

Making Love Last

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Lawrence Hedges

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Creating and Maintaining Intimacy in Long-Term Relationships

Lawrence E. Hedges

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After my research into the question of “can love last?”, what opinions on the subject have I personally developed? First, it seems to me that the evidence is in regarding our genetic and anthropological history—that is, that our species is set up to create and to emotionally endure short-term serial monogamy. Lust, love, and attachment followed by philandering, grief and re-mating are certainly our dominant genetic heritage. The possible biological advantage to young people shifting partners to mix the genes may be our history, but at this point in human life the vast majority of intimate relationships now serve other purposes that enrich human life. So can we develop new patterns to respond to our new purposes?

If it is true, for example, that verbal skills may have evolved in our species so that we could more efficiently “groom” more individuals in the course of a day than the painstaking hand-grooming techniques engaged in by non-linguistic primates, then will our prefrontal cortex not also allow for more relational flexibility and complexity so that we won’t keep losing valuable life time and energy in shifting forever from one mate to another?

We have certainly demonstrated the capacity to restrain, for example, openly violent competitive and dominance strivings in the workplace, to work toward non-prejudicial human equality, and to move in the direction of providing equal opportunity for diverse peoples. Our history demonstrates that we are a highly creative and adaptive species. Can we not also overcome our historical destiny in love? When we finally realize how much energy and effort goes into building workable intimate relationships, will we not also be able to take into consideration the high cost of perennially shifting from one relationship to another?

Our new technologies have allowed us in the last two decades to understand our nature more clearly and to delineate the ways people can more rewardingly engage in intimate intersubjective relationships. Will not the advances in neuroscience, anthropology, infant research and relational psychology also be able to point us in new, more fruitful directions for establishing intimate relationships?

On the one hand, it seems to me that it behooves us to learn to accept our heritage of short-term relationships seriously so we can pass through them as rewardingly and efficiently as possible when need be.

But, on the other hand, since longer-term relationships are clearly possible and desirable at least some of the time, it seems worthwhile to continue working on what kinds of commitments are required and what kinds of rewards are offered in long-term intersubjective relationships. And to come to understand how to move in the direction of sustaining committed relationships if time and circumstance permit it.

Our long-term monogamous relationship expectancies would appear to have been historically conditioned by patriarchal societies—contrary to what appears to be our fundamental biological nature. So at this point in time we need to release our culturally conditioned expectations about what relationships “should” be for us or for anyone else—so that none of us become unnecessarily weighed down with guilt for not trying hard enough. So that we are not burdened with shame or a sense of failure for not having “good” or lasting relationships, or confused or needlessly dissatisfied because we don’t have the “right kind” of relationships.

Relationships are. And relationships often end.

My questions are:

- How flexible can each of us learn to be so that we are able to experience freely the excitement of lust, the satisfaction of love, the security of attachment, the injury of rejection and abandonment, and the grief of parting? These are all emotions that we as humans are equipped to bear.
- How free can we become of the weight of shame, guilt and failure because we haven’t met our own or someone else’s relational expectations?”
- What kinds of exciting and satisfying relationships can we each realistically look for and commit ourselves to creating?

I believe these are our relationship challenges today. Sometimes we can make love last. I hope the thoughts offered in this book have been beneficial to you in considering your past and present intimate

relationships. But more importantly, I hope these ideas have challenged you and your relationship partners toward developing more open, fulfilling, and lasting relationships in the future.

Larry Hedges

Modjeska Canyon, California