

An Ounce of Prevention

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The Hallmarks of a Resilient Relationship: Harmony Rupture Repair

“Happily Ever After.”

How many times have you heard that phrase?

Speaking for myself, it is many, many, many. And every single time I hear it, I wince.

Since the phrase is used so often to describe the hopes and expectations of people in relationships, I do find myself wincing a lot.

Every couples therapist knows that happiness in a long-term relationship does not come easily. Both members of every couple must fight for their love each and every day. Anyone who has successfully navigated a successful long-term relationship or marriage knows that there is no such thing as happily ever after.

Nevertheless, common culture continues to promote the notion that when you find the right person, things should naturally flow in a positive direction. Nothing could be further from the truth.

One of the worst enemies of happiness in a relationship is stagnation. The couple that stops growing together ends up growing apart. In every successful relationship, each member of the couple must be challenging the other to grow and change in meaningful ways.

It's not about changing into a different person for your partner; it's only about listening to your partner's feelings and needs and making an honest effort, out of love, to meet them. As long as your partner is asking for healthy things (even if they're painful or difficult), this is a process of pushing each other to grow. That is the hallmark of a successful relationship.

When you are truly in a relationship that is working, there must be friction to keep both partners growing. The friction shows that you are being honest with each other and that you are willing to fight for the relationship. The changes you make for each other are both an expression of your love and a product of your love.

Every healthy relationship follows a predictable, productive pattern. This pattern is the hallmark of a healthy, stimulating, growing, resilient relationship.

Harmony – Rupture – Repair

- **Harmony:** This is everyone's favorite part of the relationship cycle. It's the feeling you have when things are going smoothly between you and your partner. You're enjoying each other's company and you are getting along. No fighting, no friction. This is what people are imagining when they utter the phrase “happy ever after.” And it's the picture that popular culture likes to paint of successful relationships. Everyone would like to believe that this is how relationships are supposed to be. But actually, this stage must be earned not just once, but over and over again.
- **Rupture:** It is actually not humanly possible for the Harmony stage to last forever. Every single coupling of human beings on this earth is on a path toward rupture. It's not a matter of whether a rupture will occur; it is a matter of when. But the good news is that ruptures are not bad. They are actually opportunities to deepen, enrich and enliven the relationship. The rupture holds the passion and the clash brings out the feeling. And feeling is the glue and spice that makes every relationship valuable and worthwhile.
- **Repair:** The Repair phase is where the real work happens. What do you need your partner to do to fix this problem, and what can you do to make him happy? Working out a new understanding or a compromise, or deciding to work toward a change communicates love and care, shows commitment and builds trust with each other. When you do this phase right, you continually learn more and more relationship skills that you can use over and over again, making problems become less and less painful as they happen. Going through rough waters together and coming through to the other side intact propels you into the Harmony phase, where you enjoy the love and dedication and care that has been there all along.

If you grew up in a family that avoided conflict, squelched emotions or discouraged meaningful conversation (Childhood Emotional Neglect, or CEN), you are at great risk of avoiding or squelching the healthy rupture your relationship needs or being unable to initiate and/or tolerate the meaningful conversation to repair it.

If you grew up with CEN, learning that rupture in your adult relationship is not a failure but an opportunity can open doors to building valuable communication and emotion skills and to a much more rewarding and resilient relationship.

Harmony – Rupture – Repair – Harmony – Rupture – Repair – Harmony – Rupture – Repair.

On and on it goes, one phase following another. It's not a sign of a problem, but a sign of health and love and commitment.

The harmony brings the joy, the rupture stokes the passion and the repair builds the trust.

And that's what “Happily Ever After” actually looks like.

~ by Jonice Webb, Ph.D.

https://blogs.psychcentral.com/childhood-neglect/2018/04/the-hallmarks-of-a-resilient-relationship-harmony-rupture-repair/?li_source=LI&li_medium=popular17

Sex & Intimacy in the Digital Age – Infidelity and “Gaslighting:” When Cheaters Flip the Script

Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse where one partner persistently denies the reality of the other partner (via consistent lying, bullying, and obfuscating the facts), causing that person, over time, to doubt her (or his) perception of truth, facts, and reality. Some people may be familiar with this term thanks to *Gaslight*, the 1944 Oscar winning film starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer. In the story, a husband (Boyer) tries to convince his new wife (Bergman) that she's imagining things, in particular the occasional dimming of their home's gas lights. (This is part of his plan to rob her of some very valuable jewelry.) Over time, the wife, who trusts that her husband loves her and would never hurt her, starts to believe his lies and to question her perception of reality.

In the 21st century, the rather antiquated and convoluted plot of *Gaslight* seems a bit silly. Still, the psychological concept of gaslighting – insisting that another person's perception of reality is wrong and/or false to the point where that person begins to question that perception – is well accepted, particularly in connection with sexual and romantic infidelity.

Gaslighting is similar in many respects to one of my favorite (if I'm allowed to have one) psychiatric syndromes, folie à deux, which literally translates to “madness in two.” Basically, folie à deux is a delusional disorder in which delusional beliefs and/or hallucinations are transmitted from one individual to another due to their close proximity, emotional connection, and shared reality. In short, crazy for two. If you are in a close relationship with an actively psychotic person – for instance, a person who hears voices and is afraid of being watched – you might also start to hear voices and fear being watched. Such is the power of emotional connections and our desire to hold onto them. We can actually distort our own sense of reality.

The primary difference between folie à deux and gaslighting is that with gaslighting, the person denying reality is perfectly aware of the fact that he or she is lying, usually as a way to manipulate the other person. But the effects are no less profound. Consider the following story, told to me by Alexandra, a female client who came to see me after learning about her long-term boyfriend's infidelity.

Jack and I met at a party. I was 25, he was 30. We've been dating for six years now, living together for five, and he keeps promising me we'll get married and start a family, but that never quite happens. The last three or four years, even though we're sharing an apartment, I almost never see him. He works in finance, and I know the hours are long, but sometimes I feel lonely and I try to call him but he doesn't answer his phone, even when he's gone all night. He doesn't even respond to my texts, just to let me know he's not dead. If I dare to ask him about using cocaine with his friends or sleeping with another woman, he calls me insecure and paranoid and all sorts of other things. Then he reminds me that his job is really demanding and I should cut him some slack. He tells me that if I truly want to get married and have kids with him then I need to stop acting crazy. Well, a couple of days ago I saw him at a café with another woman, kissing her across the table. That night, after he was asleep, I went through his phone and found out he's been having affairs with *at least* three other women. In the morning, when I confronted him, he told me that he wasn't at the café where I saw him, and that I was misinterpreting all the texts I found. And I actually started to believe him! Now, instead of being mad, I feel

crazy. I can't eat, I can't sleep, I can't think straight, and I have absolutely no idea what is real and what isn't.

Sadly, Alexandra's story is not unusual. In cases of romantic and sexual infidelity, almost every betrayed partner experiences gaslighting to some degree. They sense that something is wrong in the relationship, they confront their significant other, and then the cheater "flips the script," adamantly denying infidelity and asserting that the betrayed partner's discomfort is based not in fact, but in paranoia and unfounded fear. Basically, cheaters insist that they're not keeping any secrets, that the lies they've been telling are actually true, and that their partner is either delusional or making things up for some absurd reason.

The (typically unconscious) goal of gaslighting is to get away with bad behavior. Cheaters gaslight because they don't want their spouse to know what they are doing, or to try and stop it. So they lie and keep secrets, and if/when their partner catches on and confronts them, they deny, make excuses, tell more lies, and do whatever else they can do to convince their partner that she (or he) is the issue, that her (or his) emotional and psychological reactions are the cause of rather than the result of problems in the relationship. Basically, the cheater wants the betrayed partner question her (or his) perception of reality and to accept blame for any problems.

At this point, you might be thinking that you could never be a victim of gaslighting because you're too smart and too emotionally stable. If so, you need to think again. Alexandra, in the example above, has a PhD in Economics from a world-class university, currently teaches at that same school, has wonderfully supportive parents and friends, and has zero history of emotional and psychological instability (beyond her partner's cheating). Yet her boyfriend manipulated her perception of reality for the better part of six years, eventually causing her to question both her instincts and her sanity, before she finally caught him red-handed. And then, instead of being angry with him, she was angry with herself and unsure of the truth.

The ability to fall for a cheating partner's gaslighting is NOT a sign of low self-esteem or a form of weakness. In fact, it is based in a human strength – the perfectly natural tendency of loving people to trust the people that we care about, and upon whom we are healthfully emotionally dependent. In short, we want (and even need) to believe the things that our loved ones tell us.

In large part, betrayed partners' willingness to believe even the most outrageous lies (and to internalize blame for things that are clearly not their fault) stems from the fact that gaslighting starts slowly and builds gradually over time. It's like placing a frog in a pot of warm water that is then set to boil. Because the temperature increases only slowly and incrementally, the innocent frog never even realizes it's being cooked. Put another way, a cheater's lies are usually plausible in the beginning. "I'm sorry I got home at midnight. I'm working on a very exciting project and I lost track of time." An excuse like that sounds perfectly reasonable to a woman (or man) who both loves and trusts her (or his) partner, so it's easily accepted. Then, as the cheating increases, so do the lies. Over time, as betrayed partners become habituated to increasing levels of deceit, even utterly ridiculous fabrications start to seem realistic. So instead of questioning the cheater, a betrayed and psychologically abused partner will simply question herself (or himself).

Sadly, gaslighting can result in what is known as a "stress pileup," leading to anxiety disorders, depression, shame, toxic self-image, addictive behaviors, and more. As such, gaslighting behaviors are often more distressing over time than whatever it is that the betrayer is attempting to keep under wraps. With Alexandria, for instance, the most painful part of her boyfriend's behavior wasn't that he was having sex with other women, it's that he was never trustworthy and made her feel crazy for doubting his endless excuses.

~By Robert Weiss, LCSW, CSAT-S

https://blogs.psychcentral.com/sex/2017/05/infidelity-and-gaslighting-when-cheaters-flip-the-script/?li_source=L1&li_medium=popular17

Marital Spats May Impact Physical Health

New research from Pennsylvania State University finds that a fight with a partner may result in more than just emotional stress. Indeed, the arguments may lead to physical repercussions as well.

Penn State investigators found marital quarrels can cause symptom exacerbation for those with chronic conditions. They found that in two groups of older individuals — one group with arthritis and one with diabetes — the patients who felt more tension with their spouse also reported worse symptoms on those days.

"It was exciting that we were able to see this association in two different data sets — two groups of people with two different diseases," said Dr. Lynn Martire, professor of human development and family studies, Penn State Center for Healthy Aging.

"The findings gave us insight into how marriage might affect health, which is important for people dealing with chronic conditions like arthritis or diabetes."

Martire said it's important to learn more about how and why symptoms of chronic disease worsen.

People with osteoarthritis in their knees who experience greater pain become disabled quicker, and people with diabetes that isn't controlled have a greater risk for developing complications.

The researchers said that while previous research has shown a connection between satisfying marriages and better health, both physically and psychologically, there's been a lack of research into how day-to-day experiences impact those with chronic illness.

"We study chronic illnesses, which usually involve daily symptoms or fluctuations in symptoms," Martire said.

"Other studies have looked at the quality of someone's marriage right now. But we wanted to drill down and examine how positive or negative interactions with your spouse affect your health from day to day."

Data from two groups of participants were used for the study. One group was comprised of 145 patients with osteoarthritis in the knee and their spouses. The other included 129 patients with type 2 diabetes and their spouses.

Participants in both groups kept daily diaries about their mood, how severe their symptoms were, and whether their interactions with their spouse were positive or negative. The participants in the arthritis and diabetes groups kept their diaries for 22 and 24 days, respectively.

The researchers found that within both groups of participants, patients were in a worse mood on days when they felt more tension than usual with their spouse, which in turn led to greater pain or severity of symptoms.

Additionally, the researchers found that within the group with arthritis, the severity of the patient's pain also had an effect on tensions with their spouse the following day. When they had greater pain, they were in a worse mood and had greater tension with their partner the next day.

"This almost starts to suggest a cycle where your marital interactions are more tense, you feel like your symptoms are more severe, and the next day you have more marital tension again," Martire said.

"We didn't find this effect in the participants with diabetes, which may just be due to differences in the two diseases."

Martire said the results could potentially help create interventions targeted at helping couples with chronic diseases.

The study appears in the journal *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*.

"We usually focus on illness-specific communications, but looking at tension in a marriage isn't tied to the disease, it's not a symptom of the disease itself," Martire said.

"It's a measure you can get from any couple. It suggests to me that looking beyond the illness, to improve the overall quality of the relationship might have some impact on health."

~ by Rick Nauert, Ph.D.

<https://psychcentral.com/news/2018/06/24/marital-spats-may-impact-physical-health/135627.html>

Parenting Corner:

Taking Playtime Seriously

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/29/well/family/taking-playtime-seriously.html>

The Whole Brain Child - Animated

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vBEI79_oQE

**Copies of *The Whole Brain Child* available in the office

Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous: 780-424-5900
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Al-Anon/Alateen: 780-433-1818

Support Network / Referral Line: 211

Distress Line: 780-482-4357

Cocaine Anonymous: 780-425-2715

Informative Links:

The National Women's Health Information Center:

<http://4woman.gov>

75 Things You Can Control

<https://blogs.psychcentral.com/weightless/2017/09/75-things-you-can-control/>