

Lawrence E. Hedges

MAKING LOVE LAST

Creating and Maintaining Intimacy
in Long-term Relationships



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LAWRENCE E. HEDGES

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Chapter One: Love and Intimacy Are a Human Birthright

But Today Relationships Aren't Working!

Relationships today are in serious trouble and we know it. So we ask ourselves what can we do about it? Maybe we can learn to communicate better. Maybe we can spend more time doing things together. Maybe we should talk to someone or get some counseling. But we've been through all this before. We've had failed relationships in the past, but we didn't really understand what went wrong there either—so what's wrong with this picture? Whose fault is it? Or is anyone to blame? How did we get to this place? How do we get out of this place? Maybe we'll have to throw in the towel, again. And so it goes....

“Other people have good relationships. How do they do it? What's wrong with me?” Herein lies the heart of our confusion and anguish—the center of our self-deceptions about relationships. We can't *have* relationships. Because relationships aren't a thing we can possess or own. And we can't *do* relationships. Because relationships aren't activities we can perform. And when a relationship fails no *one* is to blame because relationships require the participation of *two*. While it may be true that two people together can work towards creating a good relationship. It is not true that any of us can have or do a good relationship. Or that a relationship failure is *anyone's* fault. Yet these simple deceptions cause us endless pain and suffering. We've all been there. You may be there now or fear going there again. Where do we start untangling this tough knot we call failing relationships?

But if Love is Our Birthright, Why Does Love Fade Over Time?

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record

of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects. Love always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

—Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

If what Saint Paul tells us about love is true, then why is love known to fade over time?

People with different opinions say love fades over time:

- Because love is based on idealized fantasies that are necessarily illusory.
- Because time brings reality and with it love's inevitable disappointments.
- Because love thrives on novelty, mystery, and danger.
- Because time and success are love's enemies.
- Because love breeds familiarity and familiarity breeds contempt.
- Because the raw sexuality that often drives love is difficult to reconcile with mutual caring, respect, and admiration.
- Because love turns so easily into hatred love cannot prevail indefinitely against aggression.
- Because love by nature is like fireworks in the dark night, thrilling but transitory.
- Because in any relationship the other's narcissistic self-interest is always our enemy.
- Because with time people inevitably betray one another.
- Because life is basically tragic so that sooner or later we all end up singing the blues—blaming the collapse of love on either our own shortcomings or on the failings of the other.

Each of these explanations for why love fades has wide currency and contains partial truth.

What these many explanations for why love fades over time make clear is that intimate

relationships and lasting romance are anything but easy to achieve. The bottom line is that we can only work toward giving ourselves over to love and loving as fully as possible. And then hope for a partner who is ready to work with us on loving and being loved as well. But even if we do find a promising partner and we are mutually given over to loving one another, the question remains how can we make love last?

Technological advances now reveal that all humans are capable of emotional intimacy from before birth and that all humans are born desiring and seeking out loving intimacy. But love can only last if and when we and our partners can develop together ways to continuously negotiate mutually satisfying and enriching emotional experiences on a daily basis! How do we create in our loving relationships the continuous negotiations necessarily involved for creating and maintaining lasting intimacy? When we are blocked in our intimate loving feelings in later life, it is because we have come to fear rekindling the dangers of emotional relatedness that were once experienced as frightening or hurtful in the course of growing up. But it is possible in committed relationships to unblock those closed channels to emotional intimacy and to resume our growth as loving human beings. The question is: what exactly is involved in developing or restoring our capacity for loving relationships—how can we re-claim our human birthright?

Cultural Deceptions About Relationships

Not long ago I was having dinner with my good friend Marty Klein who is a couples' therapist in Palo Alto, California. Marty reminded me that we are at present struggling simultaneously with three cultural beliefs that are absolutely unique to our time and place. To begin with, said Marty, we believe that life-long, satisfying, committed relationships can be based on romantic love. In the entire history of the world no culture has ever operated on this

premise before. Secondly, we have been conditioned to believe that we can have frequent, wild, and hot sex with our committed partner forever—certainly an unrealistic expectation given all that we know about sex, sexuality, and relationships. And thirdly, we expect to enjoy good mental and physical health for many years longer than any known population in the history of the world. In prior times and places most marriages have been arranged according to whatever dimensions benefited the ruling order. But even when culturally enforced monogamy has partially worked, it has only had to last until age 30 or 40, not until age 90 or 100.

Marty's point—as we got to our Key lime pie and coffee—was that we live in a relationally experimental era. We simply have no basis for believing that our received assumptions about relationships, sex, and monogamy have any human validity. Worse, even the great experts on couples' work still hold forth the promise—implicitly or explicitly—that if we just work hard enough we can have successful relationships. But there is simply no solid basis for this claim, Marty reminded me. First, because even if I am working at relating there is no ongoing assurance that my partner will or can work as hard. And second, just because two people are working doesn't mean they can overcome all of their incompatibilities. The current cultural expectation that working hard in relationships will yield good results leaves most people feeling guilty that they aren't trying hard enough or else feeling like failures because their relationships aren't fully working. I found myself agreeing with Marty when he said that there's simply too much we don't know about intimacy and about relationships to warrant such naive conclusions.

But there's good news! Stunning new scientific technologies and advances in relational psychotherapy are now revealing things about human nature that we have never known before. These startling new findings clearly light the way for how two people can co-create and maintain

intimacy in long-term relationships. This relationship territory is essentially new and experimental. But the late, breaking news is that we now have some powerful new tools to work with. So let me start our journey into this newly discovered relationship territory with a personal story based on one of these new technologies—ultrasound video that allows us to actually watch human life as it miraculously unfolds in the womb!

An Intimacy Illustration: My Grandson Smiled at Me!

At 5:15 on Sunday August 26, 2007, both families gather in front of Baby's First Photo studio in downtown Riverside, California. We have been told that the fifteen-minute, four-dimensional ultrasound viewing of the baby will begin promptly at 5:30—so no one arrives late. On the drive eastward out of Orange County there is an unexpected summer shower that raises a rainbow over the city of Riverside. As the eleven of us wait in front of the photo studio, the full moon of summer rises on the eastern horizon—so the day is now totally enchanted.

The emotional atmosphere is charged with the kind of high-energy excitement that one experiences in a maternity ward. This day is full of miracles. The first miracle is that we live in a time and place where two women can openly love each other and arrange with a sperm bank and a fertility clinic to have a baby together. Then there is the ultrasound technology that now permits an actual 4-dimensional color viewing of a 16 week-old baby.

Accompanying the rainbow and the full moon rising, there is the further miracle of family love. Each of us here expects to emotionally bond with this baby whom we are about to experience for the first time.

My daughter Breta, usually the family videographer, is carrying the baby and so has entrusted me with her new video camera that I am fumbling with figuring out how to use. On the sidewalk in front of the studio I zoom in on each family member and each best friend with, “Is it a boy or a girl, and why do you think so?” Everybody gives the camera their best hunches—a jolly game with lots of fun and laughter.

At exactly 5:30 the doors open and we all file into the studio theater—a thirty foot square room darkened by blackout curtains over the windows. A hush falls over the room as Nancy, the technician, closes the door and takes her seat at a video console that looks vaguely like a space ship with all its buttons and flashing lights about to take off.

As cameraman, I am standing with my back to the black curtained windows. On my right on a large, comfortable medical examining table propped up and bare-bellied is Breta. Next to Breta is her partner, Marcie, hovering across her looking at Nancy’s monitor on the other side. Directly ahead of Breta, to my left and high on the wall, is a 100-inch flat-screen video monitor, the largest any of us has ever seen. Straight ahead of me, enthralled and sprawled out over two large sofas and ottomans, are the immediate families and best friends—all positioned so they can see the big screen.

The monitors begin with the by now familiar black and white triangle image of the ultrasound wand—appearing like a churning ocean while we wait with baited breath for the miracle we are about to witness. Suddenly the monitors explode with brilliant color and there before us is a beautifully formed baby—completely visible in color and alive with movement as Nancy moves the wand across Breta’s abdomen. The baby, at first curled up in a tight fetal position, slowly begins stretching. A yellow throbbing line appears on the screen—“that’s the

heart beating,” says Nancy, “it’s a good strong beat.” By now the emotional atmosphere in the room is electric—filled with all sorts of “ooh’s” and “ahs!”

“When we begin,” announces Nancy, “There is a 50% chance of a girl, and a 50% chance of a boy.” There are more hypnotic oohs and ahs from the crowd! “Oops, that looks like a scrotum—now it’s a 60% chance of it being a boy.” More ooh’s and ah’s. “It’s hard to tell on this one, its legs are tight together—sometimes they’re spread-eagled, so sexing them is easy—Oh, look—that looks like a penis!” Promptly a white arrow appears on the screen. “That’s 70%.” Excited murmurs from the crowd—“It’s a miracle...I can’t believe...who would have ever thought...?”

Then we hear “80 %”, and then it stays “90%” for a while with gathering excitement. At about 12 minutes Breta asks if it ever goes above 90%. Nancy says “no” because there is always the chance of an artifact—“But I’m pretty good at sexing them, and I’m just sure it’s a boy.” A cheer goes up from the crowd—especially since Marcie is from a family of all girls.

Meanwhile, I’m doing my best behind the video camera to capture Breta and Marcie, Nancy and her console, and the video monitors while zooming in and out on family action in a room that is fairly dark. I’m trying my best to get all the family cheering action when suddenly I burst out from behind the camera hollering at the family—“Hey, you guys, this boy is someday going to see this video, let’s welcome him into our family!” A loud spontaneous shouting fills the room—we certainly all know how to behave in front of video cameras these days! There is a jumping up and down, with wild waving, and enthusiastic shouting, “Welcome—welcome to our family—welcome to the world—you’re my grandson—you’re my nephew—welcome, welcome—we’re so glad you’re here—we love you!” I am, of course, zooming in and out trying

to capture all of the action. As the joyous pandemonium subsides, the greatest miracle of all occurs.

I slowly pan the camera left from the crowd and upward toward the 100 inch monitor. There on the big screen is a beautiful baby who has turned his head toward me and the shouting crowd and is grinning ear to ear! I'm so startled I do a double take. Then I look at the monitor from outside the camera to be sure that I'm seeing what I think I'm seeing. This child is smiling—not a snapshot smile, but a deep, joyous, grinning—in direct response to the welcoming joy and excitement of the family. “Would you look at that baby smile...” someone says with delight—more ooohs and ahs. But our fifteen minutes are up and, overwhelmed, we all file out.

In front of the studio I aim the camera at Marcie, asking the boy's name. “Jaden Don,” she says, almost in disbelief. One grandmother is wildly hugging everyone in sight and the other is shrieking into her cell phone, “It's a boy! It's a boy!”

At The Old Spaghetti Factory across the street after our orders are taken, I ask Breta and Marcie if they realize what they have just seen? “Well sure, Dad—but wait, what do you mean?” I know I am the only professionally trained observer present, but nevertheless I want to validate what I have just seen. The whole family around the table leans in across their drinks as I recount how Jaden's smile had been in direct spontaneous response to our cheers of welcome. Jaws drop. We had all seen it. But it had happened so fast that I was the only one to fully catch the significance of the sequence. “I want to see that video first thing tomorrow to see if I really saw what I think I saw.” We were all deeply moved by the realization that this 16-week-old had heard our welcoming joy and responded. That night Breta called. “You were right, Dad, there was only

a four second delay between the shouting on the camera and when you panned up to catch the smile on the monitor—he is really alive and responsive now!”

The most precious gift of our species is this inborn capacity for spontaneous, interpenetrating emotional responsiveness—for human intimacy—which we now know is present before birth and can be carefully nurtured for a lifetime. It is by now clear that babies are highly emotionally responsive to their human environment by the third trimester. Ultrasound studies of twins demonstrate mutual interpersonal sensitivity in utero by late in the second trimester. But who has ever imagined that interpersonal emotional sensitivity begins as early as sixteen weeks!

Jaden has yet to open his eyes or to know anything about smiles or human communication consciously—yet he clearly is capable of receiving a joyous emotional message and instinctively turning toward the joy and mirroring it with a reflexive smile. How early did this capacity for emotional responsiveness, for interpersonal attunement and mirroring, begin? How much more emotional responsiveness is Jaden capable of and robustly engaging in already that we don’t know how to observe or interpret?

My story of Jaden is intended to illustrate our newly established knowledge that we are a species capable of mirroring complex emotional expressions from the get-go. Further, our newly discovered genetically-determined neuronal capacity for mirroring allows us to reach deeply into the emotional life of others and to respond with a knowledge of their inner life and how it touches our own inner life. This capacity for emotional intimacy has been evolving for millions of years since the first mammals began to communicate through emotional responsiveness. This capacity expanded exponentially with the primate development of complex gestures, vocalizations, facial expressions, and community socialization. At the human level emotional

engagement has given rise to language, thought, and reflective consciousness as well as to a rich appreciation of the truth, beauty, love, and spirituality that surrounds us. I think of the wonderful portrayals of these deeply emotional primate and human achievements in the animations of the recent film *Where the Wild Things Are*. Max falls asleep hurt and angry. In his dream he runs away to the land of the Wild Things where he struggles with his inner conflicts of anger, hurt, and love. Max's wild things immediately recognize him as king and deeply empathize with his plight and each in turn shares his or her own inner emotional turmoil. The facial expressions, voice inflections, and bodily posturing achieved by computer animation are a truly amazing reflection of emotional exchange processes we all know so well.

As we consider what we need to do in order to re-claim our human birthright of love and intimacy—how to make our relationships work better for us—there are a series of truths about intimacy that modern technology has revealed that can help us.

Chapter Two: 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 human 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,¹ 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

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.

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 divorce. 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.

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.

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 creating 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.³ 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

³ Dr. Audrey Seaton-Bacon, personal communication, 2009.

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

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.”

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

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 York: W.W. Norton.; Schore, A.N. (1994). *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; Schore, A. (2007). Review of *Awakening the Dreamer: Clinical Journeys* by Philip M. Bromberg. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*: 17(5): 753-767; Porges, S. W. (2004). Neuroception: A Subconscious System for Detecting Threats and Safety. *Zero to Three*, 5:19-23.

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 divided 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

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.

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;

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.

- (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 divorce. 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*.

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.

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).

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

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

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.

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.

Chapter Three: Avenues Toward Maintaining Intimacy

Despite our genetic endowment and our human emotional achievements that drive us toward intimate relationships, we know that lasting love in long-term relationships is anything but easy to achieve. While self-help books for couples abound, most available approaches usually focus on actions like improving communication, developing compromises, or getting counseling. What we need are some solid ideas about what goes wrong in relationships and some information about how we can develop skills to help us through difficult times. In this chapter I offer five avenues for considering problems in maintaining intimacy and what we can do about them.

1. We Must Face the Dangerous Uncertainties of Love

Celebrated leader of the international Relational Psychotherapy movement, Stephen Mitchell, in his 2002 posthumous book, *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time*, reviews the many beliefs people have about why romance fades. Mitchell concludes that it is not romance itself that fades or degrades into other forms of love and attachment, but that “we expend considerable effort degrading it. And we are interested in degrading it for very good reasons” (Mitchell, *Can Love Last?: The Fate of Romance over Time*, 2002 p.28)

Mitchell observes that there is a powerful motive in long-term relationships to establish security amidst insecurity, to gain predictability over the unpredictable, and to attain knowledge and certainty over the unknowable and the uncertain. But to the extent that this strong motive to stabilize our relationships strives to fix the fluidity and multiplicity of ourselves and our partners into known and predictable patterns it is coercive and destructive. It is our push toward predictability and certainty over the novel and unknown of romance that kills love for us. According to Mitchell, we actively and collusively do it to ourselves!

In committed relationships, says Mitchell, “we pretend to ourselves that we have somehow minimized our risks and guaranteed our safety. But in doing so we have paradoxically undermined the preconditions of desire, which requires a continuous flow of robust imagination in order to breathe and thrive. ...Love, by its very nature, is not secure; we keep wanting to make it so” (Mitchell, *Can Love Last?: The Fate of Romance over Time*, 2002 pp.47-49).

Passionlessness in long-term relationships is often a consequence not of the extinguishing of a flame but of collusive efforts to keep the relationship inert in a sodden stasis (p.55-6)....This is why, for many couples, sex becomes routinized and boring over time. It is not that familiarity breeds lack of interest, but that as mutual dependencies deepen, as shared lives become more complexly intertwined, sexual passion, with all its accompanying risks, becomes increasingly dangerous (pp. 191-2)....[R]omance in relationships is not cultivated through a resolving of tensions, the discovery of a secret, or a labored struggle to contrive novelty....The cultivation of romance in relationships requires two people who are fascinated by the ways in which, individually and together, they generate forms of life they hope they can count on. [All intimacy] entails a tolerance of the fragility of those hopes [that] in the rich density of contemporary life, realities often become fantasy and fantasies often become reality (p.201).

In the beginning of relationships we idealize love and hope all will go well. But our hope that we will at last be safe from the anxieties and insecurities that haunt single life causes us to want to freeze the goodness we feel and to control ourselves and our partners so that ongoing secure love will be a certainty. This is, of course, exactly what kills the mystery, romance, excitement, and spontaneity of love. Rather, we must cultivate with our partners a sense of suspense, uncertainty, and mystery in which each is free to be, say, and do what is personally important while each partner struggles to deal with the unexpected and sometimes frightening otherness

that emerges in both as the relationship unfolds. Lasting love that is filled with passion is by its very nature always slightly dangerous, insecure, and uncertain.

2. We Must Be Committed to Understanding Each Other's Subjectivity

Psychoanalyst Ethel Person begins her discussion of love by specifying the prerequisites for perpetuating intersubjective romantic passion.

First, she says, the lovers must be willing to make some sort of passionate commitment to one another.

Second, there must be some workable accommodation for both intimacy and separation, for union and autonomy.

Third, lovers must find ways to counter the inevitable disillusionments so rampant in committed relationships, “the lover must be able to tolerate some frustration and to be satisfied with what is good, not demanding impossible perfection of either the beloved’s character or ministrations” (Person, 1988,2007 p. 305).

Fourth, in order to sustain passion over time the lovers must maintain their interest in, and commitment to, each other’s subjectivity and continue to share moments of merged intersubjectivity, insists Person.

Perhaps the most reliable and least problematic way to preserve excitement—and this judgment surely reflects my psychological bias—is by being able to share new perceptions and insights emanating from the unconscious. This kind of excitement does not depend on any kind of external drama, but on sensitivity to the stages of one's emotional development through the ordinary cycles of life.... In short, [in order to sustain love the lovers must] undertake a joint emotional and

psychological voyage, and for those who are psychologically attuned...,there is novelty and wonder enough to preserve the pitch of excitement (Person, 1988,2007 p. 311).

As the relationship dance develops each partner has a new experience of the other in novel kinds of situations and interactions. The few rare couples who do maintain passion in long-term relationships report that every day in the relationship is unique. That each morning the two look into each other's eyes and ask, "who exactly are you today?" The experiences of each day and the dreams we have at night are forever impacting us and the ongoing relationship. Noticing how our inner subjective worlds are constantly shifting and then working in a relationship on sharing those changes with each other keeps the emotional engagement forever lively and worthwhile.

3. We Must Learn to Mentalize Intimate Personal Experiences

All therapists and couples' counselors emphasize the critical importance of talking about our intimate relational experiences as truthfully as possible with our relating partners. In struggling to represent our inner subjective experiences with our partners in words, pictures, and gestures we actively move from experiencing only at the level of the body, at the level of the unconscious, to the level of mental contemplation, of mutual excitement, and consciousness expansion. Psychologists refer to this intersubjective process of mutually expanding our consciousness of ourselves and of our relating partner as "mentalization."

Every time we enter a new relationship or have a new experience in a familiar relationship, that experience has to be integrated within innumerable pre-existing relational templates in our unconscious. This means that new experiences of everyday life always entail various forms of re-

experiencing or re-visiting past relational moments as well as anticipating future relational moments. Dedicating the time with our partners to mentalize with each other whatever micro-happenings we can identify and represent in words, pictures, and bodily experiences is committing ourselves to living within the richest of all possible human environments—the “subjective-intersubjective matrix.”

The importance of mentalization in intimate relationships has been made clear by British psychoanalyst Peter Fonagy (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002 p. 157). He reports an intriguing finding from attachment research in which toddlers are routinely tested and found to be secure or insecure in their attachment to their mothers. In one study lengthy interviews were conducted with expectant mothers asking them to talk about their relationships past and present and to remember important intimate exchanges going back as far as they could remember. Several years later their infants were tested for emotional security. A surprising finding was that mothers who could give detailed and coherent reports of their significant relationships and who could remember and recount meaningful stories of intimate encounters from early childhood produced secure children. Whereas mothers whose stories contained gaps, whose accounts were limited, and whose memories for people, places, and relationships was spotty produced insecure children. Follow-up studies make clear how important it is for us to learn how to access our inner emotional lives in words and stories and then to be able to relate these inner experiences to others in our emotionally significant relationships. The name given to this enlivening process is “mentalization.”

But mentalizing all of one’s experiences with one’s partner is full of threats to both. It means the emotional life of a couple is kept in constant motion that sometimes feels like a roller coaster

ride. Keeping an intimate relationship alive involves a mutual willingness to undergo continuous de-stabilization and uncertainty by continuously examining not only our own inner worlds and those of our partners but by continuously examining the state of our jointly constructed intersubjective world through the process of mentalization—by truthfully speaking everything that is emotionally important.

4. We Must Defeat the Energetic Upper Limits on Our Love

Couples' therapists Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks have studied for decades what happens when two people give themselves over to “co-committed conscious loving.” The Hendricks have come to believe that there is an incredible joyous excitement that emerges in freely given and freely received love. What accompanies this kind of mutually transformative love is a tremendous release of physical and mental energy that floods the entire bodies of both people—completely overwhelming them with excitement and exhaustion. While studying couples working on opening up to new loving relationships as well as couples working on rejuvenating diminished love relationships, the Hendricks have come to believe that all people have an upper limit on how much positive excitement they can tolerate. The upper limit is individually set early in each person's developmental history by how much excitement each was allowed to experience in their families of childhood and/or by what sorts of traumatic events they may have experienced that frightened them away from a heightened sense of excitement and joy.

When you get close to someone, the positive energy is multiplied beyond what each of you has attained on your own. Due to our past conditioning, we all have a limit on how much positive energy we can tolerate.... Go past this limit and an alarm goes off in your unconscious mind. ...If you do not rest at this point, allowing yourself time to integrate the energy, your unconscious mind will find a

way to stop the flow of positive energy....The strategies of a person's unconscious alarm system can be very primitive: arguments, illness, accidents. It is far better to become adept at noticing when your limit has been exceeded, so that you can consciously find a way to integrate the energy rather than leave the task to your unconscious alarm system....It is also to your advantage to find ways of raising the limit daily so that you can tolerate more and more positive energy... Let's begin by understanding the alternative to the positive/negative pulsation of have fun/crash, get close/have a fight, and so on. ...Pulsation is here to stay—that's how the universe works—but it does not have to be a positive/negative pulsation....You can install a better program in your mind and body, one that consists of positive/rest, positive/rest, positive/rest....In relationships the new program goes like this: get close/rest at the new level, get close/rest at the new level...Instead of bringing yourself down through an argument, an illness, or an accident, you let yourself rest at the new level until it is completely integrated. To accomplish this, you will have to become extremely vigilant in noticing how you bring yourself down.” (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1990 pp.126-129).

As we review what's gone wrong in our relationships we can often see how one or the other or both partners had a governor blocking the enjoyment of high pitched romantic excitement. The blocks are of course defensive in the sense that something once happened that the mindbody system found over-stimulating so that an automatic avoidance mechanism came to be set up that says, “never go there again.” In an intimate love relationship we can work towards dismantling these barriers. But since the barriers to full energetic experience are mostly unconscious, it takes time and relationship work to begin noticing them and figuring out ways of releasing them. Partners working together can pay attention to times of heightened excitement and how one or the other unconsciously limits the good times.

5. We Must Trick Our Brains into Enjoying Long-term Intimacy

Human nature that we are now a part of transcends the biology of our brains. Evolutionists now believe that the size and complexity of the human prefrontal cortex is not the result of learning to use tools or to hunt. Rather, our new brain supports the cognitive, emotional, and imaginative capacities necessary for us to construct subjective worlds that can be emotionally and intersubjectively shared in the transcendent worlds of human culture, social relationships, and evolving technologies.

But this state of affairs runs the risk of putting the biological part of our nature into immediate conflict with the transcendent intersubjective part of our nature that is ruled by culture. That is, the biological evolution of our brains and neurological systems derives from millions of years of mammals and primates struggling to adapt themselves to the demands of a physical, and to a limited extent, social world. But when the human *Logos* became created and an intersubjectively demanding culture appears, our brains are being asked to adapt to mimetic worlds they did not evolve from and have no immediately clear way of responding to.¹¹ Our ballooning prefrontal cortex is clearly our evolving brain's best effort to give us adaptive capacities to deal with the expanding worlds created by the demands of human emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity.

Of crucial concern for us as we study intimate relationships and the question of “can love last?” is that the biological mating patterns that evolved more than four million years ago do not seem to fit well the demands of the relationship cultures that have appeared relatively recently. Anthropologist Helen Fisher has concluded that we have a mating drive that is as distinct as our

¹¹Evolutionary Biologist Susan Blackmore surveys the fascinating world of memes—the cultural counterpart of genes—in her book. Blackmore, S. (1999). *The Meme Machine*. New York: Oxford University Press.

drives for hunger, thirst, and warmth. The brain chemistry of this drive and its cycles are by now well known. According to Fisher's comprehensive survey of interdisciplinary research it is now clear that humans throughout time and across all known cultures have been, contrary to popular belief, essentially serially monogamous.

She reports that during infatuation the brain becomes revved up on natural stimulants, on levels of PEA or other amphetamine-like substances, but the brain cannot endlessly maintain this heightened state. As infatuation wanes and attachment grows the opiate system begins to take over giving the partners a sense of safety, stability, and tranquility. The neurotransmitters Oxytocin and Vasopressin prolong the attachment sense but attachment also dulls and is replaced in about four years by indifference or restlessness that slowly eats into love and leads to philandering, separation, or divorce. Says Fisher,

This decline of romantic love is undoubtedly evolution's doing. Intense romantic passion consumes enormous time and energy. And it would be decidedly disruptive to one's peace of mind and daily activities (including rearing children) to spend years obsessively doting on a lover. Instead, this brain circuitry evolved primarily for one purpose: to drive our forebears to seek and find special mating partners, then copulate exclusively with 'him' or 'her' until conception was assured. At that point, ancestral couples needed to stop focusing on each other and start building a safe social world where they could rear their precious child together. Nature gave us passion. Then she gave us peace—until we fall in love again (Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, 2004 pp.204-205).

If we want to make love last we have to know the cycles of the mating drive and the brain chemistry involved and then “trick” our brains into enjoying longer relationships. Fisher raises the question of what ignites passion in another? Her answer is to find novel things to do together.

She cites research confirming that exciting experiences of togetherness can enhance feelings of attraction and couples who do exciting things together feel more satisfaction in their relationships.

Next Fisher believes that frequent, intentional sex is an important trick.

Sex can...spark romantic ardor. Sex is good for you, if you are with someone you are fond of, the time is right, and you enjoy this form of exercise and self-expression. Stroking and massage trigger the production of oxytocin and the endorphins, brain chemicals that can relax and produce feelings of attachment....Sex is not only good for relaxation, muscle tone, and giving and receiving pleasure; it is often associated with elevated levels of testosterone. And testosterone can promote the production of dopamine, the liquor that fuels romance (Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, 2004 p. 195).

Fisher cites other ways of tricking the brain that abound in professional advice:

- Commit.
- Listen 'actively' to your partner.
- Ask questions.
- Give answers.
- Appreciate.
- Stay attractive.
- Keep growing intellectually.
- Include her.
- Give him privacy.
- Be honest and trustworthy.
- Tell your mate what you need.
- Accept his/her shortcomings.

- Mind your manners.
- Exercise your sense of humor.
- Respect him.
- Respect her.
- Compromise.
- Argue constructively.
- Never threaten to depart.
- Forget the past.
- Say ‘no’ to adultery.
- Don't assume the relationship will last forever; build it one day at a time.
- And never give up!

These and many other wise habits can sustain feelings of long-term attachment. But none is likely to elevate levels of dopamine or maintain romantic passion. Other tactics, however, can keep this flame burning. Rewards that are slow in arriving prolong dopamine activity so slow things down! Fisher stresses the need for space and privacy and the importance for what therapists call ‘dating time.’ She believes that developing an array of common interests and making a point of doing novel and exciting things together supports the variety that stimulates pleasure centers in the brain so that a climate of romance can be created and maintained indefinitely.

Fisher’s evolutionary-anthropological perspective suggests that trying to make love last is, in some sense, like paddling upstream—but that we can certainly try and we can expect some positive results. Trying includes understanding the natural cycles of the mating drive and either learning to enjoy its ups and downs or learning how to trick the brain with novelty, togetherness, surprises, rewards, variety, and space.

Elizabeth Berg in her fascinating novel, *Mending*, follows the life of a couple throughout their life cycles. Early on they stumble onto a trick that impressed me greatly. They agreed that each week at their appointed “date time” they would each share an important memory from the past. As Berg’s novel progresses through the ups and downs of children, careers, boredom and betrayal the two continue their weekly ritual of talking about what’s happening between them and relating memories. Berg’s artistry produces amazingly revealing memories that each person’s unconscious has produced to deal with what’s happening inside of each and between them as their relationship unfolds. We see, in vivo, the process of mentalization through the cycles of life. What is missing in Berg’s novel, however, is what Fisher here suggests—how to work together on tricking the brain when it goes through some of its genetically driven neurotransmitter cycles. If they had been able to work on this, the couple’s relationship might have been even richer.

Chapter Four: Avenues Toward Restoring Intimacy

When I began my search of couples' books for ideas about how to create and maintain intimacy, I found that most authors focus on how to fix troubled relationships. But couples' therapist Harriet Lerner holds,

What we are truly in need of is not techniques for fixing things, but some solid theory about what relationships are about and why it is so difficult for two people to live intimately connected with one another...and how relationship systems operate under stress....Even the best how-to advice...will at best yield short-lived results unless we struggle to understand the underlying theory or principles [of relationships]. The fact is, there are no techniques to make intimacy happen (Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy: A Woman's Guide to Courageous Acts of Change in Key Relationships*, 1989 pp.202-203).

I find Lerner's words particularly inspiring and so I have sought in this book to provide some of the solid theory about relationships that she calls for. As a psychoanalyst I am especially interested in theories that help us think about what is going on inside each of us as we co-create relationships rather than simply focusing on such things as communication, compromise, and behavior changes. I have been able to locate four well-known couples' therapists who have formed theories that take into account how our individual subjective worlds of experience interact in relationships—Susan Johnson, Harriet Lerner, Harville Hendrix, and David Schnarch. In a brief overview I cannot possibly do justice to the richness and complexity of their thoughts about relationships or present examples of their stunning work with couples. But I can provide a brief schematic of their leading ideas on the restoration of intimacy that hopefully will inspire you to further study their work.

Four Avenues for Restoring Intimacy

1. The Emotionally Focused Engagement of Susan Johnson

Based on the attachment research begun in England during the 1950's by psychoanalyst John Bowlby, Canadian couples' therapist Susan Johnson understands intimacy in terms of "Emotionally focused engagements."¹² Attachment theory holds that all mammals are born immature and that biological mechanisms exist in both parents and offspring that insure attachment until the babies are mature enough to survive on their own.¹³ The neurotransmitters oxytocin and vasopressin operate in members of different species to stimulate attachment behaviors necessary to insure survival of the young.

Susan Johnson and Valerie Whiffen in their book, *Attachment Processes in Couple and Family Therapy*, speak of "emotionally focused engagement" as the route to dealing with attachment issues as they arise in intimate relationships. According to the authors most relationship problems are about the security of the bond between the partners and about their experiencing the relationship as a safe haven and a secure base. Isolation, separation, or disconnection from an attachment partner is inherently traumatizing. The need for secure emotional connection with a few key others is considered to be hard-wired by evolution, and there are a finite number of ways of dealing with the loss of such a connection. The patterns of distress in couple relationships are predictable in that they have to do with separation fears—although those fears are experienced differently depending on each person's relational past. Depression and anxiety expectably accompany relationship distress as security and connection

¹² Johnson, S. (2002). *The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy*. New York: Brunner-Routledge. Also Johnson, S. and Whiffen, V. (2003). *Attachment Processes in Couple and Family Therapy*. New York: The Guilford Press.

¹³ Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss: Vol. I, Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.

are lost. Restoring intimacy has to do with a couple working towards re-establishing the regulation, processing, and integration of key emotional responses having to do with safe attachment. Pivotal moments where the relationship is defined as unsafe and insecure must be identified. Critical moments in the restoration of a relationship are likely to be shifts and change events that redefine the relationship as mutually secure and satisfying. Change events in the restoration of an intimate relationship involve specific bonding events called “softenings.” In a softening, a vulnerable spouse reaches out to an engaged partner and asks for his or her attachment needs to be met (Johnson & Whiffen, *Attachment Processes in Couples and Families*, 2003 pp. 104-107).

Restoration of an intimate relationship is thought by Johnson to be characterized by:

- Learning to focus on and validate attachment needs and fears and the couple’s promoting an emotional engagement with safety, comfort, and support.
- Privileging emotional communication and a direct addressing of attachment vulnerabilities and fears so as to foster emotional attunement and responsiveness.
- Creating a respectful collaborative alliance, so that the relationship itself may be a safe haven and a secure base.
- Shaping each other’s responsiveness and accessibility. Withdrawn partners reengage and blaming partners soften so that bonding events can occur that offer an antidote to negative cycles and insecurity.
- Focusing on how the self is defined and can be redefined in emotional communication with the partner.

- Shaping of pivotal attachment responses that redefine the relationship and addressing injuries that block relationship repair (Johnson & Whiffen, *Attachment Processes in Couples and Families*, 2003 p. 110).

Emotionally Focused Therapy developed by Susan Johnson and her colleagues uses John Bowlby's attachment theory to work with couples and families. By encouraging individuals to discover and communicate their attachment needs and fears, Emotionally Focused Therapy seeks to promote softenings in destructive cycles that have developed in the interactions of the relationship. Further, Emotionally Focused Therapy seeks to encourage the development of new and more rewarding patterns of interaction based on the attachment needs and fears of the individuals involved.

Johnson's approach offers a vitalizing perspective on the restoration of lost intimacy from the standpoint of attachment theory. The process of defining one's dependency needs and communicating them in a vulnerable way to one's partner can serve to break the destructive cycles that have developed in the interactions of the relationship. Softenings encourage the development of new and more rewarding patterns of interaction based on the attachment needs and fears of the individuals involved.

2. The Dance of Connection and Disconnection of Harriet Lerner

Foremost couples' therapist Harriet Lerner has given us a series of magnificent books on intimacy—mostly with the word “dance” in the titles. Lerner's expertise has been looking at the way two people in a relationship construct connecting and disconnecting dances around intimacy, deception, anger, and fear. Each person enters the intimacy dance with a set of templates based on past relationships. Each person struggles between learning how her or his

partner dances and attempting to teach or coerce the partner into dancing her or his way. The worst dances emerge when partners collude to maintain patterns from the past that limit excitement and life in the present relationship.

Lerner's work highlights the process of the interaction itself and how each person can take responsibility for his or her connections and disconnections in the dance of intimacy. A central theme in Lerner's work is how our relationship dances tend to polarize around whatever differences we can define. Defining differences is a defense, she says, against our anxiety of not knowing how to be in constant vulnerable negotiation with our partners. She gives examples of how distancers distance more when pursued and how underfunctioners underfunction more around overfunctioners, and vice versa. Lerner believes that differences per se are rarely 'the problem' in relationships; the problem is instead our reactivity to differences. Paying attention to our distressing reactions has the possibility of teaching us a great deal about ourselves.

Restoring intimacy in relationships often requires tuning into and taking responsibility for one's own anger. Lerner is particularly interested in how anger often becomes a mode of relational exchange rather than a means of self-expression and interpersonal communication.

Anger is one of the most painful emotions we experience, and the most difficult to use wisely and well. Yet our anger is an important signal that always deserves our attention and respect. The difficulty is that feeling angry doesn't tell us what is wrong, or what specifically we can do that will make things better rather than worse....If our goal is to break a pattern in an important relationship or to develop a stronger sense of self that we can bring to all our relationships, it is essential that we learn to translate our anger into clear, nonblaming statements about our own self (Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships*, 1985 pp. ix and 90).

Anger is a tool for change when it challenges us to become more of an expert on our self and less of an expert on others....Learning to use our anger effectively requires some letting go—letting go of blaming that other person whom we see as causing our problems and failing to provide for our happiness; letting go of the notion that it is our job to change other people or tell them how they should think, feel, behave....In using our anger as a guide to determining our innermost needs, values, and priorities, we should not be distressed if we discover just how unclear we are....Too often, anger propels us to take positions that we have not thought through carefully enough or that we are not really ready to take.... It is an act of courage to acknowledge our own uncertainty and sit with it for a while (Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships*, 1985 pp.102 and 107).

Lerner discusses in many ways the anxiety that so often arises when a person is considering some kind of change that threatens the status quo of a relationship. It is important to learn to tolerate the anxiety that comes with doing or saying something differently. Our anxiety alerts us that we are anticipating a counter-move from the other who will insist that we return to the old pattern that is expected or demanded.

The opposition invariably goes like this: ‘You are wrong,’ with volumes of evidence to support this. ‘Change back and we will accept you again.’ ‘If you don't change back, these are the consequences,’ which are then listed....The people who most depend on you to be a certain way may equate change with a potential threat or loss. Your job is not to prevent the countermove from happening, which is impossible. Nor is it to advise the other person not to react that way.... Put simply, the challenge of change requires us to anticipate resistance from within and without—and to manage our own anxiety so that we can be our best selves when the other person, out of anxiety, acts like a big jerk (Lerner, *The Dance of Fear: Rising Above Anxiety, Fear and Shame to be your Best and Bravest Self*, 2004 pp.84-85).

Lerner speaks of the courage it takes to stand steady when the counter-moves roll in. She defines courage as the capacity to think, speak, and act in the face of our own fear and shame. “Real courage requires you to sit with the anxiety that change evokes and stay on course when the countermoves start rolling in....When you are ready, courage may require you to act in ways that elicit the fear or discomfort you believe you can't sit with—and then you learn that you can.” (Lerner, *The Dance of Fear: Rising Above Anxiety, Fear and Shame to be your Best and Bravest Self*, 2004 p. 85).

Lerner's work on partnering focuses on the way people move toward connections and the ways people then move away from connections, thus obeying internalized relational templates learned in childhood. She gives many rich and moving examples of couples caught in some kind of dilemma and how with courage and authentic voice deadened relationships can come back to life again. Lerner's work on the restoration of intimacy hinges on people's willingness to take responsibility for their own participation in the relationship dance. The dance of intimacy—of connection and disconnection—most often fades in the face of fear, shame, and anxiety learned in childhood and triggered by relationship difficulties. What is required to overcome childhood relational patterns in our current relationships, says Lerner, is authenticity, courage, and voice.

3. The Imago in Our Relationships of Harville Hendrix

Harville Hendrix launched Imago Relationship Therapy in his 1988 bestselling book, *Getting the Love You Want*, and has continued with the publication of several follow-up books. His key concept is Imago, the Latin word for image. Hendrix demonstrates in his extensive work with couples how experiences with early intimate caregivers as well as later socialization experiences

become internalized and organized unconsciously in our mindbody in the form of what would be the “perfect” partner—an unconscious Imago of what we need to complete ourselves.

Consciously we think we choose a partner based on a sensible checklist of good and bad qualities that would provide a good fit for us. But unconsciously we are searching for something very different entirely. Under the sway of powerful neurotransmitters when we fall in love, we idealize the good qualities of the beloved and we deny the bad. Only when two have entered into a commitment to be partners does the idealization and denial cease and the unconscious agenda begin to assert itself. What we call the chemistry of love is our unconscious need to select someone emotionally similar to those who failed or traumatized us in our childhood—in short Freud’s compulsion to repeat trauma with the hope of mastery. “But childhood is over; we cannot run back to our parents to get what we missed. So we find the next best thing—a relationship that recapitulates in its vital aspects the complex, idiosyncratic pattern of our wounding and loss” (Hendrix, *Keeping the Love You Find: A Personal Guide*, 1992 p. 214).

The tool that our unconscious uses to perform this feat is the Imago. We need an Imago partner in order to grow and heal, says Hendrix. The issues of self paradoxically require relationship for resolution. The partnership itself is the process by which we attempt to reclaim what is missing in ourselves. Hendrix describes how traumas in early relationships get carried over into our adult partnerships.

We are creatures of nature, with the evolutionary program of our species encoded in our genes. We all begin life in a state of relaxed and joyful bliss, with a feeling of connectedness to everything and everyone. Our overwhelming impulse at birth is to sustain this feeling of connectedness, to remain attached. If our caretakers are attuned to our wants and needs, ready and able to provide

warmth, safety, and sustenance, our feelings of aliveness and well-being are sustained. We remain whole. But, of course, that's not the way it works out. Even in the best of circumstances, our parents are not able to maintain the perfect standards of our time in the womb, when everything was provided immediately and automatically in an atmosphere of total safety and continuity. Every unmet need causes fear and pain, and in our infantile ignorance, we have no idea how to stop the pain and restore our feeling of safety. Desperate to survive, we adopt primitive coping mechanisms (Hendrix & Hunt, *Getting the Love You Want Workbook*, 2003 pp. 2-3).

All of us, to one degree or another, are nursing childhood wounds, coping as well as we can with the world and our relationships, using the feeble set of defenses born in the pain of childhood. When we fall in love, we believe we've found the bliss we were born with....We decide that we can't live without our beloved, for now we feel whole, we feel like ourselves. Finally, we feel safe and breathe a sigh of relieved deliverance. It looks as if everything is going to turn out all right, after all.... But inevitably...the veil of illusion falls away, and it seems that our partners are different from what we thought they were... Disillusionment turns to anger, fueled by fear that we won't survive without the love and safety that were within our grasp (Hendrix & Hunt, *Getting the Love You Want Workbook*, 2003 pp. 4-5).

Hendrix describes how the Imago process works in relationships.

This image of 'the person who can make me whole again' is what we call the Imago. Though we consciously seek only the positive traits, the negative traits of our caretakers are more indelibly imprinted in our Imago picture, because those are the traits that caused the wounds we now seek to heal.... Our unconscious need is to have our feelings of aliveness and wholeness restored by someone who reminds us of our caretakers—In other words, someone with the same deficits of care and attention that hurt us in the first place....Our imperfect caretakers, who

have been freeze-dried in our memories of childhood, are reconstituted in our partner....

How can we resolve our childhood issues if our partners wound us in the same ways as our caretakers and we are stuck in childhood patterns that wounded our partners?...Consciousness is the key; it changes everything. When we are unaware of the agenda of love, it is a disaster because our childhood scenarios inevitably repeat themselves with the same devastating consequences....

A conscious marriage is not for the faint-hearted. It requires reclaiming the lost, repressed parts of ourselves, which we were told as children were dangerous to have and which we unconsciously hate ourselves for having.... In a conscious marriage, we change to give our partners what they need, no matter how difficult it is, no matter how much it goes against the grain of our personality and temperament....We stretch to become the person our partner needs us to be to heal. This is not easy, but it works....You are already with your dream partner, but at the moment, he or she is in disguise—and, like you, in pain....A conscious marriage itself is the therapy you need to restore your sense of aliveness (Hendrix & Hunt, *Getting the Love You Want Workbook*, 2003 p. 8).

Says Hendrix, most partners remain unconscious in their marriages. They never develop beyond the Imago power struggle, remaining focused on childhood issues that were never resolved. But, despair can be a turning point for couples and can lead to the work that allows both partners to complete the unfinished business of their childhoods.

Harville Hendrix has capitalized on the Freudian insight that we have a compulsion to repeat the traumas of our childhoods in our emotionally intimate adult relationships. Further, Hendrix has capitalized on a widely held truth of marriage counselors—that we locate not only the hated parts of our parents in our intimate partners, but the split-off, dissociated, unwanted parts of ourselves. His solution is bringing the suppressed parts into the light of consciousness—a feat he

believes is only possible in a committed intimate relationship. His reasoning and method are radical: We must commit ourselves to being the best possible partner, to “being there” for the other in ways his/her parents of childhood never could be. Paradoxically, in struggling to be there in full conscious emotional responsiveness with our partner we not only “cure” the childhood wounds of our relating partner, but we “cure” our own childhood wounds in the process.

4. The Differentiating Crucible of David Schnarch

Couples’ therapist David Schnarch has clearly formulated how intimacy produces emotional growth and how emotional growth leads to more differentiated intimate relationships (Schnarch, *Constructing the Sexual Crucible: An Integration of Sexual and Marital Therapy*, 1991). More than telling us simply that rewarding intimate relationships require work—Schnarch specifies what kind of work is required of us and why. Schnarch explains why none of us—men or women—truly wants the upheaval and pain or the self-confrontation necessarily involved in a committed intimate relationship. He explains why we have to come into seemingly irresolvable conflict with our partners before we become willing to undertake the disruptive process of transforming ourselves.

The strong metaphor that Schnarch chooses for describing the possibilities of what can happen in an intimate relationship is a crucible. Schnarch uses crucible in both senses of the word—a container in which new alloys can be forged out of more basic metals, and an extreme situation that tests one’s strength and courage to such a degree that one becomes transformed by the experience.

Differentiation is a key concept for Schnarch. He explains that we are born into merged physical and psychological bonds with our caregivers. Within those early intimate bonds of psychological oneness we seek emotional acceptance and validation for our developing selves—the kind of “other-validation” we later seek from the socially-constructed human milieu. In time, and with appropriate encouragement, we begin to differentiate our own private selves from limiting entanglements with others in a process of “self-validation” that serves to establish our sense of separateness. In this way a lifelong process of differentiating ourselves from emotionally influential others becomes initiated.

All subsequent emotional transformations follow this growth cycle of an intimate merger for the purpose of benefiting from contact with others, followed by the painful process of asserting emotional separateness—of differentiating from the seemingly safe harbor of psychological oneness. Schnarch’s relationship crucible approach is about using the connections among intimacy, sexuality, and differentiation to facilitate the growth necessary to free yourself from emotional gridlock and experience profound sex and intimacy. The same basic principles hold for sexual as well as non-sexual committed intimate relationships.

Differentiation involves taking a stand that defines you and, at first at least, may evoke ominous responses from your partner. You are likely to hear accusations such as ‘You’re making a mistake’ or ‘You’ll destroy our relationship’ more than once before the benefits kick in. As differentiation increases, this push-pull process stops feeling adversarial and starts feeling more like you are ‘worthy opponents’—friendly training partners. It leads to being true lovers and best friends. Constructing your relationship crucible involves extracting your unresolved personal issues embedded in your gridlocked situation and confronting them as an act of integrity. You do this unilaterally, without counting on your

partner to do likewise, and without getting lost in what he is or isn't doing. Intensely satisfying committed relationships trigger fears of engulfment, rejection, deprivation, and being controlled through one's own desire. Irrational fears of pride, hubris, and the 'evil eye' surface in many forms—including the fears of losing the level of love, or safety, or good sex that one has been able to achieve. Becomes the Motto: "Best be satisfied with what one has rather than push the envelope for real satisfaction!" (Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage: Keeping Love and Intimacy Alive in Committed Relationships*, 1997).

Schnarch's position is that we are born emotionally fused into intimate relationship with others. With time and good encouragement we begin to differentiate—to express our own needs and desires that are at odds with the surrounding relational milieu. That is, other-validated intimacy gives way to self-validated intimacy. For Schnarch, personal growth always occurs within the context of emotionally committed intimate relationships. We fall in love with our relationship partner—fall into psychological merger in search of other-validated intimacy. The price partners pay for validating each other in the relationship is the price of losing oneself, one's capacity for self-validated intimacy. As differences inevitably show up and disillusionment sets in, however, one can decide on a leap of faith and validate oneself rather than the other. Protests inevitably follow as the other experiences the self-validation move as an abandonment. The perceived abandonment and protest trigger a need in the other for self-soothing and a counter self-validating move. At each step of the way each partner needs courage to make leaps of faith as well as a capacity for self-soothing and self-centering during the process of attaining greater self-validation.

Schnarch's metaphor of a crucible as a well-bounded vessel for high firing different metals into strong alloys provides an apt analogy for monogamous commitment as the container in

which individual personal growth and strength can occur. According to Schnarch, the paradox involved in intensifying intimacy is that in order to reach our full energetic potential (sexually and otherwise) we must be able to focus on what's going on inside the other person while simultaneously experiencing ourselves as separate from it—and then to see where mutual attention to meanings within the relationship takes us.

Johnson, Lerner, Hendrix, and Schnarch all open up fascinating avenues we can pursue in restoring greater intimacy to our relationships. While none of them offer techniques per se, all of them point thoughtful and useful directions.

Chapter Five: Developing Intimacy Skills

After having looked at some of the truly amazing recent discoveries about our natural drive toward intimacy and some of the ways we can restore and maintain intimacy, what has emerged for me is a series of possible skills we can cultivate with our partners for the purpose of enriching the intimacy of our relationships.

Intimacy Skill One: Learning to Pay Close Attention to Ourselves

We grow up trying the best we can to be simply who we are—to interact as honestly and spontaneously as we know how—given the emotional environment we were raised in. All our lives we have received feedback from other people telling us who they think we are or who they want us to be—and yet those ideas often don't match our ideas of who we are or want to be. So the first intimacy skill is learning to focus on the truthful details of ourselves as we participate in emotionally significant relationships. Easier said than done.

If we want improved intimacy we must cultivate with our relationship partners the habit of noticing what's going on inside ourselves as we relate to each other on a daily basis. Next we must find ways to share our reactions with our relating partners while taking responsibility for them. In this intersubjective process we hope to become familiar with our own emotional patterns even as we struggle to de-center ourselves in order to learn about the emotional patterns of the other person.

The rule of thumb for self-discovery is simple. Every time we have any strong reactions to someone we are in relationship with, we need to assume that the strength of that reaction points to a reflexive emotional habit of our own—no matter whether the reaction is “appropriate” or

not. We have no power to change others, only the power to examine and sometimes to change ourselves!

“Is this difficult work?” Absolutely, it is. “Does intimacy require a lot of togetherness time on a regular ongoing basis?” Yes, it certainly does. “Will all the time and effort spent be worth it?” You will have to be the judge. But if you want to try, you have to begin by paying close attention to yourself in all of your emotionally significant relationships—as non-defensively and non-judgmentally as possible—and hope for the same from your relating partner.

Intimacy Skill Two: Examining Our Negative Projections

We can only see the world through our own emotional lenses. Our lenses have been conditioned by past emotional relationships so that we simply see the world in certain ways and fail to notice how many other ways there are of constructing personal worlds and personal truths. In the beginning of a relationship, of course, we rely on conventional ways of getting to know each other. We search out things we like to do together and things we have in common. But have we as relational partners been getting ready for the inevitable disillusionments that we know will come? What will things look like when the going gets rough?

Fast forward into what couples’ therapists call the “negative projection” phase of relating—to how things become after the illusions have started to diminish. One very simple way to understand the projection process is to realize that in the course of growing up we are taught about our “good self” and our “bad self” by those who raised us. We also learned from experience about “good others” and “bad others.” In the romantic illusion phase of relating we project like a movie on a screen our good sense of self and other onto our relationship and new partner. That is, the idealized aspects of ourselves and of other people we have known in the past

are brought forward to positively color our experiences of the relationship and the new partner. But over time as the relating becomes more complex and more real, the negatively valued parts of ourselves and of others from the past begin to be projected onto our partners—quite without our realizing it!

Surprisingly enough, this is *the expectable way* our minds treat relationships—and this is where relationships start to bog down. In the first place I become disillusioned by my new awareness that you are not quite the person I thought you were. Then I begin to see how out of touch and really bad you can be at times. At first I don't notice that what I most dislike in you are the very things I have worked for a lifetime to eradicate or deny in myself. Then—surprise—I begin to experience you in the same ways that I once experienced my parents and other significant others throughout my life! Next we notice ourselves treating our partners in the same awful ways that we hated in our loved ones treating us in a complete role-reversal. Negative projections are not simply sometimes events—they are at the center of the ways our minds operate!

As couples enter the phase of negative projections the natural tendency is to become confused and disillusioned, to blame, and/or to avoid or to withdraw from emotional engagements. We tend to project this emerging sense of badness from the past onto the partner of the present and then, like a projected movie, we begin to believe that what we see “out there” is reality not our projections. People caught in the throes of mutual negative projections become disillusioned and then begin to fear the relationship is falling apart. In this way people often come to dread the very relational confrontations that might allow repair of relationship ruptures.

So added to the already deteriorating situation are the anxiety and despair over feeling devalued and rejected or feeling abandoned without hope of change.

We can, however, welcome this sense of impasse as the point in relationships where new and creative forms of intimacy can be developed. When negative self and other projections begin to mingle in committed intimate relationships with the realities of two unique subjective worlds of experience, fresh possibilities for transformation and growth become possible. The second intimacy skill is for partners to learn how to focus on themselves in such a way as to understand the mutual emotional processes of negative projections and to find creative ways of recognizing and dealing with the inevitable negativity that comes.

Intimacy Skill Three: Developing the Courage to Relate

In intimate encounters when we come nose to nose—each believing we are right and the other is wrong—this is when we have the greatest possibility of noticing emotional relatedness patterns in ourselves that we have never known about before. We begin when we notice that we have a strong emotional response to what is happening. Our strong emotional reaction, has tipped us off that we are bringing an emotional load to the encounter that derives from our own past experience.

How do we discover what it is that we are bringing to the encounter? We begin by non-defensively and non-accusingly attempting to discuss our puzzling reactions with our partner or with another intimate person such as our therapist. We can be sure that any heretofore unnoticed childhood reaction patterns that emerge in our current intimate relationships have been safely guarded from becoming conscious for a lifetime by intense anxiety and fear. So whenever we get close to some blocked body-mind fear reflex we can expect a strong defensive emotional

reaction—some kind of shaking in our boots. Honestly looking at ourselves and our deep reactions to our relating partners always requires mustering our most courageous selves. Oddly enough, when one person begins taking responsibility for his part in a relationship dilemma, usually the other person quickly gets in touch with what her contribution is.

Intimacy Skill Four: Resisting the Dullness of Attachment

A common observation about partnering relationships is that the excitement dulls with time. But the problem can't simply be time. So what is going on? Sigmund Freud believed that marriage leads to attachments that give rise to the incest taboo so that the edge of sexual excitement dies (Freud, 1918). His thinking is that in our original families sex was taboo so that as our lover slowly enters the category “family” it is only a matter of time before the conditioned taboo against having sex or other kinds of intimate contact with family members catches up with our partnership.

Along different lines relational psychoanalyst Stephen Mitchell proposes that sexual excitement relies on risk, uncertainty, and creative spontaneity within the relationship. But as we become more attached to our partner our dependency needs increase, making us more vulnerable to abandonment so that our risk-taking in intimate relating declines—and with it the creative spontaneity, novelty, and uncertainty of love and exciting sexuality.

Yet another set of considerations regarding dullness of attachment is advanced by anthropologist and sociologist Helen Fisher who concludes that human relationship history reveals a consistent four-year plot associated with genetically-driven neurotransmitters. We are biologically driven, Fisher says, to mating, to romance, to attaching for child rearing, and then to philandering, divorce and mating again. Getting past these ancient mating patterns demands a

partnering relationship that “tricks” our brains and neurological systems by arranging continuous novel experiences of excitement and adventure within the relationship.

Each of these theoretical approaches to the problem of dullness setting in after a while in bonded relationships outlines grim prospects for long-term relationships. But despite these potentially grim prospects exceptions to the pattern of relatively short-lived romantic relationships do exist. Indeed sometimes love lasts! So the question before us is can we locate ways of relating with each other that expand our capacities for long-term intimacy? We must find ways of working together in our relationships to resist the dullness of attachment.

Intimacy Skill Five: Representing and Tolerating “Otherness”

Aspects of ourselves that do not fit within our accepted views of who we are—of our identity—are spoken of as “otherness” that has been split off, denied, disowned, or repressed and that re-appears. Likewise, from time to time in our relationships despite our best efforts to disavow them parts of our relating partners we have “chosen” not to notice—or had hoped would go away—come inevitably to be experienced as “otherness” in our partners.

As the phase of negative projections in relationships begins, the heretofore denied “otherness” of ourselves and our partners can easily become the target of disillusionment and blame. Doing our best to mentalize together, to talk about the puzzling or surprising aspects of ourselves and our partners with our partners allows us to begin mutually exploring these split-off, denied aspects of “otherness” in ourselves as well as in our partners so that we can find ways of integrating them into the expanding co-consciousness of the relationship.

Mutually struggling to be as non-defensive and non-judgmental as possible toward aspects of ourselves and our partners, that which we experience as strange or otherness goes a long way toward starting the consciousness raising dialogue. In the long run the couple's growing capacity to tolerate and even to value otherness in each partner has rich potential for expanding both personalities as well as for deepening the relationship. A third party discussant such as a therapist can be very helpful to a couple in sorting through emerging aspects of self and other "otherness."

Intimacy Skill Six: Sustaining the Tension of Uncertainty and Insecurity

No one likes the disruption, turmoil, disorientation, and fragmentation necessarily involved in expanding and re-aligning relationships. We strive for emotional harmony and security in our committed relationships. But during the phases of negative projections and emergent otherness we become distressed and insecure by the unfortunate aspects of ourselves and our relating partners that we experience as newly emerging. Common alternatives are: cave in and lose ourselves; force our partner to capitulate; or allow the relationship to go stale or sour. Our tendency is to end up losing the very thing we were attempting to create in the first place—a lively, creative, always uncertain and exciting relationship.

THE LESSON: We cannot have a totally safe and secure relationship that is free from threat. So how do two people learn to sustain the tension in their relationship that is required to provide for basic security needs while simultaneously allowing room for novelty, change, and excitement. Again, a third party discussant like a therapist may be helpful from time to time as a couple works on finding ways of sustaining the relationship tension.

Intimacy Skill Seven: Learning Nonviolent Communication

Marshall Rosenberg has studied the words and language we use in relationships.¹⁴ He concludes that, quite without realizing it, we often speak and interact in “violent” ways. Nonviolent Communication focuses our attention on compassion as our motivation, rather than fear, guilt, blame, or shame. It emphasizes taking personal responsibility for our choices and improving the quality of our relationships as our goal.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is based on the premise that we are all simply trying to get our needs met. We fare better if we know how to get these needs met through cooperation rather than aggression. People naturally enjoy contributing to the well-being of others when they can do so willingly.

The first component of NVC entails the separation of observation from evaluation. We need to clearly observe what we are seeing, hearing, or touching that is affecting our sense of well-being, without mixing in any evaluation.

The second component of NVC necessary for expressing ourselves is expressing feelings. By developing a vocabulary of feelings that allows us to clearly and specifically name or identify our emotions, we can connect more easily with one another.

The third component of NVC entails the acknowledgment of the root causes of our feelings. NVC heightens our awareness that what others say and do may be the stimulus or trigger, but never the cause of our feelings.

¹⁴ Rosenberg, M. B. (1999). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion to Improve the Quality of Your Personal and Professional Relationships*. Encinitas: Puddle Dancer Press.

The fourth component of NVC addresses the question of what we would like to request of each other to enrich each of our lives. It is important to avoid vague, abstract, or ambiguous phrasing of our requests, and to remember to use positive action language by stating what we are requesting rather than what we are not. For example, NVC encourages the expression of appreciation solely for celebration—not as a means of expressing a positive judgment. We state: the action that has contributed to our well-being, the particular need of ours that has been fulfilled, and the feeling of pleasure engendered as a result. When we receive appreciation expressed in this way, we can do so without any feeling of superiority or false humility by celebrating along with the person who is offering the appreciation.

Rosenberg's book is replete with everyday expressions that carelessly slip off our tongues that, when examined carefully, contain disguised violence. Use of Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication can go a long way towards building a relationship that remains inspiring and that feels safe.

Intimacy Skill Eight: Making Contact with Seven Deadly Fears

Relationship fears are universally experienced consequences of the human predicament of growing up dependent for many years on families and communities to sustain us.¹⁵ Depending on our original relational circumstances, these seven relational fears manifest themselves differently in different people. Relational fears leave a chronic mark, a tissue constriction of some sort, on the mindbody that affects subsequent intimate relationships. The seven relational fears set up somatopsychic constrictions in different organ systems throughout our bodies thus

¹⁵ Hedges, L. E. (2012). *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears*. Chevy Chase, MD: IPI eBooks.

threatening our health and longevity. It is only a matter of time before each of these seven fears is experienced in relation to a partner in any committed relationship.

In a committed relationship it is essential to dedicate regular time toward mentalizing with each other the frightening experiences that necessarily arise in the course of a relationship—to consider what each partner is feeling afraid of at each and every point. At first this may be difficult because we are taught to deny and/or cover up our fears. The Seven Deadly Fears are a regular part of the phase of negative projections and a manifestation of the disavowal of aspects of “otherness” and, as such, require constant monitoring.

In my *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears* book and the separate *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears Workbook* there are many mental and physical exercises that individuals and couples can do that will put them into contact with where in their mindbody tensions their childhood relational fears are stored. The Seven Deadly Fears are thought to arise in the course of normal child development and in the following chart are ordered in terms of their interpersonal complexity.

Summary Chart: The Seven Deadly Fears

- 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?
- 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 altogether, we may assert ourselves with a demanding vengeance, or we may even relate in passive-aggressive ways.
- 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 who we really are. We may then fear we will not be affirmed or confirmed in our relationships. Or we may fear that others will only respect and love us if we are who they want 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 opening ourselves up to 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 Fully Alive** Our expansiveness, creative energy and joy in our aliveness inevitably come into conflict with demands from family, work, religion, culture, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness in order to be able to conform to the demands and expectations of the world we live in. 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 and aliveness, we may throw in the towel, succumb to mediocre conformity, or fall into a living deadness.

Intimacy Skill Nine: Becoming Fully Alive in Love and Life!

Our growing-up experiences have left us silently terrified of intimate relationships because we have all been repeatedly injured by our intimates. Most of us do our best to deny and cover up that fact much of the time, but when we pay close, honest attention to ourselves we will note that WE DO NOT WANT:

- To examine our negative projections
- To develop the courage to relate
- To resist the dullness of attachment
- To learn to tolerate “Otherness” in ourselves or in our partners
- To sustain the tension of uncertainty and insecurity, or
- To make contact with the Seven Deadly Fears.

When we get honest with ourselves and our partners we see that altogether too often instead of facing the fear, uncertainty, and internal disruption required for re-alignment of our relationships, we would rather turn the other way, project and blame, deny otherness, pretend that we are fearless—and then move on to a relationship that suits us better!

When it gets right down to it Stephen Mitchell has said it most clearly—we are highly invested in degrading our love, in sabotaging the very intimacy that we hope to establish and enjoy!¹⁶ How and when do we stop this deadly relationship cycle that has been endlessly repeated down the millennia? Some few couples have succeeded in achieving intensely

¹⁶ Mitchell, S.A. (1997). Psychoanalysis and the Degradation of Romance. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. 7:23-41. And Mitchell, S. A. (2002). *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

satisfying long-term relationships—do the exceptions to the rule show that “the rule” is basically wrong and that we do, in fact, have the power to over-ride our genetically based mating habits so that we can have more sustained intimate loving relationships? Or do we need to learn to accept our historical fate of serial monogamy—of changing partners every four years before hopeless boredom sets in? Can we become fully alive in love and life? Or are we forever doomed to live in fear, constriction, and short-term relationship unhappiness? The question is, “can we make love last”?

Chapter Six: Making Love Last

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.

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About Lawrence Hedges' Other Books

Terrifying Transferences: Aftershocks of Childhood Trauma

There is a level of stark terror known to one degree or another by all human beings. It silently haunts our lives and occasionally surfaces in therapy. It is this deep-seated fear--often manifest in dreams or fantasies of dismemberment, mutilation, torture, abuse, insanity, rape, or death--that grips us with the terror of being lost forever in time and space or controlled by hostile forces stronger than ourselves. Whether the terror is felt by the client or by the therapist, it has a disorienting, fragmenting, crippling power. How we can look directly into the face of such terror, hold steady, and safely work it through is the subject of *Terrifying Transferences*. Contributing therapists: Linda Barnhurst, John Carter, Shirley Cox, Jolyn Davidson, Virginia Hunter, Michael Reyes, Audrey Seaton-Bacon, Sean Stewart, Gayle Trenberth, and Cynthia Wygal.

Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy

In a fresh and innovative format Hedges organizes an exhaustive overview of contemporary psychoanalytic and object relations theory and clinical practice. "In studying the Listening Perspectives of therapists, the author has identified himself with the idea that one must sometimes change the Listening Perspective and also the interpreting, responding perspective." – Rudolf Ekstein, Ph.D. Contributing therapists: Mary Cook, Susan Courtney, Charles Coverdale, Arlene Dorius, David Garland, Charles Margach, Jenna Riley, and Mary E. Walker. Now available in a Twentieth Anniversary edition, the book has become a classic in the field.

Working the Organizing Experience

Hedges defines in a clear and impelling manner the most fundamental and treacherous transference phenomena, the emotional experiences retained from the first few months of life. Hedges describes the infant's attempts to reach out and form organizing connections to the interpersonal environment and how those attempts may have been ignored, thwarted, and/or rejected. He demonstrates how people live out these primitive transferences in everyday significant relationships and in the psychotherapy relationship. James Grotstein contributes a

critical history of psychotherapy with primitive transferences and a case study is contributed by Frances Tustin.

Interpreting the Countertransference

Hedges boldly studies countertransference as a critical tool for therapeutic understanding. “Hedges clearly and beautifully delineates the components and forms of countertransference and explicates the technique of carefully proffered countertransference informed interventions...[He takes the view] that all countertransferences, no matter how much they belong to the analyst, are unconsciously evoked by the patient.”--James Grotstein, M.D. Contributing therapists: Anthony Brailow, Karen K. Redding, and Howard Rogers.

In Search of the Lost Mother of Infancy

“Organizing transferences” in psychotherapy constitute a living memory of a person’s earliest relatedness experiences and failures. Infant research and psychotherapeutic studies from the past two decades makes it now possible to define for therapeutic analysis the manifestations of early contact traumas. A history and summary of the Listening Perspective approach to psychotherapy introduces the book. Contributing therapists: Bill Cone, Cecile Dillon, Francie Marais, Sandra Russell, Sabrina Salayz, Jacki Singer, Sean Stewart, Ruth Wimsatt, and Marina Young.

Strategic Emotional Involvement

Following an overview of contemporary approaches to studying countertransference responsiveness, therapists tell moving stories of how their work came to involve them deeply, emotionally, and not always safely with clients. These comprehensive, intense, and honest reports are the first of their kind ever to be collected and published. Contributing therapists: Anthony Brailow, Suzanne Buchanan, Charles Coverdale, Carolyn Crawford, Jolyn Davidson, Jacqueline Gillespie, Ronald Hirz, Virginia Hunter, Gayle Trenberth, and Sally Turner-Miller.

Therapists At Risk: Perils of the Intimacy of the Therapeutic Relationship

Lawrence E. Hedges, Robert Hilton, and Virginia Wink Hilton, long-time trainers of psychotherapists, join hands with attorney O. Brandt Caudill in this tour de force, which explores the multitude of personal, ethical, and legal risks involved in achieving rewarding transformative connections in psychotherapy today. Relational intimacy is explored through such issues as touching, dualities in relationship, interfacing boundaries, sexuality, countertransference, recovered memories, primitive transferences, false accusations against therapists, and the critical importance of peer support and consultation. The authors clarify the many dynamic issues involved, suggest useful ways of managing the inherent dangers, and work to restore our confidence in and natural enjoyment of the psychotherapeutic process.

Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through Childhood Trauma: The Psychodynamics of Recovered Memories, Multiple Personality, Ritual Abuse, Incest, Molest, and Abduction

Infantile focal as well as strain trauma leave deep psychological scars that show up as symptoms and memories later in life. In psychotherapy people seek to process early experiences that lack ordinary pictorial and narrational representations through a variety of forms of transference and dissociative remembering such as multiple personality, dual relating, archetypal adventures, and false accusations against therapists or other emotionally significant people. “Lawrence Hedges makes a powerful and compelling argument for why traumatic memories recovered during psychotherapy need to be taken seriously. He shows us how and why these memories must be dealt with in thoughtful and responsible ways and not simply uncritically believed and used as tools for destruction.”---Elizabeth F. Loftus, Ph.D.

Facing the Challenge of Liability in Psychotherapy: Practicing Defensively

In this litigious age, all psychotherapists must protect themselves against the possibility of legal action; malpractice insurance is insufficient and does not begin to address the complexity and the enormity of this critical problem. In this book, Lawrence E. Hedges urges clinicians to practice defensively and provides a course of action that equips them to do so. After working with over a hundred psychotherapists and attorneys who have fought unwarranted legal and ethical

complaints from clients, he has made the fruits of his work available to all therapists. In addition to identifying those patients prone to presenting legal problems, Dr. Hedges provides a series of consent forms (on the accompanying disk), a compelling rationale for using them, and a means of easily introducing them into clinical practice. This book is a wake-up call, a practical, clinically sound response to a frightening reality, and an absolute necessity for all therapists in practice today. Now available in a revised and updated edition.

Sex in Psychotherapy: Sexuality, Passion, Love, and Desire in the Therapeutic Encounter

This book takes a psychodynamic approach to understanding recent technological and theoretical shifts in the field of psychotherapy. Hedges provides an expert overview and analysis of a wide variety of new perspectives on sex, sexuality, gender, and identity; new theories about sex's role in therapy; and new discoveries about the human brain and how it works. Therapists will value Hedges' unique insights into the role of sexuality in therapy, which are grounded in the author's studies of neurology, the history of sexuality, transference, resistance, and countertransference. Clinicians will also appreciate his provocative analyses of influential perspectives on sex, gender, and identity, and his lucid, concrete advice on the practice of therapeutic listening. This is an explosive work of tremendous imagination and scholarship. Hedges speaks the uncomfortable truth that psychotherapy today often reinforces the very paradigms that keep patients stuck in self-defeating, frustrating behavior. He sees sexuality as a vehicle for both therapists and patients to challenge what they think they know about the nature of self and intimacy. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding 21st century human beings—or in better understanding themselves and their sexuality.

Overcoming Our Relationship Fears

We are all aware that chronic tension saps our energy and contributes to such modern maladies as high blood pressure and tension headaches, but few of us realize that this is caused by muscle constrictions that started as relationship fears in early childhood and live on in our minds and bodies. *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears* is a user-friendly roadmap for healing our

relationships by dealing with our childhood fear reflexes. It is replete with relationship stories to illustrate each fear and how we individually express them. Dr. Hedges shows how to use our own built-in "Aliveness Monitor" to gauge our body's reaction to daily interactions and how they trigger our fears. Exercises in the book will help us release these life-threatening constrictions and reclaim our aliveness with ourselves and others.

Cross-Cultural Encounters: Bridging Worlds of Difference

This book is addressed to everyone who regularly encounters people from other cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and ability groups. Its special focus, however, is aimed at counselors, therapists, and educators since their daily work so often involves highly personal cross-cultural interactive encounters. The running theme throughout the book is the importance of cultivating an attitude of tentative and curious humility and openness in the face of other cultural orientations. I owe a great debt to the many students, clients, and friends with diverse backgrounds who over the years have taught me how embedded I am in my own cultural biases. And who have helped me find ways of momentarily transcending those biases in order to bridge to an inspiring and illuminating intimate personal connection.

OTHER BOOKS IN PRESS AND PREPARATION:

Overcoming Relationship Fears Workbook

The Courage to Relate

The Relationship in Psychotherapy and Supervision

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