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The Structure of Vital Relationships

Maintaining a passionate, committed relationship is an extremely difficult challenge that most of us underestimate. If you look at it realistically, you should really appreciate two things. First, you should realize that you're really trying to do something that isn't "normal." Although this statement sounds strange, consider that nearly one out of two marriages today will end in divorce. This means that nearly half of us either getting divorced or are on the edge of a divorce, hiding our quiet frustration and discomfort from view. That's normal. What you should strive for is to have a better than normal relationship — a truly extraordinary relationship. If you merely want a normal relationship, why are you setting your sights so low? Try to appreciate that what you really want to have is a superior relationship that will demand extraordinary skill to accomplish.

The second thing you should realize is that you're expecting more emotional perks than previous generations have expected. For most of history, marriages have been more survival oriented. Even through the eighteenth century, emotional fulfillment in a marriage was not paramount. If none of your children died and you got your crops in before winter, that was considered a pretty good year! You focused on helping each other survive. You went to church, feared God, and expected the big pay off after you died. You didn't have the luxury of worrying about spiritual fulfillment from your marriage. This latter expectation is a recent historical development. Having much higher marital expectations can create additional obstacles. If your relationship isn't going well, you now feel more shame. You can develop a sense of failure that you haven't been able to maintain an intoxicating *in-love* state and where there's such shame, there's always the temptation to blame.

If you want to try for the brass ring of an enduring, passionate relationship, you will need to learn how to cultivate and influence emotions over time.

If you want to try for the brass ring of an enduring, passionate relationship you will need to learn how to cultivate and influence emotions over time. These are not emotions that you directly control with your intellect. Emotions are actually reflexes and obey a different set of rules than voluntary behavior. You will need to learn these rules with a full appreciation that mere intellect is insufficient. Anyone who has struggled with a diet has experienced how emotion can defy intellectual control. You will need to learn the art of influence instead. Exercising influence means that you must be patient and smart. Instead of taking a bull-headed approach, you need to repetitively do things that gradually shift your emotions in a certain direction. It's like growing a plant. You don't just grab it and yank the plant up to its desired height. You supply sunlight, fertilizer, and water and protect the seedling from danger. Then you have to accept that the other processes that affect the plant are beyond your personal control. Growing love and affection is like this. You have to create the appropriate conditions for love and affection and be patient while other processes take over. If you can't ease your grip on control, then you are doomed. You will need to learn how to maintain a delicate balance, and you will also need to learn the fundamental components that must be maintained.

To grow a really great relationship, you need to jettison a very popular but destructive myth. Everyone will tell you that the very foundation of your relationship is love for each other. Are you ready to hear that it's not? Believing that this kind of love is your foundation can cause problems because it can lead to unrealistic expectations. There are things that are far more fundamental. Personal integrity and respect are more precious and elemental. To say that mutual love is the foundation of a great relationship is like saying that a roof is a good foundation for a house. It's the end stage, not the foundation. If you think mutual love is your foundation, then you will expect it as your due. When your partner doesn't supply the love, you will be righteously indignant. You will perceive that they're betraying their responsibility to support the relationship with the "right" feelings. Then the blaming can and will start. Bad stuff! The truth is that love will repeatedly come and go over time.

I frequently see couples where the wife bitterly complains that her husband doesn't show affection. She shares her own frustration and indignation quite freely. Meanwhile, I can see the poor guy

sulking in his chair as if his emotional impotence is revealed to the world. This angry focus on emotional production is really counter-productive. One metaphor would be that the wife might as well berate the husband for “not getting it hard enough!” The anxiety that the wife is generating by her emphasis on control will make the husband’s emotional approach nearly impossible.

A number of years ago I experienced a humorous incident. I conceived what I thought was a clever metaphor to promote an “easy does it” attitude in some of my couples. I planned that at the end of a session I might give them a “gift” of a Chinese finger trap. These are the little straw tubes that are sometimes given as party favors. They trap your pinkies and winch down harder if you try to forcefully pull your hands apart. The trick is to relax and use minute movements to loosen its grip. I figured that this metaphor would amuse the couples and demonstrate how they were trying to force affection. I felt just a little proud at this uniquely clever intervention. However, when I went down to the local magic shop to buy a few dozen, the store owner informed they were all gone. He said, “Yeah, some lady came down here yesterday and bought a couple hundred. She said she was a marriage counselor or something like that.” Now it could be interpreted that this was a divine lesson for my humility. However, the more relevant interpretation is that other therapists recognize the same problem when couples try to directly control emotional production. You need to be able to grow emotions patiently, like vegetables in a field. There’s a science and a method to it. You need to learn it.

The Love-Based Relationship Model

To have a decent relationship, you need to get your priorities straight. If you don’t, you will sink and drown. We’re going to use this metaphor for several reasons, one of which is that your experience will be viscerally similar to drowning if you mismanage things. I have seen too many couples where one or both partners express a suffocating or choking feeling in their relationship. There’s a physiological explanation to this that I’ll explain later. For now, let’s use an analogy.

When I was seven years old, my family would vacation each summer in the Catskill Mountains in New York. The resort we stayed at had a swimming pool where we would swim each afternoon. I was still not a proficient swimmer, but could just keep my head above water if I used my swim fins and dog-paddled. I was just approaching the confidence level that I could do this without swim fins. One day, my brother asked if he could use my fins and I agreed, thinking that I would just swim around holding onto

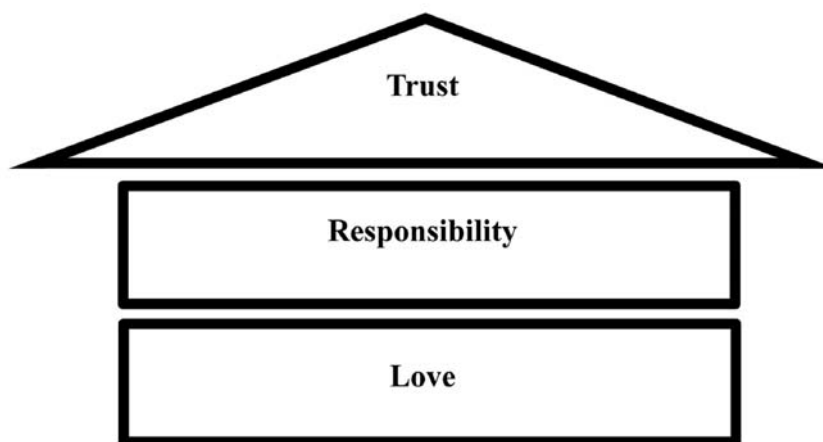
the edge of the pool. I did this for a while and started feeling more confident. I started believing that I had reached the stage when I could really swim. My brother was swimming down at the deep end of the pool, and I made my way to him. However, I made the mistake of getting too far from the edge and suddenly started taking in water and choking. I panicked. At this point, my brother ceased being my brother to me! He became a mere object that I could climb upon to get my next breath. It didn't matter that I loved him dearly. In fact, I no longer was aware of him as a person. I shoved him under while I clambered up on him to get higher. The only thing that mattered was my next breath. Fortunately, some nearby grown-ups noticed our predicament and pulled us both from the pool.

I often think of the above incident when I meet with couples who are tearing into each other. What exactly is happening with them? Both spouses usually seem like reasonable people until they get into their "STUFF." Then they start behaving like two drowning cats in the center of a pool, both clawing at the other to seek purchase. If we stay within the metaphor, it's apparent that their love for each other can't keep its head above water. That's the problem with a love-based relationship model. It puts emphasis on a feeling that you can only partially influence. The model doesn't point out other more functional priorities that can get your system re-stabilized when it's in trouble. If the love is temporarily removed, then you will have no way to keep your oxygen supply. It's as you can't swim. Everything depends on having the love.



**Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett review the status
of their monthly household budget.**

To assist with our future discussion, let's switch to a new metaphor. Drowning is a good metaphor for how "The Great No-No" of shame and inhibition can destabilize relationship partners. The unconscious can slowly accumulate inhibition over the years and gradually suffocate our identity. Alternatively, it can paralyze us within seconds if we have to face our partner's intense disapproval. Either way, drowning or asphyxiation is a close metaphor. However, it's not a good metaphor for how we develop a vital relationship. We need a better metaphor that implies the appropriate sequencing of priorities. For this, we're better off visualizing our relationship like a house.

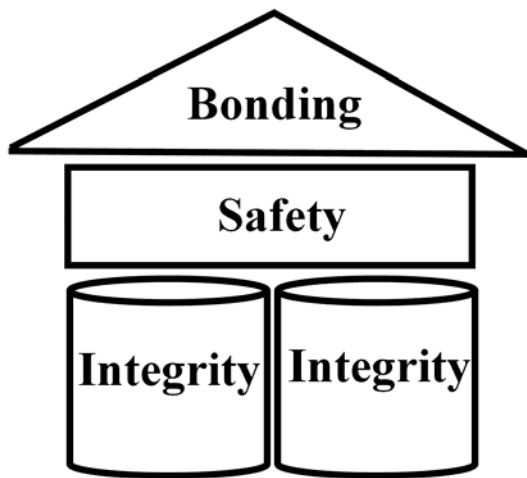


A love-based relationship model

In the house metaphor, the foundation is the basic material we lay down first. The picture of this model illustrates the commonly held view that the foundation of this relationship house should be passionate love. Many people hold a view similar to the lyric from an old disco song: "I want a love that's hot enough to last!" This hot passion is expected to motivate the other partner to remain responsible. Then trust is supposedly guaranteed. The conclusion from this belief is that you can trust passion. What a prescription for disaster! One reason why this belief is dangerous is because the "hottest" passion derives very easily from a process called "projective identification." Projective identification is produced mostly by your unconscious, magical expectations about being personally completed rather than any sober assessment of reality. There are some 12-step programs full of people trying to "kick the habit" of pursuing projective identification. They have well-established histories of repeatedly falling in love and producing dysfunctional relationships.

The Integrity-Based Relationship

Instead of a love-based relationship, let's consider an integrity-based relationship. When we base our relationship on integrity, it doesn't mean we give up love. It just means that passionate love isn't the constant basis for keeping a relationship stable. It's the final prize, but not the foundation. Picture the foundation of a healthy relationship as being like two strong pillars. Each pillar represents one partner's identity. You want each pillar to be strong and resilient. You certainly don't want any cracks. You want each pillar to have its own integrity. Each has to be able to stand on its own if necessary and have its own autonomous strength. If a sailing ship were to be constructed with strong cross-members, good caulking, good righting moment, and other features that ensure she won't break apart and sink, one could say she has good integrity. We could say the same of a house with a good foundation, strong main beams, and other features giving it sturdy resilience. In the present case we're not referring to high moral standards. We're referring to the strength of character that allows a person to adaptively use his own wisdom instead of raging, freezing, or avoiding issues altogether.



A simplified integrity-based relationship model

I should now confess that I've been purposely holding back from telling you something. I've been trying to prevent your possible confusion if I were to introduce a certain truth too early. This truth has to do with the real nature of integrity. Ordinarily, when we hear the word "love," we think of directing love towards another person. That's the same kind of love to which we were referring when we discussed love-based relationships. However, the truth is that integrity involves love as well. It's just a different kind of love. Integrity involves love being directed inward instead of outward. It's a more sophisticated

form of loving. Some people call it spiritual love but it can also be called “heterocentric” love. It requires a higher level of consciousness than merely wanting to connect to a person. Because most people are so inclined to think of love as only directed outward, I thought it better to use the expression “integrity based” to name this relationship model. I wanted to help you to clearly distinguish it as being different from conventional love.

**Integrity involves love being directed
inward instead of outward.**

Strong integrity is based on loving spiritual principles such as truth, responsibility, contribution, and creation, among many others. This framework is woven into a person’s implicit world view even on an unconscious level. When facing an emotional challenge such as when our partner is becoming furious, it’s our attachment to this heterocentric integrity that allows us to be psychologically autonomous and reasonable. Some people might refer to it as “maturity.” Others might use the term “character.” If we don’t have it, we’ll lose our autonomy and be knocked off balance into rage or emotional paralysis. Most people don’t realize that strong integrity doesn’t just regulate moral behavior; it also helps keep us safe! It gives us a type of *internal protection* against the bruising and shaming that can take place in a relationship. Our own internal attachments to the spiritual parts of self can literally block the drowning and suffocating feeling of shame. I’m not referring to a theological event. I’m talking straight neurology. (We’re going to avoid a boring technical discussion here.) Just realize that when our integrity blocks shame, we’re capable of thinking more maturely. We can then be more careful and respectful with our partner.

It makes sense that we prioritize safety next, even above affection. If we don’t feel safe with our partner, then it’s going to be very difficult to feel love. We might have a regressive or abusive dependence on them, but not a very high quality love. We need to know that we won’t be abused or hurt, and our partner needs to feel the same way. Then we can grow affection on top of our mutual safety. If our historical behavior trains our partner to fear us, then their affection will be squashed by their instinctive concern for safety.

When we feel relatively safe with each other, we can then focus on cultivating the sweet stuff. This upper-most level of bonding depends on all the lower components in our house model. Integrity

allows safety. Safety then allows us to build affection. It works in that order. However, it's still not enough to merely have integrity and safety. There are certain things you have to *do* in order to grow affection. These are various bonding behaviors that train the emotion of affection. Of course we're not referring to the *in-love* phenomenon that nature throws at us without any up-front costs. We're referring to the sentimental love that we have to earn through nurturing treatment of each other. If we have the integrity to keep the relationship safe and we keep nurturing each other in skilled and creative ways, then the resulting sentimental love can last a lifetime.

Components of Integrity

Integrity is one of the most complex subjects of this book. We'll be discussing how it's critical for maintaining the vitality of a relationship. It has 3 major dimensions which can be summarized as follows.

Emotional Resources: Emotional resources are personal memories or memory-held templates of other people that we find positive and empowering. There's evidence to suggest that positive memories, when activated, can trigger major dopamine circuits in such a way that we think and behave more maturely. These dopamine circuits project from the brain stem to the upper anterior cingulate, a part of the brain that mediates flexible and creative thinking.

Integration: Integration refers to the different parts of the brain and memory system working together with good coordination. Merely having good emotional resources doesn't mean that they'll be active when they're needed. Integration refers to the brain's ability to activate whatever useful parts of the memory system that are needed for a particular situation.

Maintenance of Autonomy: Maintenance of autonomy refers to certain actions a person must perform in order to keep his or her own separate identity alive and robust in a relationship. If a person doesn't perform these actions, then they'll gradually lose their sense of identity.

I sometimes give couples a personal example of when my own **emotional resources** once protected me from becoming emotionally overwhelmed. There have been other times when my integrity

has failed, but on this one occasion it came through like a champ. It occurred during an incident involving my father while my wife and I were in the process of adopting a second child. My father was undoubtedly the most nurturing influence in my life. During my childhood he was very loving. He played with me, taught me to dance, and shared wonder with me to such an extent that I believe he gave me my greatest gifts in life. Yet everyone sometimes reaches their limitations. When I phoned him to tell him that we wouldn't be having our own biological child, it must have come as quite a shock. He had no doubt been hoping for a biological grandchild. I explained to him that my wife and I had gone through a number of medical procedures, but our own biological child was just not going to be in the cards. He may have absorbed this OK, but he obviously wasn't prepared for what came next. I explained that we were adopting a 4-month-old little girl from Korea and that her name was Soh In Kim. At that point, he was facing the additional shock that not only would his grandchild be biologically unrelated, she wouldn't even be his own race. What I heard over the phone sounded like an angry snarl: "Why don't you just go ahead and adopt a black child!" This racial slur came from a man who had never before seemed preoccupied with racial issues. However, it was my own reaction that surprised me the most. Instead of becoming defensive or enraged, I felt sad. It wasn't so much a conscious deliberation but rather an implicit understanding that my father could not immediately appreciate what was most important.

If my internal frame of meaning could have talked at that moment it would have said the following:

1. The most important thing is to be creative with my life and to contribute the best way I can.
2. This promotion of another life (my new daughter) is a truly beautiful creation.
3. My father is overwhelmed about his own mortality and finiteness.
4. He just doesn't have the emotional resources to extend his loving this far beyond his own struggle.
5. It's sad that I have to grow beyond him here.

It's important to note that these were not explicit thoughts at the time but were all a part of an intuitive view of what was going on. This view allowed me to feel compassion for him, a sadness that he could not share our current joy, and a calm appreciation that I was connected to what was most important. If the same incident had occurred earlier in my development, I'm sure that I would have become enraged.

Although this story doesn't involve warring spouses, it's a clear example of how one's psychological connection to one's own emotional resources can stabilize a person to avoid over-reaction. More evidence for this dynamic comes from the results of doing therapy. There's a type of therapy I perform that I call conflict inoculation training (CIT). In CIT, clients are taught to practice accessing their emotional resources when threatened with shame. As a result of their practice, these clients have

often been able to stop raging toward their spouses. Others have been able to stop freezing with emotional paralysis when facing disapproval.

Integration is the second essential component of personal integrity. Many people don't realize that all of our wisdom and information isn't "on-line" at any given time. Physicians will sometimes claim that they forget medication dosage levels when they're vacationing at the beach. Once they arrive at the hospital, see the white uniforms, and smell the hospital antiseptic odors, their memory of dosages is much easier to recall. In a troubled relationship, partners may agonize with the knowledge that their raging behavior is sinking their marriage. It may grieve them terribly. However, in the heat of an argument they may no longer remember or care. Once the fight is over, they may grieve again. In more extreme cases, the person may have little or no memory of what happened while enraged. I had occasion to see this dynamic in a surprising way with one of my patients. She was a petite, middle-aged lady who was very polite and demure. One day I said something that very much riled her up. "You fucking son of a bitch!" was just one of a string of expletives she railed at me. I was surprised when she showed up at the following session. In this next session we talked for a while, and it became apparent she wasn't going to bring up her rage episode that transpired at her last session. I asked her, "By the way, what do you remember about our previous session?" She casually replied, "Oh, nothing unusual...just one of our usual sessions, really." She had no recall of her previous rage. Further discussion did nothing to trigger more recall. It was apparent that the memory of what had happened was locked in a part of her memory that wasn't integrated with her usually polite personality.

This is an example of dissociation, which is the opposite of integration. Dissociation means that we can't activate the parts of our memory that would otherwise help us out with the challenge at hand. We may have the resources, but we just can't get to them. When dissociation occurs, the brain isn't working efficiently. In extreme cases new personal identities may be associated with different emotional states. This was once called multiple personality disorder but has now been renamed Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). While DID is infrequent, we all have some degree of dissociation. Integration helps us to act more rationally in a relationship. If we have the knowledge about how to behave constructively, then integration lets us retain the knowledge in awareness when we need it.

The third component of personal integrity is the **maintenance of autonomy**. We're really referring to psychological autonomy here. It doesn't mean adolescent defiance or proving that you can be physically apart from another. Psychological autonomy means the ability to have your own views about what's important. It also means that the ability to initiate your own behavior is based upon your own true desires and not how you will be evaluated by another. When individuals lose their autonomy in a relationship, they mould their behavior to what they think their partner expects and they lose touch with

what they want themselves. If they carry this to the extreme, they may even claim that “they don’t know who they are anymore.” It’s as if they start to feel like a footnote on somebody else’s life. This is a kind of slow numbing of the soul that frequently kills relationships. It’s the result of our natural inhibitory system that unconsciously prevents us from violating social norms. This system operates “under the radar” and has a known reflex in the brain that turns off other dopaminergic reflexes. However, when our inhibitory system repeatedly turns off our expression of positive desire for too long, we then lose a sense of who we are. This is the painful sense of losing ourselves that we call “depersonalization.” A thirty year career of counseling couples has convinced me that this kind of subtle depersonalization is the number one reason why many people have affairs. It’s an easy way to escape feeling so numb by bringing back the sense of being alive. Clients will talk about how dreary they felt before they started their affairs. When I ask them about their conflict style, the majority give a picture that they are the more passive partner. It’s rare when I find a person having an affair who has been assertively negotiating for what they want.

A person may start a relationship with insufficient autonomy. For example, they may leap into a marriage directly from their dysfunctional family of origin. These marriages that involve rescuing an insecure person will often develop serious problems down the road. Even if the relationship start-up is more equal, a partner’s autonomy can be gradually lost over time if one doesn’t take precautions. The gradual accumulation of shame and inhibition can do this. If a person doesn’t service his autonomy to prevent this corrosion, then he’ll probably experience the suffocating or drowning feeling of depersonalization.

Let’s recap this part of our discussion. The foundation of an integrity-based relationship is comprised of two individuals having their own solid integrity. This integrity is best defined as having emotional resources, the integration to activate those resources when needed, and the autonomy to keep exercising and protecting their emotional system from debilitating shame. There is a parallel between my emphasis on integrity as a foundation for relationships and the structure of 12-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The twelve steps were developed as a spiritual program that strengthens moral and ethical resources within a person. As a result of doing “step work,” participants in AA find increased ability to operate out of the higher functioning non-addictive parts of their personalities. In other words, they become more able to act autonomously from their drug. The spiritual integrity helps them to better “down-regulate” their emotional compulsion to drink. Similarly, a strong connection to one’s own integrity can inoculate against the emotional challenges inherent in a long-term relationship. If we can connect to our higher consciousness, then we’re less likely to fracture in the face of our partner’s

disapproval. If we can maintain this type of autonomy, then we don't have to react aggressively. We can behave respectfully.

Components of Safety

Once we feel safe and stable in our own integrity, then we're able to provide the safety our partner wants and needs. This safety consists of the two main components of respect and responsibility.

Respect is the appreciation that people have a right to be different from us. Even though they're different, respect means they are accorded deference without the assumption of their being inferior or invalid. The ability to respect is dependent upon one having sufficient integrity and autonomy within oneself. If a person is desperate to avoid shame and fails at his own autonomy, then respect will be an early casualty. Blaming starts at this level. Couples get into shame fights like tossing a hot potato back and forth. When this happens, both parties have failed the autonomy test. Each is unconsciously trying to avoid the shame of blame by putting the other down.

Respect is a fundamental resource that is most undervalued in relationships. It's much more valuable than passion. Passion is relatively cheap and can come without much work. Many people can form passion on a first date. There are others who are addicted infatuation junkies and hook up with new lovers every several weeks. In contrast to easy passion, respect is like platinum. In our metaphorical house of an integrity-based relationship, respect forms an important part of the relationship's safety. It doesn't mean submission or putting someone up on a pedestal. It really means that you're willing to value someone's differences. It's this fundamental appreciation of differences, the healthy humility of losing egocentrism which is the precious respect that stabilizes good relationships. It also requires a maturity of character that many of us have failed to achieve. A partner who bullies or intentionally inflicts pain is depriving the relationship of a foundation of safety. And as a result, affection will be nearly impossible.

Responsibility is the next part of the safety platform for a good relationship. It means that we keep agreements, tell the truth, keep the relationship safe from internal and external dangers, and carry out tasks that help the relationship survive and thrive. Actually, respect is a fundamental type of responsibility to the relationship. Because it involves providing safety from each other's aggression, it's even more basic than other forms of responsibility. It makes sense that you need to first guarantee that

your partner is safe from you before you guarantee to protect the relationship from other outside dangers. However, there's a very good reason to view the responsibility dimension somewhat separately from respect. There are many respectful and "nice" people who repeatedly and passively expose their partners to dangers. Instead of being personally aggressive, they are loving and deferential. Meanwhile, they're failing to make mortgage payments, failing to get a job, and failing to ward off other dangers that can eviscerate a family's financial safety. They may also have affairs. What's tragic is that these people are hard to spot. People initially see that this kind of partner has respect and passion. They don't see the danger from incapacity until it's too late. They don't see it coming because they're looking for more aggressive disrespect. For this reason, we're going to stipulate that personal respect should be considered first, but that responsibility needs to be separately considered.

Bonding

When safety can be maintained, then our relationship is ready for the fun stuff. The process of bonding is in one way similar to farming. When someone farms, there's a period for planting and then there's a period for harvesting. The benefits don't all come right away. When we engage in nurturing attachment behavior, we're satisfying each other's need to feel connected and close. This involves many different ways to help our partner feel important to us, from saying "I love you," to offering touch, to asking about the meaning of their experiences, to delighting them with symbols of affectionate thoughtfulness. We'll be discussing the many creative things that couples can do to build affection. However, these behaviors should not be confused with the actual feelings of affection. Affection may not be immediate and may lag behind attachment behavior for a variety of reasons, especially when a couple is overcoming a painful history. The danger of lumping affection with attachment behavior is that it can lead to damaging expectations. When one starts expecting a partner to express a certain amount of affection that doesn't materialize, it can backfire and cause anxiety.

Gabe and Shirley were a middle-aged couple who had been married twenty years. They had been very sexually active in the early years of their marriage. Prior to marrying, Shirley had also been very promiscuous with many men. She had a long history of prescription drug abuse that continued on into the marriage for many years. The couple's marital problems began to develop shortly after Shirley attained sobriety, started attending a 12-step group, and started individual therapy with another therapist. Her

individual therapy sessions had uncovered that Shirley had suffered traumatic sexual abuse as a child. She had been clean from drugs and working on that trauma for about a year when I first saw them. What was initially presented by both of them was that Gabe was preoccupied with sex. I initially thought that the problem might be that Gabe had a sexual addiction. However, a number of exploratory sessions revealed a different picture. It was true that Gabe wanted sex with Shirley. He had been angrily complaining to Shirley that her sexual interest had shut down. But it was also true that he was not pervasively interested in porn or sex with other partners, as is the case with many sex addicts. What seemed to be happening in this situation is that Shirley had allowed herself to be sexually used for many years before marriage. She had been using sex to barter for attention and she had been using alcohol to sedate her anxiety. In other words, her sexual activity was actually pre-sexual. It had not involved her own sensual enjoyment; rather, it had been more of a tool to meet a pre-sexual need for approval.

To her credit, Shirley was struggling to graduate to a higher level of consciousness. She had attained sobriety. She was addressing her sexual trauma but had not yet developed the ownership of her own sensual sexuality. Gabe had unfortunately brought into her polarized view of him that he was depraved for wanting “too much sex.” Actually, his problem was that he was just a bit concrete in the manner in which he wanted affection. He lamented to me not just about the absence of sex, but about the absence of affection in general. What made problems worse was that every now and then, he would erupt in frustration to Shirley about her lack of affection. Shirley then took these eruptions as confirmation that Gabe merely wanted to use her like all the previous men in her life. This dynamic became a recursive dance in their relationship. She polarized further and further into a defensive posture providing no real attachment. He polarized into angry frustration with occasional outbursts that confirmed that she wasn’t safe. The more he tugged at her affection, the more she backed away and labeled him as abusive. This is an all too common dynamic in many relationships. I call it the “pursuer-evader syndrome.” It’s a dance that takes two. One way the pursuer-evader syndrome can start is when one partner unrealistically expects that the other can voluntarily produce affection.

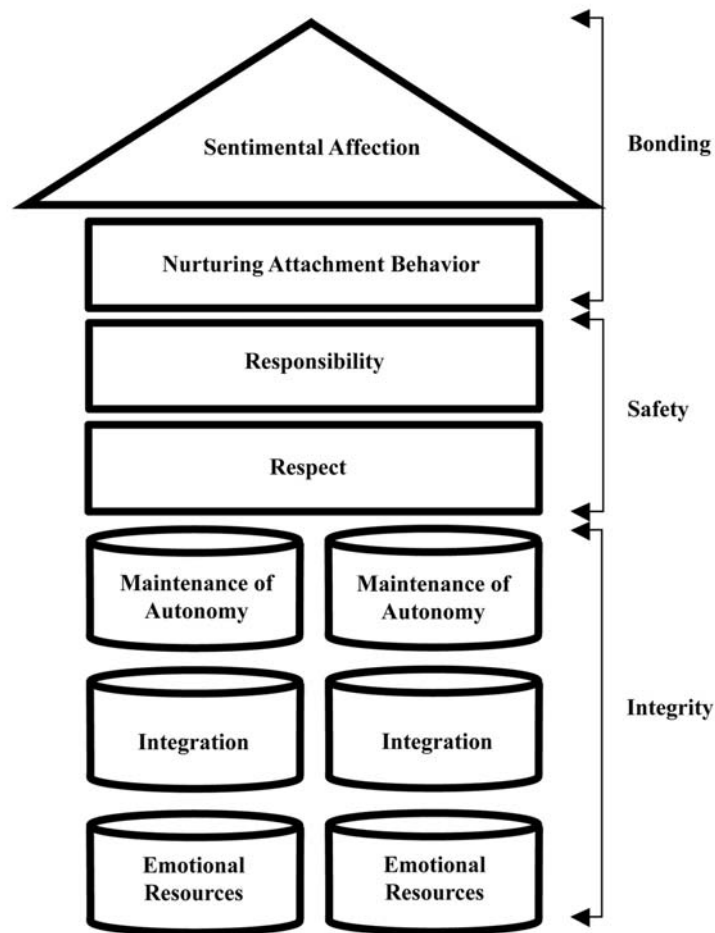
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Affection, like sexual desire, does not thrive well under command. Affectionate feelings are not voluntary. You can't consciously choose to feel affection any more than you can choose to produce erotic arousal. You need to create enough safety in your relationship so that conditions are conducive for both affection and sexual desire to emerge naturally at their own pace.

The final product of an integrity-based relationship is the affection itself. Like flame from a fire, it will wax and wane depending on the care shown for its basic requirements. It should be noted that this sentimental affection isn't the same as *in-love* infatuation that is alternatively based on unconscious projection. Unlike *in-love* infatuation, sentimental affection can be rekindled and maintained over many decades if handled with skill.

Putting the House Together

The following figure shows the integrity-based relationship model in more detail. Notice how it's hierarchical. In some ways it parallels Maslow's description of a hierarchy of needs. It makes sense that your oxygen supply over the next five minutes is a more basic and demanding need than getting food and shelter. Similarly, it makes intuitive sense that maintaining one's individual identity (through integrity operations) is more fundamental than enjoying affection. It also makes sense that experiencing safety (through mutual respect and responsibility) is a more fundamental need than affection. You can also see the hierarchical nature of this model by observing what happens when more basic levels are disrupted. For example, poor integration due to dissociating childhood trauma will often lead to disruption of respectful behavior in relationships. Similarly, poor emotional resources due to under-socialization will frequently lead to poor responsibility in adulthood. The safety operations in a relationship are naturally dependent upon an individual's integrity. Nurturing attachment behaviors won't build sentimental affection when safety operations are inadequate and leave a partner frightened and resentful. So, the rule of thumb needs to be: First things first!



An integrity-based relationship model

Now that we've reviewed the integrity-based relationship model, please take a few minutes to complete the following quiz about your own intuitive model of relationships. The results of the quiz will help you to examine some of your own expectations. It might even help you pinpoint where you may want to make some revisions.

Your Own Relationship Beliefs: A Short Quiz

Answer *true* or *false* to each of the following statements. It's best if you give your initial quick response because that will more accurately reflect your behavior in your relationship.

1. ____ When my partner and I are in conflict, we're both obligated to work it out then and there.
2. ____ If my partner insults me, then he/she is to blame if I attack in retaliation.
3. ____ My own needs are minimal. It's more important to meet my partner's needs.
4. ____ It's a duty in my relationship to avoid conflict whenever I can.
5. ____ It's a responsibility to love my partner.
6. ____ We should resolve arguments before going to bed.
7. ____ It's OK to lie to keep the peace if I know my partner will otherwise get very angry.
8. ____ I should be generous by deferring to my partner whenever we have conflicting needs.
9. ____ I feel selfish if I ask for what I want in a relationship.
10. ____ If my partner yells at me first, then it's good to yell back to show that he/she isn't the boss.
11. ____ I'm more comfortable doing chores and fulfilling responsibilities for my relationship than indulging in "fun."
12. ____ It's my partner's obligation not to leave me alone when I'm upset.
13. ____ One should provide sex to one's partner because it's a marital responsibility.
14. ____ If we're doing all the right things, then we should remain in love forever.
15. ____ It's my obligation not to leave my partner alone if he/she is upset.
16. ____ All my sacrifices for my partner build up my entitlement to be loved.
17. ____ Working together through all of life's problems is a great way to grow love and affection.

Now total up all the items for which you answered *true*. This total score indicates the degree to which your intuitive beliefs deviate from an integrity-based relationship model. Let's revisit each of the questions along with a brief explanation about what each question actually reveals.

- 1. When my partner and I are in conflict, we're both obligated to work it out then and there.**
There's no such obligation, and this belief will actually prevent you from postponing a conflict for when you both are more stable. When emotions are running too high, it's important to temporarily stop the argument and stabilize yourselves.

2. **If my partner insults me, then he/she is to blame if I attack in retaliation.** If you attack in retaliation, then you're starting to fight in order to avoid shame. The problem is that your partner will probably feel the same defensive need to counter your attack. Then both of you are locked into a rigid blaming dance.
3. **My own needs are minimal. It's more important to meet my partner's needs.** One responsibility in a relationship is to keep a good, equitable balance of meeting both of your needs. Habitual self-sacrificing isn't responsible to either yourself or the relationship. Your relationship doesn't need you to covertly resent inequity or possibly even lose your sense of self.
4. **It's my duty in my relationship to avoid conflict whenever I can.** It's your responsibility to avoid unnecessary and unproductive conflict such as fighting to establish dominance. It's also your responsibility to risk certain conflicts in order to rebalance your relationship.
5. **It's my responsibility to love my partner.** It's your responsibility to contribute to a safe environment that will allow affection to grow. It's not your responsibility to try to "squeeze" out emotions that you can't directly control. If you make love a responsibility, you will contaminate your love with guilt. It's a bad mix that can lead to emotional impotence. Don't do it.
6. **We should have arguments resolved before going to bed.** What a popular and destructive myth. (See the explanation for #1.)
7. **It's OK to lie to keep the peace if I know my partner will otherwise get very angry.** This behavior is very destructive. You will hurt your own integrity and accumulate shame. Over time, this will cause you to emotionally withdraw from the relationship. You will also destroy your partner's trust.
8. **I should be generous by deferring to my partner whenever we have conflicting needs.** It's a good idea to be generous and deferential to your partner much of the time. However, sometimes you need to hang tough for a need that's very important to you. It's your responsibility to weigh both your partner's need and your own from a heterocentric perspective. A heterocentric view considers the relative balance of both of your needs together.

- 9. I feel selfish if I ask for what I want in a relationship.** This indicates the presence of core shame. If you feel selfish when you advocate for your own desires, then you have a serious threat to your relationship. Your relationship will fall out of balance when you gradually lose your sense of autonomy and identity. Your expression of self interest is necessary if you want to maintain your attraction to your partner.
- 10. If my partner yells at me first, then it's good to yell back to show that he/she isn't the boss.** If you yell back, then you're not focusing on managing your own emotions. You've lost your autonomy by trying to prove that you're not the victim. By trying to avoid shame you will only provoke damaging escalation in the fight.
- 11. I'm more comfortable doing chores and fulfilling responsibilities for my relationship than indulging in "fun."** Keeping your "fun" self alive in the relationship is a responsibility of keeping the relationship balanced. If you turn into a depressive drone, then you won't be able to keep your passion alive, and you won't be attractive to your partner
- 12. It's my partner's obligation not to leave me alone when I'm upset.** No, no, no! It's your own responsibility to self-stabilize. It's one of the basic ingredients of autonomy. It's nice if your partner can soothe you but sometimes he/she may feel too angry or hurt. Nurturing you when you're upset needs to be a completely voluntary and elective act by your partner.
- 13. One should provide sex to one's partner because it's a marital responsibility.** The operative words here are "provide" and "responsibility." The implication is that it's not really for us. We're now doing it as a chore and using it as a tool to achieve another goal to avoid the shame of otherwise being an inadequate spouse or incurring the wrath of the partner. In this way, the provision of sex as a responsibility is motivated by fear. It's a contamination of emotional reflexes that's damaging over time.
- 14. If we're doing all the right things, then we should remain in love forever.** It's well known that the titanic "*in-love*" feelings originate more from projection and anticipation than reality. Within two to three years of living with each other, frustrating each other, stepping on each other's toes, and bruising each other up, most couples are no longer "*in-love*." It's a nice

condiment to be enjoyed while it lasts. However, the main fare is sentimental loving that must be earned through mutual respect and skilled relationship craft.

15. It's my obligation not to leave my partner alone if he/she's upset. (See # 12)

16. All my sacrifices for my partner build up my entitlement to be loved. You are deserving of love, but you are not "entitled" to demand love from anyone. If you feel entitled to be loved, you will be set up to feel rage whenever your expectations aren't met. Love isn't a bartered commodity. It's a feeling that needs to be freed from fear and shame. All your work in a relationship is to create conducive conditions for love to blossom on its own. If you miss one of the necessary conditions (e.g. respect for your partner's autonomy), love may not bloom. Even if you meet all of the conditions, your partner may still have limitations and be incapable of love. .

17. Working together through all of life's problems is a great way to build love and affection.

Actually, it's a relatively poor way to grow love and affection. Slaving away together is often necessary for survival. However, our emotional state during work makes it difficult to grow much affection. Affection is more easily grown in the free states of wonder, curiosity, and play.

I hope that this short self-examination has helped you to examine some of your intuitively based assumptions about how relationships should run. Unfortunately, many people have impaired relationships because they expect constant love. Their relationships aren't integrity-based. In the next chapter, we'll be examining a relationship truth that is counterintuitive.

A vital relationship is one in which we take responsibility for keeping ourselves emotionally stable and don't look to our partner to guarantee he/she will feel constant love.

In conclusion, a vital relationship is one in which we take responsibility for keeping ourselves emotionally stable and don't look to our partners to guarantee will feel constant love. We accept that human nature is variable and that our partner is limited and imperfect. He or she won't constantly love us

unconditionally. We are therefore prepared to “run off our own battery” when our partner shows disapproval and doesn’t have the feelings we want. When we “run off the battery” of our integrity we rely on these internal resources to help us behave respectfully and responsibly. This provides safety in the relationship. Because our resources are internal, we can behave this way even when our partner isn’t behaving responsibly. In essence, we behave respectfully and responsibly because we love these values, and not because we love our partner. We also assume responsibility for nurturing mutual affection by initiating shared attachment experiences. We strive to gradually “grow” affection by positively influencing our relationship, not by exerting coercive control.