasons is our transferring one of these knee-jerk emotional patterns from the past into the present relationship and mucking up things. An Olympic athlete may have trained endlessly to overcome a faulty reaction pattern established in childhood but deemed inefficient in the current competition. But in a moment of insecurity or anxiety the old knee-jerk returns and the swim meet is blown. How often have we blown a relationship moment in the same way—by thoughtlessly dragging in some inappropriate reaction from the past? The emotional intimacy patterns we learn early in life can continue to haunt our relationships for a lifetime. But, as we will later see, we can work together in later intimate emotional relationships to modify and improve our emotional responsiveness and to overcome our faulty knee-jerk relational patterns.

Intimacy Truth Seven: Emotional Intimacy Impacts Our Sexuality

Charles Darwin first studied human emotions in 1872 concluding that all biological features have adaptive survival value—including emotions (Darwin, 1872, 1965). But, asked Darwin, since the amount of brain elaboration required for human emotional exchanges is so enormous, why has natural selection favored the development of a complex emotional life in humans? Contemporary science has answered Darwin's question by making clear that emotion is the primary means of communication among human beings. Emotional resonance is what makes intimate relationships possible. For human beings, feeling deeply is synonymous with being alive. Emotions are the messengers of love.

Couples' therapist and sexologist David Schnarch addresses the human capacity for emotional and sexual exchange. "About 400,000 years ago, the newest portion of our brain evolved. With our neocortex, humans became nature's first experiment in intimacy. No other species has a neocortex like ours. Language, self-concept, and self-awareness, which make intimacy possible, come from this part of the brain. So does our capacity to impart meaning to sexual behavior, which gives us unmatched sexual potential among the species. Our neocortex determines the impact of the physical stimulation we receive, how emotionally involved we are in the experience, and whether or not we reach orgasm" (Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage: Keeping Love and Intimacy Alive in Committed Relationships*, 1997). Perhaps more than any other sex researcher or clinician Schnarch is a champion of our possibility for "off the charts" sexuality in committed relationships. He believes that the human capacity to signal with emotions and then to embed our subjective lives in symbols gives us exponentially greater sexual powers than any other species—if we can succeed in freeing our sexuality from inhibiting relational fears and expectations developed in past relationships. Neocortical functioning regulates not only social relations but greatly impacts many physical and psychological systems, including lust, romance, attachment, and intersubjectivity. Thus, says Schnarch, to be human is to be capable and desirous of emotional intimacy—and that includes exercising our untold capacities for sexual enjoyment. Schnarch's work makes clear that even when intimacy and love have been lost, in a committed relationship they can be re-found and even greatly expanded and enhanced.

Intimacy Truth Eight: Intimacy Motivations Exist in the Present Moment

Neuroscientist Don Pfaff has defined a human motivational drive as a neural state that energizes and directs behavior toward survival and reproduction (Cited in Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, 2004 p.74). Both Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud wrote with an awareness that the motivational systems that drive human behavior are as much enmeshed in psychology and culture as they are in biology. But Simone de Beauvoir as early as 1947 was the first to assert that human motivational realities actually transcend biology—that human nature is significantly determined by “the speaking hoard that precedes us.” Her powerful example is, “woman is made, not born” (Beauvoir, 1952, 1989).

At this point in history we can clearly understand that at the human level motivational systems are biological, personal, interpersonal, and cultural constructions. Further, infant researcher Daniel Stern, after studying the motivational systems operating in infant-caregiver dyads for decades, came to see how motivational systems operate in “the present moment” in all intimate human interactions throughout life (Stern D. N., 2004).

Stern’s studies reveal that the basic unit of human experience lasts 8 to 16 seconds—the time for a phrase in language, music, and dance. Like the illustrations in our Psychology 101 books that demonstrated that we do not see in sweeping panorama but rather in momentary points of visual fixation, so our sense of living an ongoing experience is derived from our brain’s putting seamlessly together a series of 8 to 16 second “present moments.”

In ongoing intimate relationships what Stern has called present moments often move toward special “now moments” that threaten the status quo of the relationship and threaten the intersubjective field as it has been mutually accepted up until then. That is, a relationship can be developing quietly in a series of present moments that lead up to some rift or rupture. These emotionally intense now moments create a relationship crisis that needs resolution. The resolution of the relationship crisis occurs in what Stern calls “a moment of meeting...an authentic and well-fitted response to the crisis created by the now moment. The moment of meeting implicitly reorganizes the intersubjective field so that it becomes more coherent, and the two people sense an opening up of the relationship, which permits them to explore new areas together implicitly or explicitly” (Stern D. N., 2004 pp.219-220). For example, a couple moves

forward connecting in a series of present moments toward a moment of relationship crisis, a now moment that is an emotionally charged rift. If two are successful in creating a meeting of minds, new understanding and new intimacy is created that is part of the relationship-building journey. If not, repeated unresolved crises lead to relationship disruption, to stalemates, to porce. Stern's moment by moment focus on what is going on in relationships allows us to consider that whatever motivational systems may be operating, they are immediate and intense in intimate relationships.

It is so difficult for us to live in and cultivate present moments in our intimate relationships. We are forever collecting grievances, wanting to go back and settle some score, or letting our minds take us away from present contact into some dreaded future possibility. But the lesson is clear—whatever importantly motivates us in relationships is operating in the here-and-now present moment and deserves our mutual attention and focus, a lesson nowhere more powerful than in intimate sexual exchanges.

In considering our intimate relationships it is worth our while to consider briefly five motivation systems that are crucial to love and intimate relationships. And to remember that we are always motivated in the present moment. If we cannot live together in the present moment our relationships are dragged down by the past or weighed by anxieties about the future—neither of which we can do anything about.

Intimacy and Five Human Motivational Systems

1. The Attachment Motivational System

Psychoanalyst John Bowlby began his studies into the attachment motivation system in mammals and humans in the early 1950's in England. Teams of researchers worldwide have since developed a vast network of findings about how central attachment behaviors are to our wellbeing—not only as infants for survival but throughout our lifespan. Attachment behaviors serve as antidotes to anxiety, vulnerability, and meaninglessness.

“Throughout the lifespan”, writes neuropsychologist Alan Schore, “we are biologically connected to those with whom we have close relationships. At the psychobiological core of the intersubjective field between intimates is the attachment bond of right brain/mind-body states.” Schore concludes that

“proximity to a loved one tranquilizes the nervous system” (Cited in Goldner, 2006 p.663).

New York University Psychoanalyst Virginia Goldner writes about adult attachments: “Research and theory from all quarters show that adult romantic partners are bonded with the same monumental intensity and for the same hard-wired reasons as mothers and babies....Thus adult attachment is not a metaphor, an analogy, a template or a prototype—it is ‘it’—the real thing. If you’ve been living and sleeping with your partner for two years you are bonded, wound around each other, nervous system to nervous system, and your psychic state is now joint property” (Goldner, 2006 pp.633-634).

We are biologically motivated to seek intimate partners and to seek to regulate our emotional and sexual lives in coordination with those partners we attach ourselves to. When we speak of “my other half” we aren’t using simply a metaphor but we are stating an emotional fact. Couples’ therapist Susan Johnson bases her relationship work on the large body of attachment research. As we will later see, her approach seeks to bring out in couples the attachment needs that each experiences and to show how difficulties in the relationship so often stem from frustrated and unmet attachment needs. Learning how to identify and communicate attachment needs and then learning how to be more responsive to each others’ needs in the present moment is the hallmark of Johnson’s approach.

2. The Emotional-Interactive Motivation System

In studying emotions and facial expressions in primates and humans Darwin believed that the emotions were highly evolved adaptive features that served to link members of each species—and that they were particularly well-developed and subtle in humans. Psychologist Sylvan Tomkins elaborated Darwin’s view that emotions are revealed through facial expression and are designed to lead us to action in the present moment. He stressed that emotions and emotional exchanges constitute an independent sphere of human knowledge distinct from perception, cognition, and memory. According to Tomkins and the emotion researchers that followed him, emotions are primary biological motivating mechanisms and can be understood as having primacy in human agency. In short, emotions are a vital part of our interactive-regulation motivational system from infancy throughout adult life.⁸

As we consider ways of developing and sustaining intimacy in long-term relationships, it is important to realize how we impact and are impacted by the emotional life of our relationship partners

—whether they be our lovers, our children, our parents, our grandparents, or our close friends and coworkers. Learning to pay close attention to the emotional lives of ourselves as well as our relating partners is a critical relational skill. Emotional attunement to others keeps us in touch with our motivations as well as theirs in *the present moment*.

3. *The Intersubjective Motivational System*

Key to understanding our intimate relationships is the field of engagement that develops over time in relating couples. Psychologists speak of each person as having developed his or her personal subjective world over a lifetime and of the special understandings or ways of being with each other's subjective worlds that each couple develops as intersubjectivity. When and where does this human capacity for intersubjective engagement come from? Infant researcher Daniel Stern, after years of studying babies and reviewing literally thousands of studies of newborns, concludes that early forms of intersubjectivity are present at birth and that the capacity for intersubjective engagement is innate. Says Stern, "... [infant researchers] agree that infants are born with minds that are especially attuned to other minds as manifested through their behavior. ...This conclusion is based...on the detection of correspondences in timing, intensity, and form.... Further, these researchers agree that during preverbal infancy, the baby is especially sensitive to the behavior of other humans; [and that] babies use different perceptual and expectational capacities in interpersonal interactions as compared to interactions with themselves or inanimate objects" (Stern D. N., 2004 p.85).

But even though researchers agree that the capacity for intersubjectivity is innate we still want to know more about *how* this capacity evolved in the human species and *how* it operates in intimate interpersonal relationships. One recent line of research is currently focusing on the "mirror" neurons. The mirror neurons were discovered almost by accident. It seems that workers in a primate laboratory at the University of Parma in Italy went out to lunch one day and returned in a particularly jovial mood. Someone had picked up a bag of pistachio nuts and the guys were sitting around a desk surrounded by monkey cages laughing around cracking the nuts open and popping them into their mouths. One of the monkeys set up a ruckus in his cage waving wildly for a nut. Why not? The monkey had been born in the lab and had never seen a pistachio before but grabbed the nut and without hesitation cracked it open and popped it into his mouth. How did he know how to open the nut without investigation or practice?

The guys lost no time in setting up experiments and located the group of neuron cells responsible. The discovery of mirror neurons gives us the first clues toward understanding how we enter into each other's subjective worlds.⁹ Says Stern,

Mirror neurons provide neurobiological mechanisms for understanding: reading other people's states of mind, especially intentions; resonating with another's emotion; experiencing what someone else is experiencing; and capturing an observed action so that one can imitate it—in short, empathizing with another and establishing intersubjective contact....Mirror neurons sit adjacent to motor neurons. They fire in an observer who is doing nothing but watching another person behave (e.g., reaching for a glass).... the pattern of firing in the observer mimics the exact neuronal pattern that the observer would use if he were reaching for the glass himself.... [Thus, Mirror neurons permit us to]...experience the other as if we were executing the same action, feeling the same emotion, making the same vocalization, or being touched as they are being touched. (Stern D. N., 2004 pp.78-79).

Another neurological correlate to intersubjectivity is the discovery of the adaptive oscillator neurons that allow us to synchronize our actions and emotions with others —as exemplified by the perfect synchrony of lovers or of two kitchen companions when washing and drying dishes together. Stern points out that the crucial implication of the oscillator neurons is that when people move synchronously or in temporal coordination, “they are participating in an aspect of the other's experience. They are partially living from the other's center” (Stern D. N., 2004 p.81).

Beginning at birth and extending throughout the lifespan human beings are at all times enmeshed in an intersubjective matrix of emotionally intimate relationships. The desire for intersubjectivity—the desire to know and to be known and the ongoing emotional regulation of the intersubjective space are essential features of any intimate friendship or other intimate relationship. When love becomes lost, too often it is because the partners did not know how to take an active part in exploring each other's inner subjective worlds on a daily basis and did not cultivate ways of sharing their intersubjective experiences of each other and of the developing relationship.

4. The Mating Motivational System

After decades of studying the web of intimacy—the triad of lust, romance, and attachment—anthropologist Helen Fisher writes:

I came to believe that romantic love is a primary motivation system in the brain—in short, [there is] a fundamental human mating drive.... Like drives, romantic love is focused on a specific reward, the beloved, in the same way that hunger is focused on food. And like all the other drives, romantic love is a need, a craving.

We need food. We need water. We need warmth. And the lover needs the beloved (Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, 2004 pp.74-75).

Fisher's research involves surveying literally thousands of studies in archeology, anthropology, primatology, and sociology that involve numerous groups of primates and humans throughout the world since the beginning of time. Her research makes clear that we are genetically predisposed to fall in love—that falling in love is a special motivating state of mental organization. To Fisher's trio in the web of love—romance, lust, and attachment—infant research and relational psychology now add intersubjectivity, the motivation to know what is going on inside other humans and the desire to be known to others.

Fisher's conception of a fundamental mating drive as a motivational system in human life is important in considering intimate relationships because it pulls together so many diverse behaviors, feelings, and thoughts into an intersubjective drive. We know the drive is there but Fisher's observation that the species has always been given over to serial monogamy tells us that we can't simply hope that the drive itself will make love last. How do partners enjoy the drive and then cultivate ways of keeping intersubjectivity going so that the mutual interest does not become lost is the question we are considering.

5. The Fear/Avoidant Motivational System

For more than a century psychoanalysis has studied the anxieties that beset us each as a result of a lifetime of troubling relationships. Body psychotherapies have studied the chronic constrictions that get set up in our bodies as a result of frightening relational experiences we have each endured. I have identified seven distinctly different kinds of relational fears that all people have experienced in one way or another in the course of growing up. I refer to these relational anxieties that appear in our minds and bodies when we are under stress as the Seven Deadly Fears (Hedges, 2012). When we are anxious or afraid we tighten up. Which muscle and organ systems take the hit of our stressful fears is highly individual based upon our early childhood experiences. The seven relational fears set up somatopsychic constrictions in different organ systems throughout our bodies thus threatening our health and longevity.

The Seven Deadly Fears that follow are ordered in terms of their interpersonal or relational

complexity.

- 1.The Fear of Being Alone:** We dread reaching out and finding nobody there to respond to our needs. We fear being ignored, being left alone, and being seen as unimportant. We feel the world does not respond to our needs. So what's the use of trying?
- 2.The Fear of Connecting:** Because of frightening and painful experiences in the past, connecting emotionally and intimately with others feels dangerous. Our life experiences have left us feeling that the world is not a safe place. We fear injury so we withdraw from connections.
- 3.The Fear of Being Abandoned:** After having connected emotionally or bonded with someone, we fear being either abandoned with our own needs or being swallowed up by the other person's. In either case, we feel the world is not a dependable place, that we live in danger of emotional abandonment. We may become clingy and dependent, or we may become super independent—or both.
- 4.The Fear of Self-Assertion:** We have all experienced rejection, and perhaps even punishment for expressing ourselves in a way that others don't like. We thus may learn to fear asserting ourselves and letting our needs be known in relationships. We feel the world does not allow us to be truly ourselves. We may either cease putting ourselves out there all together, or may assert ourselves with demanding vengeance.
- 5.The Fear of Lack of Recognition:** When we do not get the acceptance and confirmation we need in relationships, we are left with a feeling of not being seen or recognized for whom we really are. Or, we may fear that others will only respect and love us if we are who they wanted us to be. We may work continuously to feel seen and recognized by others, or we may give up in rage, humiliation, or shame.
- 6.The Fear of Failure and Success:** When we have loved and lost or tried and failed, we may fear the painful competitive experience again. When we have succeeded or won—possibly at someone else's expense—we may experience guilt or fear retaliation. Thus, we learn to hold back in love and life, thereby not risking either failure or success. We may feel the world does not allow us to be fulfilled. Or we may feel guilty and afraid for feeling fulfilled.
- 7.The Fear of Being Full Alive:** Our expansiveness, creative energy, and joy in our aliveness inevitably come into conflict with family, work, religion, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness to conform to the expectations and demands of the world. We feel the world does not permit us to be fully, joyfully, and passionately alive.

Rather than putting our whole selves out there with full energy, we may throw in the towel, succumb to mediocre conformity, or fall into living deadness.

As we explore ways to create and maintain intimacy in our long-term relationships, it becomes important that we develop mutually satisfactory ways of studying our relational fears and how they crop up in our minds and bodies. I will elaborate these fears and how we can work on them in our intimate relationships in the later section on developing Intimacy skills.

There are many ways to think about what motivates us in our intimate relationships. When we are considering what has gone wrong in our relationships or what may go wrong soon we would do well to consider exactly what is motivating us to hang on or to go forward in a relationship or not. And where exactly our motivation is flagging. Processing how we are experiencing our various relational motivations with our partner can be a crucial way of getting back on track or of preventing some threatened derailing.

Intimacy Truth Nine: Intimacy Isn't For the Faint of Heart

This section may be difficult to follow unless you pay close attention and watch the psychological soup I am brewing that demonstrates how difficult intimacy is to achieve and how we can do better. I will consider five psychological concepts which, taken together, help us think about how complex relationships truly are: (1) The *Logos*, (2) Otherness, (3) Identity, (4) Dissociated Self-States, and (5) Multiple Selves. If you can be patient with me I think you will find this soup tasty with some real possibilities for spicing up your relationships!

1. The *Logos*

The ancient Greeks referred to the system of symbols—gestures, mimetics, language, and grammar—that we use to express ourselves as the *Logos*, meaning the word. As a psychological concept the *Logos*, the system of human symbols we use to define ourselves, is understood as necessarily alienating us from our bodies. That is, we are born into the world living in our bodies, exploring and expressing with our physical being who we are and what we can do. But rapidly the human environment gives us meanings from the constructed *Logos* that is handed down the generations to us and we come to express ourselves

in language and symbols that are not properly our own but are constituted by reflected socio-cultural realities.

French Psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, in a paper delivered at Marinbad hot springs in 1938 called “The Mirror Function” first showed us how the *Logos* works in human life (Lacan, 1977). Lacan began by noting that while birds, dogs, and some fish notice and respond to the mirror, there is only one species that plays with and actively uses the mirror. He defines a mythical moment in human life when a baby playing with a mirror points and says, “that’s me.” At that moment two things occur simultaneously: (1) the child is forever alienated from her kinesthetic body self, from knowing who she is by what she does and (2) she enters the human system of symbols and symbolic thought. The net result of this mirroring function is that we come to use language, gestures, bearing, and symbols to define who we are. But none of them does us justice because none is able to capture the richness of our subjective lives. Now let’s consider the second ingredient to this soup.

2. Identity

The human world quickly identifies us—first with a family name, then with qualities that flow from perceptions and projections of others as well as concepts from the *Logos*—we are said to be cute, bright, willful, strong, active, passive, colored, middle-class, catholic, handicapped, etc. We, of course, participate in creating our personal identities, but by and large it is the world around us that tells us who we are and who we are to become. Over time, using the tools of speech and symbolization afforded by the *Logos* and the tools of identity bestowed upon us by the human social environment, we develop certain consistencies of thought and behavior so that our personalities or characters become “known” to ourselves and to those around us. But the words and symbols of the *Logos* and the personality descriptions constructed to identify us are necessarily incomplete and faulty in many ways—since each of us as a human being is far too complex and ever changing to be captured by such limited descriptions.

Nevertheless, when two people approach one another hoping for an intimate emotional relationship, they each bring a host of socio-cultural reflected realities and self-definitions with them that tell them who they are, how they are to be with each other, and what they can reasonably expect from each other and the relationship. Each relating partner has a lifetime of accumulated ideas, fantasies,

images, and reflections of who they are thought to be, of what each believes to be real, and of how life in relationships is “supposed to” be. But in fact, we have no idea whatsoever what to expect from each present moment of encounter with our intimate relating partners. Now to the next two psychological ingredients involved in intimate relating.

3. Dissociated Selves and

4. Otherness

Furthermore, for a lifetime we have worked to disown or disavow various parts of ourselves that don’t fit well with our accepted versions of ourselves. Yet these disavowed, disowned, dissociated aspects of ourselves have a way of showing up at inconvenient times when we are least expecting or least wanting to deal with them. The same can be said for those aspects of our partners that she or he has disavowed or that we have chosen not to notice in them. Disowned and unnoticed parts of ourselves and our partners keep cropping up to confuse, perturb, and often even to frighten us. Psychologists speak of these unwanted, unrecognized, un-comprehended parts that feel alien or strange in ourselves and in our partners as “other” or “otherness.” Hold on, there’s one more ingredient to consider.

5. Multiple Selves Too!

Now added to the psychological soup I am brewing is the fact that we don’t have simply one self, but it turns out, multiple selves or multiple self-states. Psychologists now generally recognize that multiple dissociated self-states are the human norm—that we all have developed multiple frames of mind that appear at separate moments and in differing relational contexts—some of them quite ugly, some of them quite crazy, many of them quite enjoyable, and many of them not very comprehensible.¹⁰ At any given moment in time we are living in a certain self-state with a particular version of who we are and what we want activated in the present relational moment. Yet other unwanted aspects of ourselves keep popping up, or keep clamoring to be heard. A dilemma in all intimate relationships is how to be consistent, sensible, and reliable when some unruly thought, feeling, or inconsistent fantasy is tugging in some other direction. In intimate relationships there is always a strange “otherness” lurking just around the corner—both in ourselves and in our partners. At times this strangeness is experienced as elusive, mysterious,

and very exciting. At other times this strangeness may be confusing, distressing, or frightening.

The Intimacy Brew

When we come together for an intimate relationship we each try to put our best foot forward. We use our human capacity for symbolization to forge our personal identities and to share them with our partner. Likewise, our human capacity to dissociate inconsistent or unwanted selves allows us to experience them as “not me” or “otherness.” Given the tendency to idealize our partners at the beginning of a relationship we accept at face value the identities and dissociations they provide us with and vice versa. This works until our identities become challenged by the relationship and our dissociations can no longer be held at bay. Then what a fine kettle of fish we have! We’re suddenly not too sure of exactly who we are in this relationship. And we’re not too sure this is the person we fell in love with or even ought to be with. When such surprising and truthful moments begin arriving both partners doubt their involvement in the relationship and the other’s good will. But the good news is that when these puzzling moments of seeming impasse arrive we have the opportunity to begin really relating intimately. Being in intimate relationships is ultimately about representing or putting into thoughts and words these strange experiences of “otherness,” and, in so doing, creating some mutually transformative now moments—Now moments in which two get to know themselves and each other in never before imagined ways. We all know psychological jargon can be a pain. But the concepts of subjectivity and intersubjectivity as well as the concepts of dissociated selves and otherness can be extremely useful for partners in trouble.

Intimacy Truth Ten: Intimacy Takes Us to Higher Levels of Consciousness

The First Idea: How Symbols, Language, and Intelligence Evolved from Our Primate Ancestors to Modern Humans by child psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan and primate psychologist Stuart Shanker integrates a world of recent neurological, infant, primate, anthropological, and psychological research. The authors demonstrate convincingly that while our best attempts to date to understand the development of the human mind have been based on Darwinian determinism, there has been a missing link in our thinking that has flawed our studies until quite recently. They see the leading edge of Darwinian evolution as the human capacity for personal growth through emotional intimacy. The origins of symbolic thinking and speaking depend on social transmission of cultural practices learned anew by

each generation. The sufficient condition for the development of human thought involves a series of emotional-interactive learning steps—in which even the tools of learning must be interactively relearned each generation. Say Greenspan and Shanker, “our highest level mental capacities, such as reflective thinking, only develop fully when infants and children are engaged in certain types of nurturing learning interactions” (Greenspan & Shanker, 2004).

The foundation of emotional engagement that leads to symbolic thought involves a series of early emotional processes that a baby and her caregivers enter into from the get-go—processes that develop over time and that are referred to as self-regulation, other-regulation, and mutual regulation. The missing link in our understanding between early mutual emotional regulation processes and the human capacity for reflective thought is the capacity to separate perception from action. For example, a trout perceiving a fly darts toward it, or perceiving a shadow flees. Mammals instinctively fight, freeze, or flee in instantaneous response to threatening perceptions. Human infants and impulsive individuals likewise are emotionally swept away by unmediated perceptions. Telling examples would be a baby who sees his mother and instantly reacts with loving or aggressive responses. Or a barroom reveler who is suddenly angered and strikes out without thinking. But normal human development encourages the attachment of various emotions to a wide range of perceptions. For example, perceptions of mother become imbued with both love and hate, with both hope and dread. Often a complex fabric of interwoven and even contradictory emotions is embedded in human perceptual images that allows pause for consideration of multiple meanings of the perceptions as well as meaningful choices. In this way human images slowly become “freestanding” as it were—multiple perceptions linked together with complex and contradictory emotions that mediate between perception and action. The other species live “on the stimulus-response reflex arc” and are thus prevented from having ideas, and from developing symbols to capture the essence of complex emotional perceptions and to make possible thoughtful choices. But the fulcrum for the development of human cognitions is the development of freestanding images that mediate between perception and action thereby giving rise to symbolic thought.

The critical accent of Greenspan and Shanker’s sixteen lifespan stages of Functional Emotional Development describe and define emotions not simply as various affective states but rather as the child’s overall emotional abilities. “The overall emotional abilities are ‘functional’ in that they enable the child to interact with and comprehend her world. They are ‘fundamental emotional organizations’ that guide

every aspect of day-to-day functioning, unite the different processing abilities, and...orchestrate the different parts of the mind” (Greenspan & Shanker, 2004 p.53).

Say Greenspan and Shanker, “Just as the discoveries of the wheel and fire set in motion enormous technological advances, the learned ability to signal with emotions and progress through various stages of emotional transformation enabled the development of symbols, language, and thinking, including reflective reasoning and self-awareness.” It is through a lifetime of intimate emotional relationships that our capacity for growth and consciousness expansion in committed relationships emerges. People who have been deprived of early relationship learning for whatever reason have a difficult time achieving the intimacy in human relationships required for complex self-development in later in life. In our troubled relationships it is our capacity for symbolizing, for thinking and talking about our emotional engagements with our relating partners, that holds the key to consciousness expansion and relationship development

Notes

- 1 It no longer makes good sense to talk about the “theory” of evolution. The evolution of the species is as much a fact today as Earth’s orbit around the sun—although, as we know, there was also loud right-wing religious controversy for centuries over the fact of the earth orbiting the sun! Francis Collins, eminent geneticist and head of the Human Genome Project at the National Institute of Health and a devout conservative Christian, in his book, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, declares that the evidence for evolution that is now available from numerous scholarly disciplines is so absolutely overwhelming that evangelical creationist Christians make themselves look foolish. Worse, he says, they end up betraying their young people who will someday become educated as scientists so that they will have no choice but to renounce their blind religious dogmas. Fresh interpretations of ancient texts are now what is called for, says Collins. His creationist concern echoes loudly for all faiths whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or others.
- 2 Psychoanalysts Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood define the central theoretical construct of intersubjective theory as “the intersubjective field—a system composed of differently organized, interacting subjective worlds.
- 3 Dr. Audrey Seaton-Bacon, personal communication, 2009.
- 4 Massive pruning of those neuronal pathways that are not actively engaged by our relationships occurs during the second year of life. Neuropsychologist and psychoanalyst Catharine Jenkins-Hall in a personal communication describes the neurological effects of the early relational processes: “During the first couple of post-natal years, brain cells migrate to form cell assemblies that ultimately form the neural scaffolding that supports various neuropsychological functions. The redundant brain cells or those brain cells that are irrelevant or neutral to that particular cell assembly get pruned away.”
- 5 See Siegal, D. J. (1999). *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. New York: The Guilford Press.; Siegal, D. J. (2007). *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being*. New York: W.W. Norton.; Cozolino, L.J. (2002). *The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy: Building and Rebuilding the Human Brain*. New York: W.W. Norton.; Cozolino, L.J. (2006). *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain*. New

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[6](#) Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux in *The Synaptic Self* and *The Emotional Brain* maintains that we are each responsible from long before birth for constructing a self, a sense of personal agency, that is essentially made up of how our flow of neurotransmitters come to influence migrations of neuron connections in response to our early relationship strivings. Our “synaptic selves” are the direct genetic heritage of our limbic and neocortical brains that develop in response to our early social-emotional contexts.

[7](#) A good overview of recent infant research upon which these comments are based is Beebe, B. and Lachmann, F. (2002). *Infant Research and Adult Treatment: Co-constructing Interactions*. Hillsdale, NJ Analytic Press.

[8](#) Infant researchers like Beatrice Beebe, Frank Lachman, and Daniel Stern as well as neuroscientists like Allan Schore and Stephen Porges all speak of the importance of mutual regulation of emotions that characterizes all intimate relationships.

[9](#) The story is recounted by Giacomo Rizzolati, Leonardo Fogassi, and Vittorio Gallese from the University of Parma in Italy.

[10](#) See Bromberg, P. M. (1993). Shadow and Substance: A Relational Perspective on Clinical Process. In Mitchell & Aron. (1999). *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press; Stern, D. B. (1992). Commentary on Constructivism in Clinical Psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 2: 331-363 ; Stern D. B. (1997). *Unformulated Experience: From Dissociation to Imagination in Psychoanalysis*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press; and Stern D. B. (2009). *Partners in Thought*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.