

3

Balance and Paradox

The fertile conditions for maintaining passion require that you and your partner satisfy two core human needs for each other. These needs are part of a profound human paradox. We all want to belong, to be connected, to be nurtured, and to be held in high regard in the mind of our partner. We want to be attached. On the other hand, we also want our privacy, to stand on our own two feet, to make our own choices, to be our own person, and to be autonomous and independent. *Attached versus independent:* they're opposites! We have opposing needs. In fact, we have a number of opposing needs. We want to relax, but we also want excitement. We want to cooperate with others, but we also want to compete. We want to build for the future, yet we want to be able to enjoy the moment. We carry all of these paradoxes together within our natural genetic endowment. All of these needs are important, but when it comes to maintaining passion in a relationship, none are as important as attachment and autonomy. If you learn only one thing from this book it should be this: your relationship requires a balancing act between the two opposing needs of attachment and autonomy, not mere "closeness." In fact, enmeshing attachment without a counter-balancing sense of autonomy is a sure-fire way to kill your attraction to your partner.

**Your relationship requires a balancing act
between the two opposing needs of attachment
and autonomy, not mere "closeness."**

If you want to maintain a strong relationship, you must service the needs for both attachment and autonomy without ignoring either one. This may seem counterintuitive, but think of it this way: How long can you feel attracted to someone whom you don't respect? And how long can you respect someone who is too afraid of your disapproval to speak his own mind? Or how long can you feel attracted to someone whose disapproval you fear so much that you always cave to his desires and let his preferences eclipse your will? If you do the latter, then you're well on the way to joining the legions of numbed out depersonalized zombies whose frequent refrain is "I don't know who I am anymore." The sad fact is that total self-sacrifice kills relationships just as effectively as narcissistic selfishness. The trick is to maintain balance and that's not easy.

The Myth of a Homogenous Self

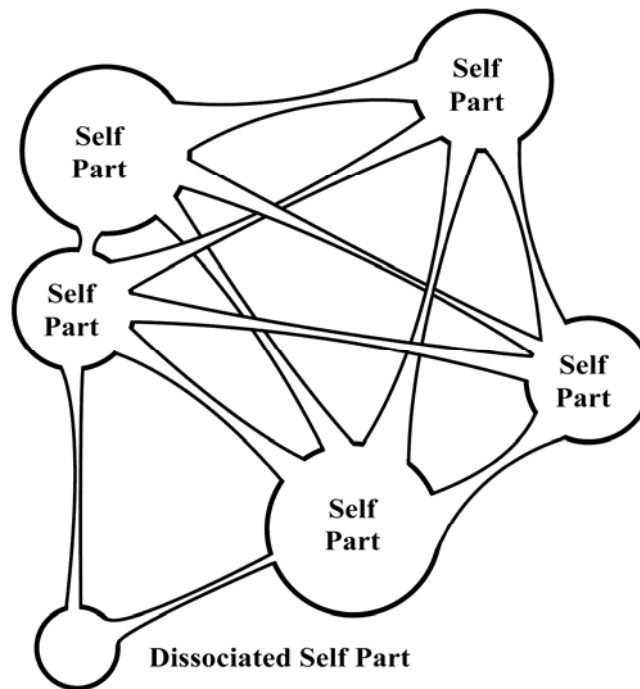
It will be a very useful aid for balancing your relationship if you can adopt a radically new and different view of yourself than what most people perceive. Paradigm shifts are not uncommon in science. For example, the paradigm shifts from Newton to Einstein to quantum views of the universe were all counterintuitive radical changes. Neuroscience has similarly shifted our understanding about what constitutes the "self." The conventional view is that the self is like an onion. But in reality, it's more like a potato.

The conventional view is that the self is like an onion.

But in reality, it's more like a potato.

Potatoes are tubers that are connected but also somewhat separated in their structure. They are interconnected by their root structure under ground. In a similar way, our brains have neurological clusters of memories, emotions, and attitudes bundled into different self parts. At any given time, one self-part is usually more dominant than the others. These parts will communicate with each other most of the time but not always. We can see this most clearly when our memories don't transfer from one part to another. However, it's not just memory that may not make the jump between parts. Neurohormonal

resources also may not make the jump. I sometimes ask my clients, “How sexy do you feel three minutes after completing your annual taxes?” Some things may not work for quite a while after.



A simplified model of personality self parts

I have a personal story that illustrates how separated self parts can disrupt memory transfer. However, I need to risk disclosing a painful episode in my own history so that you can understand the story’s context. When I was twenty one years old, I made the mistake of marrying a girl when my own identity and maturity had not yet consolidated. What followed was eight years of a tumultuous relationship. We loved each other, but that still didn’t prevent her from violating our marital boundaries in some very serious ways. I finally reached the point where I decided to end the relationship rather than risk having children with a woman whom I doubted could ever become trustworthy. Out of courtesy, let’s refer to her using the alias name “Janie .”

Twelve years after our divorce I paid a visit to my parents at their lake house where I had spent much time while starting my relationship with my first wife. My brother was also visiting so our complete original family was gathered together, much like the old days. It was a rare event. After standing in the main living room and talking with them for several minutes, I noticed that my parents were grinning and my brother was laughing. “What’s going on? What’s so funny?” I asked. My brother

then explained: “Do you realize that for the past five minutes you’ve been referring to Janie as if she’s your wife? You’ve mentioned her three or four times.” I was stunned. I had been divorced from Janie for twelve years. I’d been happily married to Helen for the previous eight years. This wasn’t a case of early Alzheimer’s. It was a case of one of my younger self parts being evoked by all the contextual cues around me at the time: the old lake house associated with my younger self and all the old family members similarly associated. I unconsciously responded to all these old cues by reactivating an implicit memory set that was consistent. “Janie” was the name of my primary attachment in that memory set and I was in a younger self part.

For years now, my clinical practice has routinely involved accessing people’s different self parts by using hypnosis and trance. I’ve learned that having differing self parts is the norm and not the exception. What really varies is the degree of separation between parts. This is called dissociation. We all have these separations to some degree. When one self part is dominant, certain reflexes will work. If another self part is dominant, they won’t. You can see this most visibly with sexual arousal. If either of you are in work mode, forget it! If you’re both in play mode, then you will probably have more luck. When you’re really smart about managing your self parts, you can begin to predict under what circumstances the most appropriate self part will be more easily available to you. This can be *very* beneficial to the intimate side of your relationship.

Experience-Focused Versus Goal-Focused States

Understanding your different self parts can help you to manage them more intelligently. If you’re oblivious to the fact that you have different parts, then you won’t see certain dangers. Many marriages are lost this way. The most common example is when a couple trades all of their romantic privacy for round-the-clock parenting. In the parenting role, affection usually won’t build. It tends to wither. Couples who intelligently manage their mental states make sure that they routinely share private time away from their children. Similarly, smart couples will schedule work and play so that the two opposing states are safely compartmentalized from each other.

British psychologist Michael Apter has studied and researched opposing states for over forty years. He summarizes several dimensions of Reversal Theory in his book *Motivational Styles in Everyday Life*. His Reversal Theory has stimulated the publication of over 800 papers and accounts for extensive research in over fifty universities. Its core premise is that we humans aren’t comprised of static

traits because we often reverse or switch states of mind. The theory proposes that four motivational dimensions account for most state reversals in our everyday life. We'll only concern ourselves with one dimension because it has the most profound effect on marital satisfaction. It pertains to reversals between "telic" and "paratelic" states.

Apter explains that we're in a telic state when we're focused on achieving some goal. This is how we are when we're thinking about a responsibility. We're trying to get from here to there. Being in the moment isn't as important as maintaining order while we try to reach the desired goal. In a telic state, the more we're aroused, the more we'll feel stressed. It's my own belief that the stress occurs because there's a heavy lacing of fear while we're trying to avoid disorder. It evokes what neuroscientists refer to as the "fight/flight" system. So when we talk about work or try to achieve some goal, fear is usually in the background. We covertly fear that we'll make a mistake and fail to reach our goal. Most of us don't recognize this as fear, but think of it as healthy caution. However, caution involves a subtle fear.

An experience-focused paratelic state is quite different. Instead of trying to accomplish some goal, we're focused on savoring experience. It's the taste of the food. It's the feelings that we have during lusty sex. It's the wonder of exploration and learning. It's the aesthetic appreciation we feel when we view a beautiful painting. Our arousal feels positive when we're in this state. We experience it as joy and excitement.

You can greatly improve your relationship if you become savvy about these different goal-focused and experience-focused states. The following lists should help but there's a caveat I first need to give you. Telic and paratelic states are mental and not behavioral. You can ride your bicycle to work merely to get there, or you can ride your bicycle so you can enjoy the scenery and the sensations. The former involves a goal-focused telic state. The latter is paratelic. In a similar vein, you can experience sex as a paratelic, joy or you can put up with it as a telic chore. You might even reverse states in the middle of an activity. It's all a matter of how your attention is focused. So when you review the following lists, be aware that they describe behaviors in which the average person will be in a particular state most of the time. Here are the lists.

Goal-focused (Telic) State

Supervising a child to look out for its safety

Balancing a checkbook

Cleaning the house

Mowing the lawn

Folding laundry
Going to the doctor for a physical
Negotiating with a spouse about buying a new car
Replacing a light bulb
Cooking dinner
Driving to work
Shopping for groceries
Voting for your favorite candidate
Bringing the car in for inspection
Having sex with one's husband in order to pacify him

“Having sex with one's husband to pacify him?” What's kind of item is that? Well, truth be told it involves a goal-focused state. Notice that there's a subtle fear involved. The focus is on achieving the goal of safety instead of enjoying the experience. We'll discuss this kind of perversion later in our chapter about sex. Now, let's review a list of activities that usually involve more focus on experience.

Experience-Focused (Paratelic) State

Having lusty sex with a partner and enjoying both the emotional closeness and the sensations
Exploring a new museum with a sense of wonder
Dancing with your child to a lively tune
Riding the Ferris wheel at the state fair
Enjoying the taste of a candy apple
Bathing among the breaking waves at the beach
Enjoying a back rub from your partner
Reading a good novel or magazine
Listening to a concert
Enjoying the company and story telling of some good friends
Browsing in some gift shops just to explore
Taking a vacation cruise
Embracing a partner and feeling close
Listening with curiosity to a partner tell about her day

It's important to maintain a balance over time between goal-focused and experience-focused states. If we only indulge in the pleasures of experience-focused states, then we'll be undisciplined and un-toughened for life's challenges. This kind of damage is similar to when a young man lives in his original home and is over-nurtured by his mother through his twenties. She takes care of his every need. Such coddling can leave a man woefully dependent upon females and unprepared to face life's challenges. It's also like someone lying in bed for six months after an operation instead of following the doctor's orders for exercise and physical therapy. The absence of any challenge will stunt a person and make him weak.

While it's damaging to continually stay in an experience-focused paratelic state, it's also destructive to remain in a telic goal-focused state. Unfortunately, the latter occurs frequently in our present culture. People often work two jobs, lug their laptops home, stay plugged into work when they're at home, think about work, talk about work or, in a similar manner, talk all the time about their children. Like work, parenting most often involves a goal-focused responsibility state. When we're parenting, we're usually focused on safety and the welfare of our children. We're thinking about how to responsibly raise them and very often we're not as free as we'd like to be. If you have children, just think about how nonsexual you feel when you're supervising them. The reason is because parenting most often involves a responsibility-focused telic state.

The propensity to remain in a telic state doesn't just come from the outside. It can also come from our own internal mandate. Some of us may carry so much unconscious inhibition that we can feel that it's wrong to relax. We may feel that without hard toil we're undeserving and "not enough." It's as if we're wasting time when we're not working. Our unconscious might constantly search for things to be done, while relaxation, fun, exploration, and all the unnecessary stuff is put off for when there's time left over. But somehow there's never enough time left over because the unconscious is always slating us up with more commitments. This is how many of us hide from the shame of enjoyment. That sounds strange doesn't it? "The shame of enjoyment." It's a very real phenomenon. It often results from the person's disturbed relationship with his or her parents during childhood. These first relationships have a profound effect on how well a person can relax and play in later adult life. It also affects their adult relationships with his spouse and children. Inhibiting shame can become trans-generational when it's transmitted to children and even through children to grandchildren.

**The shame of enjoyment
is a very real phenomenon.**

The balance between goal-focused and experience-focused states is critical because affection is grown mostly while we're in an experience-focused state. We usually don't feel very close when we share responsibilities. This conclusion doesn't come from Apter's research, but from my own work with thousands of couples. Although this rule of thumb is practical because it's generally true, there are a few exceptions. When shared responsibilities hold a tremendous personal value for a person, that person may grow affection despite being in a telic state. For example, soldiers in wartime will develop strong affectionate bonds with each other while trying to protect each other's lives. Sensitive partners may grow affection if they perceive that their spouse's help with chores is a love-motivated sacrifice. Patients who fight a serious illness may develop strong affection for their doctors. However, these exceptions aren't usually present in everyday marital life. We usually don't perceive that sharing responsibilities will save us from imminent death. Responsibilities and chores are usually ineffective symbols for communicating love. Therefore, it's best that we keep the rule simple. Affection can build in a paratelic experience-focused state but usually not in a goal-focused state.

**The balance between goal-focused and experience-focused
states is critical because affection is created
mostly while we're in an experience-focused state.**

One of the questions I like to ask couples is "How many minutes do you spend alone together each week, not solving any problem but just talking for the fun of it?" I then ask, "How many minutes each week do you spend exploring something new or doing something fun away from the kids?" Most often the husband and wife will give each other a bewildered look until one of them will turn and blurt out the answer with some exasperation. Their answer is usually somewhere between zero and twenty minutes per week. Of course my practice has a self-selecting population with relationship problems. The general population may fare somewhat, but perhaps not much, better.

My wife Helen and I had a relevant experience when we adopted our daughter. At the time, I was working hard to establish a new practice, while Helen was doing her best to mother a difficult, screaming infant. After several months of this ordeal, our bickering and fights had increased to toxic levels. Helen, brilliant lady that she is, was the first to take corrective action. One day she confronted me so directly that it felt as if she were grasping my lapels in her hands. It went something like this:

“All we do is work, work, work. All I am is a nanny and a diaper changer. You’re head is always at work even when you’re with me. We’re just like two ships passing each other in the night. This isn’t what I signed up for. When was the last time we really connected? When have we had time for just the two of us? What are we going to do about this?”

I had to agree with her. The balance between our work and play selves had gone “out of whack.” We discussed how we would deal with the problem methodically. We finally decided to create a routine that would guarantee that we’d spare time for each other. Every Thursday evening we would have a babysitter arrive at 6:00 PM. We would leave and have dinner at a cozy local restaurant. After dinner, we had several hours with no other agenda than to reconnect by talking and listening to each other. We brought various self-help books solely for the exercises that we used to help jump-start the process. We eventually found we didn’t need them. We learned to avoid talking about any responsibilities or problems. We trained ourselves to jointly slip into an experience-focused state by sharing curiosity. Then a funny thing happened. The fighting and bickering stopped almost completely. Things started going really well between us.

In certain fields of research this is called a “time series” study. You plot a symptom for a while to get its pre-treatment level. Then you introduce a treatment intervention to see if the symptom level changes over time. Ours did! In fact, it did several times because we got complacent after a while. When the babysitter moved out of town, we let our routine slip. Things were going so well we didn’t make an effort to replace the babysitter. We let things slide. The result should be obvious. Our fights and bickering went back up. We eventually went through three cycles of this fiasco before I finally woke up. I figured that if I can change the oil in my car every 3,000 miles to avoid engine burnout then I can also make sure my marriage has regular connection time. Over the years, this awareness has served us well. It’s also served others well because there have been many couples who have replicated our experience. These couples have been able to dramatically increase their mutual affection by regularly scheduling experience-focused time together. These same couples have usually experienced a reduction in their destructive fighting.

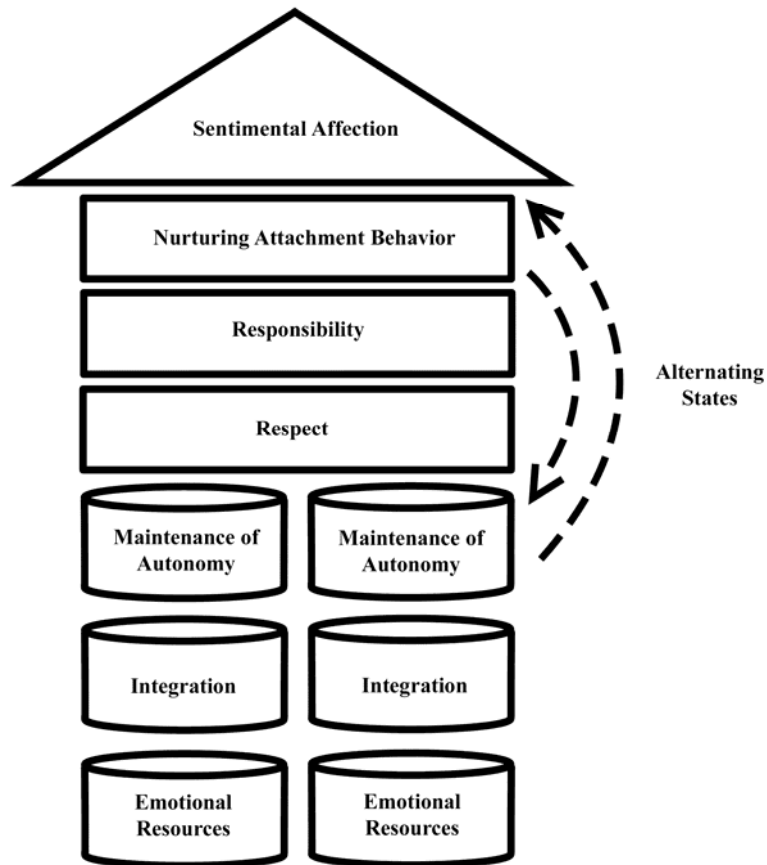
John Gottman is a therapist and prolific author who has conducted extensive research on the behavioral dynamics in couples. One behavioral dimension has to do with “repair techniques.” A repair technique is when one partner uses good tact to help the other partner emotionally recover from feeling hurt during a conflict. Gottman found that some small gesture of good will can often prevent a small conflict from sinking into a toxic fight. However, he also found that even excellent repair techniques don’t work very well if the quality of the friendship is poor. Good tact alone isn’t enough. It needs to be accompanied by a recent history of emotional connection in the relationship. Gottman’s conclusion is consistent with what I’ve observed. The frequency of toxic fighting will often go up when goal-focused and experience-focused states are so out of balance that there’s no emotional connection. I interpret this as built up shame in each partner’s unconscious: “I’m not feeling loved or important in my marriage. It must be my partner’s fault!” When couples share experience-focused paratelic states with each other, they enable the strengthening of their friendship. Consistent with Gottman’s findings, this improved bond makes couples more resilient to little triggers and annoyances. Repair techniques can then nip potential fights in the bud before they gain momentum.

Attachment and Autonomy

Maintaining balance is dynamic. An acrobat on a high-wire is constantly moving, making small counter-balancing adjustments to maintain his center of gravity. If he were to freeze in a stationary position, he would fall. This is why I prefer the verbal “balancing” instead of the noun “balance.” Balancing a relationship isn’t static. Not everything has to be 50-50 at any given point in time. We need both air and water to survive, but we satisfy each of these needs at different times. Our needs for autonomy and attachment are similarly satisfied at different times. We alternate between these two states in a vital relationship. Sometimes we enjoy closeness. At other times we enjoy privacy. Sometimes we enjoy sacrificing in order to nurture our partner. At other times, we need to confront our partner about an issue in order to protect ourselves. Sometimes we want our partner to lead us. At other times we want to take the lead ourselves. Back and forth, back and forth. A good relationship keeps moving in a kind of resonance where both partners do a coordinated dance. And when this dance results in our attachment and autonomy needs both being satisfied over time, then passion will flourish. When our fear of shame interferes with this dance, our passion then becomes comatose.

**A good relationship keeps moving in a
kind of resonance where both
partners do a coordinated dance.**

So what exactly are these two essential determinants of passion? What is the true nature of attachment and what exactly does autonomy mean? Each of these topics is worthy of a book in its own right. In fact, many books have already been written about attachment. Since the mid 1980s, researchers and authors have written extensive treatises about it. Attachment is a need that starts shortly after birth and initially involves the child observing their caregiver's nonverbal behaviors to determine whether its caregiver is emotionally attuned. The child learns to search out their caregiver's eyes, facial muscles, and tone of voice for signs of attention and emotion. When the child observes positive attention and the caregiver's contingent response to the child's own behavior, then attunement has occurred. This attuning process initially involves the right hemisphere of the child's brain, even before the child organizes language centers in the left hemisphere. As the parent and child go through repetitive cycles of attachment, attachment break, and then attachment repair, an important process takes place in which the child is trained for emotional stability. Through this cyclical process the mind of the parent actually helps organize the child's prefrontal cortex. This is how we learn to regulate shame and other emotions.



Alternating attachment and autonomy

Touch also serves an extremely important role in developing attachment. In fact, it's so crucial that a newborn infant will usually die without it. In the beginning of the 1900s many institutions were giving orphaned infants good food and medical care. However, it was not known that human touch was essential for infant survival. In the research performed at that time, about 85% of those orphaned infants who were not being touched died in their first year of life. That's right. We can die if we're not touched during infancy and now we know why. Without human touch in early infancy, our stress system secretes cortisol which in turn switches off the immune system. Opportunistic infections can then settle in. In addition, human touch mediates the activation of genes that produce ornithine decarboxylase which in turn mediates protein production. Without human touch stimulating ornithine decarboxylase release, infants are much more likely to experience failure to thrive. The important truth to be drawn here is that attachment is a critical psychobiological need and not merely a lifestyle luxury.

In adulthood, we still desire touch, the loving tone of voice, and the facial displays that indicate positive attunement and approval. Our attachment mechanisms and our attachment needs still endure. However, as adults we have elaborated our identities beyond our physical beings to include many facets of mind. Our memories, fantasies, experiences, and especially our desires and our loves become the essence of what we want our partner to notice. So instead of looking for attunement to just our physical presence, we even more strongly crave attunement to our minds. When we observe our partner's facial expression light up with the discovery of what we value and when we notice their curious excitement when they seek to know more about how we feel, then our adult attachment needs are being satisfied. When this experience happens repetitively, then it conditions into us a feeling of affection that we call love. This is the essence of healthy adult attachment: the pursuit and appreciation of mind, mirrored back mostly by nonverbal displays of positive emotion. It is essential if you're going to keep passion alive in your relationship. We're simplifying some things in this explanation. It's true that there are other forms of attachment besides the healthy adult variant. However, since we're shooting for health, we'll save our discussion of destructive attachments for later.

**This is the essence of healthy adult attachment:
the pursuit of mind mirrored back mostly
by nonverbal displays of positive emotion.**

Autonomy is the other essential ingredient for preserving passion. It is a concept that is less commonly defined than attachment. Earlier in our discussion, we said autonomy involves the three operations of hedonic expression, confronting broken agreements, and confronting boundary intrusions. However, we'll also give it a more general definition so that it can be a handy construct in your relationship work. First, let's dispel a common but potentially misleading definition of autonomy. It's not proving to yourself that you can't be controlled by your partner. People who seek to prove their autonomy are operating at an adolescent level and may in fact wind up negatively enmeshing with their partner. When we say a person is enmeshed, we mean that he's overly focused on his partner's desires and emotions. So if Peter focuses on proving that he's not ruled by Jane's insistence that he shouldn't meet his friends at the pub, he would still be controlled by her opinion, but in the opposite direction. If Peter were to defocus off of Jane's mind and instead let his actions be guided by a matrix of

considerations including self-maintenance, needs in his partner, prior commitments, and other ethical considerations, then his decision making would be truly autonomous. So our operational definition of autonomy is this: we are autonomous when we are motivated by our own self-generated frame of meaning. By “self-generated” I’m referring to positive desires, values, and principles that we’ve chosen for our own. When we’re solely motivated to satisfy the expectations we think are held in other people’s minds and we don’t consider our own perspective, autonomy is lost. So, in essence, autonomy is really something that is determined by what happens inside us. It can’t be determined by merely looking at our external behavior. It’s the emotional stability that we generate within ourselves based on what we love and find valuable in our lives.

When we talk about the balance between autonomy and attachment, we’re really talking about how we flow back and forth between these two states. It’s not a static proposition of merely dividing the distance between the two. At one time we allow ourselves to be nurtured and to enjoy feeling important in the other person’s mind as we perceive it. We like the feeling we get of being important to our partner and, in that sense, we’re momentarily like a baby being cradled in the mesh of our partner’s frame of meaning. But if we stay there permanently, something damaging begins to happen. If all we do is allow ourselves to be loved, we’ll eventually lose a sense of who we are independent of our partner... and that’s going to start to feel very painful. So, maintaining balance means that we sometimes push off of our partner’s mind, hang onto our own frame of meaning, and make choices for ourselves. For example, suppose tonight our partner wants to eat Italian but we want our turn and instead press for Thai. They want to take a vacation at the shore, but we may press our point that we’ve conceded to go to the shore for the past two summers. We now want our turn in the mountains. These are the risks that we take in stating our preference. They’re vitally important to maintaining the balance between feelings connected to our partner versus feeling connected to our self. And that’s the balancing we really need to do. Connection to other *versus* connection to self is primarily a question about whom we are attaching to in the moment.

We’ll lose our own emotional integrity if we don’t exercise our choice-making and tend to our needs.

It's critical to service autonomy in a relationship. If we don't, then the very foundation of our relationship begins to crack. We'll lose our own emotional integrity if we don't exercise our choice-making and tend to our needs. As implied by our house metaphor (See Figure 3), affection will suffer if the foundation of personal integrity isn't maintained. Exercising autonomy is one major way that we maintain our personal integrity foundation. Self-sacrificing to placate a partner is paradoxically one way we can kill a relationship. It's like acid on the beams of a house. It won't cave immediately but the long-term effects are predictable.

**Self-sacrificing to placate a partner is paradoxically
one way we can kill a relationship.**

I remember one couple where the husband's self-sacrificing behavior was most visibly killing their relationship. Rodney and Paula were a couple in their late thirties with sexual difficulties. Rodney had lost all attraction despite professing that he still loved and cared about Paula. Paula had been struggling with a depression that had episodically reoccurred throughout her life. She had come from a dysfunctional family background and had an older brother who had sexually assaulted her repeatedly during childhood. Paula responded well to a combination of anti-depressant medication as well as EMDR psychotherapy. However, Rodney didn't correspondingly regain sexual interest despite Paula's improved mood. There was another more subtle dynamic at play. One clue to its nature was Rodney's guilt. He was exquisitely sensitive to Paula's every need. While she was depressed and inactive, Rodney wouldn't consider doing anything without her. He would tell me that he'd feel too guilty leaving her at home. Initially, his rationale was that he didn't want to exacerbate her depression. However, as Paula's depression improved, Rodney still showed a reluctance to pursue separate interests. He still complained that he would just feel too guilty if he did so. I strongly suspected that Rodney had lost so much autonomy that his emotional integrity was compromised. He and Paula were intelligent people so I was able to explain to them the suspected dynamic of enmeshment. I also outlined how we would go on a campaign for Rodney and Paula to exercise autonomous pursuit of interests. Paula was even able to advocate for Rodney to leave her at times in place of the hovering behavior to which they both had become accustomed. The couple's emotions didn't immediately change but did gradually shift over several months. With this shift, Rodney reported that he felt much less guilt. At the same time, Rodney's sexual interest resurrected. They both started jumping each other's bones with relish. So here's a case of

a phenomenon that's rarely discussed: that sexual interest can be squashed by too much of the wrong kind of "closeness." When partners enmesh by taking too much responsibility for each other's feelings, the loss of autonomy will often suppress their sex life. It's a frequent phenomenon.

You can starve a relationship by not feeding it enough attachment.
You can also smother a relationship with too much guilt-riddled responsibility.

Imbalance in a relationship can take place in either direction. You can starve a relationship by not feeding it enough attachment. You can also smother a relationship with too much guilt-riddled responsibility. It's like over-feeding or under-feeding. Either can kill. The enlightened view is more heterocentric. Your responsibility needs to be that you keep a balance in ALL the parts of a relationship. This includes servicing both attachment and autonomy. You make sure that you and your partner have enough free paratelic time together to enjoy a sense of connection. You must also make sure that you service your autonomy—your need to be a separate human being. Your respect for your partner allows him to do the same despite your differences. Your responsibility in keeping commitments builds a sense of safety and trust. All of these "moving parts" need to be functional to provide the fertile conditions for affection to grow.

Assessing Your Own Balance

Here's a little quiz to help you evaluate the balance of your own lifestyle. Answer T (True), F (False), or NR (Not Relevant) to each of the following.

Part I -

1. ____ I usually know the times in my day in which I look forward to relaxing and “letting down.”
2. ____ I usually know when my partner and I’ll have our next “get-away” for just the two of us.
3. ____ My partner and I frequently schedule times dedicated to just “tuning in” to each other.
4. ____ I occasionally enjoy a lazy afternoon reading a good book or doing something else just for fun.
5. ____ We do everything together as a family, children included.
6. ____ I can’t ever take time for myself because there’s always too much to do.
7. ____ I sometimes come up with ideas of things to do that my partner and I can explore for fun.
8. ____ My partner and I usually look forward to talking during meal time.
9. ____ My partner and I make an effort to usually share some talk or touch at bedtime.
10. ____ I feel silly or guilty if I’m not doing something productive.

Part II -

11. ____ I usually treat other people’s needs as being more important than my own.
12. ____ I usually give in rather than see my partner disappointed.
13. ____ I feel guilty if I tell my partner what I really want.
14. ____ I sometimes tell small lies to avoid my partner’s disapproval.
15. ____ I’m a good negotiator for what I want, but I try to be fair.
16. ____ I can usually confront my partner in the moment when I think he’s doing something unfair.
17. ____ I usually freeze up in conflict and can’t think very well.
18. ____ I usually wait for my partner to tell me what he/she wants without expressing my own ideas.
19. ____ I prefer to deal with problems when they arise. I don’t hold my resentments for later.
20. ____ I avoid conflict at all costs. I harbor resentments and sometimes blow at a later time.

Now let’s revisit each of the items from the first part of the quiz along with a brief explanation about what each item actually reveals. This first part may reveal if you have a free paratelic state deficiency (i.e., living your life predominantly in a constant telic state).

1. **I usually know the times in my day in which I look forward to relaxing and “letting down.”** If you carry no shame about giving yourself pleasure, then you will integrate it into your day. You will have routine times when you know you will enjoy that quiet moment to relax and enjoy a cup of coffee while you read the paper or listen to a song on the radio. You will have a few of these sprinkled throughout each day like little oases in the desert where you can refresh. If you answered “False” here, take a look at your inhibition about giving yourself pleasure.
2. **I usually know when my partner and I’ll have our next “get-away” for just the two of us.** This item is similar to #1 except on a different time scale. If you answered “False” to this item then you’re not being very proactive in giving yourselves free time together. You’re also missing out on a great method to help you both feel emotionally closer. Shared anticipation is a powerful way to feel connected, even before you have your “get-away.”
3. **My partner and I frequently schedule times dedicated to just “tuning in” to each other.** If you answered “True” to this item, then you’re probably feeding the relationship great attachment through emotional intimacy. If you are not really “tuning in” to each other and you interpreted this expression as watching TV or a movie together, then you’re missing the boat.
4. **I occasionally enjoy a lazy afternoon reading a good book or doing something else just for fun.** If you answered “True,” then you’re probably fairly uninhibited about giving yourself free paratelic time. However, you also want to arrange leisure time to share with your partner.
5. **We do everything together as a family, children included.** This is a classic mistake. Almost all of your parenting time puts you in a telic state because you’re responsible for setting limits, scanning for safety, etc. If you answered “True” to this item, you will be one of the majority with children who lose satisfaction with their marriage. You and your partner need some free time to be alone with each other.
6. **I can’t ever take time for myself because there’s always too much to do.** If you answered “True” then you may be fooling yourself into thinking that the problem is all situational. All of us sometimes feel overwhelmed with responsibilities. But if you have a long history of near constant crises,

consider the possibility that you may unconsciously seek them out. You might be unconsciously avoiding the anxiety you would otherwise feel in a free paratelic state.

7. **I sometimes come up with ideas of things to do that my partner and I can explore for fun.** Great stuff! This is high-level functioning if you answered “True.”
8. **My partner and I usually look forward to talking during meal time.** Meal time is a paratelic ritual for many people. If you’re looking forward to it, then you’re doing a good job of keeping it free and enjoyable.
9. **My partner and I usually make an effort to share some talk or touch at bedtime.** Here’s another routine paratelic moment that’s great for building affection. Even if you’re tired and brain-dead from a stressful day, low intensity stroking or massage can go a long way.
10. **I feel silly or guilty if I’m not doing something productive.** If you answered “True” to this, then you’re probably inhibited about giving yourself paratelic experiences. This unconscious shame will block you from creating shared free time with your partner.

Now let’s revisit each of the items from the second part of the quiz along with a brief explanation about what each item reveals. This second part reveals the ease with which you express your autonomy.

11. **I usually treat other people’s needs as being more important than my own.** A “True” answer here indicates that you will probably be self-sacrificing in your relationships. This can result in the gradual build up of shame and/or depersonalization. You ideally want to feel as lovable and as deserving as anyone else.
12. **I usually give in rather than see my partner disappointed.** If your needs are as important as everyone else’s and if you’re doing your job in protecting your autonomy then you will be a good negotiator. This means you will ask your partner to yield to your wishes about half the time when you’re negotiating. Disappointment in your partner shouldn’t be your only criterion. If it is, then you will sacrifice yourself and the relationship will eventually suffer. Answering “True” to this item suggests you may gradually build up resentment or shame.

- 13. I usually feel guilty if I tell my partner what I really want.** Answering “True” to this question indicates that you probably have core shame that’s inhibiting you from expressing your desires. It can also pull down your self-esteem to the point that it will be hard for you to get close to your partner.
- 14. I sometimes tell small lies to avoid my partner’s disapproval.** If you answered “True”, this is an indicator of an extremely serious problem. It means you don’t think you have the internal resources to defend yourself against your partner’s disapproval. If you’re not a psychopath and you don’t think that lying is OK, then you’re engaging in a compulsive behavior. Compulsive behaviors generate shame and will make you fearful of getting close. Your deceit is also ruining the foundation of trust in your relationship.
- 15. I’m a good negotiator for what I want, but I try to be fair.** Good for you if you answered “True.” This is the heterocentric perspective that involves considering both of you at the same time.
- 16. I can usually confront my partner in the moment when I think he’s doing something unfair.** The key phrase here is “in the moment.” Many people are too afraid to speak up in the moment and stew about it instead. They may confront their partner later when it’s 90 % forgotten. When you have good autonomy skills, you’re able to efficiently deal with problems in real-time.
- 17. I usually freeze up in conflict and can’t think very well.** A “True” to this one usually indicates that your autonomy is momentarily lapsing. There’s a neurological basis for this parasympathetic shut-down which we will discuss later.
- 18. I usually wait for my partner to tell me what he/she wants without expressing my own desires.** A “True” here is deadly to your relationship. If you let your partner’s will completely eclipse your own then you’re on your way to “losing yourself” in the relationship. When this happens, you lose attraction to your partner and you start feeling that “you don’t know who you are anymore.” It’s no fun being a footnote to someone else’s life.
- 19. I prefer to deal with problems when they arise. I don’t hold my resentments for later.** You earn a gold star if you said “True” to this one. (See #16.)

20. I avoid conflict at all costs. I harbor resentments and sometimes blow at a later time. If you avoid conflict at all costs, then it may cost you your relationship. There's a common pattern that occurs for people with poorly integrated anger: hold back, hold back, hold back, hold back, **BLOW!** Afterwards, you feel terribly ashamed about your blow out. The natural consequence is that you accumulate even more shame about your un-integrated anger. Healthy conflict is a good rebalancing tool in a relationship. If you don't use it, you will use less beneficial defenses like self-sacrifice and avoidance.

Now that you've evaluated your own degree of balance, it's a good idea to get your partner to take the same quiz. It'll be interesting to compare answers and discuss their implications. However, it's best to hold off from planning any interventions until you've read the rest of this book.

**Where we place our focus determines
the direction in which we're going to grow.**

A final point is relevant to our discussion about balancing states. That fact is that we grow our "selves" by what we do every moment we're alive. Where we place our focus determines the direction in which we're going to grow. If we maintain an existential diet that's loaded only with the work or responsible telic state, then we're going to be focused primarily on maintaining order, and we're going to increasingly discount the importance of other kinds of fun experiences. I've seen clients who have focused for decades on achievement and who have let the more sensitive, emotional sides of their personality atrophy. These clients are less capable of a healthy intimate relationship now than they were when they were more balanced earlier in their lives. The issue of attaining and maintaining balance doesn't just pertain to our current relationship. It's also relevant to how we develop as a person. If we want to limit our growth, then all we need to do is keep focusing and striving in one quadrant of our emotional experience. We'll consequently be sure to develop limitations in our other dimensions. Conversely, if we keep challenging ourselves to welcome experiences in different states that require different mindsets, then we'll grow our capacities in complex and ultimately more adaptive ways.