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EDITORIAL

Celebrating Our 100th Issue

100 issues! How about that! Taking on the role of editor has been one of the greatest good fortunes of my career. It is a task but not a chore. I look forward to the next 100.

My gratitude for this good fortune and for all the benefits that the Science of Psychotherapy brings to readers of the magazine, listeners to the podcast, and members of the Academy goes to Matthew Dahlitz who brought this amazing project into being. His dedication and sacrifices have meant that we are here, now, at the 100th issue. Over the past decade Matthew has shepherded the growth and development of the Science of Psychotherapy and has also been the steward of the invaluable resources that are now an extensive and growing archive of knowledge and learning for everyone concerned with mental health and therapeutic practice. The podcast is a weekly pleasure to thousands of listeners and the Academy can proudly boast more than 600 core units of education with access to over 1000 videos, articles, and documentaries, which have been curated into hundreds of hours of ongoing education with CEU certificates. And more is being added every day! Members are treated to a cornucopia of riches at a price that is unrivalled in the online space and now non-members can purchase individual courses to satisfy their specific interests.

This 100th issue is more than I could have imagined. There is not enough space in the editorial to precis each contribution, but I can tell you it is an extraordinary reading experience. The list of contributors is proudly displayed on the cover and there are even more who have sent articles that could not fit into this issue, but you will find in upcoming issues. The 100th is, in effect, a double issue, with contributions from extraordinary people expressing their current ideas and research through articles, commentaries, and opinion pieces. We also share some of the messages of congratulations we received from special friends of the Science of Psychotherapy.

I know there is plenty to fascinate and stimulate curiosity and wonder, so, please enjoy our 100th. Be well, stay safe, and may your world be full of love and joy.

RICHARD HILL | EDITOR

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FEATURE

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Introduction

As a couple therapist, I struggle with partners every day who seem primarily to follow their feelings and emotions when attempting to govern each other. These couples exist without a shared, co-created relationship architecture, ethos, purpose, or vision that would otherwise guide them. No other union would form in this manner, for people generally unionize around a common purpose and vision that binds them, focuses them, and overrides their differences.

Often people form alliances because they must for survival of all kinds — physical, economic, spiritual, psychological, and cultural. Professional entities, such as a sports team, an actor troupe, a musical group, or a business partnership form collaborations in order to gain something. Still others will create limited alliances for trade and commerce. Some workers are forced by circumstance, as in a dangerous job, to have each other's backs and protect each other from foes, such as cop car partners, a military troop, or fire fighters.

These examples have nothing to do with love, yet romantic partners unionize without any organizing principle or purpose other than love or the promise of it. Certainly, there are marriages without love as the central organizing purpose. Both historically and currently, people wed for religious or cultural reasons, familial pressures, green cards, obligations compelled by others having nothing to do with the partners themselves, and those “forced” to do so out of duty, guilt, or fear of social shaming.

I posit that attachment is the “I can’t quit you biology” that folks often confuse with love. We might assume that the biological portion of the attachment system serves as a biological mandate to remain glued or fixed to one’s primary attachment figures. If that mandate is necessary to the survival of the human infant, it might follow that all threats to the attachment system would be tantamount to a primitive existential threat experienced in early childhood. The threat of losing one’s primary attachment figure is experienced at the level of life or death.

Partners in a romantic relationship too often forgo creating *shared principles of governance* (SPGs), guardrails that allow them to govern each other — limit and push each other — by previous agreement and permission to do so. Failure to co-create shared principles of governance leaves the couple open to chaos, lawlessness, unfairness, injustice, and insensitivity.

Part of the problem may be due to biological principles of energy conservation, which for humans is to automate all novelty and relegate it to procedural memory whereby routine experiences and tasks can operate with minimal conscious effort and without critical thought output. One such energy-conserving tenden-

cy in couples is to assume that partners are “family,” which they are not. To maintain the reality of strangeness would require energy expenditure, including increased presence and attention. That partners seem to default to illusions of familial-arity in romantic relationships makes sense, not only due to energy conservation but also due to the projective nature of these relationships and the memory systems engaged throughout the lifespan of the couple.

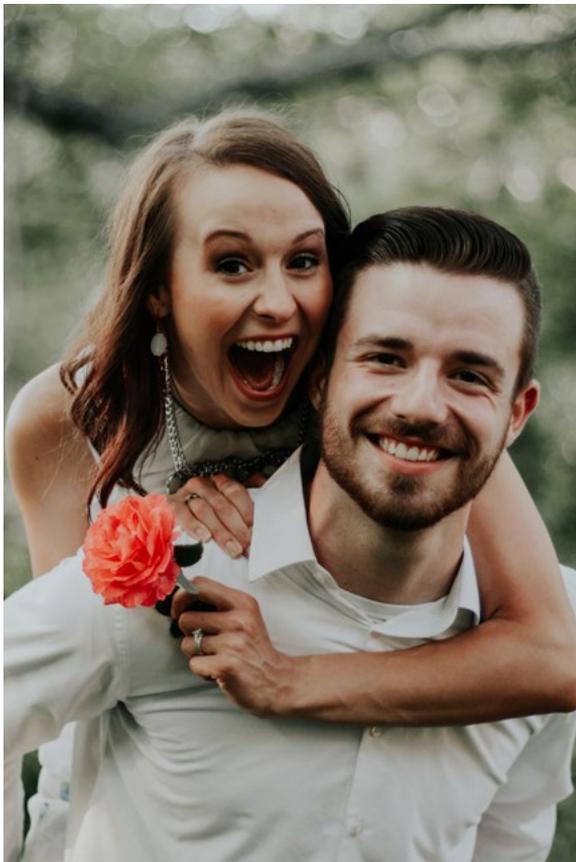
Partners tend to become natural proxies for all earlier, emotional experiences with original primary attachment figures, particularly those experiences prior to age 12 (Hughes & McGauley, 1997; Main, 2000; Steele et al., 2008). Human primates are memory and threat animals, who not only build internal working models around



safety and security but also must cope with new and archaic internal object representations that include attractant and repellent, safe and threatening qualities.

Partners who unionize for love and operate as if they were family — or family as recalled from one’s original family culture — would likely not organize according to terms and conditions as autonomous adults engaged in a conditional set of shared principles and purpose as is the case with all other types of unions and alliances.

In my practice and at the PACT Institute, what I’ve come to realize is that couple relationships begin to break down because unionizing for love is not enough. Partners do not equip themselves with enough foundational



alliance to ensure they will sustain those powerful emotions that drove them to bond. Love alone is never enough.

Secure Functioning

Differentiated from secure attachment, secure functioning is a set of behavioral principles based on fairness, justice, and mutual sensitivity between fully equal adults who maintain full collaboration and cooperation in order to satisfy a shared purpose (or a set of them). The partners’ shared set of purpose(s), their vision (or sets of them), and their shared principles of governance (rules of engagement) are what bring them on board — not love, sex, emotions, or feelings.

Unions based on the couple’s SPGs, like all others in a free system of equals, amount to a “deal or no deal” proposition. Partner differences are resolved by their shared purpose, vision, and co-created culture or ethos. These are attractors and are never a union held together by fear, threat, guilt, or shame.

Driving these couple systems are *third elements* the couple enjoys, strives to achieve, problem-solve, or manages without partners focusing on each other as the problem to be solved. In other words, secure-functioning partners solve problems, not each other. Insecure-functioning partners do the opposite.

Attachment

Attachment has long been studied as a psychological bonding mechanism necessary to human infant survival in a postnatal environment (Leerkes, Gedaly, & Su, 2016; Moriceau &

Sullivan, 2005). This is true of all species where newborns require feeding, protection, and care from an adult member of that species. Neurobiological models of mammalian imprinting demonstrate neural circuits and various neurotransmitters that enable quick infant attachment to a caregiver.

For instance, hyper-activation of the locus coeruleus enables the production of noradrenaline, which helps create an affinity for the caregiver while a hypo-active amygdala helps reduce aversions to them. Neuropeptides such as vasopressin and oxytocin facilitate attachment bonds between both caregiver and newborn (Moriceau & Sullivan, 2005). Attachment bonds that fail during infancy and early childhood — usually due to neglect or abandonment — lead to failure to thrive, a serious problem with long-term developmental, health, socio-emotional, and psychological outcomes (Benoit & Coolbear, 2004; Chugani et al., 2001).

In the first 18 months of life, the right hemisphere of the brain — a kind of multi-modal processor — develops first through frequent and extended experience-dependent interactions with one or more caregivers. These interactions are largely face-to-face, eye-to-eye, and skin-to-skin. Brain areas that set up during this early period are those dominant for social-emotional development, regulation of the autonomic nervous system, thermoregulation, stress modulation, and other basic functions.

The infant is externally regulated by the caregiver. Only later (around 10–12 months) will the child discover nascent self-regulation abilities (Balbernie, 2001; Decety & Chaminade, 2003; Schore, 1994, 2000). Prior to that, only

autoregulation, external regulation, and interactive regulation exists for the infant (Tatkin, 2010).

The infant's *felt sense* of safety and security within the tight infant–primary caregiver orbit gives rise to what John Bowlby called an *internal working model*, a kind of blueprint for interacting with the primary attachment figure. If the child feels less than safe or secure, the child will adapt to the relational environment with compensatory defensive behaviors (Bowlby, 1988).

A secure child will not make such adaptations and will therefore expend less energy to cope with the vicissitudes of the child–primary relationship. We know that neuroplastic alterations occur in the psychobiology of the child



with various adaptations in attachment security. The earlier insecure adaptations occur, the more significant are the effects on the developing right hemisphere and the child's later social-emotional acuity.

For instance, infants with distancing caregivers tend to have less frequent and extended enriched interactions with caregivers that dismiss attachment values. Allan Schore has theorized this results in a relative paucity of right brain development in favor of later left-brain compensation (Schore, 2001). If the right hemisphere is good at processing meaning and emotion, the left is really good at processing sequence, detail, precision, and reason.

In contrast, those infants exposed to overly ambivalent, clingy, and preoccupied caregivers tend to have lots of face-to-face, eye-to-eye, and skin-to-skin contact and interactions with

their primary, but the relationship is fraught with ambivalence, uneven caregiver emotional availability, and implicit demands on the infant to provide some level of emotional regulation function for the adult. These infants are thought to be "right-leaning" and may have less development in left hemisphere functions.

Insecure infants, children, and adults — in general — are more vulnerable to abandonment concerns regardless of their positioning on the insecure attachment spectrum. Those who are anxious-avoidant may exhibit distancing defenses that deny infant needs, attachment values, and dependency privations.

They nevertheless experience abandonment depression and anxiety when their distancing defenses are no longer required (J. F. Master-son, 1981; Tatkin, 2009). Individuals who are anxious-ambivalent remain vulnerable to their



abandonment anxiety and depression and defend with clinging, negativism, and preoccupation with past injustices. Those with insecure attachment can often present as passive in partnership or exhibit poor self-activation. They therefore forgo or deny their agency, leadership, or collaborative role in the teamwork that is expected and required in a secure-functioning couple.

Other obstacles to secure functioning point to developmental delays, such as with lack of differentiation and separation/individuation models. For instance, persons who may be held back by pre-oedipal relational trauma due to neglect and/or abuse may continue to seek early infant needs and repair of injuries that strain the capacities of an adult term-based, purpose-centered relationship between equals sharing power and authority. Their unresolved trauma and loss remain ungrieved and metabolized thereby creating a dyadic system ripe for unfairness and resentment.

The “I can’t quit you” attachment mandate maintains a stronghold on insecure individuals and those with disorders of the self who focus strongly on early dyadic needs and requirements. Ungrieved, early developmental traumas and losses can create enormous obstacles for individuals attempting to organize around principles over loss.

Love

Young children, in most cases, fall in love with their primary caregiver. With the developing brain and a sequence of losses every child must suffer, the internalized primary caregiver, as representation, takes on other forms, in-

cluding crushes on teachers and other children. Many children play with reunion fantasies, not with their caregivers but with proxies in other forms, including those made up through books or movies. Several of those initial crushes form templates for later attractions in adulthood, a kind of memory/recognition/transference system that mostly plays out unconsciously (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 2021, p. 88)

I remember from my own childhood having a wild elementary school crush on a mysterious 10-year-old blonde who later became a crush on Haley Mills, a famous child actor with blonde hair. Later, aboard a cruise ship as a 12-year-old, I kissed a girl who, looking back, reminds me of my junior high school crush, a mysteriously beautiful statuesque blonde. I should also mention, I later married that girl in my forties. (Full disclosure, I had another, lighter crush on a brown-haired girl in elementary school, and I believe she served as a template as well for later relationships).

Love is a term that may forever be open to interpretation. Philosophers, religious scholars, playwrights, songwriters, popular books, movies, and magazines all have something to say about what love is and isn’t. Science takes a different view. For instance, romantic love, particular in the courtship phase of a relationship, looks more like an addiction than an emotion. It’s as if nature drugs us with a potion to mate and procreate or at least attempts to do so.

What most couples don’t consciously realize unless they dig deeper into the science is that catecholamines, such as noradrenaline and dopamine, phenylethylamine, and neuropeptides, such as oxytocin and vasopressin, and hor-

mones, such as testosterone, fill our brains and bodies with sensations and feelings of exhilaration and pleasure and hope. At the same time, the brain's reward circuit remains activated with dopamine and GABA neurons firing on all cylinders. All together, these internal charges keep us coming back for more and more. A sufficient drop of serotonin maintains just enough anxiety and perseveration to keep that person in mind, crowding out all other competitors for our obsessive attention.

Secure-functioning partners rely less on the fleeting emotional highs and lows that romantic love provides. Instead, they bank on *earned love* and respect that arises through deeds — behaviors that adhere to the couple's co-created ethical guidelines and principles that lead partners to do the right thing when the right thing is the hardest thing to do.

Devotion to a shared principle requires discipline, purpose, vision, and character. Secure functioning is far from easy due to the nature of the human primate — selfish, self-centered, moody, fickle, impulsive, opportunistic, intellectually lazy, easily influenced by groups, aggressive and warlike (Harari, 2014; Kahneman & Egan, 2011). Human beings are also capable of selfless acts of kindness and heroism, moral and intellectual inclusiveness, discipline, character, and restraint. Yes, we're terrific animals, but these features, along with xenophobia and racism dog us and complicates our ability to maintain relationships over time.

The point of establishing SPGs is that nobody remains perfectly principled across all conditions. Co-created and agreed upon principles of governance may be viewed as perfect, however, our adherence to them will occasionally fall

short. Earned loved is created by quickly falling on one's sword when failing to uphold a principle. The only recourse for failing — hyperbolic as it may sound — is to beg for forgiveness and to right the wrong. That's the cooperation part and it's simple. Easy it's not. Because it's the right thing to do, and the hardest, that is what earns feelings of love and respect — a type of regard that is longer lasting than fleeting feelings of romantic love. This character choice also rises above the "I can't quit you" attachment bond. Actions aren't based on fear of loss or abandonment, but rather on the feel-good results of doing the right thing for the self and the union.



The Intersection of Attachment and Love

But are love and attachment the same thing? The question about love is, How much of that is due to development? To one's own psychology, culture, education, neurotransmitters, and hormones? How much of that is the biological portion of the attachment system?

The attachment system serves as an evolutionary function to keep pair-bonded human primates together if only to protect offspring for at least four years. This is the conventional wisdom of many cultural and biological anthropologists (Fisher, 1989; Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2015; Kauth, 2020; Moxon, 2013; Zeifman & Hazan, 1997). Human beings began to group together, ostensibly, to protect each other from the dangerous environment, including predators and other threats. They would also band together to create shelter for

one another, the ability to hunt and gather together, and provide food for the group.

The general consensus that human primates are by nature aggressive, warlike, and xenophobic gives rise to the idea of unions based on selective mutuality, familiarity and familiarity, and a sense of tribalism (Fienup-Riordan, 1980; Harari, 2014, p. 18). The same kind of grouping is seen in all areas of the primate world. Similarly, the attachment bond is also observed in all primates as well as other mammals when at least young.

The classic problem that arises in couples therapy is that the attachment system prevents partners from making sound decisions based on principles and purpose rather than feelings and emotions. Feelings and emotions include one's experience of the attachment system being in threat, which is an existential issue, I would



say, on par with the other existential givens that the existentialists have outlined. Perhaps the awareness that we are alone, one of the existential givens, is most fitting for this notion that loss of the primary, in a sense, equals being adrift, untethered, and death.

As with the existentialists, the *thrown condition* (we are thrown into a situation where we don't know why we exist, we are alone, life inherently has no meaning, and we are all going to die) is mediated by purpose and meaning as created by the human mind (Lucas, 2004). Human beings create shared mythologies, such as religion, spirituality, corporations, and other "made up" entities first created by the mind. Romantic relationships are based on mythologies. Problems arise when the mythologies are not shared. You and I must co-create our relationship mythology which includes the meaning and purpose of unification. If that mythology is based on romantic love and physical attraction, our relationship cannot remain safe and secure because feelings and thoughts come and go like the weather. Feelings and thoughts are not reliable. How can we possibly sustain feeling when we can't even sustain joy, happiness, or bliss throughout a full week?

Without a shared relationship mythology (purpose, meaning, vision) and shared principles of governance, partners will remain dangerously adrift in a one-person psychological system of unfairness, injustice, and insensitivity, particularly when one or both persons are under stress.

Principles must be placed higher than the "I can't quit you" attachment biology if partners wish for real collaborative governance.

Because human primates, as with all living organisms, are programmed to survive, the matter of stress, distress, and threat perception commonly leads to state changes that drive memories and alter perceptions. Under stress, most partner will default to a one-person orientation of me, my, mine, and you, you, you. In other words, under stress, partners are most likely to become non-collaborative and uncooperative. If partners do not have established SPGs to mitigate fight/flight behaviors, they will necessarily focus on each other as "the problem." Remember, SPGs, like all other mutual agreements, must be established ahead of time with each partner fully agreeing to the guardrail, and with full permission to enforce it in the moment. The collaboration part is establishing a guardrail, the cooperation part is yielding when reminded, cued, or prompted to do so.



Interdependence Versus Dependence and Codependence

That infants are fundamentally dependent on their caregiver(s) for basic survival and psychoneurobiological development seems obvious to most, if not all, people. However, aspects of infant dependency, attachment, and psychobiological development continue throughout the lifespan. That is certainly not apparent to the average adult human. The matter of dependency is largely debated among young and old alike, particularly in the West. *Dependency* is a frowned-upon term in adulthood as is *codependency*, a term coined by Alcoholics Anonymous and originally referred to as the co-alcoholic, someone partnered with someone who has a drinking (or drug) problem. The term has since morphed through social media and books profiting from the idea of partnership with someone

toxic, to having borderline features, to being paired with a narcissistic personality disordered partner, to being an enabler to an abuser, and so on. The pejorative interpretations of words that include “dependency” is extremely common in the layperson’s lexicon.

Interdependency, as interpreted here, means that two (or more) people in an alliance have the same things to gain and the same things to lose. They are equal shareholders with absolute parity. That doesn’t mean they do the same things. Rather, they are both accountable, bottom line, for their successes and failures as a team or union. Any other arrangement in which someone has more to gain or lose is not interdependency. Codependency is a relationship that lacks parity, shared power, and authority. Same with dependency.



Secure-functioning partners are interdependent based on equity and fair play. Insecure-functioning partnerships lack these qualities. Therefore fear of loss may be the mitigating factor that allows one partner to surrender their agency, power, and authority — a factor that prevents them from standing up on principles of fairness and justice.

It's important to mention here that helplessness gives rise to aggression. Those who surrender purpose and principle for feelings and emotions will govern by emotion and create threat loops that repeat in the couple system. It's as if the system begins to react to itself with partners attempting to legislate and enforce their rights and privileges unilaterally. Secure functioning begins to erode.

Heightening how tensions grow, feelings of helplessness create perceptions of unfairness and injustice that further result in resentment and unfriendly behavior. Instead of co-creating policies for “doing business,” partners will focus on each other as the problem. The longer perceived transgressions occur, the more repetition. The more repetition, the higher the inflammation in the wronged partner. Threat cues become part of the couple's communication pattern, increase in number, and become more amplified with resulting problems including mismanagement of thirds¹ and content spread².

¹ Thirds are all elements outside of the primary attachment relationship that could compete for the couple's (or a partner's) resources. Thirds include people, things, activities, substances, belief systems, and much more. When a partner mismanages a third, the other partner will complain of jealousy, being thrown under the bus, feeling betrayed, feeling they are being demoted or regulated to third wheel.

² When a person or persons feels victim to an injustice and the act continues to repeat, the ill-treated partner will, in essence, get louder, angrier, and their content will begin to spread to other areas of com-

Interdependency is key to secure functioning. It means that partners of equal power and authority — two (or more) generals, leaders, governors, executives — have the same things to lose and the same things to gain. This makes partners equal shareholders in terms of the benefits of what they do and the drawbacks of what they shouldn't do. Interdependent partners are in the foxhole together, so to speak. They depend on each other for specific goods and services, including protection. They are in each other's care. Equal shareholding helps keep partners honest because neither can afford the other to fall outside of the couple's ethical culture. For instance, in any bid, if one person loses to the other, what is actually won? And for how long? Systems, such as a romantic relationship, where one person benefits at another person's cost can produce bad downstream effects.

Codependent or dependent relationships will yield unhappy results because both partners don't have the same skin in the game. Often, one partner resents the extra burden of having to do all the heavy lifting. In adulthood, and in relationships that are conditional, lack of shared responsibility, accountability, and leadership ultimately results in accumulated resentment and threatening interactions.

Purpose-Centered Principles

As mentioned, all free unions attract members based on a shared purpose and shared vision, not love. We're going to create a community, a church, a business, a rock and roll band,

plaint. The content spread is a product of frustration at not being able to reach their audience so that the behavior stops.

a soccer team, a triathlon preparation group, a community theater with a set of regular actors. Unless that system is based on slave-ownership or a dictatorship, we assume that members join voluntarily and according to their attraction to the group mission.

They each have an organizing principle upon which the union is based. “We’re going to work together in order to win, survive, contribute, make money, etc.” Some examples of purpose-centered principles may include:

1. We put our relationship as our highest priority beyond everyone and everything else.
2. We have each other’s backs at all times.
3. We tell each other everything and remain completely transparent.
4. We manage all “thirds” together and never unilaterally
5. We make decisions jointly by getting each other fully on board before deciding.
6. We protect each other’s sense of safety and security at all times.
7. When one of us is in distress, the other drops what they are doing and attends to the other.
8. We never threaten the relationship, neither explicitly nor implicitly.
9. We work on problems, not each other.
10. We do loving, romantic, affectionate, admiring things for each other throughout each day.
11. We can go to bed angry, but we have to at least touch toes.

Principles are purpose-based, meaning that both partners must agree on them and do them, regardless of how either feels. They need to be done. For example, item #10 must be performed according to how the *other* partner wants to be

loved, romanced, touched, and so on. It must be done even if partners are angry, hate each other, feel sick, or any other feeling that would lead to making a unilateral decision based on current state of mind. Each of these principles represents what the couple wants to create and avoid.

We might say that rituals were invented because of our human nature of moodiness, fickleness, laziness, and basic tendency is to only do what we want when we want. Rituals, whether religious, cultural, or family-oriented exist because no group would routinely do good, healthy, prosocial activities without commitment to the principles of the ritual.



Purpose-centered principles are co-constructed by individuals getting each other fully on board by first finding where they agree and where they are alike. Most partners will focus on where they disagree and where they are different. This is low-hanging fruit and it's lazy. Consensus builders know that attention to how people are different and where they disagree is a non-starter. Again, this process requires collaboration and cooperation between two policy-makers who focus on the third thing which is the puzzle to be worked on — dispassionately and without aiming fire at the other. They must get consensus through a back-and-forth process of suggesting ideas, persuading, countering, bargaining, and then clarifying. In this way, partners show leadership, autonomy, and a team attitude for getting things done and then moving forward.

Clashes with the Attachment System

Couple therapists commonly deal with situations that are called *deal breakers*. These are differences between partners that cannot or may not be resolved through therapy. Deal breakers include two people living in different states or countries, where neither can move to the other's location — or any common location, but at least one partner cannot tolerate the distance. Or one partner wants children and the other never wants children. Or one partner wants polyamory and the other monogamy. This list goes on. Some of these, such as the first example of a long-distance relationship, is a structural matter, not a therapeutic one. The therapist can do nothing to solve the problem of long distance. Yet partners will still look to couple therapy to solve such problems.

These relationships will continue for years



with one or more deal breakers eating away at the couple's safety and security system. The deal breaker(s) will be the underlying irritant while the couple fight about everything other than the elephant in the room. The "I can't quit you" attachment system prevents either from dealing with what could be the end of the relationship.

"I must raise my children Muslim. That's non-negotiable." The other partner says, "I must raise my children Jewish. It's non-negotiable." The couple look into the abyss that is the end of their relationship, and one of them says, "Let's buy a house together." The "I can't quit you" biological mandate of the attachment system prevents either partner from doing the right thing. They kick the can down the road, both in hopes of changing the other's mind. And then they come into couple therapy.

Perhaps one of the most concerning aspects of the "I can't quit you" part of the attachment system is tactical. When partners feel helpless, they become more aggressive. Neither partner has a bottom line, an ace in their hand, that can leverage relationship properly and in a non-violent manner. For instance, a partner that keeps repeating an offense and is not remorseful or will not "fall on their sword," may lead the other to increase their threat response and become angrier, more attacking, and themselves act more unfairly and insensitively. Because that partner cannot see any other remedy, they must badger the other into submission. This will not work.

The manner in which partners interact under stress will always be the central problem with regard to threat management. Therefore, the proper method to leverage the relationship



when a partner repeatedly refuses to cooperate is to *temporarily* withdraw as a clear consequence of non-collaboration or cooperation. I say temporarily because each partner's greatest leverage are the services and goods they provide to the other. A longer than necessary withdrawal of goods and services (e.g., one's attention and affection) will be perceived as a *punishment* rather than an immediate *consequence* of having let a partner down and failing to uphold the principles of the union. Punishments make persons angry thus cancelling out the purpose of withdrawing in the first place.

Additionally, the least violent way to enforce a red line is to exit the relationship — if not just temporarily. For instance, my partner refuses to stop drinking despite frequent complaints of mismanaging a third (the alcohol) and threatening the well-being of the union. I'm not

home when they return the next day. No anger, no attack, no argument. Gone. This represents a clear line in the sand with the consequence of leaving the relationship. This is not a threat but an action. The responsibility to repair and prove they "get it" along with evidence of the required changes falls to the deserted partner if they desire to do so. But the responsibility for holding the line is entirely on the shoulders of the repeatedly wronged partner. The unwillingness to do so exhibits poor faith in the potential of the relationship.

Sadly, people will commonly continue to do things until they realize they can't. Just telling a partner "You can't do that" or repeatedly yelling at them or threatening them, will eventually become ineffective.

To this point, the "I can't quit you" attachment issue prevents many partners from ac-



knowledging, let alone exercising, the right to opt out of the relationship due to a breach or breaches of good faith. This inability to stand up for the health and well-being of the union is a major problem for *both* partners, not merely for the aggrieved; for each partner is responsible for holding the other accountable for shared interests and concerns. Failing to act on injustices put both partners at later risk for eventual dissolution.

Just to be very clear, I am *not* advocating withdrawing or exiting the building or relationship willy-nilly. The latter is a serious act, but if done in good faith, it can rally partners to do better if they are so motivated. Again, romantic relationships are “pay to play” and “deal or no deal.” Same goes for all unions created by and for free people. Love and other emotions have nothing to do with it. Nor should attachment,

if avoidance of loss is the dominant purpose for one or both partners.

Case Example

Partner A discovers that Partner B has been cheating and lying for over seven years. Partner B hides valuable information and therefore deprives Partner A of any agency or ability to make decisions. The discovery comes from a jilted lover, who contacts Partner A and tells them everything, including that there is another lover *they* discovered who Partner B lied about.

When confronted, Partner B denies the affairs and starts gaslighting Partner A by calling them “paranoid,” “insecure,” and “needing therapy.” Weeks later, Partner A presents proof of these lovers and only then does Partner B start admitting things.



The discovery of vital information that, if previously known, would have changed everything almost always results in PTSD symptoms for the discovery partner (DP). These symptoms will persist for at least one year or longer depending on several factors, most predictably, the attitude and responsiveness of the secret keeper (SK). If the SK remains defensive, secretive, withholding, or demanding, the recovery period will extend. In these cases, the therapeutic architecture as set by the couple therapist should account for the massive injustice at the center of the crisis. With this in mind, the SK should no longer be a gatekeeper of information and must be and continue to be fully transparent. In addition, because this betrayal should be a deal breaker, the DP should now have all the leverage, not the SK, and thus should be in a position to name the terms for continuance — if even considered.

In the above case, the situation is upside down with Partner B, the SK, still holding all the power and leverage by blaming the DP for causing the affairs in the first place. Furthermore, the SK remains ambivalent about remaining in the marriage. This naturally puts Partner A, the DP, in the precarious position of bargaining at their own cost.

Why does this happen? For one thing, Partner A will not view themselves in a position of power by immediately suspending or ending the relationship. Fear of loss or abandonment is more important than standing up for a principle of fairness and justice, in this case having been robbed of vital knowledge and thus agency to make decisions. Partner A is *not* responsible for the actions of Partner B pre-discovery but *is* responsible for failing to make Partner B accountable by action, not words, not emotions.



Secure-functioning relationships must be “pay-to-play” because the purpose of the union is based on terms and conditions that serve and suit both participants. This is not a one-and-done concept. It’s a fluid process of checks and balances based on previous agreements and permissions that allows for governance. “You break it, you fix it” must therefore be applied here or there is no real parity.

Because Partner A refuses to employ principle over loss avoidance, both partners lose. Partner A loses power and authority, personal agency, self-esteem, and a relationship that might otherwise learn and grow from this event. Partner B loses a partner who can and will stand up to them and is left with someone who now gives them tacit permission to act out further.

That Partner B is unrepentant and even

unfazed by losing the relationship should not matter to Partner A (although who wouldn’t feel devastated, heartbroken, and defeated?). This is where the “I can’t quit you” biological mandate of the attachment bond gets in the way of doing the right thing when it’s the hardest thing to do. Principles and purpose over feelings and emotions is what gives rise to good things, good behavior, good teamwork, and long-standing unions. Both partners must be ready and willing to “throw down” when necessary to enforce what “we both said we wanted” and take a stand for the union!

This, of course, is much easier said than done. Secure functioning requires a strong *reality ego* to maintain a real self — autonomous, self-activated, and character-driven decision-making (J. Masterson & Costello, 2014).

Studies show that the reality ego, the more



cognitive executive function that tends to the right thing over the easy or the least energy expending is the dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex (Sapolsky, 2017; Schore, 2017). In contrast, the ventral medial prefrontal cortex is more susceptible to influence by the limbic and reward circuit.

In PACT couple therapy, the therapist uses techniques and interventions meant to scaffold partners' reality ego while supportively confronting maladaptive defensive behaviors that lead to acting out and non-collaborative speech and behavior.

The "I can't quit you" attachment biology prevents partners from doing the right thing when it is the hardest to do. The confusion between love, devotion, and commitment and the attachment mandate is extraordinarily common and is one of the biggest factors in bad de-

cision-making and poor enforcement of shared principles.

Secure functioning entails a good modicum of differentiation, individuation, reality executive function, and a true appreciation of and attraction to interdependency as outlined in this article.

Summing-up

Secure functioning is a simple idea that has been around since the beginning of civilization. That it is simple does not mean that it is easy. It is not. Then again, nothing worthwhile is usually easy. We are lazy creatures who, by nature, will do the least necessary to get by, especially when it comes to romantic relationships. It would be nice if we were all blessed with a consistent prosocial character where we wouldn't be swayed by opportunism, selfish-



ness, moodiness, shiny objects, secrecy, addictions, compulsions, deception, aggression, and other passions that can appear threatening to others. Fact remains that we are perfectly imperfect and must rely on higher level principles and ideals in order to rise above our basic nature.

The “I can’t quit you” biological mandate of attachment, along with our preloaded mythologies about love, love relationships, our allergies to dependency and fears and misunderstanding of interdependency, prevent us from viewing romantic relationships soberly and properly. Adult romantic unions are best viewed from a position and attitude similar to forming all other unions and alliances. These coalitions are based on a clear shared purpose or set of purposes. Shared vision is equally vital for getting and keeping people on board. Shared principles of governance assures that all will abide by prosocial rules of fairness, justice, and mutual sensitivity. Equal power, authority, and parity as shareholders helps people work collaboratively and cooperatively as they have the same things to gain and the same things to lose.

Pre-agreed upon guardrails for limiting and pushing each other, with full permission to do so, helps facilitate future enforcement to adhere to the right thing to do when it will be the hardest to do.

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